

TRANSPORT

Having invested vast sums in its public transport infrastructure, Singapore is undoubtedly the easiest city in Asia to get around. With a typical mixture of far-sighted social planning and authoritarianism, the government has built, and continues to extend, its Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) rail system and its road network.

If you're going to be using public transport heavily, buy the TransitLink Guide (\$2.50 from MRT ticket offices), which lists all bus and MRT routes. Maps show the surrounding areas for all MRT stations, including bus stops.

For online bus information, including a searchable bus guide and the useful IRIS service (which tells you in real time when your next bus will arrive), see www.sbstransit.com.sg. For train information, see www.smrt.com.sg. Book flights, tours and rail tickets online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

AIR

Singapore's location and excellent facilities have made it a natural choice as a major South-east Asian aviation hub, with direct services all over the world. It is also serviced by four budget airlines, which often offer extremely cheap deals if you book well in advance.

Websites worth checking out for flights to and from Singapore include the following:

www.bezurk.com Similar to Zuji, but helpfully lists fares including the taxes and charges.

www.cheapestflights.co.uk This site really does post cheap flights (out of the UK only), but you have to get in early to get the bargains.

www.lastminute.com This site deals mainly in European flights but does have worldwide flights, mostly package returns. There's also an Australian version (www.lastminute.com.au).

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

www.statravel.com This is STA Travel's US website.

There are also sites for the UK (www.statravel.co.uk) and Australia (www.statravel.com.au).

www.travel.com.au This is worth checking out for cheap flights from Australia.

www.travelonline.co.nz This is a good site for New Zealanders to find worldwide fares from their part of the world.

www.zuji.com.au This site offers decent deals on a range of top-notch carriers.

Airlines

Below are some of the major airline offices in Singapore. Check the Business Yellow Pages for any that are not listed here.

British Airways/Qantas (Map pp74–5; ☎ British Airways 6622 1747; www.britishairways.co.uk; 06-05 Cairnhill Pl, 15 Cairnhill Rd)

Cathay Pacific Airways (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6533 1333; www.cathaypacific.com.sg; 25-07 Ocean Towers, 20 Raffles Place)

Garuda Indonesia (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6250 5666; www.garuda-indonesia.com; 12-03 United Sq, 101 Thomson Rd)

KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6832 2220; www.klm.com.sg; 06-01, 79 Anson Rd)

Lufthansa Airlines (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6245 5600; www.lufthansa.com; 05-01 Palais Renaissance, 390 Orchard Rd)

Malaysia Airlines (Map pp52–3; ☎ 6336 6777; www.malaysiaairlines.com; 02-09 Singapore Shopping Centre, 190 Clemenceau Ave)

Qantas (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6415 7373; www.qantas.com.sg; 06-05 Cairnhill Place, 15 Cairnhill Rd)

Singapore Airlines (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6223 8888; www.singaporeair.com; Level 2, Paragon Bldg, Orchard Rd)

Thai Airways International (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6210 5000; www.thaiairways.com.sg; the Globe, 100 Cecil St)

The following budget airlines operate out of Singapore. They are changing their networks all the time, so check websites for details. Bookings are made almost entirely online, though Air Asia tickets can also be bought at post offices.

Air Asia (☎ 6733 9933; www.airasia.com)

Cebu Pacific (☎ agents 6735 7155, 6737 9231, 6220 5966; www.cebuspacificair.com)

Jetstar Asia (☎ 6822 2288; www.jetstarasia.com)

Tiger Airways (☎ 6538 4437; www.tigerairways.com)

GETTING INTO TOWN

Bus

Public bus 36 runs from terminals 1, 2 and 3 to Orchard Rd and the Colonial District (\$1.70, one hour). They leave roughly every 15 minutes, the first departing at 6.09am and the last just after midnight.

Faster and more convenient are the airport shuttle buses (adult/child \$9/6, 20 to 40 minutes) that leave from all main terminal arrival halls and drop passengers at any hotel, except for those on Sentosa and in Changi Village. They leave from Terminals 1 and 2 and the Budget Terminal (6.15pm to midnight, every 15 minutes; all other times every 30 minutes) and Terminal 3 (6am to 10am and 6pm to 2am, every 15 min; all other times every 30 minutes). Booking desks are in the arrival halls.

Train

The MRT is the best low-cost way to get into town. The station is located below Terminals 2 and 3, the fare to Raffles Place is adult/child \$2.70/\$1.50 (including a \$1 refundable deposit) and the journey takes around 35 minutes. You have to change trains at Tanah Merah (just cross the platform). The first train leaves at 5.30am and the last goes at 12.06am.

Taxi

Taxi lines at Changi are usually fast-moving and efficient. Even at the Budget Terminal you rarely have to wait long. The fare structure is complicated, but count on spending anywhere between \$18 and \$35 into the city centre, depending on the time of travel. The most expensive times are between 5pm and 6am, when a whole raft of surcharges kick in.

A limousine transfer service operates 24 hours a day and costs a flat \$45 to anywhere on the island.

Airports

CHANGI AIRPORT

Unless you are travelling from Tioman or Redang Islands in Malaysia, your plane will land at one of the three main terminals or the Budget Terminal at **Changi Airport** (☎ 6542 1122, flight information 1800 542 4422; www.changiairport.com.sg).

Regularly voted the world's best airport, Changi Airport is vast, efficient and amazingly well organised. Among its many facilities you'll find free internet, courtesy phones for local calls, foreign-exchange booths, as well as the following:

Left luggage (🕒 24hr; cabin bag 1st/subsequent 24hr \$3.15/4.20, suitcase \$4.20/5.25) Terminal 1 (☎ 6214 0628; Basement West); Terminal 2 (☎ 6214 1683; Level 1, Arrival Hall North); Terminal 3 (Basement 2 South)

Medical centres Terminal 1 (☎ 6543 1113; Level 2, Transit Mall West; 🕒 8am-2am); Terminal 2 (☎ 6543 1118; Basement South); 🕒 24hr Terminal 3 (☎ 6241 8818; Basement 2 South, 🕒 24hr)

Napping rooms Terminal 1 (☎ 6541 8518; www.rainforestsats.com; Rainforest Lounge, Level 3, Transit Mall West; per person per hr single-occupancy only \$10); Terminal 2 (☎ 6541 9107; www.airport-hotel.com.sg; Level 3; Transit Mall South; per 6hr \$40.45)

Post offices (🕒 6am-midnight) Terminal 2, Level 2, Departure Hall South; Level 2, Transit Mall North.

Shower/spa/massage/gym Terminal 1 (☎ 6541 8518; www.rainforestsats.com; Level 3, Transit Mall West);

Terminal 2 (☎ 6545 0388; www.plaza-ppl.com/sg_en/index.ppl; Level 3, Transit Mall South)

Swimming Pool (☎ 6546 5357; www.airport-hotel.com.sg; Level 3, Transit Mall East, Terminal 1; per visit \$13.90; 🕒 7am-11pm)

SELETAR AIRPORT

This small, modern facility is more used to corporate flyers and visiting luminaries. You may come here to catch the daily Berjaya Airways flights to Tioman Island in Malaysia.

Seletar is in the north of the island, and the easiest way to get there is to take a taxi; otherwise bus 103 will take you from Serangoon MRT or outside the National Library (Map pp52-3) to the gates of the Seletar Air Force base, from where you take a local base bus to the airport terminal.

BICYCLE

Singapore's roads are not for the faint-hearted. The roads are not only furiously hot, but also populated by fast, aggressive drivers who tend to be unsympathetic to the needs of cyclists. Fortunately there's a large network of parks and park connectors, and a few excellent dedicated mountain-biking areas at Bukit Timah Nature Reserve, Tampines and Pulau Ubin.

