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EATING

Singaporeans live to eat, and while you're here you might as well join them.

For Singaporeans, what's on the plate is far more important than the quality of the china (or plastic) it's served on. The smartest-dressed businessman is as comfortable sitting down on a cheap plastic chair at a plastic table and wading into a \$3 plastic plate of *char kway teow* (Hokkien dish of broad noodles, clams and eggs fried in chilli and black-bean sauce) as he is eating \$50 crabs in an air-conditioned restaurant. Combine this unpretentiousness with infinite variety, high standards of hygiene and the prevalence of the English language, and you have some of the best and most accessible eating opportunities in Southeast Asia.

The city has every imaginable cuisine, for every imaginable budget. Not surprisingly, Chinese food in its many varieties dominates, but there are significant pockets of North and South Indian food, particularly in the area of Serangoon Rd, which, along with Kampong Glam, is also home to a large number of Muslim eateries.

In the Colonial District and the Quays area, expensive restaurants hold sway. Here, and in affluent neighbourhoods around Holland Rd and Bukit Timah, you'll find the greatest concentration of Western food. Eastern Singapore is well known for its seafood and Peranakan restaurants – the rich, sour-and-spicy cuisine developed by the mixed Malay-Chinese people.

But everywhere, from the city to the heartlands, you will find countless hawker centres and food courts, where the majority of ordinary Singaporeans spend an extraordinary amount of time.

HISTORY

Step into any large hawker centre and you'll see the history of Singapore laid before you in edible form: fish-head curry from South India, *nasi biryani* (saffron rice flavoured with spices and garnished with cashew nuts, almonds and raisins) or *rendang* (curried meat in coconut marinade) from Malaysia, chicken rice from Hainan, Hokkien *char kway teow*, Cantonese crispy pork, Teochew rice porridge, Peranakan *popiah* (similar to a spring roll but not fried), or those Western 'mixed grills' that most Westerners find unrecognisable.

As each ethnic group and subgroup came to Singapore, it brought its own cuisine along. They remain largely undiluted to this day, but as often happens when cultures are transplanted far from home, local variations and customs have crept in. Just as the people of Singapore developed their own characteristics the longer they were separated from their homelands, the character of dishes such as fish-head curry, chilli crab and *yu sheng* (raw fish salad eaten at Chinese New Year) have all evolved from traditional favourites.

ETIQUETTE

Visitors to Singapore often say that hawker centres are among the most memorable parts of their trip. Food courts located in malls are easy, but for the first-timer the older hawker

centres can be a little daunting, so it's worth brushing up on some etiquette before plunging in.

When you arrive, bag a seat first, especially if it's busy. You can either do this by placing a member of your group at a table, or do it Singaporean style and lay a packet of tissues on a seat. Don't worry if there are no free tables; it's quite normal to share with a complete stranger.

You're then free to wander off in search of food. Signboards list the stall's specialities, and you can buy any number of dishes from any number of stalls. Sometimes the stall will have a sign saying 'self service', which means you have to carry the food to the table yourself, not dish up your own food. Otherwise, the vendor brings your food to you (which is why you should get a table first, or they won't know where you are).

Generally, you pay when you order, but some hawkers take money when they deliver.

In most older hawker centres and *kopitiam* (coffeeshops), someone will come to your table and take your drinks order. You pay them when they deliver the drinks. In the modern food courts in malls, you have to go and order from the drinks stalls.

Some hawker centres, notably Newton Circus – the one most popular with visitors – have wandering touts who try to grab you

when you arrive, sit you down and plonk menus in front of you. You are not obliged to order from them and in fact it's illegal for stalls to tout at all, which you might like to point out to any persistent pests.

Singapore's amalgam of cultures has largely made strict eating etiquette redundant. Each ethnic group still follows its own eating code for its own food, but often ignores the codes of other cuisines. You'll see Chinese eating *roti prata* (fried Indian flat bread) with a spoon and fork, Indians eating Chinese food with a spoon, Malays attacking a pizza with a knife and fork... In other words, don't feel obliged to follow any rules.

SPECIALITIES

Chinese

With Chinese food, the more people you can muster for a meal the better, because dishes are traditionally shared. A Chinese meal should be balanced; a yin (cooling) dish such as vegetables, most fruits and clear soups, should be matched by a yang (heating) dish such as starchy foods and meat.

The best-known and most popular style of Chinese cooking is Cantonese, despite the majority of Singaporean Chinese not being of Cantonese descent. Cantonese food is usually stir-fried with just a touch of oil to ensure that the result is crisp and fresh. Typical dishes include *won ton* (dumpling filled with spiced minced pork) soup and *mee* (noodles). At the expensive end of the spectrum are shark's-fin and bird's-nest dishes.

One of the most famous Cantonese specialities is dim sum (also known as yum cha); small snack-type dishes usually eaten at lunchtime or as a Sunday brunch in large, noisy restaurants where the dishes are whisked around the tables on trolleys or carts; take what you like as they come by.

The most popular Hainanese dish is chicken rice: steamed fowl, rice cooked in chicken stock, a clear soup and slices of cucumber. It's practically the national dish and the ultimate Singaporean comfort food. Eaten with dips (ginger and chilli, and soy), it's light but surprisingly filling. Another popular Hainanese dish is steamboat, which features a boiling stockpot in the middle of the table, into which you dip pieces of meat, seafood or vegetables.

Many of Singapore's Chinese are Hokkien, from southern China, infamously coarse-

tongued folk whose hearty noodle dishes like *char kway teow*, *bak chor mee* (noodles with pork, meat balls and fried scallops) and *hokkien mee* (yellow Hokkien noodles with prawn) are a fast-food favourite.

If you're looking for something more fiery, try Sichuan (aka Szechuan) food – garlic and chillies play their part in dishes such as diced chicken and hot-and-sour soup. Beijing cuisine also has more robust flavours and is usually eaten with noodles or steamed buns.

From the area around Shantou in China, Teochew is a style noted for its delicacy and natural flavours (many say it's bland). Seafood is a speciality – fish *maw* (a fish's swim bladder) crops up alarmingly often. The classic Teochew comfort food is rice porridge, served with fish, pork or frog (the latter being a Geylang favourite).

Indian

Essentially, Indian cuisine can be classified into two broad categories: south and north. South Indian food dominates, as most Indian Singaporeans and migrant workers originate from the south, but North Indian restaurants are becoming much more widespread, thanks to the growing number of North Indian professionals and tourists in Singapore.

South Indian food tends to be hot, with the emphasis on vegetarian dishes. The typical South Indian dish is a thali (rice plate), often served on a large banana leaf. On this leaf is placed a large mound of rice, then various vegetable curries, *rasam* (hot, sour soup) and a dessert. South Indian food is traditionally eaten with the right hand, not utensils – though spoons are always available.

The most popular Indian dish among local Chinese is *roti prata* – a heavy flat bread cooked with oil on a hotplate and served with a curry sauce. Pratha restaurants usually list dozens of varieties, both sweet and savoury.

Other South Indian vegetarian dishes include *masala dosa*, a thin pancake that, rolled around spiced vegetables with some chutney and *rasam* on the side, makes a cheap light meal. An equivalent snack meal in Indian halal (Muslim) restaurants is *murtabak*, made from paper-thin dough filled with egg and minced mutton and lightly grilled with oil.

Another favourite Indian halal dish is biryani, which is different from the North Indian version. Ordering a chicken biryani will get you a mound of spiced, saffron-coloured rice, a piece of deep-fried chicken, a bowl of curry

THE INVENTION OF CHILLI CRAB

In 1956, Mr and Mrs Lim opened a seafood restaurant called the Palm Beach. It was here that Mrs Lim first concocted the now-famous tomato, chilli and egg sauce that makes the quintessential Singapore chilli crab. At least that's the story according to her son Roland, who is the proprietor of the eponymous Roland Restaurant (p134). Singaporean food outlets love their rags-to-riches tales.

The Lims emigrated to New Zealand in the 1960s, but Roland returned to Singapore to find his mum's dish a huge hit. He opened his own restaurant in 1985, and since moving to its present location along Marine Pde in 2000, the 1300-seater place has built up a solid reputation – so much so that former prime minister Goh Chok Tong dines here on National Day.

sauce and a small mound of salad (often with a squirt of sweet chilli sauce on top).

North Indian cuisine is more familiar to Westerners, and most commonly associated with heavier, slightly less spicy, dishes, eaten with breads like naan (leavened bread baked inside a clay oven) and chapati (griddle-fried whole-wheat bread).

Malay & Indonesian

The cuisines of Malaysia and Indonesia are similar. Satay – tiny kebabs of chicken, mutton or beef dipped in a spicy peanut sauce – is ubiquitous. Other common dishes include *tahu goreng* (fried soya bean curd and bean sprouts in a peanut sauce), *ikan bilis* (anchovies fried whole), *ikan assam* (fried fish in a sour tamarind curry) and *sambal udang* (fiery curried prawns).

Both *ayam goreng* (fried chicken) and *rendang* are popular staples. *Nasi goreng* (fried rice) is widely available, but it is as much a Chinese and Indian dish as Malay, and each style has its own flavours. *Nasi lemak* is coconut rice served with fried *ikan bilis*, peanuts and a curry dish.

The Sumatran style of Indonesian food bends much more towards curries and chillies. *Nasi padang*, from the Minangkabau region of West Sumatra, consists of a wide variety of hot curries served with rice. *Mee rebus* (noodles in a rich soya-based sauce) is a Javanese dish that is also widely available in food centres.

Peranakan

As descendants of early Chinese immigrants who married Malay women, the Peranakans developed a unique cuisine that blends Chinese ingredients with Malay sauces and spices. It is commonly flavoured with shallots, chillies, *belacan* (Malay fermented prawn paste), peanuts, preserved soybeans and galangal (a ginger-like root). Thick coconut milk is used

to create the sauce that flavours the prime ingredients.

In the past decade there has been a resurgence of interest in Peranakan cuisine, which was once confined to the home, and there are numerous excellent Peranakan restaurants, like Chilli Padi (p133) and Guan Hoe Soon (p133).

Typical dishes include *otak-otak* (a delicious sausage-like blend of fish, coconut milk, chilli paste, galangal and herbs, wrapped and cooked in a banana leaf) and *ayam buah keluak* (chicken stewed with dark nuts imported from Indonesia to produce a rich sauce – the black, paste-like nut filling, eaten in small amounts with each mouthful, has an unusual, earthy flavour).

Also don't miss out on slurping the distinctive Peranakan laksa (noodles in a savoury coconut-milk gravy with fried tofu and bean sprouts).

Desserts

The lurid mini-volcanoes you'll often see at food centres are *ais kacang* (ice ka-*chan*), a combination of a mound of shaved ice, syrups, evaporated milk, fruit, beans and jellies. *Cendol* is similar, consisting of coconut milk with brown sugar syrup and green jelly strips topped with shaved ice. Both taste terrific – or at least a lot better than they look. Also worth trying is *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.

Head to Little India to experiment with Indian sweets: *burfi*, *ladoo*, *gulab jamun*, *gelabi*, *jangiri*, *kesari* and *halwa*, to name a few, are made with ingredients that include condensed milk, sesame and syrups.

Nonya (Peranakan) desserts are typified by *kueh* (colourful rice cakes often flavoured with coconut and palm sugar) and sweet, sticky delicacies such as miniature pineapple tarts

that are sold everywhere in small plastic tubs with red lids. The magnificent *kueh lapis*, a laborious layer cake that involves prodigious numbers of eggs, is a must-try.

One notable popular Singaporean oddity is the ice-cream sandwich, dished out by mobile ice-cream vendors and enjoyed by young and old alike. This consists of a thick slab of ice cream folded into a slice of bread, though sometimes it's served between the more traditional wafer slices.

WHERE TO EAT

Aside from the standard Western-style restaurants and cafes, Singapore has several local species of eating venue: hawker centre, *kopitiam*, food court, food centre, canteen...all of them feature open dining areas, around which are clustered anything from a handful to a hundred stalls. The subtle distinctions between these places are often a mystery to foreigners, but Singaporeans insist they are different.

The term 'hawker' was once used to describe food vendors who moved their wares around in mobile carts, stopping and setting up their burners wherever there were customers. Of course, such itinerant behaviour was unacceptable in modern Singapore and virtually all of them are now stockaded into hawker centres. Admittedly, it makes life easier for everyone.

Hawker centres are usually stand alone, open-air (or at least open-sided), large and old. There are usually a wide variety of different local cuisines on offer and the atmosphere is often raucous. However, the food is uniformly good. If it isn't, stalls go out of business very quickly.

Food courts are indoor dining areas, often found in air-conditioned shopping malls. There's usually a wider variation of cuisines and prices are marginally higher. Some very swanky food courts are springing up, like

Wisma Atria's Food Republic (p132), where the food is fancier and the prices a little higher still.

