

# NIKOI ISLAND

## Guide to Singapore

Increasingly we have found that more and more of our guests have come from further afield than Singapore and thus often spend a night or two in Singapore. We therefore decided to write a brief guide to Singapore.

## Restaurants

One of the best things about Singapore is the food. Here is our pick of our favourite haunts....

**Budget** - Hawker centers - you almost cannot go wrong here although a little bravery might be needed. Don't be intimidated as most stall holders are usually happy to help explain a dish. Alternatively go with the flow and find the longest queue, join it and check out what the locals are ordering and follow suit. There are hawker centres scattered across Singapore, often in the most unlikely places and without exception the food is delicious, extraordinarily cheap and offers a melting pot of cuisines from all over Asia. Many are open 24 hours a day so if you are suffering jet lag and feeling a bit peckish go check them out. There is even a guide book to hawker centres and restaurants called Makansutra. The blog Chubby Hubby is also worth checking out. The most famous Hawker Centres are Lau Pau Sat, a fantastic Victorian iron pavilion in the business district and Newton Circus which has become a little too touristy for our liking but still worth a visit. Local favourites are Laksa, Chicken Rice, Roti Prata and Beef Kway Teow washed down with freshly made lime juice, cane juice or the local coffee made with condensed milk. Local tip - in the busy centres people will put a small packet of tissues on a table to reserve a spot whilst they go in search of food. So go and buy a packet of tissues from the drinks stall to reserve your table.

**Yhingthai Palace** - Cheap, basic but very good Thai food, closes around 9pm - just a short hop and a jump from Raffles Hotel. T. 63371161, 36 Purves St. **Yet Con** - Bit of history here - they have been serving chicken rice (Singapore's national dish) since 1940. T. 63376819, 25 Purvis St. **Thai Noodle House** - fantastically cheap Thai food but in the suburbs so a bit of hike if you are staying centrally. T. 646701045, Coronation Road #01-04 Coronation Arcade. **Xin Tao Yuan** - handmade noodles and dumplings. T.63236367, 63 Tanjong Pagar Rd. We preferred it when they hand rolled the noodles in the front window but for some reason they stopped doing this.

**Mid priced** - **Taste Paradise** - a refreshing take on Chinese food with excellent service. T. 6509 9660, Ion Orchard Road. **Broth** - Duxton Hill, Aussie bistro food with an Aussie chef in a pretty shophouse. T. 63233353, 21 Duxton Hill. **Mag's Kitchen** - a hole in the wall in Circular Road behind Boat Quay. Simple European food and a superb wine list. **Sabio** - a Spanish tapas bar in Duxton Hill (#5) - great atmosphere and great food. T. 6223 4645. **Buko Nero** - A tiny innovative Italian restaurant run by an Italian chef and his Singaporean wife. Need to book a month or two in advance, excellent value. T. 63246225, 126 Tanjong Pagar Rd. **PS Café** - one of the original restaurants that put the old Dempsey army

barracks on the map. Good bistro food with a great outlook. T.64791588, 28B Harding Rd. **The Wine Company** also in the old Dempsey army barracks. Originally a wine bar specializing in some great South African wines and simple well priced meals. **Spruce** - Good bistro food and half decent service (rare in Singapore) T. 6836 5528, 320 Tanglin Road, Phoenix Park

**Expensive** - **Garibaldi** - Chef Roberto is a legend in the kitchen and delightful character. Truly authentic Italian cuisine and impeccable service. Tell him we sent you along and I am sure he will look after you. T. 68371468, 36 Purves St (near Raffles Hotel). **Iggy's** - In the World's Best 100 restaurants this cosy but stylish restaurant is a testament to the interest in food in Singapore. A fixed degustation menu (no a la carte). T.67322234, Level 3 of the Regent Hotel, 1 Cuscaden Rd. **Saint Pierre** - Cutting edge French cuisine in a stark minimalist setting. T. 64380887, 3 Magazine Rd. **Flutes at the Fort** - For a true colonial experience. Modern Aussie bistro food in the old Fie Chief's residence (they looked after them in those days). 21 Lewin Terrace, Fort Canning Park tel 63388770. **Tatsu Sushi** - For great authentic Japanese meals this place sets the benchmark in Singapore. Chijmes (just across the road from Raffles City). Others - **Absinthe** Bukit Pasoh Road Chinatown - classic French, excellent service. If you want to completely blow the boat out then visit **The Cut** or **Tetsuyas** at Marina Bay Sands or Joel **Robuchon** at Resorts World or the **Tipling Club** in Dempsey Village

**Dim Sum** **Jiang Nan** - Beautifully decorated and first class service as you would expect from a Four Seasons Hotel. Go for Dim Sum and relish in the surroundings. **Lei Garden** in Chijmes is also worth a visit for Dim Sum just please don't order the shark's fin soup.