Other excellent places for cycling include East Coast Park, Sentosa, Pasir Ris Park and the new route linking Mt Faber Park, Telok Blangah Hill Park and Kent Ridge Park.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor transport generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow jetsetters to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

Hire

In the city, the best place to rent top-quality bikes is [Trekology Bikes 3](#) (Map pp92–3; ☎ 6466 2673; www.trekology3.com; 24 Holland Grove Rd; per day \$35; ☎ 11am–7.30pm). It's probably the best bike shop in Singapore.

Bikes can also be rented at several places along East Coast Parkway, on Sentosa Island and Pulau Ubin, with prices starting from \$5.

If you have your own bike, be aware that it's not allowed on public transport.

BOAT

You can take a bumboat (motorised sampan) tour up the Singapore River from several points along the bank, or to go to the islands around Singapore (see Excursions chapter, p176).

The big cruise centre at the [World Trade Centre](#) (Map p100; ☎ 6513 2200; www.singaporecruise.com.sg), next to HarbourFront MRT station, is the main departure point for cruises and ferries to Indonesia; a host of agents here handle bookings.

There are regular ferry services from Changi Point to Pulau Ubin (\$2) and two destinations in Malaysia. To get there, take bus 2 from Tanah Merah MRT.

The Tanah Merah ferry terminal (Map pp46–7) south of Changi Airport handles ferries to the Indonesian island of Bintan and one destination on Batam. To get to the Tanah Merah ferry terminal, take the MRT to Bedok and

then bus 35. A taxi from the city will cost from \$18 to \$30, depending on the time of day.

Malaysia

TANJUNG BELUNGKOR

The ferry from [Changi Ferry Terminal](#) (Map pp46–7; ☎ 6546 8518) to Tanjung Belungkor, east of Johor Bahru, is primarily a service for Singaporeans going to Desaru in Malaysia. The 11km journey takes 45 minutes and costs \$16/22 one-way/return. Services leave at 10am, 5pm and 8.15pm Monday to Thursday, 7.15am, 10am, noon, 5pm and 8.15pm Friday and Saturday, 7.15am, 10am, 6pm and 8.15pm Sunday. From the Tanjung Belungkor jetty, buses operate to Desaru and Kota Tinggi.

PENGERANG

From [Changi Point ferry terminal](#) (Map pp46–7), boats go to Pengerang, a back-door route into Malaysia (see Excursions, p183). There's no fixed schedule; ferries leave throughout the day when a full quota of 12 people (\$6 per person) is reached.

Indonesia

Direct ferries run between Singapore and the Riau Archipelago islands: Pulau Batam, Pulau Bintan, Tanjung Balai and Tanjung Batu. Services to Bintan and to Nongsapara on Batam run from the Tanah Merah ferry terminal. Services to Batam, Balai and Batu run from the cruise centre at HarbourFront.

From Batam, boats go to Sumatra, a popular way to enter Indonesia. The ferries are modern, fast and air-conditioned.

BUS

Singapore's extensive bus service is, needless to say, clean, efficient and regular, reaching every corner of the island.

Bus fares range from \$0.90 to \$1.80 (less with an Ez-link card). When you board the bus, drop the exact money into the fare box (no change is given), or tap your Ez-link card or Tourist Pass on the reader as you board, then again when you get off.

For information, contact **SBS Transit** (☎ 1800 287 2727; www.sbstransit.com.sg).

Train operator **SMRT** (www.smrtbuses.com.sg) runs three free shuttle buses (11am to 10pm Saturday and Sunday, every eight minutes) on three routes: Dhoby Ghaut MRT station to Little India, Dhoby Ghaut MRT station to Chinatown, and Outram Park MRT station to Chinatown.

SMRT also runs two late-night weekend bus services running between the city and the suburbs: Nite Owl (\$3 flat fare, midnight to 4am Friday and Saturday) and NightRider (\$3 flat fare, 11.30pm to 4.30am Friday and Saturday). See the website for route details.

Tourist Buses

Singapore Airlines runs the **SIA Hop-On** (☎ 9457 2896; www.siahopon.asiaone.com.sg) tourist bus, traversing the main tourist arteries every 30 minutes daily, starting at Raffles Blvd at 9am, with the last bus leaving at 5.30pm and arriving back at 7.35pm.

There's also a Sentosa Hop-On bus running between Raffles Boulevard, Orchard Rd, Lau Pa Sat hawker centre and Sentosa. The first bus leaves Sentosa at 10am and the last at 5.30pm. Tickets cost \$12/6 per adult/child, or \$3 with a Singapore Airlines or Silk Air boarding passes or ticket. Buy tickets from the driver.

Malaysia

For information on getting to Johor Bahru, see p180.

If you are travelling beyond Johor Bahru, the simplest option is to catch a bus straight from Singapore, though there are more options and lower fares travelling from Johor Bahru.

In Singapore, long-distance buses to Melaka and the east coast of Malaysia leave from and arrive at the **Lavender Street bus terminal** (Map p68; cnr Lavender St & Kallang Bahru), **Queen Street bus terminal** (Map p68; Queen St) or **Golden Mile Complex** (Map p68; Beach Rd). Public transport options to all three are poor, so it's best to take a taxi.

Konsortium Transnasional (☎ 6294 7034) is Malaysia's biggest coach company and has services throughout the country. **Grassland Express** (☎ 6293 1166; www.grassland.com.sg) has services to Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Melaka, Perak and other destinations.

Thailand

The main terminal for buses to and from Thailand is at the **Golden Mile Complex** (Map p68; Beach Rd). Among the travel agents specialising in buses and tours to Thailand are **Grassland Express** (☎ 6293 1166), with buses to Hat Yai (\$42), and **Phya Travel** (☎ 6294 5415) and **Kwang Chow Travel** (☎ 6293 8977), both with bus services to Hat Yai (\$35) and beyond. Most buses leave around 6pm and travel overnight.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Singaporeans drive on the left-hand side of the road and it is compulsory to wear seat belts in the front and back of the car. The *Mighty Minds Singapore Street Directory* (\$12.90) is invaluable.

Driving

If you plan on driving in Singapore, bring your current home driver's licence and an international driving permit issued by a motoring association in your country.

Singapore once boasted fairly clear roads, but in recent years congestion has significantly worsened. The roads themselves are immaculate, but don't let that lull you into a false sense of security – nowhere is the infamous *kiasu* (Hokkien for 'afraid to lose') Singaporean character more evident than on the roads. Aggressive driving is common, speeding and tailgating endemic, use of signals rare, and wild lane-changing universal. Given Singapore's reputation for strict punishment, penalties for serious offences – even killing pedestrians while drunk – are breathtakingly lenient.

In short, we don't recommend driving in Singapore, but if you do, practise extreme defensive driving, and have your road rage under control!

As for motorcycles, they are held in very low esteem (we speak from experience here). At best, drivers display almost no regard for bike safety. At worst, they appear to violently object to the right of a lowly motorcycle to be in front of them and try to hunt you down.

Hire

If you want a car for local driving only, it's worth checking smaller operators, whose rates are often cheaper than the big global rental firms. If you're going into Malaysia, you're better off renting in Johor Bahru, where the rates are significantly lower (besides, Malaysian police are renowned for targeting Singapore licence plates).

Rates start from around \$60 a day. Special deals may be available, especially for longer-term rental. There are hire booths at Singapore Changi Airport as well as in the city. These are some of the major companies:

Avis (Map pp52–3; ☎ 6737 1668; www.avis.com.sg; 392 Havelock Rd, 01-07)

Express Car (Map p80; ☎ 6842 4992; www.expresscar.com.sg; 1 Sims Lane)

Hawk (Map pp46–7; 6469 4468; www.hawkrentacar.com.sg; 32A Hillview Terrace;)

Hertz Rent-a-Car (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6734 4646; 15 Scotts Rd, 01-01 Thong Teck Bldg)

Premier (Map pp74–5; www.singapore.com/premier/index.html; 03-05 Balmoral Plaza, 271 Bukit Timah Rd)

Restricted Zone & Car Parking

From 7.30am to 7pm weekdays, as well as from 10.15am through to 2pm Saturday, the area comprising the CBD, Chinatown and Orchard Rd is considered a restricted zone. Cars are free to enter but they must pay a toll. Vehicles are automatically tracked by sensors on overhead gantries, so cars must be fitted with an in-vehicle unit, into which drivers must insert a cashcard (available at petrol stations and 7-Elevens). The toll is extracted from the card. The same system is also in operation on certain expressways. Rental cars are subject to the same rules.