Coffeeshops, also called *kopitiam* (*tiam* is Hokkien for 'shop'), are another Singaporean institution. These are open shopfront cafes, usually with a handful of stalls inside, patrolled by an 'auntie' or 'uncle' who takes your drinks order after you've got your food.

Hawker centres and food courts are scrupulously inspected for hygiene. Look for the 'ABC' signs, representing an annually awarded grading based on excellence in cleanliness and food hygiene ('A' is the highest award, which some local wags say stands for Absolutely Tasteless). Some also have special stickers indicating that they offer healthier dishes low in oil, salt, lard and other life-threatening substances.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

The predominance of the Buddhist and Hindu religions in Singapore means finding a vegetarian restaurant, stall or cafe is usually not difficult. Little India in particular teems with vegetarian food, but food courts and hawker centres all over the island often feature a vegetarian stall, or have some vegetarian options.

One thing to be aware of is that interpretations of dishes among Chinese and Malays can be slightly different. We have encountered 'vegetable soup' that contains both chicken and prawn (the reasoning being that because it contains vegetables, it's a vegetable soup!) The solution is to be highly specific when ordering food – don't just say 'vegetarian', but stress that you eat 'no meat, no seafood' and make sure you've been understood.

Vegans are likely to find life a little more difficult, but since the consumption of dairy and other animal by-products is relatively limited, usually all you have to do is ensure there are no eggs.

WATCH YOUR QUEUES

It's a common sight in all hawker centres and food courts: a collection of dozens of stalls, some devoid of customers, some with a handful, then one stall with a line of 10, 20 or sometimes more people patiently waiting to place an order.

It's thoroughly baffling to most foreigners, but Singaporeans are so manic about food that they are quite happy to spend half an hour or more in line to get a dish that's new, popular, or famous. According to local wisdom, if you want the best food, join the longest queue.

Stalls go in and out of favour very quickly, but if you want to witness or join in with this phenomenon, you can find sure-fire mammoth queues for black-pepper crab at Eng Seng Coffeeshop (p133) in Joo Chiat or for *satay bee hoon* (peanut sauce-flavoured noodles) at East Coast Lagoon Food Village (p134).

top picks

VEGETARIAN RESTAURANTS

Indian

- **Ananda Bhavan** (p129) Top-notch informal eatery, with three branches.
- **Annalakshmi** (p128) Magnificent pay-what-you-like buffet lunches.
- **Madras New Woodlands** (p130) Excellent thalis and *dosai* (South India savoury pancake), away from the Komala Vilas tourist crowd.
- **Bombay Woodlands** (p131) Superb, affordable North Indian food just off Orchard Rd.

Chinese

- **Lingzhi Vegetarian** (p132) Excellent traditional and modern Chinese food on Orchard Rd and Novena Sq.
- **Ci Yan Organic Vegetarian Health Food** (p128) It's 100% organic, onion and garlic-free, and surrounded by spiritual books.

Other

- **Original Sin** (p135) Stylish Mediterranean fare in the Holland Village expat enclave.
- **Whatever** (p108) New Age bookstore at the front, superb veggie food at the back.

For a complete list of vegetarian restaurants, check out www.vegetarian-restaurants.net/Asia/Singapore.

COOKING COURSES

Whether you want to know how to whip up your own laksa (no, not out of a jar) or finally learn what the hell *jus* is, there are a number of courses available.

At-Sunrice (Map pp52–3; ☎ 6336 3307; www.at-sunrice.com; Fort Canning Centre) In Fort Canning Park. Pay \$35 for a walk around the spice garden and a tea reception, then an extra \$100 for a half-day class, where you can learn five dishes of your choice (three hands-on, two demo), followed by lunch. More-serious amateur chefs can sign up for a course, taking place on eight consecutive Saturdays and costing \$2100.

Cookery Magic (☎ 6348 9667; www.cookerymagic.com) Perhaps the best classes of all are offered by Cookery Magic, run by the wonderful Ruqmana, who teaches a huge range of popular Indian, Malay, Indonesian, Chinese and Singaporean classics to small groups in her own home, or on field trips. Classes cost from \$50 to \$75 per person.

Shermay's Cooking School (Map pp92–3; ☎ 6479 8442; www.shermay.com; 03-64 Block 43, Jalan Merah Saga, Chip Bee Gardens, Holland Village) Slightly more formal are these hands-on and demo courses, costing from \$69 to \$139. The dessert classes are particularly popular (how often do you get the chance to attend a cupcake workshop?) and there are also courses in European and Asian cuisines.

Raffles Culinary Academy (Map pp52–3; ☎ 6412 1256; www.affleshotel.com/culinaryclass.html) On the second level of the Raffles Hotel Arcade, the academy offers a wide variety of one-day cookery classes for groups of up to 20 people, costing from \$65 to \$130 per person. Very few are hands-on, but you will get lunch or dinner at the end.

Coriander Leaf (Map pp52–3; ☎ 6732 3354; www.corianderleaf.com; 02-03, 3A Merchant Court, Clarke Quay) This Asian fusion restaurant also runs regular classes in anything from Italian and French to Thai and Vietnamese. Each lasts three-and-a-half hours, covers around eight recipes (which seems a little rushed) and costs \$120 to \$130.

PRACTICALITIES

Opening Hours

Generally, the fancier the restaurant, the shorter the opening hours. Top restaurants usually open from noon to 2.30pm, then from around 6pm to 11pm (we've listed the hours where they differ). Food courts, coffeeshops and hawker centres operate throughout the day – sometimes 24 hours a day – and usually close down sometime between 10pm and 1am. Midrange restaurants often stay open throughout the day, while chain cafes such as Coffee Bean stay open as late as 1am.

How Much?

You can spend as much or as little as you like on food in Singapore and still find a good meal – the mark of a great eating city. At a hawker centre or coffeeshop, a meal with coffee, tea or juice will set you back as little as \$4.50, while a food court might cost you an extra \$2. A hearty meal for two in a mid-range restaurant with a couple of beers will cost around \$40 or \$50. Top-end restaurants will set you back at least \$100 a head, and if you're drinking wine, a decent bottle will cost a minimum of \$40.

Bear in mind that most menu prices will have a hefty 18% added to them at the end: 10% for service charge, 7% for GST and 1% government tax.

PRICE GUIDE

The following price guide is based on dinner for two, with a couple of drinks.

\$\$\$	over \$75
\$\$	\$20-75
\$	under \$20

Booking Tables

Generally, the more expensive the restaurant, the likelier it is you'll have to make a reservation. As a rule of thumb, always book ahead for a top-end restaurant. For midrange restaurants, make bookings for Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights.

Tipping

Tipping is usually unnecessary in Singapore, as most restaurants impose a 10% service charge – and nobody ever tips in hawker centres. It's worth checking your bill, though, as a number of bars and restaurants are now opting to withdraw the 10% charge and let customers decide whether or not to leave a tip, presumably in an effort to improve the notoriously poor standard of Singaporean service.

Self-Catering

Food markets like those at Tekka Market, Chinatown Complex and Geylang Serai are pretty thin on the ground in Singapore, but supermarkets are everywhere. Two decent local chains dominate the scene: NTUC FairPrice and Cold Storage (Map pp92-3), which has earned a reputation for being slightly more upmarket – it's certainly more consistent than FairPrice – but in reality there's little to choose between them.

Other popular retailers include French *hypermarket* empire Carrefour (Plaza Singapura and Suntec City), where you'll find a much wider choice and better quality produce, and high-end grocers Jason's Market Place (Raffles City, Orchard Towers, Paragon and Tanglin Mall).

Singapore's relative wealth, large expat population and obsession with food has also spawned a thriving industry in gourmet food and wine retail. Shops like Gastronomie (p116), Swiss Butchery and Jones the Grocer (p116), sprinkled around the city centre and wealthy residential areas like Holland Village, do a roaring trade.

The online store at www.greengrocer.com.sg offers a wide range of fairly high-priced gourmet imports.

COLONIAL DISTRICT & THE QUAYS

Eating around the Colonial District and the three quays is a fancy affair – budget options are pretty thin on the ground in this part of town. The range of international restaurants, from sophisticated French, such as Saint Pierre, to shameless raunch, like Clarke Quay's Hooters, is so staggering it would take a year or more just to eat your way through the Quays. A few hawkers centres, ideal for a quick lunch or cheap dinner, remain and all the main shopping malls have their obligatory food courts.

BOBBY'S TAPROOM & GRILL

Map pp52-3

American \$\$\$

☎ 6337 5477; www.bobbys.com.sg; B1-03 Chijmes, 30 Victoria St; mains from \$20; 🍷 noon-midnight Sun-Tue, noon-2am Wed-Sat; 🚶 City Hall; 🍴

A completely refurbished high-end American barbecue and sports bar specialising in steaks, chops, ribs and all things meaty. It's particularly well-known for its baby back pork ribs, but the steaks are also excellent. Veggie options available.

CHEF CHAN'S RESTAURANT

Map pp52-3

Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 6333 0073; 01-06 National Museum, 93 Stamford Rd; set menu \$88; 🚶 Dhoby Ghaut Staking a very strong claim to be Singapore's top Chinese restaurant, everything about Chef Chan's is outstanding, from the glorious location buried in a hard-to-find nook of the National Museum to the genuine antique Chinese decor and the magnificent, classic set menu (featuring his famous crispy roast chicken, complete with head). Reservations only.

DOC CHENG'S

Map pp52-3

International \$\$\$

☎ 6412 1264; level 2, Raffles Hotel Arcade, 1 Beach Rd; mains from \$20; 🚶 City Hall Decked out with curtained booths, high ceilings, soft lighting and chequered tiles, Doc Cheng's has a discreetly colonial air. The food, however, is decidedly modern fusion. 'Son-in-law' egg starter is surprisingly successful, as are dishes like the tandoori trout.

EQUINOX Map pp52–3 International \$\$\$

☎ 6431 5669; level 70, Swissôtel, 2 Stamford Rd; mains \$30

Seventy floors up, with the city sprawled below, you'll wonder what brought you – the view or the food. The former is better than the latter, but it's still an unforgettable experience. Tastefully decorated with plush red carpets, hanging Chinese screens, subdued lighting, Equinox is a must-visit. Retire for a drink at the New Asia Bar or City Space afterwards.

GARIBALDI Map pp52–3 Italian \$\$\$

☎ 6837 1468; 36 Purvis St; mains \$26–48;

M Bugis

One of the most accomplished Italian restaurants in Singapore – and there's no shortage of competition – Garibaldi's is the perfect spot for a romantic occasion, offering rich, hearty country food. Expect to come out at least \$150 lighter if you have wine.

HAI TIEN LO Map pp52–3 Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 6826 8338; 37th fl, Pan Pacific Hotel, 7 Raffles Blvd; mains from \$20; 🚗 N1–N7

In preparation for a superb meal, savour the spectacular views while riding the external lift up to the 37th floor. A large range of nearly 30 set menus tailored to different tastes and requirements takes the headache out of ordering and allows you to concentrate on the scene outside.

INDOCHINE WATERFRONT

Map pp52–3 Southeast Asian \$\$\$

☎ 6339 1720; 1 Empress Pl; mains from \$20;

M Raffles Place; ♿

This is boutique dining at its peak, surrounded by Buddha statues and with a superb view across the Singapore River to the CBD and the Fullerton Hotel. It's often packed, but the food (if you can forget that you're paying top dollar for what are essentially Lao, Khmer or Vietnamese street dishes) is generally very good, particularly the Cambodian tiger prawns. Next door is the equally trendy Bar Opiume.

MY HUMBLE HOUSE

Map pp52–3 Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 6423 1881; 02-27/29 Esplanade Mall; mains \$15–20; M City Hall

With an outlandish interior designed by Chinese artist Zhang Jin Jie, the name of this restaurant cannot be anything but ironic.

The menu doesn't hold back either, with set lunches named 'The Wind Wafts Above the Shoulder' and suchlike. Eating here is an experience you're unlikely to forget.

PEONY JADE Map pp52–3 Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 6338 0305; 02-02 Clarke Quay; mains from \$15;

M Clarke Quay

Boasting a picturesque riverside location, Peony offers Szechuan and Cantonese food, often with a twist – everyone raves about the prawn with curry leaves, but it's also known for its smoked duck and baked cod.

PIERSIDE KITCHEN & BAR

Map pp52–3 Fusion Seafood \$\$\$

☎ 6438 0400; 01-01 One Fullerton, 1 Fullerton Rd;

M Raffles Place

Completely refurbished and reborn to exploit its superb bayside location to full advantage, Pierside promises outdoor dining with a fantastic view. Ideal spot for a breezy romantic meal – provided you're both into seafood.

ROYAL CHINA Map pp52–3 Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 6338 3363; 03-09 Raffles Hotel, Beach Rd;

M City Hall

Raffles does most things superbly, and its signature Chinese restaurant is no exception. Dress in your best summer casuals and pop in for afternoon dim sum. The scallop dumplings are magnificent, as is the crispy duck. Worth skipping breakfast for.

