

Understand Singapore

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Wealthy, ambitious and cutting-edge, Singapore is Southeast Asia's poster child. But success comes at a price, as the city-state is quickly learning.

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From malarial backwater to global economic powerhouse, the Lion City's dazzling rise is a lesson in planning and perseverance.

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Chinese, Malay, Indian, European and everything in between: get the low-down on Singapore's complex DNA.

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Explore a rich heritage that spans colonial temples and mosques, to flouncy Peranakan shophouses and 21st-century marvels.

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Malay, Tamil, Mandarin, English...or Singlish? *Aiyah!* Get to grips with Singapore's idiosyncratic take on English.

Singapore Today

Eco-friendly architectural wonders, a billion-dollar super park and a swell of world-class bars and eateries... Singapore has never looked or felt so sexy. Yet the city state's ascent from regional nerd to global 'It' kid is not without its challenges. Driven by an influx of foreign workers, massive population growth is straining infrastructure, affordability and the patience of many Singaporeans. Simultaneously, the reported local exploitation of poorer foreign workers is threatening to tarnish the Red Dot's sparkling new look.

Best on Film

Ilo Ilo (Anthony Chen, 2013) A touching story about a troubled Chinese-Singaporean boy and his Filipino maid. The film won the *Caméra d'Or* award at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival.

12 Storeys (Eric Khoo, 1997) A dark comedy about the lives of separate individuals living in the same public-housing apartment block.

881 (Royston Tan, 2007) Musical comedy about the *getai* (stage singing) aspirations of two friends. Colourful, campy and touches on a fading Singapore art form.

Best in Print

Singapore Story (Lee Kuan Yew; 1999) To get the official story on the Singapore Miracle, go straight to the source – the man who masterminded the whole thing.

Singapore: A Biography (Mark Ravinder Frost and Yu-Mei Balam-singchow; 2010) Staid title aside, this is a well-written and handsomely illustrated history of Singapore across 450 riveting pages.

Little Ironies: Short Stories of Singapore (Catherine Lim; 1978) The doyenne of Singapore fiction has published numerous short-story collections and novels. This is her first collection.

Sustainable City

With the opening of Gardens by the Bay in 2012, Singapore moved another step closer towards its vision of becoming a 'City in a Garden', a cutting-edge role model of urban sustainability and biodiversity. A planned 35% improvement in energy efficiency between 2005 and 2030 led the government to introduce a sustainability rating system for buildings – the so-called Green Mark. Since 2008, all construction projects greater than 2000 sq metres (both new and retrofitted) are obliged to meet the Green Mark's minimum standards.

At present, Green Mark-certified buildings account for more than 20% of Singapore's gross floor space, and generous incentive schemes have encouraged an ever-growing number of buildings to incorporate sustainable design features, among them sun-shading exteriors, extensive overhangs, sky gardens, efficient water systems and computer systems capable of monitoring carbon emissions.

Among the best role models is Orchard Rd mall 313@Somerset. Its credentials include the use of non-potable water for 81% of its total water consumption, the recycling of cooking oil, and energy-saving escalators and elevators. Even more impressive is the newly built, award-winning Parkroyal on Pickering hotel, where the design incorporates rainwater harvesting and dramatic, cooling overhanging gardens.

Foreign Frustration

Singapore's population more than doubled from 2.4 million in 1980 to almost 5.5 million in 2014, an increase driven in no small part by waves of foreign workers. Indeed, non-Singaporeans now constitute almost half of the nation's headcount. According to the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), large-scale immigration has been essential to the country's economic growth.