Anyone whose vehicle is not fitted with a unit, or whose card does not have sufficient credit, is automatically photographed and fined.

Parking in the city centre is expensive, but relatively easy to find – almost every major mall has a car park. Outdoor car parks and street parking spaces are usually operated by

the government – you can buy booklets of parking coupons, which must be displayed in the window, from post offices and 7-Elevens.

MASS RAPID TRANSIT

The superb MRT subway system is the easiest, quickest and most comfortable way to get around Singapore. The system operates from 5.30am to midnight, with trains at peak times running every three minutes, and off-peak every six minutes. For a map of the system, see the maps section at the back of this book.

In the inner city, the MRT runs underground, emerging overground out towards the suburban housing estates. It consists of three lines: North-South, North-East and East-West, with a fourth – the Circle Line – on the verge of opening at the time of writing.

Fares & Fare Cards

Single-trip tickets cost from \$1.10 to \$1.90 (plus a \$1 refundable deposit), but if you're using the MRT a lot it can become a hassle buying and refunding tickets for every journey. A lot more convenient is the Ez-link card (\$15, including a \$5 nonrefundable deposit), which you can top up as necessary and use on all buses and trains. Alternatively, a **Singapore Tourist Pass** (www.thesingaporetouristpass.com) offers unlimited train and bus travel (\$8) for one day.

TAXI

Poor old Singapore has endless problems with its taxi system. Despite an interminable cycle of debate, reform, complaint and adjustment, finding a taxi in the city at certain times (during peak hours, at night, or when it's raining) remains a major headache. The fare system is also hugely complicated, but thankfully it's all metered, so there's no tedious haggling over fares. The basic flagfall is \$2.80, then \$0.20 for every 385m.

The one exception is at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station, where there's no Changi Airport-style system. It's not unknown for taxi drivers to swoop on new arrivals and demand outlandish fares for short distances. Demand that they use the meter; it's against the law if they don't. Credit card payments incur a 10% surcharge.

These are the taxi companies:

Comfort and CityCab CabLink (☎ 6552 1111)

Premier Taxis (☎ 6363 6888)

SMRT Cabs (☎ 6555 8888)

Ordering a taxi by phone from any of these companies during nonpeak hours is usually quick, but during peak hours you'll often be waiting a long time. Just tell them your location, then wait for an automated message to give you the taxi registration number and estimated time of arrival.

You can flag down a taxi any time, but in the city centre taxis are not allowed to stop anywhere except at designated taxi stands.

TRAIN

Malaysia & Thailand

Singapore is the southern termination point for the Malaysian railway system, **Keretapi Tanah Melayu** (KTM; www.ktmb.com.my). Malaysia has two main rail lines: the primary line going from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur, Butterworth, Alor Setar and then into Thailand; and a second line branching off at Gemas and going right up through the centre of the country to Tumpat, near Kota Bharu on the east coast.

The booking office at **Singapore railway station** (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6222 5165; Keppel Rd) is open 8.30am to 2pm and 3pm to 7pm.

Three express trains depart every day to Kuala Lumpur (1st/2nd/3rd class \$68/34/19) roughly around 7.40am, 3.30pm and 9pm, and takes between seven and nine hours; check the website or call the booking office for the exact times. One-way fares range from \$19 for Economy to \$111 for 'Premier Night Deluxe'. There are also three daily services to the northeast.

The luxurious **Eastern & Oriental Express** (☎ 6392 3500; www.orient-express.com) runs between Singapore and Bangkok, then onward to Chiang Mai and Nong Khai (for Laos). The sumptuous antique train takes 42 hours to do the 1943km journey from Singapore to Bangkok. Don your linen suit, sip a gin and tonic, and dig deep for the fare: from \$3430 per person in a double compartment to \$6650 in the presidential suite.

DIRECTORY

BUSINESS HOURS


In Singapore, government offices are usually open from Monday to Friday and Saturday morning. Hours tend to vary, starting between 7.30am and 9.30am and closing between 4pm and 6pm. On Saturday, closing time is between 11.30am and 1pm.

Shop hours vary. Small shops generally open from 10am to 6pm weekdays, while department stores and large shopping centres open from 10am to 9pm or 9.30pm, seven days a week. Most small shops in Chinatown and Arab St close on Sunday, though in Little India, Sunday is the busiest shopping day.

Banks are open from 9.30am to 3pm weekdays (to 11.30am Saturday), while top restaurants open at lunchtime and in the evenings.

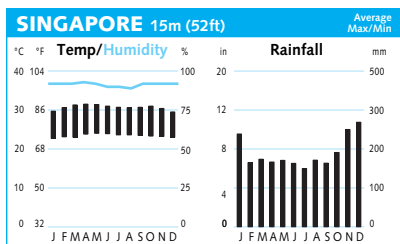
CHILDREN

Singapore is a safe, healthy and fun country for children, provided you make provisions for the heat. Singaporean society is very family-oriented and kids are welcome pretty much everywhere. Eating out as a family is considered normal and hotels are usually able to provide family rooms, extra beds or cots, and babysitting. Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan is packed with useful information for family travel.

In this book, sleeping and eating venues that are child-friendly show the  icon. For things to see and do with children, see p87.

CLIMATE

Singapore is hot and humid all year round and though it gets regular rainfall, it's usually in the form of heavy tropical showers that last an hour or two and leave clear skies behind them. There's little distinction between seasons but



the hotter months are usually between May and September.

COURSES

Singaporeans are mad on courses, but town councils provide them at subsidised rates to citizens or permanent residents. For visitors, the most popular short-term courses are in cookery (see p122).

CUSTOMS REGULATIONS

Visitors to Singapore are allowed to bring in 1L of wine, beer or spirits duty-free. Electronic goods, cosmetics, watches, cameras, jewellery (but not fakes), footwear, toys, arts and crafts are not dutiable; the usual duty-free concession for personal effects, such as clothes, applies.

It is forbidden to bring any tobacco products into Singapore, though they'll turn a blind eye to the odd pack of smokes.

Duty-free concessions are not available if you are arriving in Singapore from Malaysia or if you leave Singapore for less than 48 hours.

Fire crackers, toy currency and coins, obscene or seditious material, gun-shaped cigarette lighters, endangered species or their by-products, and pirated recordings and publications are prohibited. The importation or exportation of illegal drugs carries the death penalty for more than 15g of heroin, 30g of morphine or cocaine, 1.2kg of opium, 500g of cannabis, 200g of cannabis resin, 1000g of cannabis mixture or 250g of methamphetamine. Trafficking in ecstasy (more than 150 tablets) carries a penalty of 30 years' jail and 15 strokes of the *rotan* (a rattan cane).

Penalties for trafficking in lesser amounts range from two years in jail and two strokes of the *rotan* to 30 years and 15 strokes. If you bring in prescription drugs, you should have a doctor's letter or a prescription.

There is no restriction on the importation of currency.

DISCOUNT CARDS

There are no discount cards as such, but anyone flying into Singapore on Singapore Airlines or Silk Air can get discounts at multiple shops, restaurants and attractions by pre-

sending their boarding pass. See singaporeair.com/boardingpass for information.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity supplies are dependable and run at 220V to 240V and 50 cycles. Plugs are of the three-pronged, square-pin type used in the UK. Most malls have electronic or hardware stores, all of which stock a full range of adaptors. For more information on travellers' electrical issues, see www.kropla.com.