TIFFIN ROOM Map pp52–3 Indian \$\$\$

☎ 6431 6156; lobby, Raffles Hotel, 1 Beach Rd;

lunch/dinner buffet \$48/52; M City Hall

A Raffles institution to rank with the Long Bar and Billiard Room, this priceless dining room, complete with lazy ceiling fans, takes our prize for best buffet in town. The largely North Indian food is superb and the temptation to overeat almost irresistible. The tourist-friendly reduced chilli content is the only disappointment.

AH TENG'S BAKERY Map pp52–3 Café \$\$

☎ 6337 1886; Raffles Hotel Arcade, 1 Beach Rd;

🕒 7.30am–5.30pm; M City Hall; ♿

A great place for breakfast pastries or *dim sum* and just about the only part of Raffles Hotel you can enter without your wallet trying to make a run for it. With its genteel wooden chairs and marble-top tables, it has the same colonial air, but it's more reasonably priced.

BOOK CAFÉ Map pp52–3 Cafe \$\$

☎ 6887 5430; 01-02 Seng Kee Bldg, 20 Martin Rd; mains \$10-15; ☎ 8.30am-10.30pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-midnight Fri & Sat; 🚗 33, 54, 139, 195; ♿
At the river end of Mohamed Sultan Rd, Book Café is a convivial bistro with large, comfy sofas and a good selection of old books, magazines and foreign newspapers to browse through while you lounge around enjoying breakfast or a coffee.

CORIANDER LEAF Map pp52–3 Asian Fusion \$\$

☎ 6732 3354; www.corianderleaf.com; 02-03, 3A Merchant Court, Clarke Quay; mains \$15-25; 🚗
☎ Clarke Quay
A fusion of European, Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian menus, Coriander Leaf offers a wide selection of dishes, some a little jarring, most excellent. There's also a small deli and a demo kitchen offering cooking courses (see p122).

SAGE Map pp52–3 European \$\$

☎ 6333 8726; 7 Mohamed Sultan Rd; mains from \$28; 🚗 33, 54, 139, 195
Set in a tiny converted shophouse on the Mohamed Sultan bar strip, Sage is one of the best restaurants in the Quays area. Intimate and relaxed, the service is immaculate and the food, from the prawn and escargot risotto starter to the mushroom soup and the beef cheek main, is superb. The only potential downside is the noise, if a big group happens to be sharing the small space with you. Booking is essential.

TAPAS TREE Map pp52–3 Spanish \$\$

☎ 6837 2938; 01-08, Block 3D, Clarke Quay; tapas from \$5; 🚗
☎ Clarke Quay
Among the most popular of the recent Clarke Quay arrivals, this eatery boasts a huge range of classic tapas, a riverside location (though there's comfy seating inside) and great music (the flamenco trio are fun, though inevitably they're Filipino). Booking at weekends is essential.

WAH LOK Map pp52–3 Chinese \$\$

☎ 6311 8188; 2nd level, Carlton Hotel, 76 Bras Basah Rd; mains over \$20; 🚗
☎ City Hall
The rotunda hall with the high dome ceiling, floor-to-ceiling glass windows, bright interior and warm ambience of this Cantonese place don't quite prepare you for the entertainingly brusque service, but

top picks

HAWKER CENTRES & FOOD COURTS

Hawker centres are one Singaporean institution you simply should not miss. Be prepared for a noisy, crowded, hot (unless you're in a mall) and wonderful time. These are among the best hawker and food centres in Singapore:

- **Smith Street Hawker Centre** (Map pp62–3) At night, Smith St is closed off and the road is filled with tables and diners munching seafood and drinking beer. One of our favourites.
- **East Coast Lagoon Food Village** (p134) Soak up the sea breezes by the beach while wolfing down satay and seafood.
- **Tekka Centre** (p130) The grimy, bustling heart of Little India, where you'll find dozens of Indian and Muslim stalls, wrapped in the noise and smells from the wet market.
- **Golden Mile Complex** (p130) Popular with Thai workers, this is the spot to get a *tom yum* (spicy and sour soup) and a *som tam* (green papaya salad) just like they make in the Land of Smiles.
- **Newton Circus Hawker Centre** (p132) OK, it's a well-worn stop on the tourist trail, but the food and the atmosphere are still memorable.
- **Old Airport Road Food Centre** (Map p80) Refurbished but not sanitised, this old Geylang favourite houses some legendary hawkers.
- **Kopitiam** (p126) A 24-hour food court perfect for post-drinking munchies, if you can stand the blazing lights.
- **Maxwell Road Hawker Centre** (p128) A throw-back to the old days in the heart of Chinatown: noisy and chaotic.
- **Lau Pa Sat** (p128) Dating back to 1822, it's been substantially modernised, but still pulls in the crowds, and even tour buses.
- **Food Republic** (p132) One of a new breed of fancy food centres, with great views of Orchard Rd below.

the food is great. Wah Lok well known for its excellent tofu; the roast meats are also a highlight.

GLUTTONS BAY Map pp52–3 Hawker Centre \$

☎ 6336 7025; 01-15 Esplanade Mall; mains \$10-20; ☎ 6pm-3am; 🚗
☎ City Hall; ♿
Selected by the Makansutra food guide (see p126), this bayside collection of the best hawkers (or street-food masters, as they call them)

GOURMET GUIDES

Of the annual restaurant guides available from most bookstores, *Singapore Tatler* magazine's *Best Restaurants* guide focuses on the best top-end establishments in town, while KF Seetoh, the founder of the superb *Makansutra* (the bible of hawker centre food), has attained guru status. *I-S* magazine produces free annual eating and drinking guides, but unless you're in town at the time they're published they're hard to get hold of.

The reviews in *Time Out* and *I-S* are a good source of news on Singapore's ever-changing restaurant scene.

Check out these websites too:

www.makansutra.com The website of the TV food show, *Makansutra*, is lively, but apart from the Top 10, you have to purchase the book to read its reviews.

www.makantime.com Covering hawker centres, budget eateries and restaurants, this website has lots of local feedback, but is dated.

www.sbestfood.com An excellent site for hunting down hawker food, with listings arranged by type of food and by location. Reviews, though, are scant.

www.singaporehalaldirectory.com List of halal-certified companies and outlets in Singapore.

is a great place to start your exploration of the island's food culture. Everyone has their own favourites – we like the BBQ seafood stall.

KOPITIAM Map pp52–3 ☕ Coffeeshop \$
 cnr Bencoolen St & Bras Basah Rd; ☎ 24hr;
 📍 City Hall

One of the top spots in the district for a late-night feed, this branch of the Kopitiam chain is brisk and blindingly bright, so if it's a late boozy night grab a table outside, where the light is more friendly. The food is uniformly good and you won't pay much more than \$6 for a meal.

CHINATOWN & THE CBD

Combining the narrow lanes of olde Singapore with the bewildering variety of a truly 21st-century metropolis, Chinatown is probably the best food district in the city and has something for everyone: from the hip, sophisticated eateries of Club St and Ann Siang Rd to the tiny teahouses of Tanjong Pagar, to the jovial bustle of the Chinatown Food St and the rough-and-ready Maxwell Rd hawker centre and everything in between.

L'ANGELUS Map pp62–3 🍷 French \$\$\$
 ☎ 6225 6897; 85 Club St; mains from \$16;
 📍 Chinatown

Cosy, friendly, traditional French restaurant run by a couple of attentive French expats, who also own the excellent bar *Le Carillon de L'Angelus* (☎ 6423 0353; 24 Ann Siang Rd; ☎ 5pm-

2am Mon-Sat, 5pm-1am Sun), further up on Ann Siang Rd. The escargot are a speciality, but we like the cassoulet, an incredibly filling, hearty bean and meat stew.

OSO RISTORANTE
 Map pp62–3 🍷 Italian \$\$\$
 ☎ 6327 8378; 27 Tanjong Pagar Rd; mains from \$22;
 📍 Tanjong Pagar

Slightly out of place among the mild sleaze of Tanjong Pagar Rd, Oso specialises in refined but hearty Tuscan food, with sauces that feature wild boar and rabbit, plus excellent cheeses and wines. Highly recommended.

SAINT PIERRE Map pp62–3 🍷 French \$\$\$
 ☎ 6438 0887; 01-01 Central Mall, 3 Magazine Rd; mains from \$50; 📍 Clarke Quay

While many are naturally sceptical of self-styled 'celebrity' chefs, the peroxide blond Mr Stroobant has earned his fame. The modern French menu is often inspired and though the six types of pate foie gras might test the patience of animal lovers, it pulls in the crowds. Easily one of the top restaurants in town.

SENSO Map pp62–3 🍷 Italian \$\$\$
 ☎ 6224 3534; 21 Club St; 📍 Chinatown

Senso oozes class, from the understated chic of the bar at the front to the intimate courtyard – once the playground of the school that occupied the building. It's the perfect spot for a romantic evening under the stars, the food and the service are immaculate and the wines (a sommelier is on hand to make suggestions) are superb.

SPRING JUCHUNYUAN

Map pp62–3

Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 6536 2655; www.juchunyuan.com.sg;

01-01 Far East Sq; dishes from \$15;

M Raffles Place

In terms of atmosphere, this must be the most irresistibly romantic Chinese restaurant in Singapore. Done up like a 19th-century house, it specialises in Fuzhou classics like Buddha Jumps Over The Wall. Save for a special occasion.

BROTH Map pp62–3

International \$\$

☎ 6323 3353; 21 Duxton Hill; mains \$15–25;

M Tanjong Pagar

Broth has a great location on a cobbled dead-end street closed to cars, as long as you don't mind walking past the Duxton Rd KTV bars to get there. It's a small, cosy, beautifully converted shophouse, with an appealing Western bistro-style menu, popular among the local office crowd.

CHUAN JIANG HAO ZI

Map pp62–3

Steamboat \$\$

☎ 6225 1518; 12 Smith St; steamboats from \$25;

M Chinatown

Delicious, traditional, impossibly fiery Sichuan steamboat, the eating of which involves strict etiquette (helpfully described in signs on the walls). The special octagonal pots, imported from China, have two chambers, so that two stocks can be used simultaneously, and some of the ingredients are unique to Sichuan steamboat, like duck gizzard, sweet potato and pork trotters. For hardy chilli lovers only.

CORK CELLAR KITCHEN

Map pp62–3

Western \$\$

☎ 6327 9169; 01-08 Capital Tower, 168 Robinson Rd;

mains from \$20; ☎ Mon-Fri; M Tanjong Pagar

This stretch of the CBD is a bit of a culinary vacuum, so it's not surprising this wood-and-glass bistro gets packed with businesspeople during lunchtimes, when the chatter echoing off the minimalist walls can be deafening. Instead, go in the evening, when the excellent food and wine list can be enjoyed in peace.

SEVEN ON CLUB

Map pp62–3

Mediterranean \$\$

☎ 6327 9663; 7 Club St; mains from \$18;

M Chinatown

One of the newer Club St restaurants, Seven exudes class and has been attracting the area's affluent professionals in droves. The alfresco area is a bit too close to the main road for comfort during early evening peak hour, so head inside or wait til the traffic dies down. The Mediterranean dishes, like swordfish belly, are excellent and its set lunches and dinners are good value.

SPIZZA Map pp62–3

Pizza \$\$

☎ 6224 2525; 29 Club St; pizzas from \$15;

M Chinatown

Easygoing, friendly pizzeria – one of the most relaxed options on Club St. The wood-fired thin-crust pizzas are perfect, not too heavy on the toppings – and unlike many pizzerias in Singapore they're happy to load on the anchovies if you ask nicely. Deservedly popular.

THE ART OF TEA APPRECIATION

Taking time out in a teahouse is a pleasant way to relax and learn about the finer points of many kinds of tea available and how to appreciate them. The best place to start is **Yixing Xuan Teahouse** (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6224 6961; www.yixingxuan-teahouse.com; 30/32 Tanjong Pagar Rd; ☎ 11am–11pm), where former banker Vincent Low explains all you need to know about sampling different types of tea. The demonstration with tastings lasts around an hour (\$20 or \$30).

Once you know your green tea from your oolong, nip around the corner to **Tea Chapter** (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6226 1175; www.tea-chapter.com.sg; 9-11 Neil Rd; ☎ 10am–11pm), where Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip dropped by for a cuppa in 1989. There are several different areas in which to sit, but choose carefully: the more private incur a higher surcharge. If you don't know the drill, the waiter will give you a brief demonstration of how to make tea.

Wang San Yang (Map pp62–3; ☎ 6532 2707; www.wystm.com; 01-61, Block 531 Hong Lim Complex ☎ 10am–9pm) is an oasis of elegance amid the bustle of the Hong Lim Complex, and stocks a large range of teaware and does demonstrations on request.