**Bars** - now we are talking

**Boomarang** - an Aussie pub and restaurant - great food and atmosphere helped by the largely antipodean clientele. **Wala Wala** - famous in Holland Village or HV. Try their stuffed jalapeno's. **White Rabbit** - an old chapel converted into a pub/restaurant. T. 6473 9965, 39C Harding Road Dempsey Village (off Holland Road). **Post Bar** - The Fullerton hotel used to be the main post office hence the name. A bit of a hang for the IB and Hedge Fund crowd so watch your wallet. **La Maison du Whisky** - believe it or not the French know a thing or two about whisky. You can taste before you buy and for a cleanser, there is a Harry's next door. **Harry's** - too many of them these days but worth checking out the original Harry's bar in Boat Quay. Still as popular as ever. A good formula but it might have become a bit formulaic. Worth going to the boat quay one and if you are brave ring up ahead and book a table in Nick Leeson's name. Don't try that at the Cricket Club where his membership was revoked. **Brewerkz** - the first micro brewery in Singapore and still the best. When it first opened you could buy 2 pints and a two course lunch for S\$15. We called it the library in those days and we were often found studying the menu there. **Colbar** - harks back to the British Army days. Very simple fare but a unique selection of ales and ciders that makes this a classic.

Bulldozed in naughties it was moved to its current location such was the outcry over destroying this institution. The story even made the FT.

## Nightclubs

**Zouk** - the doyenne of the nightclub scene. It has been open the longest and has seen many competitors wilter in the limelight. They get a steady stream of international DJs passing through. Also worth checking out **Attica** in Clarke Quay and either **New Asia Bar** or **Ku De Ta** if you like to sip your cocktails with a view. **Stereolab** and **Home Club** are newest clubs on the scene and worth checking out.

## Hotels

Not something we get to try out so often as we all live in Singapore. All the big names are represented. Standouts amongst these are **Four Seasons** and the **Hyatt**. Other 5 star hotels worth checking out are the **Fullerton**, **Goodwood Park Hotel** and the grand daddy of them all, Raffles (impeccable service and meticulously restored, leaves you feeling like royalty). If you are looking for something a bit more quirky and boutique then our picks are the **Scarlet Hotel** (Chinatown), **The New Majestic** (Chinatown), **Quincy Hotel** (Orchard Rd) and **Naumi Hotel** (Seah St near Raffles Hotel). Check out TripAdvisor for details and reviews.

## Shopping

It is commonly joked that the national pastime in Singapore is shopping. Given the number of malls it is not very hard to believe. Orchard Road is probably the shopping mecca for most, particularly if you are into the luxury labels. Ion is the latest and classiest mall along Orchard but Ngee Ann City is also worth a visit.

**Electrical** - Parisilk 15A Lor Liput in Holland Village is the place to go for electrical goods. They will only quote their best price and are extremely knowledgeable. Ask for Kevin and tell them Nikoi sent you.

**Fabrics** - Arab Street has undergone a bit of revival in recent years and there is now a fascinating mixture of clothing shops and small restaurants and coffees houses.

**Books** - Our favourites are **Kinokuniya** in Ngee Ann City which has a great local section. On a completely different scale is the tiny **Select Books** in Tanglin Shopping Centre (the first shopping centre to open in Singapore). They publish and retail a fascinating range of Asian books. Tanglin shopping centre is filled with a host of other boutique stores selling everything from suits to antiques.

## Things to do with kids

The idea of taking your kids to the zoo might sound a bit corny but you have to hand it to Singapore as they have done a great job in creating a

very natural environment without the feeling of peering through cages. The Night Safari (next door to the main zoo) is definitely worth a visit and will fascinate all ages. If you are into birds then pay a visit to Jurong Bird Park or better still get in touch with Nikoi's naturalist Raj Suberaj ([serin@swiftech.com.sg](mailto:serin@swiftech.com.sg)) and arrange for him to take you on a guided walk. He is Singapore's leading naturalist, a bird specialist and an enchanting guide.

If you are interested in the natural world a visit to Macritchie Reservoir is worth a visit. It is an 11km walk all the way around and there is fantastic tree top walk if you aren't scared of heights. Also worth a visit are Bukit Timah Nature Reserve and Sungei Buloh.

Sentosa Island (linked to the mainland by a bridge) has had a big makeover over the last few years and there are a few activities worth visiting, notably the Luge if you are after a bit of action or the Aquarium if you want to see some marine life. There is also a wave machine if you fancy surfing. The Sentosa Resort has a great spa and a very good Sunday brunch. More recently the Resorts World casino has brought in Universal Studios and a bunch of star studded restaurants. All a bit tacky but the kids will love the rides, they are world class.

For a visit back into what Singapore life would have been like 50 years ago take a bike (rentals available) around Pulau Ubin, reached by bum boat from Changi Village.

### Golf

Our pick of the golf courses, Sentosa or Singapore Island Country Club. The other option for golfers is to play Ria Bintan on Bintan which in our view is one of the best in Asia.

### Sculpture

Something that many visitors to Singapore overlook is the extraordinary collection of public sculptures. Everyone from Henry Moore to Dali to Botero is represented. There is a website with the location and pics of all of the works - [www.publicart.sg](http://www.publicart.sg)

### Transport

Singapore's land mass has increased by more than 20% since independence through land reclamation works and yet it is still less than 50km across and around 20km from north to south. This makes getting around easy - no matter what your mode of transport is. Taxi's are cheap and plentiful provided it isn't raining. The biggest taxi provider is Comfort T.65521111 (also an iphone app). The metro rail system known as the MRT is so clean that you could eat off the floors but then don't try that because you are not allowed to.