EMBASSIES

For a list of Singaporean missions abroad, check out www.visitsingapore.com, where you'll also find a full list of foreign embassies and consulates in Singapore. Contact details for some foreign embassies and consulates include the following:

Australia (Map pp92–3; ☎ 6836 4100; www.australia.org.sg; 25 Napier Rd; 🚇 Orchard, then 🚏 7 or 123)

Canada (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6854 5900; www.cic.gc.ca; 11-01, One George St; 🚇 Tanjong Pagar)

China (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6418 0246; www.chinaembassy.org.sg; 150 Tanglin Rd; 🚇 Orchard, then 🚏 7 or 123)

France (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6880 7800; www.france.org.sg; 101-103 Cluny Park Rd; 🚇 Newton, then 🚏 48, 66 or 170)

Germany (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6533 6002; www.singapur.diplo.de; 12-00 Singapore Land Tower, 50 Raffles Place; 🚇 Raffles Place)

India (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6737 6777; www.embassyofindia.com; 31 Grange Rd; 🚇 Orchard, then 🚏 7 or 123)

Indonesia (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6737 7422; 7 Chatsworth Rd; 🚇 Orchard, then bus 7 or 123)

Ireland (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6238 7616; www.ireland.org.sg; 08-00 Liat Towers, 541 Orchard Rd; 🚇 Orchard)

Israel (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6235 0966; 58 Dalvey Rd; 🚇 Orchard)

Japan (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6235 8855; www.sg.emb-japan.go.jp; 16 Nassim Rd; 🚇 Orchard)

Malaysia (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6235 0111; 301 Jervois Rd; 🚇 City Hall)

New Zealand (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6235 9966; www.nzembassy.com; 15-06/10 Ngee Ann City, 391A Orchard Rd; 🚇 Orchard or Somerset)

Thailand (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6737 2644; 370 Orchard Rd; 🚇 Orchard)

UK (Map pp92–3; ☎ 6424 4200; www.britain.org.sg; 100 Tanglin Rd; 🚇 Orchard, then 🚏 7 or 123)

USA (Map pp92–3; ☎ 6476 9100; <http://singapore.usembassy.gov>; 27 Napier Rd; 🚇 Orchard, then 🚏 7 or 123)

EMERGENCY

Useful emergency numbers:

Ambulance (☎ 995)

Fire (☎ 995)

Police (☎ 999)

SOS Helpline (☎ 1800 774 5935)

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Sex between males is illegal in Singapore, carrying a minimum sentence of 10 years. In reality, nobody is ever likely to be prosecuted, but the ban remains as a symbol of the government's belief that the country is not ready for the open acceptance of 'alternative lifestyles'.

Despite that, there are lots of gay bars and you'll see lots of openly gay people around the city.

A good place to start looking for information is on the websites of **Utopia** (www.utopia-asia.com) or **Fridae** (www.fridae.com), both of which provide excellent coverage of venues and events across Asia.

Singaporeans are fairly conservative about public affection, though it's becoming much more common to see displays of familiarity among straight and lesbian couples these days (the latter don't seem to attract any attention). A gay male couple doing the same would definitely draw negative attention.

HEALTH

As well as being a healthy place, Singapore has excellent facilities that draw lots of 'medical tourists'. For a complete rundown on what's available, see www.singaporemedicine.com.

Hygiene is strictly observed and the tap water is safe to drink. However, hepatitis A does occur. You only need vaccinations if you come from a yellow-fever area. Singapore is not a malarial zone but dengue fever is an increasing concern.

Lonely Planet's *Asia & India: Healthy Travel Guide* is a handy pocket-sized and packed with useful information including pretrip planning, emergency first-aid, immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* also includes advice on travel health for younger children.

Medical Problems & Treatment

Self-diagnosis and treatment can be risky, so you should always seek medical help. An embassy, consulate or hotel can usually recommend a local doctor or clinic. Singapore has many pharmacies (check www.yellowpages.com.sg).

DENGUE FEVER

Singapore has suffered a sharp rise in cases of this nasty viral disease in recent years. Spread by day-biting *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes – recognisable by their black-and-white striped bodies – it is characterised by sudden high fever, extremely painful joint pains (hence its old name 'breakbone fever'), headache, nausea and vomiting, which peaks and settles after a few days, after which a rash often spreads across the body. The illness usually disappears after 10 days, but the resulting weakness can take months to recover from. The biggest danger is dengue haemorrhagic fever and dengue shock syndrome, which causes internal bleeding and can be fatal. If you suspect dengue, seek medical treatment immediately.

HEAT EXHAUSTION

It's important to avoid dehydration in Singapore's constant heat – it can lead to heat exhaustion. Take time to acclimatise to high temperatures; drink sufficient liquids and do not do anything too physically demanding. Salt deficiency, another cause of dehydration, is characterised by fatigue, lethargy, headaches, giddiness and muscle cramps; salt tablets may help, but adding extra salt to your food is better.

HEPATITIS A

Hepatitis A can be found in Singapore and is transmitted through contaminated food and drinking water. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, fatigue, feelings of weakness, and aches and pains, followed by loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, light-coloured faeces, jaundiced (yellow) skin and yellowing of the whites of the eyes. People who have had hepatitis should avoid alcohol for some time after the illness, as the liver needs time to recover.

You should seek medical advice, but there is not much you can do apart from resting, drinking lots of fluids, eating lightly and avoiding fatty foods.

The hepatitis A vaccine provides long-term immunity (possibly more than 10 years) after

an initial injection and a booster after six to 12 months.

PRICKLY HEAT

This is an itchy rash caused by excessive perspiration trapped under the skin. It usually strikes people who have just arrived in a hot climate. Keep cool, bathe often, dry the skin and use a mild talcum or prickly heat powder, or resort to air-conditioning.

SUNBURN

In the tropics you can get sunburnt surprisingly quickly, even through cloud. Use a sunscreen, a hat (or umbrella), and a barrier cream for your nose and lips. Calamine lotion or a commercial after-sun preparation is good for mild sunburn. Protect your eyes with good-quality sunglasses.

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays

Listed are public holidays in Singapore. For those days not based on the Western calendar, the months they are likely to fall in are provided. The only holiday that has a major effect on the city is Chinese New Year, when virtually all shops shut down for two days.

New Year's Day 1 January

Chinese New Year Three days in January/February

Good Friday April

Labour Day 1 May

Vesak Day May

National Day 9 August

Hari Raya Puasa October/November

Deepavali October

Christmas Day 25 December

Hari Raya Haji December/January

School Holidays

There are two long breaks; the first is a four-week break in June and the second is usually the entire month of December.

INTERNET ACCESS

Every top hotel has internet access and will help get you set up if you bring your own laptop or palmtop computer. The newer backpacker hostels all offer free internet access.

Singapore's island-wide broadband network and thousands of wireless hotspots

WI-FI ACCESS

Singapore has an ever-expanding network of around 1000 wireless hotspots – and most cafes and pubs operate them. A list of hotspots can be found by following the Wireless@SG link at www.infocomm123.sg. Logging on is free until 31 December 2009 – you can get a user ID and password by dialling ☎ 186 on the SingTel Mobile network.

means you don't have to worry about telephone cables, but if you need dial-up internet access, ensure that you have at least a US RJ-11 telephone adaptor that works with your modem. You can almost always find an adaptor that will convert from RJ-11 to the local variety.

Major Internet service providers such as **CompuServe** (www.compuserve.com), **AOL** (www.aol.com) and **AT&T** (www.attbusiness.net) have dial-up nodes in Singapore. **SingTel** (www.singtel.com.sg) and **StarHub** (www.starhub.com) are the two biggest local providers.

If you intend to rely on internet cafes, you'll need your incoming (POP or IMAP) mail server name, your account name and your password from your internet service provider.