ANNALAKSHMI

Map pp62-3

Indian Vegetarian \$

☎ 6223 0809; www.annalakshmi.com.sg; 104 Amoy St; 🕒 11am-3pm Mon-Sat; 📍 Tanjong Pagar
This Indian eatery is an institution in more ways than one: first, because of the outstanding quality of the vegetarian food, second, because it's a charity organisation staffed by volunteers. Eat your fill, then pay what you think it deserves at the cashier - \$5 to \$10 is appropriate, because the money goes to charity. There are other branches at [Lau Pa Sat](#) (below) and [Chinatown Point](#) (p109), and one in [Johor Bahru](#) (p180) across the Causeway.

CI YAN ORGANIC VEGETARIAN HEALTH FOOD

Map pp62-3

Chinese \$

☎ 6225 9026; 2 Smith St; mains \$10; 🕒 noon-10pm; 📍 Chinatown
Detox at Ci Yan Organic Vegetarian Health Food, where the food is organic, 100% vegetarian and contains no garlic or onion. The tiny wooden tables and chairs and the spiritual book selection give this place a schoolhouse atmosphere to complement your rising sense of worthiness.

HONG HU EXPRESS

Map pp62-3

Coffeeshop \$

cnr Telok Ayer & McCallum St; 🕒 24hr; 📍 Tanjong Pagar
This part of Chinatown is almost completely comatose at night (except for the gay cruising activity), but if you're spilling out of a club on the other side of Ann Siang Hill at 4am with a severe case of the munchies, the 24-hour Hong Hu might just be a lifesaver.

LAU PA SAT

Map pp62-3

Hawker Centre \$

18 Raffles Quay; 🕒 11am-3am; 📍 Raffles Place
Lau pa sat means 'old market' in Hokkien, which is appropriate since the handsome iron structure shipped out from Glasgow in 1894 remains intact. A recent renovation has sapped some of the 'old Asia' atmosphere away, but everyone should come here at least once, if only to sit and down a few Tigers in the corner beer garden.

MAXWELL ROAD HAWKER CENTRE

Map pp62-3

Hawker Centre \$

cnr South Bridge & Maxwell Rds; 📍 Chinatown
One of Chinatown's iconic hawker centres, Maxwell Rd is best viewed at lunchtime,

when it's heaving with people, though that might not be the best time to be a foreigner wandering bewildered among the hundreds of stalls. Its most famous resident is the [Tian Tian](#) chicken rice stall (No 10).

YA KUN KAYA TOAST

Map pp62-3

Coffeeshop \$

☎ 6438 3638; 01-01 Far East Sq, 18 China St; 🕒 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun; 📍 Raffles Place

Though a large chain of Ya Kun outlets has spread across the island, this is by far the most atmospheric and the closest to the original. It's packed with office workers during the week; try to get an inside table to watch the brusque staff in action. Polite they are not, but at least they won't tell you to have a nice day, or ask if you want fries with that.

LITTLE INDIA & KAMPONG GLAM

Obviously you don't come here looking for escargot (with one exception). This is curry paradise, with inexpensive food from almost every part of India. And because most restaurants cater primarily to Indian clientele, you know the food hasn't been adjusted for foreign palates.

Along Race Course Rd are the more up-market restaurants, which cater to more foreigners, while the lanes off Serangoon Rd are worth exploring.

To the east is Kampong Glam, where a clutch of Middle Eastern restaurants play host to a low-key and mildly trendy night scene. Across Beach Rd is the Golden Mile Complex, spiritual home to thousands of Thai migrant workers, where you can find the most authentic Thai food in town.

AL-TAZZAG

Map p68

Egyptian \$\$

☎ 6295 5024; 24 Haji Lane, Kampong Glam; mains from \$8; 🕒 11.30am-4am Mon-Sat, 4pm-4am Sun; 📍 Bugis

A small, colourfully painted Egyptian cafe in quiet Haji Lane, with leather cushions on the bench seats and a backlit display of sheesha pipes. At night it spreads out, putting up tables under the five-foot ways. It's quieter, more relaxed and far more atmospheric than Café Le Caire on Arab St,

though the food isn't quite as good. Still, the dips, kebabs and sheesha pipes are top notch.

FRENCH STALL Map p68 French \$\$

☎ 6299 3544; 544 Serangoon Rd, Little India; mains \$10-20; 🕒 6-10pm Tue-Sun;

📍 Farrer Park

It's cash only at the French Stall, a charming Gallic cafe owned and run by a two-star Michelin chef all the way from Brittany, who embarked on a mission to show that great French food doesn't need to be expensive. His mission has been highly successful.

GAYATRI Map p68 Indian \$\$

☎ 6291 1011; www.gayatrirestaurant.com; 122 Race Course Rd; dishes from \$6; 📍 Little India

Fame is a mysterious thing. While Banana Leaf Apolo 100m away is perpetually packed, Gayatri has much better service, better food (well, its fish-head curry is almost on par) and a far more pleasant ambience, yet it's much quieter and almost free of tourists. It deserves to be much more popular.

KASHMIR Map p68 Indian \$\$

☎ 6293 6003; 52 Race Course Rd; dishes from \$8; 📍 Little India

From the moment a waiter brings a bowl of warm water and a towel to your table for you to wash your hands, you suspect you might be in for a good meal and excellent service – and you are! Stick with the Kashmiri specialities (marked with a maple leaf) and you'll walk out a very happy person.

KOREAN HOT STONE BBQ

Map p68 Korean \$\$

☎ 6299 3866; 249 Beach Rd; dishes from \$12; 🚗 48

A popular alternative to the area's ubiquitous Middle Eastern fare, this no-frills shop-house joint is nearly always packed at night with Singaporean diners, clustered hungrily around the tables, feasting on *bibimbap* (rice with pickled vegetables and chilli sauce), hotpot and other Korean classics.

TEPAK SIREH Map p68 Malay \$\$

☎ 6396 4373; 73 Sultan Gate, Kampong Glam; buffet \$16; 📍 Bugis

One of the most atmospheric Malay restaurants in the city, next to the former Sultan's palace (now Malay Heritage Cen-

tre, see p67) and inside the former 'Prime Minister's' house. The buffet spread is a virtual encyclopaedia of Malay specialities, though slopped into bain-marie trays it's not so appealingly presented. *Tapak Sireh* often caters for functions, so call ahead, or you might get swallowed up by a wedding reception.

ANANDA BHAVAN

Map p68 Indian Vegetarian \$

☎ 6297 9522; 58 Serangoon Rd; 🕒 7.30am-10.30pm; 📍 Little India

Far better than its rival, the Komala Vilas chain. Fill yourself up here with outstanding *idli* (steamed rice cakes with chutney) and *masala thosai* (savoury pancake filled with curried vegetables) or the enormous 'mini' set meal, all washed down with sublime ginger tea. There are also takeaway snacks and a tempting range of Indian sweets. There are other branches **outside the Tekka Centre** (221 Selegie Rd) and **opposite the Mustafa Centre** (☎ 6297 9522; 95 Syed Alwi Rd).

ANDHRA CURRY Map p68 Indian \$

☎ 6296 3935; 41 Kerbau Rd; meals from \$7; 📍 Little India

No fancy decor and no ceremony, but the food here, from the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, is superb and the service quick and functional. Particularly good is the Hyderabad *biryani* (traditionally cooked in a dough-sealed pot) and the large vegetarian thalis.

ANJAPPAR Map p68 Indian \$

☎ 6392 5545; www.anjappar.com.sg; 102 Syed Alwi Rd; meals from \$8; 📍 Farrer Park Originally from Chennai, this restaurant dynasty has spread to Singapore and proved extremely popular for its outstanding Chettinad cuisine, from the deep south of India. Our favourites are the mutton *uppu kari* (a dry, spicy mutton curry) and the chicken *nattu koli masala* (chicken in a spicy gravy), the latter guaranteed to have you bathing in a sweat of chilli bliss. The flagship branch is on Race Course Rd.

BANANA LEAF APOLO Map p68 Indian \$

☎ 6293 8682; www.bananaleafapolo.com; 54-58 Race Course Rd; dishes from \$6, fish-head curries from \$18; 📍 Little India

A popular stop on the tourist route, but nevertheless the Apolo continues to attract

a wide range of customers and has never compromised on the quality or spiciness of its famous fish-head curry, or any other dish it serves up on wide banana leaves. Like many places that get lots of tourists, though, the service can be a little grumpy and slow.

CAFÉ LE CAIRE (AL MAJLIS)

Map p68

Middle Eastern \$

☎ 6292 0979; 39 Arab St, Kampong Glam; dishes under \$10; ☎ 10am-2am; (M) Bugis

Highly informal, Egyptian hole-in-the-wall cafe attracting a multinational crowd, run by a former accountant who went on a quest to preserve Arab culture in Singapore. In the daytime you'd hardly notice it, but at night it spreads its tables and rugs along both sides of the street, serving up superb dips, breads and kebabs, plus sheesha pipes. Best Middle Eastern food in the area.

COUNTRYSIDE CAFE

Map p68

Western/Indian \$

☎ 6297 6964; 71 Dunlop St; ☎ 10am-midnight Tue-Sun, 5pm-midnight Mon; mains \$6-12; (M) Little India

A relaxed, friendly and cosy shophouse eatery ostensibly aimed at the local backpacker crowd, but attracting a broad range of people with its well-priced Western and Indian food (excellent veggie burgers), eager service and cheap beers (\$6.50 for a pint of Tiger – about half the price of a city pub!). The Countryside's smart interior design, with its bookshelves and small wine collection, add a touch of charm not usually found in your average traveller joint.

GOLDEN MILE COMPLEX

Map p68

Thai \$

5001 Beach Rd; ☎ 48

This is Singapore's mini-Thailand, full of Thai shops, grocers, butchers and eateries. The signs are in Thai, the customers are mostly Thai and the food, clustered on the ground floor, is 100% magnificent like-mother-makes Thai. The atmosphere is often boisterous and drunken and a little rough-house for some. The Isan (north-east) food is best – try the **Nong Khai Food & Beer Garden** on the ground floor (with the orange sign in Thai and tiny lettering in English), then once you're fed and boozed up, head for Thai Disco 1 or 2 to complete the evening.

MADRAS NEW WOODLANDS

Map p68

Indian Vegetarian \$

☎ 6297 1594; 12-14 Upper Dickson Rd; ☎ 7.30am-11.30pm; mains \$5-10; (M) Little India
Another excellent vegetarian joint dishing up some huge portions (if you ever wondered how vegetarians get fat, here's your answer) on banana leaves. The thalis are vast and truly magnificent, and need at least half an hour to finish, if you can finish them at all. The service is friendlier and more accommodating towards confused foreigners than many of the Little India eateries.

TEKKA CENTRE

Map p68

Hawker Centre \$

cnr Serangoon & Buffalo Rds; dishes \$3-5;

(M) Little India

Like most of Little India, this is the perfect antidote to any notions of 'sterile Singapore'. Wrapped around the hacked bones, sloshed guts and pungent odours of the wet market, the Tekka hawker centre serves up excellent Indian and Muslim food at between \$3 and \$5 a dish.

ORCHARD ROAD

Like the Colonial District, Orchard Rd is dominated by fancier places to eat. The malls are studded with midrange to top-end restaurants, many of which are busy most evenings and weekends. Most malls also have their own food courts, however, where it's easy to find a good lunch or dinner for a few dollars.

BLU

Map pp74-5

Western \$\$\$

☎ 6213 4598; 24th fl, Shangri-La Hotel, 22 Orange Grove Rd; mains from \$30; ☎ 7-10.30pm Mon-Sat; (M) Orchard

Top-notch sophisticated Western cuisine against a backdrop of posh condominiums, all bathed in a seductive low blue light and serenaded by some decent lounge jazz make this a good option for the fashionably minded. The tables are well-spaced to give a feeling of privacy and the service is notably excellent.

NOGAWA

Map pp74-5

Japanese \$\$\$

☎ 6732 2911; 03-25 Le Meridien Singapore, 100 Orchard Rd; mains from \$30; (M) Somerset
This is not the place for a mid-shopping-trip light lunch, because you're liable to keep ordering once you get going to the sushi here. Plonk yourself at the counter

for a chefside view. At \$35, the set lunches are a good deal, considering the quality of the food.

GORDON GRILL

Map pp74–5 International \$\$\$

☎ 6730 1744; Goodwood Park Hotel, 22 Scotts Rd; mains from \$30; M Orchard

With its old military club atmosphere, complete with 'family' portraits, and its famed steaks, the Gordon Grill is an old world oasis in the middle of ultramodern Orchard Rd. It's as much an experience as it is a meal, so it's worth splashing out on the wagyu, ordered by weight.

SHANG PALACE

Map pp74–5 Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 6213 4473; ground fl, Shangri-La Hotel, 22 Orange Grove Rd; mains from \$20; M Orchard, then taxi

Definitely on the A-list of Singapore's Chinese restaurants, Shang's Cantonese seafood and classics such as Peking Duck are well known – and the interior more than matches the food. To sample the ambience without distressing your bank manager, order from the dim sum menu. Book in advance.

