



*A DESTINATION IN ITS OWN RIGHT
THIS VIBRANT CITY IS NO LONGER
JUST A STOPOVER*

FALLING IN LOVE WITH SINGAPORE

It's vibrant beguiling
beauty.

THE WOW FACTOR

What a change. Everything is so bright and clean. The architecture is stunning and everything is so well ordered. After Penang with its dusty roads and the choking fumes of hundreds of bikes and mopeds jostling for position it seems like heaven. Gone are the shabby chic buildings of George town and the concrete jungle of uninspiring hotels. Gone are the bikers wearing their coats back to front- I never did find out why! Instead the air is pristine and the city glistens in the darkness of early evening. The storm through which we flew has now passed and the wet landscape duplicates the bright lights and makes everything shimmer.



SINGAPORE SKYLINE

ILLUMINATIONS AT MARINA BAY

GARDENS BY THE SEA



MARINA BAY SANDS HOTEL

A short drive from Changi airport and we arrive at our hotel. Its grand and we receive a warm welcome from the 'bell boy'. He is well past retirement age but my what a memory. He never fails to remember us, offers us great advice about everything and soon we feel we have known him for ever. We love this place. Some might argue that Singapore has too many rules and regulations but from a visitors point of view it means that your taxi driver will never over charge you, you won't find the pavement covered in chewing gum and should you lose something nine times out of ten it will find its way back to you. Like the camera my husband left in the taxi!

THE LIGHT SHOW AT THE ICONIC MARINA BAY

All too soon we discover that our stop over is going to be far too short so

when others opt to climb into bed we head for the Bay and the extra 11 pm laser, sound and light show. We eat pizza and enjoy a drink in the balmy warmth which engulfs Singapore at almost any time of year. Soon the 15 minute electrifying extravaganza engulfs us. Interweaving lasers join dancing coloured fountains and the story of life unfolds on giant streaming water screens. Like so many things in Singapore it is completely free.

It's getting late but as Christmas is only a month away the shopping and eating complex which adjoins the Marina Sands is still ablaze with activity and we wander over. The stunning architectural mall is complimented by its ribbons of water which are fed by a cascade of water which descends from a giant swirling bowl which can also be viewed from above. Bedecked with tasteful over-

tones of the festive season we enjoy its 'over the top' extravagance, even though our budget runs to just window shopping!

GETTING SKY HIGH ON THE SINGAPORE FLYER AND AT THE MARINA SANDS SKY PARK

The Singapore Flyer is Asia's largest giant observation wheel and like the London Eye it has become a great tourist attraction. We took a 30 minute ride in one of its fully air conditioned capsules and had we had more time we would have taken high tea or cocktails and Champagne on one of the Flyer's special in-flight packages.

The Marina Bay Sands Hotel was designed by architect Moshe Safdie and it is one of the most complex innovative buildings ever

built. Completed in the last decade It offers over two and a half thousand rooms with breath taking views across the city and the Gardens by the Bay and believe it or not, when we enquired, they did not have a spare room! It consists of three towers which stand 55 storeys high. It is capped by the Sands SkyPark, which is home to restaurants, gardens and the iconic infinity pool. We took the lift to check it out for ourselves. Unfortunately the skies darkened and so we spent time in the bar watching the drama of the lightning as it flashed again and again above the city. Believe it or not some folks remained at the edge of the pool watching the lightning show in the warm heavy downpour. When the sun came out again we too took a closer look.

MOONLIGHT ADVENTURE

Early evening saw us with our guide Kaley - a great character, obviously a guy before she took on her female persona. Her voice was deep, her wit sharp and she herded her brood like a mother hen. She was no longer a spring chicken and had been voted best Singapore guide on numerous occasions. We learnt that Singapore was a very small fishing village less than two hundred years ago. The modern city has been built on reclaimed land and within the last couple of decades has changed beyond all recognition. Three quarters of the population are Chinese with Malay, Indian and westerners making up the other quarter.