LEGAL MATTERS

Singapore's reputation for harsh laws is not undeserved – don't expect any special treatment for being a foreigner. Despite the surprisingly low-key police presence on the street, they appear pretty fast when something happens. Police have broad powers and you would be unwise to refuse any requests they make of you. If you are involved in an incident, it's worth noting that the first person who calls the police tends to be the one who gets believed. If you are arrested, you will be entitled to legal counsel (who will usually advise you to plead guilty if it's a minor offence, even if you're not) and contact with your embassy.

MAPS

Good-quality free tourist maps are available at tourist offices, the airport on arrival, and at some hotels, hostels and shopping centres. The *Official Map of Singapore*, available free from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and hotels, is very good and very easy to follow. Of the commercial maps, Nelles and Periplus

are good. The *Mighty Minds Singapore Street Directory* (\$12.90) is superb and essential if you plan to drive.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Singapore's medical institutions are first-rate and generally cheaper than private healthcare in the West. Needless to say, insurance cover is advisable. Check with insurance providers what treatments and procedures are covered before you leave home.

Clinics

Raffles SurgiCentre (Map p68; ☎ 6334 3337; www.affleshospital.com; 585 North Bridge Rd; ☎ 24hr; 🚗 Bugis) A walk-in clinic.

Singapore General Hospital Accident & Emergency Department (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6321 4311; Outram Rd; ☎ 24hr; 🚗 Outram Park) Located in Block 1 of this big compound.

Emergency Rooms

The following operate 24-hour emergency rooms:

Gleneagles Hospital (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6470 5688; 6A Napier Rd)

Mount Elizabeth Hospital (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6731 2218; 3 Mt Elizabeth Rd)

Raffles Hospital (Map p68; ☎ 6311 1111; 585 North Bridge Rd)

Singapore General Hospital (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6321 4113; Level 2, Block 1, Outram Rd)

MONEY

The country's unit of currency is the Singapore dollar, locally referred to as the 'singdollar', which is made up of 100 cents. Singapore uses 5¢, 10¢, 20¢, 50¢ and \$1 coins, while notes come in denominations of \$2, \$5, \$10, \$50, \$100, \$500 and \$1000. The Singapore dollar is a highly stable and freely convertible currency.

Changing Money

Banks change money, but virtually nobody uses them because the rates are better at the moneychangers dotted all over the city. Usually Indian-run, these tiny stalls can be found in just about every shopping centre (though not in the more modern malls).

NEWSPAPERS & MAGAZINES

English dailies in Singapore include the broadsheet *Straits Times* (which includes the *Sunday Times*), the *Business Times*, the afternoon tabloid *New Paper*, and *Today*, a free paper.

The *Straits Times* is a drab affair that acts as the mouthpiece of the government, though its coverage of Asia is OK. Stablemate the *New Paper* is Singapore's attempt at lurid tabloid journalism, and also offers obsessively detailed coverage of English football.

Today looks like a dog's breakfast, but most agree it's a better read than either of its rivals.

Foreign current affairs and business magazines are widely available, though you won't find the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, which was banned after displeasing the government. Pornographic publications are strictly prohibited, but *Cosmopolitan* and racy lads' magazines like *FHM* and *Maxim* are allowed.

ORGANISED TOURS

Singapore is easy for self-navigation, but there are a number of worthwhile tours that can open up the city and its history, or simply offer a unique experience. Recommended:

Culinary Heritage Tour (☎ 6238 8488; www.eastwestplanners.com) Taking on Singapore's vast food culture can be daunting for the newcomer, so these tailor-made tours are a good way not just of sampling the most famous dishes, but having someone show you the best places to eat them. Aimed at the more affluent visitor. Prices and itineraries are available on request.

Imperial Cheng Ho Dinner Cruise (☎ 6533 9811; www.watertours.com.sg; adult/child daytime cruises \$27/14, dinner cruises \$55/29) Singapore's port and harbour has long been its lifeblood, and though it may be very touristy, there's no better way to see it than from this replica Chinese junk that picks its way through the giant container ships. The food is nothing spectacular, but the views are.

Original Singapore Walks (☎ 6325 1631; www.singaporewalks.com; adult/child from \$25/15) If you just do one tour in Singapore, make it one of these. Led by informed, enthusiastic guides, these walks through various parts of the city – including Chinatown, Little India and the Quays – provide a fascinating insight into Singapore's past, including the down-and-dirty stuff you won't hear about anywhere else. The WWII tour is excellent, too. No booking necessary, just check the website for meeting times and places, then turn up.

Singapore DUCK Tours (☎ 6333 3825; www.ducktours.com.sg; adult/child \$33/17) We're including this because the vindictive streak in us likes the idea of subjecting

people to the cringing embarrassment of being driven around the city in a brightly coloured amphibious vehicle playing a tinny soundtrack, before plunging into the harbour. So excruciating you'll never forget it.

Singapore Nature Walks (☎ 6787 7048; serin@swiftech.com.sg) Singapore's natural assets are often overlooked and hard to find, but freelance guide Subaraj has a passion for nature and an intimate knowledge of the island's pockets of wilderness.

Singapore Zoo Management Tour (☎ 6269 3411; www.zoo.com.sg; adult/child \$20/10; ☎ 11am, 2pm & 4pm) Excellent behind-the-scenes tours of various exhibits with zoo staff, sure to be a hit with the kids. Fragile Forest at 11am, Reptile Garden at 2pm and baboons at 4pm.

River Cruises

They're a little short and vaguely unsatisfying, but the bumboat cruises that ply the stretch between Clarke Quay and Marina Bay are a pleasant way of soaking up some history. Festooned with Chinese lanterns, they are best taken at night, when they make a romantic pre-dinner excursion. Cruises depart from several places along the Singapore River including Clarke Quay, Raffles Landing and Boat Quay. They generally run between 8.30am and 10.30pm.

One company **Singapore River Cruises** (☎ 6336 6111; www.rivercruise.com.sg) operates glass-top boats and bumboats up and down the river (adult/child 30-minute tours \$13/8, 45-minute \$18/10); for atmosphere, the chugging bumboats are by far the most preferable. There are two tour lengths: one goes as far as Clarke Quay, while the longer tour takes in Robertson Quay as well, which is not really worth the extra 15 minutes.

POST

Postal delivery in Singapore is very efficient. Most post offices are open 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and 8am to 2pm Saturday. Call ☎ 1605 to find the nearest branch or check www.singpost.com.sg.

Letters addressed to 'Poste Restante' are held at the **Singapore Post Centre** (Map p80; ☎ 6741 8857; 10 Eunos Rd; 📧 Paya Lebar), which is next to the Paya Lebar MRT station. It's open on Sunday, as is the post office on **Killiney Rd** (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6734 7899; 1 Killiney Rd; 📧 Somerset). There's another branch on **Orchard Rd** (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6738 6899; 04-15 Takashimaya, Ngee Ann City, 391 Orchard Rd; 📧 Orchard). Terminal 2 at Changi Airport (Map pp46–7) has two branches, one

open from 6am to midnight, the other from 8am to 9.30pm.

Airmail postcards and aérograms cost \$0.50 to anywhere in the world. Letters weighing 20g or less cost from \$0.65 to \$1.10, depending on the destination.

RADIO

The Media Corporation of Singapore (MediaCorp for short) runs the largest radio network, with 12 local and four international radio stations. It has five English-language stations: Gold 90.5FM, Symphony 92.4FM, NewsRadio 93.8FM, Class 95FM and Perfect 10 98.7FM. International Channel 96.3FM, also run by MediaCorp, specialises in French, German, Japanese and Korean programmes. Private stations include Sastra Radio's English-language Power 98FM, a 24-hour station aimed at the 18- to 35-year-old market. The BBC broadcasts on 88.9FM.

Most of the island's radio stations have web streaming if you want to get a taste of mid-Atlantic accents with a Singaporean twang before you come.