PROJECTSHOP CAFÉ

Map pp74–5 Cafe \$\$

☎ 6735 6765; 02-20/21 the Paragon, 290 Orchard Rd; dishes from \$12; ☎; 10am–8.30pm; M Orchard; ♿

Dessert heaven. Pick a table in the middle of the mall for a view of the well-heeled shoppers, or head inside so that you and your banana cream pie can enjoy a private moment. The main courses here are pretty good too, but the real reason to come is for dessert and coffee.

BOMBAY WOODLANDS RESTAURANT

Map pp74–5 Indian Vegetarian \$\$

☎ 6235 2712; B1-01/02 Tanglin Shopping Centre, 19 Tanglin Rd; mains \$5-7; M Orchard; ♿

Tucked away below street level in the Tanglin Shopping Centre, Bombay Woodlands is the sort of place you'd pass by without a glance. Don't. The food is magnificent and cheap; go for the lunchtime buffet, or go à la carte and order the *idli* with terrific mint chutney, excellent *dosai* (try the Mysore Masala) or *bhindi* (okra), washed down with *lassi* (yoghurt-based drink). With its attentive white-shirted waiters, it has a charm not easily found in the Orchard Rd vicinity.

CRYSTAL JADE STEAMBOAT KITCHEN

Map pp74–5 Chinese \$\$

☎ 6336 2833; 02-32 Plaza Singapura, Orchard Rd; mains from \$6; M Dhoby Ghaut; ♿

Crystal Jade is the king of delicious, reliable and affordable Chinese food in Singapore, which is why it's nearly always packed. On offer here are excellent dim sum and rice porridges. As always, the best plan of attack is to get a group together and order up big.

DIN TAI FUNG

Map pp74–5 Chinese \$\$

☎ 6836 8336; B1-03 Paragon, 290 Orchard Rd; dishes from \$7; M Orchard; ♿

One of the best restaurants in the country, Din Tai Fung is the first Singapore branch of Taiwan's oldest dumpling and noodle chain. The food here, carefully prepared by the large team of chefs visible through the full-length glass of the kitchen, is nothing short of unbelievable. Among the highlights, and worth savouring, is the simple pork and shrimp dumpling soup in a delicate broth, while the fried rice, delicately flavoured with spring onion, is superb. A must visit.

IMPERIAL TREASURE NAN BEI KITCHEN

Map pp74–5 Chinese \$\$

☎ 6738 1238; 05-12 Ngee Ann City, 391 Orchard Rd; dishes from \$8; M Orchard

Superb midrange Cantonese and Shang-hainese food. The *xiao long bao* (soup dumplings) here rival those of [Din Tai Fung](#) (above) for best in town, while its roast meats (goose and pork) are also excellent and its soups (which change daily) extremely tasty. Perfect way to end a shopping trip.

IZAKAYA NIJUMARU

Map pp74–5 Japanese \$\$

☎ 6235 4857; 02-10 Cuppage Plaza, 5 Koek Rd; mains from \$12; M Somerset; ♿

Modelled on the Japanese *izakaya* (drinking restaurant), the emphasis here is as much on boozing as it is eating – and the Japanese businessmen who come here like their booze. Sit down, order some sake and endless rounds of skewered meat, and kiss the evening goodbye. Cuppage Plaza is extremely popular with expatriate Japanese, so don't be surprised to find yourself in a minority of one.

NO RESTAURANT FOR DILETTANTES

The line at **Wasabi Tei** (Map pp74–5; 05-70 Far East Plaza, 14 Scotts Rd; dishes \$5-15; ☎ noon-3pm & 5.30-9.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-4.30pm & 5.30-9.30pm Sat; 🚶 Orchard) begins at the front door and often extends a dozen or more people down the corridor. Reserved seating is not permitted (it has no telephone), so be prepared to wait.

Once inside, order promptly, and only once. Your hostess – the chef's wife – will politely ignore any post-order amendments. Such are the rules laid out by the chef himself. Remember the Soup Nazi in *Seinfeld*? Well, here's the Singapore equivalent.

He works silently, fluidly, each movement efficient and solemn. The final gesture in each dish's preparation blends seamlessly into the next, its delivery. Neither asking nor offering acknowledgment, he's already begun work on the next by the time the last has even been tasted.

The diners eat quietly, reverently; most are well aware that, in a different world, the chef would be preparing sushi (and what sushi!) for royalty rather than serving a grateful public at a 20-seat mom-and-pop sushi bar in a mall off Orchard Rd.

Long before your meal is finished you'll understand why so many call this somewhat austere sushi bar Singapore's finest. But when your plate is clean, thank the hostess and pay your bill; post-meal dallying is not encouraged.

LINGZHI VEGETARIAN

Map pp74–5

Chinese \$\$

☎ 6734 3788; 05-01/02 Liat Towers, 541 Orchard Rd; mains \$12-20; 🚶 Orchard

The service here can be a bit variable (better to go in the evenings, when staff seem to be less grumpy), but the food is consistently excellent, with a creative menu, using ingredients many may not have encountered before. Another outlet at **Novena Square** (Map pp74–5; ☎ 6538 2992; 03-09, Velocity@Novena Square) is open for lunch only.

FOOD REPUBLIC

Map pp74–5 Food Court \$

level 4, Wisma Atria, 435 Orchard Rd; ☎ 11am-10.30pm; 🚶 Orchard; 🍴

One of the new breed of more upmarket food courts springing up around Singapore, Food Republic offers traditional hawker classics, as well as Thai, Indian, Japanese and other cuisines. It's survival of the quickest when it comes to grabbing a table at weekends and weekday lunchtimes, but some stalls have private seating areas, where you pay a little more for the food.

LUCKY PRATA

Map pp74–5

Indian \$

☎ 6235 5223; 01-42 Lucky Plaza, 304 Orchard Rd; dishes from \$4; 🚶 Orchard

From the outside, in seedy Lucky Plaza, it looks completely uninviting, but the difficulty in getting a table at lunchtime is a pretty good indicator of the food quality. Pick what you want from the counter at the front, or order à la carte. The fish-head curry is very popular.

NEWTON CIRCUS HAWKER CENTRE

Map pp74–5

Hawker Centre \$

Scotts Rd; 🚶 Newton

Near Newton MRT, and best visited late in the evening when the atmosphere is liveliest, this is one of Singapore's iconic hawker centres and a longtime favourite with tourists. This popularity has of course led to some un-Singaporean practices by the stall owners, like accosting you as you arrive and trying to direct you to a particular stall, but once you shrug them off it's one of the best hawker centres in the city for eating. Famous stalls include **Boon Tat** BBQ seafood, **Hup Kee** oyster omelette (stall 65) and, next door, Singapore's most beloved fish-ball noodles.

EASTERN SINGAPORE

Few visitors spend a great deal of time in Eastern Singapore, but we're hoping that will change, because the area is not only rich in history, culture and architecture, but also is home to some exceptional food, from the Peranakan delights of Katong and Joo Chiat to the superb seafood along East Coast. Hardier souls might brave the nightly sleaze of Geylang, where some great food lurks among the prostitutes and punters.

SIN HUAT EATING HOUSE

Map p80

Seafood \$\$\$

☎ 6744 9755; Lorong 35, Geylang Rd; 🚶 11am-late; 🚶 Paya Lebar then walk; 🍴 fair

The best seafood in Singapore, or a victim of its own fame? Famous food writers have come here in legions and declared

Chef Danny's crab *bee hoon* to be one of the greatest dishes on earth. Inevitably, it's very expensive, usually busy, and service notoriously rude, but as much as you're itching to criticise it, the food is fantastic.

CHARLIE'S CORNER Map pp46-7 Western \$\$

☎ 6542 0867; 01-08 Changi Village Hawker Centre; dishes \$10; 📍 Tanah Merah then 🚶 2

Charlie's Corner is something of an institution, run by an old fella who's been a fixture here for years. The endless varieties of beer and the fish and chips are the main draws, attracting people from far afield. The prices are a little high for a hawker-centre stall, but after a few beers you won't notice. Pop in if you're heading to or from the ferry terminal for Pulau Ubin (see p176) or Sungei Rengit (see p183).

CHILLI PADI Map p80 Peranakan \$\$

☎ 6275 1002; 11 Joo Chiat Pl; dishes from \$6; 📍 Eunos then 🚶 155

Outstanding Peranakan food in its spiritual home of Joo Chiat – and so popular it's spawned a range of home-cook pastes. Try the sour *assam* fish head and or sambal *sotong* (squid), and don't miss the *kueh pie ti* (flour cups filled with prawn and turnip).

ENG SENG COFFEESHOP

Map p80 Hawker Centre \$\$

247/249 Joo Chiat Pl; ☎ 5-9pm; 📍 Eunos then bus 155

People start queuing up at this hawker centre, well known far and wide for its black-pepper crab, before it opens, so be prepared for a long wait. If you haven't yet acquired the bottomless Singaporean patience for a good meal, then try the BBQ seafood stall here, which is also excellent.

GUAN HOE SOON Map p80 Peranakan \$\$

☎ 6344 2761; 214 Joo Chiat Rd; mains under \$20; 🚫 closed Tue; 📍 Eunos

Famously, this is Lee Kuan Yew's favourite Peranakan restaurant, but even boasts like that don't cut much ice with picky Singaporeans if the food doesn't match up. Fortunately, its fame hasn't inspired complacency and the Baba-Nonya food here is top notch.

JIA WEI Map p80

Chinese \$\$

☎ 6340 5678; 2nd fl, Grand Mercure Roxy Hotel, 50 East Coast Rd; mains from \$15; 🚶 10, 14

Top spot in the East Coast area for dim sum, popular with business lunchers. Don't be put off by the remarkable ugliness of the hotel building – the service and the food here is excellent and there are some splendid views over the sea. If you've acquired a taste for durian, try the fried ice-cream for dessert.

JUST GREENS VEGETARIAN

Map p80 Vegetarian \$\$

☎ 6345 0069; 49/51 Joo Chiat Pl; dishes from \$4; 🕒 8am-10pm; 📍 Eunos

You know you've found a good veggie place when meat eaters and monks are prominent among its happy customers. The lunchtime buffet is worth checking out, but you can also order à la carte – the dishes are clearly made with love and the service is generally friendly.

MANGO TREE Map p80

Indian \$\$

☎ 6442 8655; 1000 East Coast Parkway; mains \$10-25; 📍 Bedok then taxi or 🚶 401 from 📍 Bedok, weekends only

An oasis of sophistication among the general Marine Cove brashness in East Coast Park, Mango Tree is a small, stylish beachfront eatery specialising in coastal Indian food, mainly from Goa and Kerala. The outside tables are nice if it's breezy, but the ambience can be spoiled a little by the nearby bars, so it's better to head inside.

NO SIGNBOARD SEAFOOD

Map p80 Seafood \$\$

☎ 6842 3415; 414 Geylang Rd; dishes from \$15; 🕒 noon-2am; 📍 Aljunied

Madam Ong Kim Hoi famously started out with an unnamed hawker stall (hence 'No Signboard'), but the popularity of her seafood made her a rich woman, with five restaurants and counting. Principally famous for its white pepper crab, No Signboard also dishes up delightful lobster, abalone and less familiar dishes like bullfrog and deer. Other branches are at East Coast Seafood Centre (Map p80; ☎ 6448 9959), Kallang (Map p80; ☎ 6344 9959; Stadium Blvd), Esplanade (Map pp52-3; ☎ 6336 9959) and VivoCity (Map p100; ☎ 6376 9959).

ROLAND RESTAURANT

Map p80

Seafood \$\$

☎ 6440 8205; Block 89, 06-750 Marine Parade Central; crabs from \$14; 🕒 10, 14; ♿

Located on top of a car park, but don't let that put you off. If the chilli crab and USA duck (see p120) in this giant restaurant are good enough for the prime minister, they're good enough for us, though eating in huge dining rooms is a little impersonal.

WERNER'S OVEN BAKERY & RESTAURANT

Map p80

German \$\$

☎ 6442 3897; 6 Upper East Coast Rd; mains \$18; 🕒 10, 14; ♿

It lacks the ostentatiously Teutonic decor of other German restaurants in town – in fact, it's downright plain-looking – but the food here is robust and tasty. Ignore the spaghetti and burgers, and plunge into a rich oxtail stew, a bratwurst, bockwurst or splendid wild garlic sausage (all served with a fine sauerkraut and mashed potatoes), some crispy pork knuckle or German meatloaf, washed down with some Paulaner beer. There are some superb breads in the bakery and the breakfasts are very good value.