*MARINA BAY
SINGAPORE FLYER
HAWKER SELECTION*





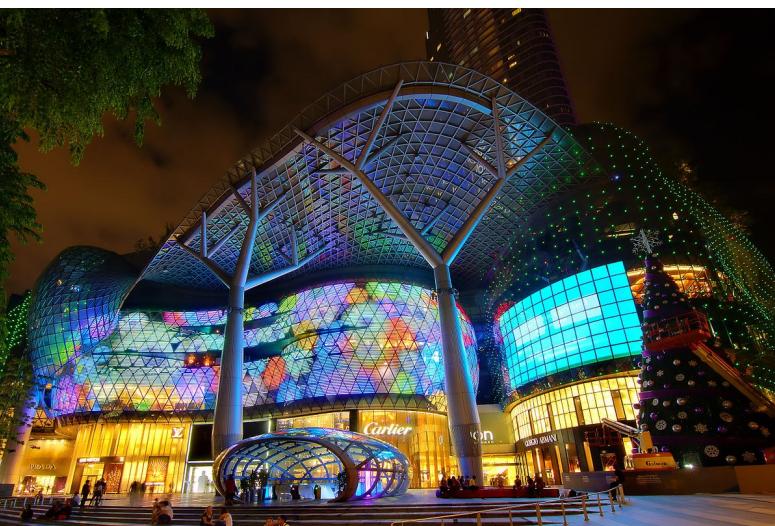
GARDENS BY THE BAY

A MAIN SHOPPING AREA

one of those tee shirts with 'so much to do, so little time' emblazoned across it! We have barely sat down at the wooden tables when we are summoned to board the bus but its hard to hurry with chopsticks so we pick up spoons. Next stop is Burgis village for a quick overview of the exuberant street market and on in time for the show at the Gardens by the Bay for a spectacular sound and light show.

GARDENS BY THE BAY

I knew this was going to be my favourite before we had even alighted from the bus. Like everything else in Singapore lifts provide easy access to everything. The 'trees' are awesome by day but when the sun goes down and the amazing light and sound show brings them to life it's another dimension. As the festive season is just around the corner we enjoy a special captivating presentation. These manmade super trees are as tall as skyscrapers. They have giant steel and concrete trunks with thousands of thick wire rods for branches. In the daytime you can walk between them on high walkway



CRUISING DOWN RIVER

When the historical bumboat arrives at the jetty we sit up front. It's a great chance to see the cityscape by night in all its glory. We pass by all the major landmarks, get caught up in the light and laser show as it erupts into life for a new audience on the shore, pass under bridges, admire the lighted Christmas trees and finally arrive at Clarke Quay. Some leave us to party the night away but we re-board the bus and head for Orchard Grove Road.

THE HAWKER STALLS

First stop are the Hawker stalls at the Singapore Flyer. The smell from every cart-shaped stall is inviting as pots steam and woks sizzle. There is satay, char kway teow, and satay celup to name just a few - whatever shall we choose. Everything is cheap and everything looks inviting. There is no time to dilly dally. It's becoming a constant cry. Perhaps we need

THE NIGHT IS FILLED WITH BIRD SONG

I thought the USA knew how to decorate for Christmas but the major shopping zone is something else. Shoppers are everywhere and they make the journey down the main thoroughfare slow but it gives us more time to

appreciate the lights and festive decorations, which if we stand up on the top deck of the bus, we can almost touch! Suddenly I hear the sound of birds. I think at first that it must be 'piped' but I am a little confused as to why they are playing bird song and not Christmas carols. Then I realise that it is actually thousands of birds singing. It is so light they think it is daytime! Half an hour later we take a taxi back to the hotel. In a few hours the birds will be singing again as we wake to their dawn chorus.

TIME TO SAY FAREWELL

Day three dawns and we have got to catch the plane but I need more time. There is so much still to see and do. Another half dozen stopovers will not be enough. I've fallen in love. Can't get the city out of my mind. I'll be back but it won't be for just a couple of days. I want to visit the aquarium, see the orchids and the botanic gardens, admire the temples, take a ride on the cable car. I want to go on the night time safari at the zoo, try more authentic food at the hawker stalls. The list goes on and on. I've lost my heart to Singapore. I need to get to know you better.

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