RELOCATING

Singapore is one of the easiest places in the world to settle, with thousands upon thousands of expatriates streaming in and out constantly. But while the immigration and bureaucratic procedures are smooth and streamlined, the process of becoming socially established can be difficult. Probably the most popular online meeting point is www.singaporeexpats.com, which has a wealth of information on relocating, a real estate service, online forums on every possible topic, a popular dating and friendship service, and online classifieds where you can find lots of goods being discarded by people on their way out.

The spouses and partners of people coming to Singapore on work contracts can apply to the [Ministry of Manpower](http://www.mom.gov.sg) (www.mom.gov.sg) for permission to work. The procedure is a formality, but many find the process of finding jobs a dispiriting slog – Singaporean employers are generally very reluctant to hire foreigners inside the country. Another option is to register a sole proprietorship company and work freelance; the paperwork can be completed at post offices and is usually a formality. Once approved, registering the company and getting the work permit are simple.

TAXES & REFUNDS

As a visitor you are entitled to claim a refund of the 7% Goods & Services Tax on your purchases, provided you meet certain conditions (see [p105](#)).

TELEPHONE

You can make local and international calls from public phone booths. Most phone booths take phonecards.

Singapore also has credit-card phones that can be used by running your card through the slot. At SingTel centres, there are also Home Country Direct phones – press a country button to contact the operator and reverse the charges, or have the call charged to an international telephone card acceptable in your country.

Useful numbers include the following:

Directory information (☎ 100)

Flight information (☎ 1800 542 4422) Voice activated.

STB 24-hour Touristline (☎ 1800 736 2000)

There are no area codes within Singapore; telephone numbers are eight digits unless you are calling toll-free (☎ 1800).

To call Singapore from overseas, dial your country's international access number and then ☎ 65, Singapore's country code, before entering the eight-digit telephone number.

Calls to Malaysia (from Singapore) are considered to be STD (trunk or long-distance) calls. Dial the access code ☎ 020, followed by the area code of the town in Malaysia that you wish to call (minus the leading zero) and then your party's number. Thus, for a call to ☎ 346 7890 in Kuala Lumpur (area code ☎ 03) you would dial ☎ 02-3-346 7890. Call ☎ 109 for assistance with Malaysian area codes.

Mobile Phones

In Singapore, mobile phone numbers start with ☎ 9. As long as you have arranged to have 'global roaming' facilities with your home provider, your GSM digital phone will automatically connect with one of Singapore's networks. Singapore uses GSM900 and GSM1800 and there is complete coverage over the whole island. Check roaming rates with your operator, as they can be very high.

Alternatively, you can buy a local SIM card for around \$28 (including credit) from post

offices and 7-Eleven stores – by law you must show your passport to get one.

Phonocards

Phonocards are particularly popular among Singapore's migrant workers – the domestic maids and construction workers that keep the city ticking over – so there are plenty on sale. There's a small thriving phonocard stall outside the Centrepoint shopping centre (p113) on Orchard Rd, and plenty of retailers around Little India, but check which countries they service before you buy.

TIME

Singapore is eight hours ahead of GMT/UTC (London), two hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time (Sydney and Melbourne), 13 hours ahead of American Eastern Standard Time (New York) and 16 hours ahead of American Pacific Standard Time (San Francisco and Los Angeles). So, when it is noon in Singapore, it is 8pm in Los Angeles and 11pm in New York the previous day, 4am in London and 2pm in Sydney.

TOILETS

It will come as no surprise that Singapore's public toilets are widely distributed and immaculate, even those in public parks and train stations. Many places, the zoo for example, have the latest fancy 'outdoor' designs. Occasionally you'll need to pay \$0.10 or \$0.20 to use them – particularly at hawker centres – but ironically these are often the least well-kept.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Before your trip, a good place to check for information is the website of the [Singapore Tourism Board](http://www.visitsingapore.com) (www.visitsingapore.com).

In Singapore, there are several tourism centres offering a wide range of services, including tour bookings and event ticketing, plus a couple of electronic information kiosks.

Liang Court Tourist Service Centre (Map pp52–3;

☎ 6336 7184; Level 1, Liang Court Shopping Centre, 177 River Valley Rd; ☎ 10am–10pm; 🚶🏻♿ Clarke Quay)

Singapore Visitors Centre@Little India (Map p68;

☎ 6296 4280; 73 Dunlop St, InnCrowd Backpackers Hostel; ☎ 10am–10pm; 🚶🏻♿ Little India)

Singapore Visitors@Orchard Information Centre (Map

pp74–5; ☎ 1800 736 2000; cnr Orchard & Cairnhill Rds; ☎ 8am–10.30pm; 🚶🏻♿ Somerset)

Suntec City Visitors Centre (Map pp52–3; ☎ 1800 332 5066; 01-35/37/39/41 Suntec City Mall, 3 Temasek Blvd; ☎ 10am–6pm; 🚶🏻♿ City Hall)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Facilities for wheelchairs used to be nonexistent in Singapore, but in recent years a large government campaign has seen ramps, lifts and other facilities progressively installed around the island. The pavements in the city are nearly all immaculate, MRT stations all have lifts and there are even some buses equipped with wheelchair-friendly equipment. Check out *Access Singapore*, which is a useful guidebook by the Disabled Persons Association of Singapore; it has a complete rundown on services and other information, and can be found online at www.dpa.org.sg. The booklet is also available from STB offices (see left) or from the [National Council of Social Services](http://www.nccs.org.sg) (☎ 6210 2500; www.nccs.org.sg).

VISAS

Citizens of most countries are granted 30-day visas on arrival by air or overland (though the latter may get 14-day visas). The exceptions are the Commonwealth of Independent States, India, Myanmar, China and most Middle Eastern countries. Extensions can be applied for at the [Immigration Department](http://www.immigration.gov.sg) (Map p68; ☎ 6391 6100; 10 Kallang Rd; 🚶🏻♿ Lavender).

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Singapore is probably the safest Asian country in which to travel and sexual harassment is very rare – though women might be a little uncomfortable in Little India during the weekends, when tens of thousands of male migrant workers throng the area. Women are not cloistered in Singaporean society and enjoy considerable freedom and equality.

WORK

Work opportunities for foreigners inside the country are limited – the vast majority of foreigners get hired from overseas. One of the main reasons for this is the high cost of accommodation and car ownership, which overseas companies often cover for top executives.

However, foreigners do find work inside the country and there is a huge skills gap in

many industries, including digital media, finance and hospitality. Business experience, marketable job skills and impressive qualifications are your best bet – like the rest of Asia, Singapore often places a higher value on your paperwork than your experience. **Contact Singapore** (www.contactsingapore.sg) should be your first stop for job-hunting, though there are also dozens of headhunting firms on the lookout for skilled foreigners.

Doing Business

Singapore prides itself on being a dynamic and efficient place to do business. Leaving Barings Bank and a couple of other scandals aside, Singapore has stable financial markets, a stable government and negligible corruption.

Singapore has aggressively attracted foreign capital, and big money from overseas has played a large part in the dramatic rise in Singapore's wealth. As a free-trading promoter of foreign investment with minimal restrictions, Singapore is an easy place to set up a business. Though it primarily directs its energies and substantial concessions to large investors in export-oriented industries, the current focus on boosting tourism, arts and entertainment has opened up a new world of opportunity. The domestic economy is very much directed by the government through the auspices of the **Economic Development Board** (www.sedb.com).

Singapore pursues a free-trade policy and, other than the GST for the importation of goods, very few goods are dutiable

or restricted for import or export. **International Enterprise Singapore** (Map p68; ☎ 6337 6628, Singapore only 1800 437 7673; www.iesingapore.gov.sg; Level 10, Bugis Junction Tower, 230 Victoria St) has simplified import and export procedures, and trade documents can be processed through TradeNet, an electronic data system. Check its website for a list of its offices worldwide, usually located at the Singaporean diplomatic missions.

You may also find the *Business Times* newspaper useful.