328 KATONG LAKSA

Map p80

Peranakan \$

216 East Coast Rd; laksa \$5; 🕒 10, 14

As controversial food subjects go, the source of the original, authentic Katong laksa is one of the most emotive. Several laksa stalls along this stretch have been engaged in Singapore's infamous 'Laksa Wars' for years, bickering over who was first. Decide for yourself. You won't go wrong at any of them, but this is, commercially at least, the most successful.

SERANGOON SALT-BAKED CHICKEN

Map p80

Peranakan \$

☎ 6348 2282; 97 East Coast Rd; 🕒 10, 14

In typically Singaporean fashion, Serangoon Salt-Baked Chicken is found nowhere near Serangoon. Also in typically Singaporean fashion, people will travel across town whenever a craving for the wonderfully toothsome takeaway fowl takes hold. Rip it apart with your fingers and devour.

CHIN MEE CHIN CONFECTIONERY

Map p80

Dessert \$

☎ 6345 0419; 204 East Coast Rd; dishes from \$4; 🕒 10, 14

Kaya (jam made from coconut and egg) toast like grandma used to make. A nostalgia trip for many older Singaporeans, old-style bakeries like Chin Mee Chin are a dying breed, with their mosaic tile floors, wooden chairs and strong steaming coffee. One of the few Singaporean breakfast joints that still makes its own *kaya*, apparently.

EAST COAST LAGOON FOOD VILLAGE

Map p80

Hawker Centre \$

East Coast Park Service Rd; 🕒 10.30am-11pm;

🚗 Bedok then taxi, 🚗 401 from

🚗 Bedok, weekends only

Perfect for a cheap outdoor lunch and a beer or two after a stroll, cycle or rollerblade through East Coast Park, this hawker centre gets packed at weekends, but there's usually enough space to bag yourself a table – try to get one closer to the sea to catch any breeze. Well-known for its satay hawkers, BBQ seafood and the *satay bee hoon* stall (just look for the long queue).

HOLLAND ROAD & BUKIT TIMAH

The two long arteries of Holland Rd and Bukit Timah Rd, running east-west from the city centre, border some of Singapore's most affluent residential neighbourhoods, and they also host some fine eating. Infamously overrun with expatriates, Holland Village is one of the few places outside the Quays where locals are outnumbered, but explore further afield and you'll find neighbourhood bar-and-restaurant strips like Greenwood Avenue, and the excellent Rider's Café (opposite).

AU JARDIN

Map pp92-3

French \$\$\$

☎ 6466 8812; EJI Corner House, Singapore Botanic Gardens, Cluny Rd; mains from \$70; taxi

Set in a refurbished colonial mansion and surrounded by the extravagant lushness of the Botanic Gardens, there can hardly be a more charming restaurant in Singapore. It comes at a price, but in terms of both food and experience, it's hard to beat. Dress up, forget the bill and have a romantic promenade through the gardens afterwards.

SEBASTIEN'S BISTROT

Map pp92-3

French \$\$\$

☎ 6465 1980; 12 Greenwood Ave; mains from \$27;
☎ 66, 67, 174

Part of the Les Amis group (which also runs Au Jardin), Sebastien's serves classic French fare (soufflés, terrines, onion soup, escarrot, *boeuf bourguignon*, coq au vin etc) in a sophisticated but relaxed country-style atmosphere, patrolled by the genial and portly eponymous manager. If you have room left, the cheese platter is outstanding and the desserts (profiteroles, rhubarb crumble, lemon tart) are exceptional.

HALIA Map pp92-3

Modern Asian \$\$\$

☎ 6476 6711; Singapore Botanic Gardens, 1 Cluny Rd; mains from \$20; taxi; ♿

The outdoor deck at Halia is a magical spot. Surrounded by the Botanic Gardens' ginger plants and twittering birds, it's perfect for a lazy breakfast, a light lunch, or a romantic dinner. From 3pm to 5pm every day except Sunday, there's an English Tea, with scones, jam and sandwiches.

MICHELANGELO'S Map pp92-3

Italian \$\$

☎ 6475 9069; 44 Jalan Merah Saga 01-60; mains from \$25; ☎ closed lunch Sat; ♿ 7

Along peaceful, upmarket Jalan Merah Saga, Michelangelo's is definitely a place for the hungry. Ignore the cheesy reproduction artwork and dive into the epic portions of mussels, lamb shanks and pastas. There's also an impressive wine list.

NORTH BORDER BAR & GRILL

Map pp92-3

American \$\$

☎ 6777 6618; 2 Rochester Park; mains \$25-69;
☎ Buona Vista

Part of the hip Rochester Park scene, the North Border makes the most of its colonial bungalow setting, offering southwestern American food with the occasional modern twist in a relaxed alfresco setting. The flavours are bold and hearty and the emphasis is firmly on flesh: grain-fed steaks; grilled prawns, baby back ribs, chops.

ORIGINAL SIN

Map pp92-3

Vegetarian \$\$

☎ 6475 5605; 43 Jalan Merah Saga 01-62; mains \$20-30; ♿ 7

The food at this friendly and relaxed place is exceptional and is accompanied by one

of the best wine lists in the city. Try the stuffed portobello mushrooms (\$15), ricotta cake (\$20) or Moroccan eggplant (\$22) washed down with a Portuguese port and try to forget that it looks like you're in a fancy Australian suburb. Fantastic.

PS CAFÉ Map pp92-3

International \$\$

☎ 6479 3343; 28B Harding Rd; mains from \$20;
☎ 7, 123, 174

One of the better results of the Dempsey Rd restaurant explosion, PS Café is the sister of the [ProjectShop Café](#) (p131) on Orchard Rd. It's renowned for its desserts, but when ordering mains it's best to stick to the classics. Some of the fusion offerings, like the duck *rendang*, don't work and some of the staff are too cool for school (or a restaurant, apparently).

GREENWOOD FISH MARKET & BISTRO Map pp92-3

Seafood \$\$

☎ 6467 4950; 34 Greenwood Ave; mains from \$15;
☎ 170

When your meal is lying on a bed of ice, or swimming around in a tank by your ankles, you can be pretty sure it's fresh. Order up the well-known fish and chips, or try one of the more sophisticated offerings, or go on Tuesday, when oysters are \$1 each. You can also buy fish to take home.

MONSTER MASH Map pp92-3

British \$\$

☎ 8161 0967; www.monstermashcafe.co.uk; 26A Lorong Mambong; entrees from \$12; ♿ 7

What can we say about a restaurant that serves vegetarian haggis? That depends, of course, on the quality of said haggis, which in the case of Monster Mash is excellent: savoury, warm, filled with wholegrain goodness. Monster Mash also serves a wide variety of traditional British foods, including puddings, sausage and mash and, of course, outstanding fish and chips. It also has a fine selection of wine, beer and ale.

RIDER'S CAFÉ Map pp92-3

Western \$\$

☎ 6466 9819; www.riderscafe.sg; 51 Fairways Drive; mains from \$15; taxi

Our pick for the best breakfast spot in Singapore. Part of the Bukit Timah Saddle Club, it's set in an old colonial bungalow, where you can sit on the veranda with a coffee and pancakes. You're surrounded by nothing but greenery (not a big building in sight) and can watch the horses being

groomed, washed or put through their paces. You'd hardly believe you were 10 minutes from the city.

L'ESTAMINET Map pp92-3 European \$\$

☎ 6465 1911; 4 Greenwood Ave; mains from \$15;
☎ 66, 67, 174; ♿

Done up like a rustic Belgian pub, L'Estaminet is heavily stocked with a wide selection of Belgian beers – including those potent monastery brews. It also has a selection of excellent wood-fired pizzas, which makes it worth coming for dinner, as well as drinks. The seating areas out the back and on the left are kid-friendly. Head to **Sebastien's Bistrot** (p135) for dessert afterwards.

SAMY'S CURRY RESTAURANT

Map pp92-3 Indian \$\$

☎ 6472 2080; Civil Service Club, Block 25, Dempsey Rd; mains from \$5; ☎ 7, 123, 174

How things change. Once this was a charming, raffish old military canteen dishing up outstanding curries and cheap beer. The curries are still outstanding (though beware, they always offer you the most expensive ones first) and Samy's is still a Singapore institution, but now the building is hemmed in by two large restaurants and much of the atmosphere has been lost.

CA*CALIFORNIA Map pp92-3 American \$\$

☎ 6473 3231; 8B Dempsey Rd; dishes from \$6;
☎ 7, 123, 174; ♿

A cool, rough brick interior, wooden bench tables, ceiling fans, leather couches, a man noodling on an acoustic guitar, this family-friendly restaurant (incorporating a Ben & Jerry's ice-cream outlet) has just about got everything right, serving up tasty sandwiches, salads, burgers and

FOOD ON THE FLY

If you've spent the day at the Jurong Bird Park, make a night of it and head up the hill to **Hilltop Japanese Restaurant** (Map pp46-7; ☎ 6266 3522; 2 Jurong Hill; dishes from \$10; ♿) Jurong East then ☎ 194 or 251), an unusual restaurant. Boasting a perhaps unique Japanese-Indonesian menu, its location inside the observation tower is pretty memorable too. Climb the tower after dinner for a great view over the industrial sprawl.

other American fare. The special kids' area makes it ideal for parents, though things can get noisy.

HOLLAND VILLAGE MARKET & FOOD CENTRE Map pp92-3 Hawker Centre \$

Lorong Mambong; ☎ 10am-late; ☎ 7

Probably the only hawker centre in Singapore that has a signboard outside describing the local dishes and the etiquette of ordering – but then, this is Expat Central. Strangely, despite the dramatically lower prices, most foreigners seem to steer clear of the place, which is a mistake, because all the classics are here, from BBQ seafood to Katong laksa to fried *kway teow*.

ISLAND CREAMERY

Map pp92-3 Dessert \$

☎ 6468 8859; 01-03 Serene Centre, 10 Jalan Serene;
☎ 11am-10pm; ☎ 174; ♿

Small and nondescript, with only a handful of tables, Island Creamery serves ice creams and sorbets that are the stuff of legend. Local flavours are a speciality, including *teh tarik* (Indian spiced tea), *chendol* and the refreshing Tiger Beer sorbet. Others, like burnt caramel, black forest, Horlicks and berry are just plain superb. Be prepared to eat standing up.

SOUTHWEST SINGAPORE

Largely industrial and often overlooked, this area hides a few delights, tucked away in small hilltop parks and inside the monumental VivoCity shopping centre, which acts as the gateway to Sentosa. Getting around this area requires a little effort and some extra expense due to the limited public transport, but it's worth it to get away from the crowds.

THE OLIVE Map pp48-9 Italian \$\$\$

☎ 6479 2989; Labrador Villa Rd, Labrador Park;
☎ HarbourFront then ☎ 408 Sat & Sun, or taxi
other days

Tucked away on a hill inside thickly forested Labrador Park with the city lights peeping through the trees, the Olive cries out for a romantic, candlelit occasion. The food, like the location, is excellent – it's worth a bit of extra effort to get up here for a peaceful evening away from the city bustle.

BROTZEIT GERMAN BIER BAR

Map pp48–9

German \$\$

☎ 6272 8815; 01-149 VivoCity, 1 Harbourfront Walk; dishes from \$15; **M** HarbourFront Sausages, pork knuckle and German beers galore, with soothing views over Sentosa and the harbour. The sausages are superb (the knoblauchwurst was a favourite, and not just for the name) and the draft Paulaners are dangerously easy on the palate. Service swings wildly from outstanding to hopeless, depending on your luck.

FABER HILL BISTRO

Map pp48–9

Western \$\$

☎ 6377 9688; 101 Mt Faber Rd; mains from \$12; ☎ 9am–1am Sun–Tue, 9am–2am Wed–Sat; **M** HarbourFront then **🚗** 409 Sat & Sun, or cable car

Boasting magnificent views over the sea and the CBD, you'd expect prices to be sky-high, but the steaks, pastas and other bistro staples are fairly cheap, though not outstanding. Get here just before sunset and try to bag a table at the edge, then head to Altivo, a few metres up the hill, for an even more spectacular drink after dinner.

SENTOSA ISLAND

Once the management realised it wasn't against the law to provide something other than junk food at a tourist attraction (a lesson many tourist attractions could learn), eating on Sentosa underwent something of a renaissance. Combining decent beachfront eateries, fine hotel restaurants and some top-notch fine-dining institutions, Sentosa has planted its flag proudly on the city's culinary map. Some of the places double as bars in the evenings, catering mainly to the bikini-clad club crowd (see p148).

BRAISE Map p100

French \$\$\$

☎ 6271 1929; Palawan Beach; mains from \$38; **M** HarbourFront then monorail or shuttle bus Braise typifies the new Sentosa, serving up refined nouvelle cuisine in a minimalist interior (sorry, *space*), with white walls, high vaulted ceilings, bare brick and full-length glass maximising the beachfront views. Seafood monopolises the starter menu, while meat dominates the mains. Don't come in your beach gear.

