

# Welcome to Singapore

*Long dismissed as little more than a sterile stopover, Singapore has reinvented itself as one of the world's hotlist destinations.*

## Asian 'It' Kid

Asia's perennial geek has finally found its groove. More than just satay and malls, new-school Singapore is all about sci-fi architecture in billion-dollar gardens, contemporary art in converted colonial barracks, and single-origin coffee in heritage shophouses. There's a deepening self-confidence and it's driving everything, from Singapore's striking new hotels to its modern menus and expertly curated cocktails. Beyond these bold new thrills is a nation with history and depth, recounted in museums as enlightened as they are engaging. Singapore, boring? *Pah-lease.*

## Food, Glorious Food

From chilli crab to fragrant laksa, *rendang* (spicy coconut curry) and biryani, Singapore is a mouthwatering feast of flavours. Singaporeans are obsessed with food, and you'll find it steaming, sizzling and simmering almost everywhere you look. Indeed, food is the greatest unifier across ethnic divides, and the country's celebrated hawker centres are a heady mix of Chinese, Malaysian and Indian spices. Centuries of cultural exchange shine through in the region's unique Nonya cuisine, while modern Singapore's global status is reflected in a booming restaurant scene that covers all bases.

## Shop Until You Drop

Dirt-cheap prices may be a thing of the past but Singapore remains a retail joyride. Its malls are the stuff of legend – ambitious consumer temples packed with catwalk couture, on-trend street brands and just-released electronics. Beyond the malls is a scene that's deliciously eclectic and increasingly idiosyncratic: hunt down Chinese medicines, dusty antiques or local art in heritage Chinatown shophouses; bag bespoke fragrances to the Islamic call to prayer in Kampong Glam; or pick up local frocks, bling and books in the deco buildings of Tiong Bahru.

## The Wild Side

The world's aspiring 'City in a Garden' is an unexpected wonderland for fans of all things green and natural. Catch a city bus and end up in ancient rainforests rustling with monkeys and greater racket-tailed drongos, muddy wetlands teeming with lobsters and giant lizards, or sleepy farms heaving with bananas, papayas and jackfruit. Alternatively, hop on a bumboat and then cycle your way around a rustic island paradise. Or just stay central and escape to Singapore's soothing Botanic Gardens. Welcome to the wild side, in an oh-so-Singaporean, user-friendly package.



## Why I Love Singapore

By Cristian Bonetto, Author

What I love most about Singapore are the sharp and constant contrasts: smoky temples in the shadow of skyscrapers, luxe condos backing onto jungle, old-school shophouses housing secret cocktail dens. I can travel the world without ever leaving the island. One minute I'm in the 'Hong Kong' wet markets and malls of Chinatown, the next the 'Mumbai' street scenes of Little India, and later the red-light 'Patpong, Bangkok' district of Geylang. Dig deeper than the 'sterile' clichés and you'll find a place more complex, contradictory and addictive than you might imagine. Asia's little red dot never fails to make me swoon.

**For more about our author, see p224.**