Bring plenty of business cards with you – business meetings typically begin with the exchange of cards, which are offered with two hands in a humble gesture signifying that you are presenting yourself to your contact. Expect to be liberally dined and entertained. Establishing personal rapport is important and your business contacts are unlikely to let you languish in your hotel at the end of a working day.

Volunteering

Singapore prides itself on its volunteer culture. If you're living in the city, volunteers are usually welcome at any of the customary places: rest homes, disability associations, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), the Singapore zoo, environmental groups etc. Don't be surprised if you're asked to go through extensive procedures and/or training sessions before being accepted, however.

LANGUAGE

The four official languages of Singapore are Malay, Tamil, Mandarin and English. Malay is the national language, adopted when Singapore was part of Malaysia, but its use is mostly restricted to the Malay community.

Tamil is the main Indian language; others include Malayalam and Hindi.

Chinese dialects are still widely spoken, especially among older Chinese, with the most common being Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese and Hakka. The government's long-standing campaign to promote Mandarin, the main nondialectal Chinese language, has been very successful and increasing numbers of Singaporean Chinese now speak it at home.

English is becoming even more widespread. After independence, the government introduced a bilingual education policy aimed at developing the vernacular languages and lessening the use of English. However, Chinese graduates found that this lessened their opportunities for higher education and presented them with greater difficulties in finding a job. English was the language of business and united the various ethnic groups, and the government eventually had to give it more priority. It officially became the first language of instruction in schools in 1987. In 2000 the government launched a 'speak good English' campaign to improve the standard of English.

All children are also taught their mother tongue at school. This policy is largely designed to unite the various Chinese groups and to make sure Chinese Singaporeans don't lose contact with their traditions.

SINGLISH

You're unlikely to spend much time in Singapore without finding yourself at some point staring dumbly at someone, trying to work out what on earth they are on about. Unnecessary prepositions and pronouns are dropped, word order is flipped, phrases are clipped short and stress and cadence are unconventional, to say the least. Nominally English, the Singaporeans' unique patois contains borrowed words from Hokkien, Tamil and Malay.

There isn't a Singlish grammar as such, but there are definite characteristics, such as

the long stress on the last syllable of phrases, so that the standard English 'government' becomes 'guvva-men'. Words ending in consonants are often syncopated and vowels are often distorted. A Chinese-speaking taxi driver might not immediately understand that you want to go to Perak Road, since they know it as 'Pera Roh'.

Verb tenses tend to be nonexistent. Past, present and future are indicated instead by time indicators, so in Singlish it's 'I go tomorrow' or 'I go yesterday'.

The particle 'lah' is often tagged on to the end of sentences for emphasis, as in 'No good lah'. Requests or questions may be marked with a tag ending, since direct questioning can be rude. As a result, questions that are formed to be more polite often come across to Westerners as rude. 'Would you like a beer?' becomes 'You wan beer or not?'

SPEAK MANDARIN, PLEASE!

Singapore is a country with many languages and people, but Chinese ultimately predominate.

When their forebears came from China they brought with them a number of Chinese languages and dialects, including Hokkien, Teochew, Hakka, Cantonese and Mandarin. So dissimilar are these dialects that they might as well be separate languages. The British temporarily solved the problem by making English the lingua franca (common language) of its tropical colony, and to a large degree that still remains the case today.

Since 1979 the Singapore government, in an effort to unite its disparate Chinese peoples, has been encouraging minority-language speakers to adopt the language of administration used by Beijing, namely Mandarin. It is hoped that in this way disunity and differences can be eliminated and the concept of a Singaporean nation can be better realised.

The campaign was initially targeted at monolingual Chinese-speakers, but over the years it has spread to English-educated Chinese who have begun to show an increasing willingness to use Mandarin as their main vehicle for communication in business and pleasure. The government is so intent on its 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' that it even has a website where would-be converts can get themselves motivated – it's at www.mandarin.org.sg.

You'll also hear Singaporeans addressing older people as 'uncle' and 'auntie'. They are not relatives and neither is this rude, but more a sign of respect.

Following are a few frequently heard Singlishisms. For a more complete exploration, get hold of the hilarious Coxford Singlish Dictionary on the satirical website **Talking Cock** (www.talkingcock.com).

a bit the – very; as in *Wah! Your car a bit the slow one*

ah beng – every country has them: boys with spiky gelled hair, loud clothes, the latest mobile phones and a choice line in gutter phrases; his fondest wish, if not already fulfilled, is to own a souped-up car with an enormous speaker in the boot, so that he may pick up the cutest *ah lian*

ah lian – the female version of the *ah beng*: large, moussed hair, garish outfits, armed with a vicious tongue; also known as *ah huay*

aiyah! – 'oh, dear!'

alamak! – exclamation of disbelief or frustration, like 'oh my God!'

ang mor – common term for Westerner (Caucasian), with derogatory undertone; literally 'red-haired monkey' in Hokkien

ayam – Malay word for chicken; adjective for something inferior or weak

blur – slow or uninformed

buaya – womaniser, from the Malay for crocodile

can? – 'is that OK?'

can! – 'yes! That's fine.'

char bor – babe, woman

cheena – derogatory term for old-fashioned Chinese in dress or thinking

confirm – used to convey emphasis when describing something/someone, as in *He confirm blur one* (He's not very smart)

go stun – to reverse, as in *Go stun the car* (from the naval expression 'go astern')

heng – luck, good fortune (Hokkien)

hiao – vain

inggrish – English

kambing – foolish person, literally 'goat' (Malay)

kaypoh – busybody

kena – Malay word close to meaning of English word 'got', describing something that happened, as in *He kena arrested for drunk driving*

kenna ketok – ripped off

kiasee – scared, literally 'afraid to die'; a coward

kiasu – literally 'afraid to lose'; selfish, pushy, always on the lookout for a bargain

kopitiam – coffee shop

lah – generally an ending for any phrase or sentence; can translate as 'OK', but has no real meaning, added for emphasis to just about everything

lai dai – 'like that'; used for emphasis, as in *I so boring lai dat* (I'm very bored).

looksee – take a look

makan – a meal; to eat

malu – embarrassed

minah – girlfriend

or not? – general suffix for questions, as in *Can or not?*

(Can you or can't you?)

see first – wait and see what happens

shack – tired

siok – good, great, delicious

sotong – Malay for 'squid', used as an adjective meaning clumsy, or generally not very switched on.

steady lah – well done, excellent; an expression of praise

Wah! – general exclamation of surprise or distress

ya ya – boastful, as in *He always ya ya*

FOOD

Before sampling the delights of a hawker centre, it's a good idea to arm yourself with the names of a few dishes and ingredients, to avoid bewilderment.

Food Glossary

CHINESE

ah balling – glutinous rice balls filled with a sweet paste of peanut, black sesame or red bean and usually served in a peanut- or ginger-flavoured soup

bak chang – local rice dumpling filled with savoury or sweet meat and wrapped in leaves

bak chor mee – noodles with pork, meat balls and fried scallops

bak choy – variety of Chinese cabbage that grows like celery, with long white stalks and dark-green leaves

bak kutteh – local pork rib soup with hints of garlic and Chinese five spices

char kway teow – Hokkien dish of broad noodles, clams and eggs fried in chilli and black-bean sauce

char siew – sweet roast-pork fillet

cheng ting – dessert consisting of a bowl of sugar syrup with pieces of herbal jelly, barley and dates

choi sum – popular Chinese green vegetable, served steamed with oyster sauce

congee – Chinese porridge

Hainanese chicken rice – a local speciality; chicken dish served with spring onions and ginger dressing accompanied by soup and rice

hoisin sauce – thick seasoning sauce made from soya beans, red beans, sugar, vinegar, salt, garlic, sesame, chillies and spices; sweet-spicy and tangy in flavour

ka shou – fish-head noodles

kang kong – water convolvulus, a thick-stemmed type of spinach

kway chap – pig intestines cooked in soy sauce; served with flat rice noodles

kway teow – broad rice noodles
lor mee – local dish of noodles served with slices of meat, eggs and a dash of vinegar in a dark-brown sauce
mee pok – flat noodles made with egg and wheat
popiah – similar to a spring roll, but not fried
spring roll – vegetables, peanuts, egg and bean sprouts rolled up inside a thin pancake and fried
won ton – dumpling filled with spiced minced pork
won ton mee – soup dish with shredded chicken or braised beef
yu char kueh – deep-fried dough; eaten with congee
yusheng – salad of raw fish, grated vegetables, candied melon and lime, pickled ginger, sesame seeds, jellyfish and peanuts tossed in sweet dressing; eaten at Chinese New Year
yu tiao – deep-fried pastry eaten for breakfast or as a dessert