FARM FRESH

Set in the wonderfully peaceful Bollywood Veggie organic farm, **Poison Ivy Bistro** (Map pp46–7; ☎ 6898 5001; 100 Neo Tiew Cres; dishes from \$4; ☎ 9am–6pm Wed–Sun; taxi) is the perfect place to stop after a visit to the other farms in the area, or **Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve** (p88). The food, using veggies from the farm, is nothing to write home about, but the rural location makes it special.

IL LIDO Map p100

Italian \$\$\$

☎ 6866 1977; www.il-lido.com; Sentosa Golf Club, Bukit Manis Rd; set menus \$90–180, mains from \$40; **M** HarbourFront then monorail or shuttle bus

With stunning views over the Strait of Singapore and the lights of Indonesia beyond, Il Lido does the vista justice with its food. Choose from modern, classic or vegetarian menus or, if you have a spare \$3000 lying around, you can book the yacht for an evening of private dining.

SKY DINING Map p100

European \$\$\$

☎ 6377 9633; www.mountfaber.com.sg; meals \$98–168; ☎ 6.30–8.30pm Tue–Sun; **M** HarbourFront

We can't quite decide if this is inspired, or just plain silly, but the idea of eating a meal travelling along in a cable car 70m up in the air holds an undeniable appeal. The novelty might wear thin by dessert, but gliding from Mount Faber to Sentosa taking in the sunset cityscape is a stunning way to spend a romantic evening – though the cars are too small to contemplate anything indecent. Book at least two days in advance.

THE CLIFF Map p100

Seafood \$\$\$

☎ 6275 0331; www.thesentosa.com; 2 Bukit Manis Rd ☎ 6.30–11pm (last order 9.30pm); **M** HarbourFront then monorail or shuttle bus; **♿** good

Sitting on a clifftop, The Cliff has become a byword for 'special occasion', partly because of its location, partly its great service, but mostly because of its seafood. Take the pain out of it and order the set menu, then sit back as plate after plate of marine masterpiece files past you. Book one of the junior suites, and the evening will be complete.

COASTES Map p100

International \$\$

☎ 6338 8832; Siloso Beach; snacks & mains \$7-25;
 🚇 HarbourFront then monorail or shuttle bus; ♿

The pick of Sentosa's beach eats, Coastes' atmosphere is relaxed and friendly. While it draws blatant inspiration from Ibiza, it's also the kind of place you can bring the kids without being made to feel like you're ruining the vibe. Pick a wooden bench, or recline on a lounger and order your wood-fired pizza while you sun-fire your body.

SAMUNDAR Map p100

Indian \$\$

☎ 6276 8891; 85 Palawan Beach Walk; mains from \$12; 🚇 HarbourFront then monorail or shuttle bus

It boasts one of those vast menus that can drive you mad with indecision, but stick with the tandoor menu and you won't go wrong (unless you're vegetarian – but even then you have 15 choices). Order three days in advance for the special *sikandari raan* (marinated leg of lamb) – a snip at \$84.

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DRINKING & NIGHTLIFE

top picks

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DRINKING & NIGHTLIFE

Step aside, New York City. Once-boring Singapore has stolen your 'city-that-never-sleeps' mantle. From small, poorly lit watering holes where characters straight out of Tom Waits ballads might meet to exchange tales over whiskey sours to thumping all-night clubs where fashionistas gather to dance until the birds are twittering, this city has something to offer people of every taste and inclination seven nights a week.

WHERE TO DRINK

In Singapore, what's hot and what's not changes as regularly as the seasons (if Singapore actually had seasons) meaning that this month's happening club may well be next month's old news. That and the sharply rising price-per-square-metre of commercial space mean that a club can open, gain and lose hipster status, and close down in a span of time slightly less than the career of your average boy-band. Neighbourhoods, for the most part, tend to retain their character for a bit longer, and for this reason we've gone ahead and expanded our listings to include a bit more verbiage about the streets and alleys surrounding the bars and clubs, which might still be hot (or even there) by the time this book goes to press.

PRACTICALITIES

How Much?

Barring Brunei, Singapore is probably the most expensive place in Southeast Asia for drinking and nightlife. A combination of liberal licensing laws and free-market economics breeds high prices, especially in some of the city's trendier joints, where an evening's libations can set even a casual drinker back a hefty sum. Those who are looking for spirits on the cheap, and don't mind plastic tables and fluorescent lights, can hang out at hawker centres and coffeeshops, drinking \$6 bottles of Tiger to their hearts' content. A beer at most city bars can set you back between \$10 and \$15, ditto for mixed drinks, and many of the more upscale clubs have entrance fees of \$20 or more (though these will usually include a drink).

If you're looking to save on libations, hit the bars early to take advantage of the happy hours; these typically stretch from around 5pm to 8pm, sometimes later. At these times you'll generally get two of most drinks for the price of one and cheaper 'housepours', which

are the bar's selections of spirits or wine. On Wednesday or Thursday night, some bars offer cheaper (sometimes free) drinks to women, presumably on the assumption that drunk women attract paying men. Of course, if you're really tight, you can always drink \$5 beers in your hostel.

Opening Hours

While the government maintains tight controls on many aspects of life in the Lion City, Singapore's licensing laws are positively *laissez-faire*, and many bars and clubs stay open until the early hours, some right through to breakfast. Generally speaking, expect most clubs to open around 5pm, and stay open until 1am or 2am from Sunday to Thursday, and until about 3am on Friday and Saturday. We've made note of bars and clubs that keep hours vastly different from this.

COLONIAL DISTRICT & THE QUAYS

In a metropolis that practically straddles the equator, it only makes sense that the trendiest bar and club scene is found along the river; after all, this is where the coolest breezes tend to be found. Though the area is a bit too popular with tourists (say some in the know), and too yuppieified (claim others), the three Quays (Clark, Boat and Robertson) and further west along the Singapore River is where you'll find some of the most up-and-coming (and priciest) clubs and watering holes in Singapore.

BAR OPIUM Map pp52-3

Bar

☎ 6339 1720; www.indochine-group.com;
1 Empress Pl; ☎ 5pm-2am Mon-Thu, 5pm-3am Fri & Sat, 5pm-1am Sun; (M) Raffles Place
Very posy, Bar Opium is next to its sibling restaurant [Indochine Waterfront](#) (p124), facing Boat Quay. The expensive, slightly mismatched decor features a huge chan-

SCOOPING THE CITY WITH DAWN *Dawn Mok*

Besides the weather, change is the only other constant in Singapore. Us locals are always trying to find ways to beat the heat, keep up with the trends and be the first to tell our friends, 'Sorry I didn't reply to your SMS, I was at (fill in spunky name of spanking new place) – so fun! You haven't been? Must go lah!'

To accomplish all this, you need to head for the trees, the rooftops or the river. Sure, the city's concrete gems will continue to dazzle and dazzle the masses but more discerning denizens will prefer to snuggle up to Mother Nature and admire her still-ample offerings while enjoying the buzz and excitement of city life.

The green, black and white **Wessex Village Square** (5B Portsdown Rd) is a tranquil creative suburb by day and an inviting bohemian hangout by night. Get a taste of Tuscany at family-run Italian restaurant, Pietrasanta, before moseying over to Klee, a retro-rustic saloon-style bar that serves an impressive array of freshly muddled cocktails (made with the best stuff on earth: real fruit juice and premium alcohol!).

If you dig the colonial vibe but prefer to posh things up a notch, head to 'lifestyle hub' Rochester Park. Here, housed in beautiful pre-war bungalows are top-class restaurants as well as a gourmet bakery, a modern gastrobar and a Russian caviar and vodka bar. Not far from here is yet another hub – **HortPark** (33 Hyderabad Rd), also touted as 'Southeast Asia's first gardening and lifestyle hub'. It's a surprising yet fitting location for Kha, a modern Thai restaurant with a swanky chill-out deck overlooking splendid trees and a water feature.

For more great views and al-fresco fun, go on and hit the roof. There's the ever-popular **Loof** (p142) at Odeon Towers and newish kid on the block **Helipad** (with 6000 sq feet of party space) over at the Central. If you prefer more intimate views and lounging options, check out The Screening Room's rooftop terrace with Chinatown as its backdrop. Or get closer to the stars via Moon Ladder Bar and Bistro nestled atop Labrador Nature Reserve.

The Singapore River – heart of the city – now pulsates to different rhythms. You can opt for the pump and grind of Clarke Quay or follow the river towards Robertson Quay to find authentic Japanese bars and eateries. At the **Gallery Hotel** (1 Nanson Rd), settle yourself under the trees with a chilled brew at eM by the River. For a giggle, head upstairs to Bar 84 and let the resident bartender-magician wow you with a selection of 300 whiskeys and illusionary tricks. On the other side of the river, between Clarke Quay and Boat Quay, you'll find the unpretentious Home Club, and a thriving alternative music scene. Make nice and attempt to chat with the ones who smile back at you. You can always read up about the latest cool hangout in Singapore, but if you want the real deal – talk to the locals.

Co-creator of Singapore CityScoops (www.cityscoops.com), the (semi) annual hip hiker's guide to hot spots and hidden finds throughout the city, Dawn Mok is the woman to ask about where to draw the up-and-coming dots on Singapore's cool map.

delier and large standing Buddhas. Not surprisingly for a location like this, the drink prices might have you sipping slowly, but the quiet spot next to the river is priceless. Check out the website for links to other Indochine Group–managed properties, all of which are worth a visit for the ambience alone.

BREWERKZ Map pp52–3

Bar

☎ 6438 7438; 01-05 Riverside Point Centre, 30 Merchant Rd; ☎ noon-midnight Sun-Thu, noon-1am Fri & Sat; 📍 Clarke Quay

One of Singapore's gems, this sprawling microbrewery and restaurant offers a variety of superb beers brewed on site and varying in strength from 4.5% to 6%. The India Pale Ale is apparently the most popular, but the dark beer and the Golden Ale are also excellent. Those with adventurous palates will want to try the fruit beers, brewed from whatever happens to be in season at the time.

ESKI Map pp52–3

Bar

☎ 6327 3662; 46 Circular Rd; ☎ 2pm-1am Sun-Thu, 2pm-3am Fri & Sat; 📍 Clarke Quay

The name is derived from the word 'Eskimo', and with good reason; Eski is Singapore's first sub-zero bar, complete with a solid ice bar for downing frozen shots of – what else – vodka. Singapore visitors foolish enough to have forgotten to pack ski parkas needn't worry, though; loaner winter clothing is available, and a good thing too, as temperatures here plummet to a testicle-shrinking -10°C.

HARRY'S Map pp52–3

Bar

☎ 6538 3029; www.harrys-bar.com.sg; 28 Boat Quay; ☎ 11am-1am Sun-Thu, 11am-2am Fri & Sat; 📍 Raffles Place

Loaded with history for those interested in doomed finance, Harry's is the one-time hangout of Barings' bank-breaker Nick Leeson. It's still a city-slickers' favourite,

with the suits flocking here for happy hour until 8pm. Later it turns into a good jazz venue (9.30pm to 12.30am from Tuesday to Saturday). The upstairs lounge is quieter and a comfortable place to contemplate busting a bank. It has a free pool table.

HIDEOUT Map pp52-3 Bar

☎ 6536 9445; 31B Circular Rd; ☎ 7pm-midnight Wed & Thu, 7pm-3am Fri & Sat; 📍 Clarke Quay or Raffles Place

The walk up three floors might put you off, but this tiny, ultratrendy place is worth a little legwork, with its deep red walls, hotch-potch furniture and indie and hip-hop playlist. A little cliquy, so dress your coolest.

LOOF Map pp52-3 Bar

☎ 6338 8035; 331 North Bridge Rd; ☎ 5.30pm-2am; 📍 City Hall

What's the name all about? We'll give you a clue - Loof is a rooftop bar, and they don't serve 'fled lice'. The view is superb and the space itself is ultracool, with secluded alcoves perfect for your more intimate moments. Happy hour lasts from 5.30pm to 8.30pm each weekday evening.

RAFFLES HOTEL Map pp52-3 Bar

1 Beach Rd; 📍 City Hall

Yup, it's a cliché, but still, few visit Singapore without at least stopping off for drinks at one of the several bars in the famous Raffles Hotel. **Bar & Billiard Room** features live jazz and has a nice veranda for chilling out, Raj style. It was underneath this bar that a guest shot a tiger in his pyjamas in 1904 (how the tiger got in his pyjamas, he never did find out). The courtyard is where you'll find the **Gazebo Bar**, which also boasts live music in the evening. The most popular bar with tourists is the plantation-style **Long Bar** on the Arcade's second level, where you can throw peanut shells on the floor and enjoy a Singapore Sling for \$16 (or \$25 with a souvenir glass).

CHIHULY LOUNGE Map pp52-3 Bar/Club

☎ 6434 5288; 3rd fl, Ritz-Carlton Millenia Singapore, 7 Raffles Ave; ☎ 8am-1am; 📍 City Hall

With its distinctive blue arched roof and amazing Daly Chihuly glass sculpture on the wall (his work is also on display at the **Singapore Art Museum**, p56), this refined hotel lounge deserves a bit of sartorial effort

and is worth a visit for an early-evening loosener or a late-night wind-down cocktail.

