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5 reasons why Singapore is more than just a stopover city

by Ian Updated on 13 Jul 2018

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Singapore's multi-award winning Changi Airport makes the South-Eastern Asian nation a popular stopover city for travellers heading further afield. However there are plenty of excellent reasons why Singapore should be enjoyed as a destination in itself rather than just a stopover. We outline five reasons to choose Singapore for your next holiday.

Garden city

A quick glance at a map of central Singapore might suggest that the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Botanic Gardens and the conservatories of the spectacular Gardens by the Bay are the only areas of green amid the country's futuristic ever-changing cityscape of skyscrapers.

But delve a little deeper and you'll soon discover that these Singaporean highlights are just the tip of the iceberg, with successive governments seeking to create a 'city in a garden'. The rainforest at MacRitchie Reservoir and Nature Trail, for instance, provides an alternative view of the city – one of wild beauty. Its ten kilometre treetop trail brings visitors face to face with native long-tailed macaques and monitor lizards, as well as a cavalcade of orchids and butterflies at any time of year. What's more, it's just ten minutes away from the city centre.

Likewise, Bukit Timah Nature Reserve, is just 12 km from the centre of the city. It contains Singapore's highest point at 163m, and 160 hectares of untouched rainforest where you can find 40% of the nation's endemic flora and fauna.



Photo source: Pixabay

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Fascinating history

Although Singapore as an independent state dates back little more than 50 years, it has a history that goes back centuries. Artefacts from the period of British colonial rule can be found dotted about the modern city centre and beyond.

More obvious colonial sights include St Andrew's Cathedral, the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, and impressive National Gallery buildings, as well as the President's official residence, the Istana Palace. At its Orchards Road entrance you can regularly watch a ceremonial changing of the guard.

Beyond the bounds of the city centre various districts, including the Alexandra Park estate, contain the quaint British-built homes known as 'black and white' houses, which acted as a home away from home for British officers and their families on the island. You can find examples on Nassim Road, Goodwood Hill, and Dempsey Road too.



World-class shopping and cuisine

Singapore is world-renowned for its sparklingly clean shopping malls, but there's also a host of bargains – and cultural insight – to be had by heading to one of the city's increasingly popular flea markets. With stalls manned by the next generation of up-and-coming artists and designers that haven't yet made it into the high-end stores of Singapore's malls, these markets are a great way to experience Singapore as a local. Try TGI Bazaars flea market for new and second-hand clothes, and local handicrafts you won't find anywhere else. Alternatively, look out for pop-up markets such as Public Garden at the Suntec Convention and Exhibition Centre, or the weekly market in China Square, Cross Street, which takes place every Sunday and has everything antique and collectable.

Then follow the locals into one of the dozens of hawker stalls serving exquisite food at very reasonable prices. In Chinatown you can order the world's cheapest Michelin-starred meal – a plate of Hong Kong Soya Sauce Chicken Rice & Noodle on the second floor of the Chinatown food complex will cost you just a few dollars.

Michelin stars are not just limited to market stalls however, and 29 restaurants in the city are able to boast of holding the award, more than Rome or Berlin. Celebrity chefs Gordon Ramsey and Jamie Oliver also have restaurants in the city (Bread Street Kitchen, Marina Bay Sands, and Jamie's Italian Forum, Orchard Road, respectively). Even if your budget doesn't quite stretch to the Michelin-starred, ensure you try the chilli crab available throughout the city – Singapore's de facto national dish.



Island escapes

Singapore is far more than a city break. The ring of small islands which surround the main island offer a fantastic escape from the soaring skyscrapers of the financial district. You only need to head as far as Sentosa (accessible by cable car, public transport, bicycle and a traveller walkway) to find the sort of pristine tropical beaches more associated with Thailand or the Indian Ocean.

Sentosa is also home to a golf course, and family-favourite attractions including Universal Studios, Adventure Cove Waterpark, the Trick Eye Museum and Madam Tussauds. In contrast, the tiny Saint John's Island (accessible via boats from Marina South Pier) boast coral reefs and shoals of colourful fish amid its many lagoons. It was also the first anchorage in the area of Sir Stamford Raffles, founder of modern Singapore.

Pulau Ubin is another easy island escape, which takes visitors back to the Singapore of the 1960s when it was still a land of gravel roads and low wooden cabins. Its home to just one hundred or so permanent residents, who enjoy a way of life unchanged for decades. A ten minute bumboat ride from Changi Point Ferry Terminal, it's a popular place to cycle, with bikes for rent by the landing stage.



Multicultural delights

Thanks to centuries of multiculturalism, Singapore enjoys a busy calendar of festivals and cultural celebrations, from Christmas, to the Muslim holiday of Hari Raya Puasa, Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights in October/November, and the city-wide Chinese New Year celebrations every January/February.

This melting pot of Singaporeans, Malays, ethnic Chinese, Tamils and Europeans doesn't end with these festivals, but has also resulted in a plethora of different neighbourhoods, all of which merit exploration.

The Sri Mariamman Temple acts as the lynchpin around which the country's Hindu population revolve, rubbing shoulders with Muslims walking to afternoon prayers at the Jamae Mosque, and the hubbub of market stalls in Chinatown, where you can find everything from roast duck to firecrackers. To best understand Malay heritage on the island head to the Kampong Glam neighbourhood, while the Baba House in Joo Chiat/Katong offers a glimpse of Straits-born Chinese (Peranakan) culture.



Photo source: [Pixabay](#)

Far from being a stopover city, devoid of its own attractions, Singapore has many diverse sides, a diversity which can only really be explored when looking at the city as the destination, rather than part of the journey.

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IAN

Ian M Packham is an adventurer, travel writer and after-dinner speaker. He has spent years travelling the world, including a two month stop in Singapore.

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