INDIAN

achar – vegetable pickle
fish-head curry – red snapper head in curry sauce; a famous Singapore-Indian dish
gulab jamun – fried milk balls in sugar syrup
idli – steamed rice cake served with thin chutneys
keema – spicy minced meat
kofta – minced meat or vegetable ball
korma – mild curry with yoghurt sauce
lassi – yoghurt-based drink, either sweet or salted
mulligatawny – spicy beef soup
pakora – vegetable fritter
paratha – bread made with ghee and cooked on a hotplate; also called *roti prata*
pilau – rice fried in ghee and mixed with nuts, then cooked in stock
raita – side dish of cucumber, yoghurt and mint, used to cool the palate
rasam – spicy soup
roti john – fried roti with chilli
saag – spicy chopped-spinach side dish
sambar – fiery mixture of vegetables, lentils and split peas
samosa – fried pastry triangle stuffed with spiced vegetables or meat
tikka – small pieces of meat and fish served off the bone and marinated in yoghurt before baking
vadai – fried, spicy lentil patty, served with a savoury lentil sauce or yoghurt

MALAY & INDONESIAN

ais kacang – similar to *cendol* but made with evaporated milk instead of coconut milk; it is also spelt 'ice kacang'
belacan – fermented prawn paste used as a condiment

belacan kankong – green vegetables stir-fried in prawn paste
cendol – local dessert made from a cone of ice shavings filled with red beans, *attap* (sweet gelatinous fruit of the attap palm) and jelly, then topped with coloured syrups, brown-sugar syrup and coconut milk
gado gado – cold dish of bean sprouts, potatoes, long beans, *tempeh*, bean curd, rice cakes and prawn crackers, topped with a spicy peanut sauce
itek manis – duck simmered in ginger and black-bean sauce
itek tim – a classic soup of simmered duck, tomatoes, green peppers, salted vegetables and preserved sour plums
kari ayam – curried chicken
kaya – a toast topping made from coconut and egg
kecap – soy sauce, pronounced 'ketchup' (we got the word from them, not the other way around)
kepala ikan – fish head, usually in a curry or grilled
kueh mueh – Malay cakes
lontong – rice cakes in a spicy coconut-milk gravy topped with grated coconut and sometimes bean curd and egg
mee siam – white thin noodles in a sourish and sweet gravy made with tamarind
mee soto – noodle soup with shredded chicken
nasi biryani – saffron rice flavoured with spices and garnished with cashew nuts, almonds and raisins
nasi minyak – spicy rice
pulut kuning – sticky saffron rice
o-chien – oyster omelette
rojak – salad made from cucumber, pineapple, yam bean, star fruit, green mango and guava, with a dressing of shrimp paste, chillies, palm sugar and fresh lime juice
sambal – sauce of fried chilli, onions and prawn paste
soto ayam – spicy chicken soup with vegetables, including potatoes
tempeh – preserved soya beans, deep-fried

PERANAKAN

ayam buah keluak – chicken in a rich, spicy sauce served with buah keluak (a unusually flavoured black, paste-like nut)
carrot cake – omelette-like dish made from radishes, egg, garlic and chilli; also known as *chye tow kway*
kueh pie ti – deep-fried flour cup filled with prawn, chilli sauce and steamed turnip
otak – spicy fish paste cooked in banana leaves; a classic Peranakan snack, also called *otak-otak*
papaya titek – type of curry stew
satay bee hoon – peanut sauce-flavoured noodles
shui kueh – steamed radish cakes with fried preserved-radish topping
soup tulang – meaty bones in a rich, spicy, blood-red tomato gravy

GLOSSARY

Also see the glossaries for Chinese (p203), Indian (p204), Malay and Indonesian (p204) and Peranakan (p204) cuisine.

adat – Malay customary law

akad nikah – Malay wedding ceremony

ang pow – red packet of money used as offering, payment or gift

Baba – male Peranakan

bandar – port

batik – technique for printing cloth with wax and dye

batu – stone, rock, milestone

bendahara – Sultan's highest official

bercukur – Malay haircut

bertunang – to become engaged

bukit – hill

bumboat – motorised *sampan*

bumiputra – indigenous Malays (literally 'sons of the soil')

chettiar – Indian moneylender

chinthas – half-lion, half-griffin figure

chou – clown character in Chinese opera

godown – river warehouse

gopuram – colourful, ornate tower over the entrance gate to Hindu temple

gurdwara – Sikh temple

hajj – Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca; man who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca

hajjah – woman who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca

hantar tanda – family's permission to marry

haveli – traditional, ornately decorated Indian residence

hawker centre – undercover eating area with food stalls; known as hawker market, food court and food centre

HDB – Housing & Development Board; state body responsible for the provision of public housing

imam – Islamic leader

istana – palace

jalan – road

kallang – shipyard

kampung – traditional Malay village

kasot manek – slippers

kavadi – spiked metal frames decorated with peacock feathers, fruit and flowers used in the Thaipusam parade

kebaya – blouse worn over a sarong

kelong – fish trap on stilts

kenduri – important Malay feast

keramat – Malay shrine

kerasong – brooches, usually of fine filigree gold or silver

kiasu – Hokkien word expressing the Singaporean philosophy of looking out for oneself

kongsi – Chinese clan organisations for mutual assistance known variously as ritual brotherhoods, heaven-man-earth societies, triads and secret societies

kopitiam – traditional coffeeshop

kota – fort, city

kramat – Malay shrine

KTM – Keretapi Tanah Melayu (Malaysian Railways System)

kuala – river mouth, place where a tributary joins a larger river

lorong – narrow street, alley

masjid – mosque

merlion – half-lion, half-fish animal and symbol of Singapore

moksha – the Hindu notion of spiritual salvation

MRT – Singapore's Mass Rapid Transit underground railway system

muezzin – the official of a mosque who calls the faithful to prayer

namakarana – Indian name-giving ceremony

Nonya – female Peranakan

padang – open grassy area; usually the city square

pantai – beach

PAP – People's Action Party; main political party of Singapore

pasar – market

pasar malam – night market

penjing – Chinese bonsai

Peranakan – literally 'half-caste'; refers to the Straits Chinese, the original Chinese settlers in Singapore, who intermarried with Malays and adopted many of the Malay customs

pintu pagar – swing doors seen in Chinese shophouses

po chai pills – traditional remedy for travellers' diarrhoea and minor stomach problems

pulau – island

raja – prince, ruler

Ramadan – Islamic month of fasting

rotan – cane made of rattan used to punish criminals

sampan – small boat

shen – local deities

Singlish – variation of English spoken in Singapore

STB – Singapore Tourism Board

STDB – Singapore Trade Development Board

sungei – river

tai-tai – wealthy lady of leisure

tanjung – headland

temenggong – Malay administrator

thali – necklace worn by bride during Indian wedding ceremony; buffet of rice, curried vegetables, soup, curries and bread (Indian)

thola – Indian unit of weight

towkang – Chinese junk

towkays – Chinese business chiefs

wayang – Chinese street opera

wayang kulit – shadow puppet play

wet market – produce market

WTC – World Trade Centre

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