### A very very short history.....

Singapore history dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century but it only rose to prominence in 14<sup>th</sup> century under the rule of the Srivijayan prince,

Parameswara. It wasn't until 1819 when Sir Stamford Raffles founded the port of Singapore that it really started to develop. Raffles didn't stay long leaving Governor Farquar to take charge. Before leaving he did lay the modern foundation of Singapore by deciding that it should be a free port. In 1826 Singapore was grouped with Penang and Malacca to form the Straits Settlements which was administered by the British East India Company.

Despite spending a staggering \$500mn developing Singapore as a naval base after WWI Singapore was surrendered to the Japanese who had cycled down peninsular Malaysia in Dec 1941. Blissfully arrogant that the Japanese would ever be able to penetrate their "Gibraltar of the East" the exodus for women and children when the Japanese crossed the causeway in Feb 1942 was chaotic.

On 1 April 1946 the Straits Settlements was dissolved and Singapore became a separate crown colony and with its British masters wanting to devolve power the first elections were held in 1948. Even still only British subjects were eligible to vote which caused some angst amongst the left wing chinese communities leading to the Malayan Emergency which was put down swiftly and harshly by the authorities.

In 1957 after a crackdown against communist insurgents the British agreed to granting Singapore complete internal government. Shortly afterwards Lee Kuan Yew's People's Action Party won a landslide election winning 43 out of 51 seats. The PAP have been in power ever since.

In 1963 the leaders of Malaya, Sarawak, Singapore and Sabah agreed to merge. The merger did not last long with Singapore being expelled in 1965 against Lee Kuan Yew's wishes. Economically the country prospered with GDP growth running at around 8% and unemployment falling to 3%. A focus on education (English was made the national language) and on schemes to attract businesses to the country helped this development.

Up until 1981 such was the dominance of the PAP that no opposition party held a seat in parliament. Lee Kuan Yew handed over the reins to Goh Chok Tong in 1990 who led a more open and consultative style of leadership. LKY was appointed Senior Minister and then Minister Mentor in 2004 when his son Lee Hsien Loong was appointed Singapore's third prime minister. The role of Minister Mentor was abolished when LKY stepped down from this position in 2011. It was under Lee that Singapore opened the doors to the casino developments and the Grand Prix that have been the latest driver of growth in Singapore.

### Some myths and misconceptions corrected...

Chewing gum is legal you just cannot buy it. You can bring it into the country for personal consumption. Littering is illegal and can attract a S\$300 fine for first offenders although in reality in all of our many years in Singapore we have never heard of anyone being fined.

It is also illegal to jaywalk and first offenders can be fined S\$500 for doing so although in reality we have never heard of anyone ever being fined for

this. Similarly it is illegal to be seen naked even in your own home and we did once read of someone being fined for this!

You are also not allowed to take Durian (the local fruit that smells a bit like a mix of vomit and blue cheese) on to the MRT. If you can stand the smell it is worth trying it if it is in season (July – Aug).

Singapore has cleaned up its act with regard to allowing fakes to be sold and whereas in the past it was easy to find it is now very difficult. If you are caught with fake DVDs you can be fined up to S\$10,000 per DVD in your possession.

Smokers also be warned that you are now not allowed to bring in more than one packet of cigarettes into the country and hefty fines apply. Similarly smoking indoors can also attract hefty fines.

Michael Fay was the first American to be censored after he was sentenced for pleading guilty to 50 vandalism offences. A clemency request by Bill Clinton saw the punishment reduced from 6 to 4 lashes!! The punishment didn't seem to make much difference to Michael who went on to be cited for various offences in 1996 in the US and was arrested in 1998 for drug offences.

### **Facts and figures**

Population:	5.1mn (3.8mn residents)
Median age:	36
Expat population:	0.9mn
Minimum wage:	Nil
Income tax rates:	2%>\$10k...20%>S\$320k
GDP per capita:	S\$59,813 (2010)
Real economic growth rate:	14.5% ('10) vs -0.8% ('09)
Home ownership:	87.2% (highest in world)
Literacy rate:	96%
Unemployment rate:	2.2% (2010)
CPI:	2.8% (2010)
Land Area	712.4sqkm (+2.1 from '09) making it the 2 <sup>nd</sup> most densely populated country in the world. The US is 15,000x larger.
Highest point:	164m (Bukit Timah)
No of islands:	63
Temperature range:	25C to 32C
Ave yearly rainfall:	2340mm
Daily chance of a thunderstorm:	40%
Visitor arrivals:	11.6mn (2010)
Sea cargo handled:	503mn tonnes
Labour participation rate:	66.2%
Domestic interbank lending rate:	0.3%
Ownership of cars:	38.3%
Ownership of TVs:	99.5%
Ownership of mobile phones:	95.4%
Life expectancy at birth:	79.3/84.1 (M/F)
Highest grossing local movie:	S\$6.1mn ("Money No Enough")