CRAZY ELEPHANT Map pp52-3 Bar/Live Music

☎ 6537 7859; www.crazyelephant.com; 3E River Valley Rd, 01-03/04 Clarke Quay; ☎ 5pm-1am Sun-Thu, 3pm-2am Fri & Sat; 📍 Clarke Quay

The more things change, the more they stay the same at this Clarke Quay stalwart, which has remained consistently cool since it first opened a dozen years back (in the days pre-dating the area's trendy reincarnation). The walls are still covered with graffiti, the music is still loud, and heavy on the blues and rock, and the stage is still made of wood. For this reason and others, Crazy Elephant is popular with tourists and locals alike. If the live music gets too loud, outdoor seating is available for pints in relative peace.

ATTICA Map pp52-3 Club

☎ 6333 9973; www.attica.com.sg; 3A River Valley Rd, 01-03 Clarke Quay; ☎ 5pm-3am Mon-Thu, 11pm-late Fri & Sat; 📍 Clarke Quay

One of the swankest clubs in town, Attica is where the bold and beautiful meet to dazzle and be dazzled. When it gets too hot inside, cool down in the chic courtyard and ogle the eye-candy. There's usually a line to get in, always a sign of pedigree in Singapore's club world.

BUTTER FACTORY Map pp52-3 Club

☎ 6333 8243; www.thebutterfactory.com; 01-03 Robertson Quay 48; 📍 Clarke Quay

Where whimsy meets chic, the Butter Factory's interior is covered with cartoon graphics provided by ultra-hip Phunk Studio of Singapore; you'll feel like you've stepped into the pages of an underground comic book (the kind your parents used to confiscate). The front room features a bar and comfy leather couches, both milk-white, and the darker back room has a dance floor and bar of its own. The weekend cover charge (cheaper for ladies) includes a free drink.

MINISTRY OF SOUND

Map pp52-3 Club/Live Music

☎ 6333 9368; www.ministryofsound.com.sg; 01-07 Block C Clarke Quay; men \$15-25, women free-\$20;

☎ 9pm-3am Wed-Sat; 📍 Clarke Quay; 📺 fair Seven rooms, superb digital sound and

light, a chequered dance-floor and a 20ft water curtain, not to mention hordes of the nation's youth. Those all-conquering Brits have challenged the supremacy of **Zouk** (p146) and done a pretty good job of it, though the older beautiful crowd still prefer the latter. Women get in free on Wednesdays.

PAULANER BRAUHAUS

Map pp52–3 German Beer House

☎ 6883 2572; 01-01 Times Square@Millenia Walk, 9 Raffles Blvd; 📍 11.30am–1am Sun–Thu, 11.30am–2am Fri & Sat; 🚶 City Hall

A three-storey wood-and-brass German microbrewery bar and restaurant serving up its excellent signature Munich lager and Munich dark brews. There are also special seasonal brews like Salvator Beer (March), Mailbock Beer (May) and Oktoberfest Beer (October). Beers are served in either 300mL, 500mL or 1L mugs! Tours of the brewery are available for \$40, but you have to book well in advance.

MOLLY MALONE'S Map pp52–3 Irish Pub

☎ 6536 2029; 53-56 Circular Rd; 🚶 Raffles Place Just behind Boat Quay on Circular Rd, Molly Malone's has moved from its old location to larger premises just down the road. Well-travelled drinkers will have seen the mock-Irish interior and the genuine Irish stew and fish-and-chip menu a hundred times before, but that doesn't make it any less cosy or welcoming.

PENNY BLACK Map pp52–3 Pub

☎ 6538 2300; 26/27 Boat Quay; 📍 11am–1am Mon–Thu, 11am–2am Fri & Sat, 11am–midnight Sun; 🚶 Raffles Place

Fitted out like a 'Victorian' London pub (without the tuberculosis and dodgy gin), the Penny Black's interior was actually built in London and shipped to Singapore, so it has some claim to authenticity. Specialises in hard-to-find English ales for the swathes of expat Brits that work in the area. The upstairs bar is particularly inviting.

RED LANTERN BEER GARDEN

Map pp52–3 Bar/Live Music

50 Collyer Quay; 🚶 Raffles Place For a taste of old Singapore, head to the seedy, bayside Red Lantern Beer Garden where bands often play, cheap meals are served, and you can get a reasonably

SING'S GAY SCENE SWINGS

While you won't find a San Francisco-style Halloween parade or 'exclusively-queer' neighbourhoods in the Lion City, Singapore's has plenty of gay and gay-friendly bars and clubs. PLUguide-Singapore puts out an excellent annual map pinpointing bars, clubs and spas; you can find it at many of Singapore's GLBT-friendly businesses, or download it from www.pluguide.com.

priced beer. It can get pretty rowdy late at night. There are so many bars, most with outdoor tables, that you can just wander along until one takes your fancy.

CHINATOWN & THE CBD

When the sun goes down, the blocks just south of Chinatown and the central business district (CBD) emerge like a butterfly from their daytime slumber, transforming into a centre of beautiful debauchery. Just south of Maxwell Rd, the area's main artery, South Bride Rd, forks off into Neil Rd and Tanjong Pagar Rd, an area referred to by those in the know as 'the Pink Triangle'; if Singapore has a 'gay district', this would be it.

BAR SÁ VANH Map pp62–3 Bar

☎ 6323 0145; 49 Club St; 📍 5pm–1am Mon–Thu, 5pm–3am Fri & Sat; 🚶 Chinatown

If you're after more than just a drink, this is one of those 'do you remember...' places. The main attraction is a large waterfall cascading into a tranquil *koi* (ornamental carp) pond, surrounded by large Buddha statues, wafting incense and teak furniture. The music is mostly alternative, fusion style, which does not drown out conversation. Drinks are expensive, but it's worth having at least one.

BARRIO CHINO Map pp62–3 Bar

☎ 6324 3245; 60 Club St; 📍 4pm–midnight Mon–Thu, 4pm–2am Fri, 4pm–1am Sat; 🚶 Chinatown

This cosy Spanish bar boasts great frozen margaritas, a large wine selection and some tasty tapas. Either sit out on the five-foot-way or enjoy the intimate set-up inside. Good Latin music sets the mood.

COWS & COOLIES KARAOKE PUB

Map pp62-3

☎ 6221 1239; 30 Mosque St; **M** Chinatown
Smoke-filled (despite a city-wide ban on smoking) and often loud, C&C is a throwback to the good old days when a neighbourhood bar was a place you came to drown your sorrows in loud music, cigarettes and booze. Though it doesn't bill itself as a gay bar per se, the bar is very popular with both the gay and lesbian crowd.

Bar

POST BAR

Map pp62-3

☎ 6733 8388; Fullerton Hotel; ☎ noon-2am; **M** Raffles Place

Named the Post Bar, as it retains the original ceiling of the General Post Office, this classy lounge bar within the glorious Fullerton Hotel lobby is way upmarket, without being snobbish. It also serves the best mojitos this side of Havana.

Bar

THE ROOFTOP

Map pp62-3

6536 0456; rooftopbar@lycos.com; Level 4, 114C Neil Rd; **M** Outram Park

This diminutive and lovely rooftop bar in the pink triangle district offers a secluded respite from the thumping music and crowds of the surrounding area. The bar itself, which barely seats six, serves fine, reasonably priced wine, beer and cocktails. And the outdoor patio, with just enough room for an additional dozen, offers panoramic views of Singapore's night sky.

Bar

TANTRIC BAR

Map pp62-3

☎ 6423 9232; 78 Neil Rd; ☎ 8pm-3am; **M** Outram Park

A peaceful spot to relax among the fountains, palm trees and Arabian chic in the courtyard, this gay bar is a pleasant antidote, or warm up, to the queues and pounding music elsewhere.

Bar

VINCENT'S

Map pp62-3

☎ 6736 1360; 15 Duxton Rd; ☎ closes 2am; **M** Outram Park

Singapore's first gay bar spent years in Lucky Plaza on Orchard Rd before moving to bigger, better premises to take advantage of what was at the time the developing gay ghetto around Tanjong Pagar. It's a popular starting-out point and offers a free gay guide to Singapore.

Bar

XPOSÉ

Map pp62-3

☎ 6323 2466; 208 South Bridge Rd; ☎ 6pm-midnight Mon-Wed, 6pm-1am Thu & Sun, 6pm-2am Fri & Sat; **M** Chinatown

Another more relaxed gay bar, which also serves up some excellent Thai and Vietnamese food, though karaoke-phobes might want to stay away until after midnight, when the mic is turned off.

Bar

PLAY

Map pp62-3

☎ 6227 7400; www.playclub.com.sg; 21 Tanjong Pagar Rd; **M** Tanjong Pagar

Flashing lights, loud music and boys galore all adds up to Play, one of the most popular and happening gay (though all are very welcome) bars in the city. Play features loud techno music, a big dance floor, and probably the most over-the-top (we mean this in the best way possible) 'F*** the world, it's time to play!' attitude you'll find anywhere in Southeast Asia. International DJs, mixed drinks, and more fellas than you can shake a stick at.

Club

LITTLE INDIA & KAMPONG GLAM

A backpacker hub, Little India has its share of cheapish pubs and bars catering to the 'Singapore on a shoestring' crowd. Some of the hostels in Little India double as pubs, so if you're in need of a quick pint, check out the Sleeping options on p166 for leads.

PRINCE OF WALES

Map p68

☎ 6299 0310; 101 Dunlop St; ☎ 9am-1am; **M** Little India

A rough at the edges, knockabout Australian pub, which doubles as a backpacker hostel (p168). With friendly, laconic bar staff, live music on most nights and a small beer garden, it's one of the few bars in Little India – and a little surreal on Sunday nights, when the streets are packed with migrant workers from the subcontinent enjoying their off-day.

Bar

BLUJAZ CAFÉ

Map p68

☎ 6292 3800; 11 Bali Lane; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Thu, noon-2am Fri, 4pm-2am Sat; **M** Bugis; ☎ outside

Decorated in a decidedly eccentric fashion and located next to an artists' studio that spills its works into the laneway, this is as

Bar/Live Music

close as you'll get to a bohemian hangout in Singapore, though it attracts a diverse crowd. There's live jazz downstairs on Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays, and a funky lounge upstairs.

NIGHT & DAY Map p68 Bar/Live Music

☎ 6884 5523; www.nightandday.sg; 139 Selegie Rd; Little India or Farrer Park

Art-school cool meets techno-groove chic at this three-storey bar, gallery and happening space located in a 1950s art deco building, smack in the centre of Singapore's burgeoning art-student district. The space has a 2nd-floor bar featuring drinks and live music (from grunge and heavy metal to more esoteric stuff), and the 3rd floor has an art-space where local students show their latest work. The second storey is taken up by the architecture studio of co-owner Randy Chan.

CAFE DOMUS Map p68 Bar/Lounge

☎ 6392 5652; 124 Owen Rd; Farrer Park

This fantastic chill-out space is located on a seldom-traversed (by tourists) street just around the corner from Little India's 'curry belt'. Bare wooden ceilings, peony-painted walls and an opulent Tiffany chandelier are just some of the quirkiest decorations of this café-bar frequented by artists, architects and other young professionals in creative industries. The backyard bamboo garden (complete with a narrow platform perch, accessible by spiral staircase) is a particularly intimate touch.

ORCHARD ROAD

By day it's Singapore's Grand Canyon of Shopping. But after the sun sets, Orchard Rd becomes Entertainment Avenue, replete with movie theatres, high-class hotel bars, and trendy pubs and clubs. The area is also where you'll find Orchard Towers – the infamous 'four floors of whores' – a multistorey commercial property, the first four floors of which are honeycombed with bars, clubs and massage parlours, all catering to men with more on their mind than mere libation.

3-MONKEYS Map pp74–5 Bar/Nightclub

☎ 6735 3707; Orchard Tower 1, Backside; ☎ 11am–5am; Orchard

Tiger on Tap, cocktails, and yes, Kumar too. 3-Monkeys is the playground of Singapore's

famed transvestite comic, whose riotous review is featured from 11pm until 1am every Friday and Saturday evening. Decor is an eclectic mix of Americana and Asian, and if you get bored waiting for Kumar, you can always stroll upstairs through the famed 'four floors of whores', where plenty of other (though probably not as humorous) transvestites loiter.

ALLEY BAR Map pp74–5 Bar

☎ 6732 6966; 2 Emerald Hill, 180 Orchard Rd; ☎ 5pm–2am Sun–Thu, 5pm–3am Fri & Sat; Somerset

Emerald Hill Rd has a collection of bars in the renovated terraces just up from Orchard Rd that formerly housed many Peranakan families. The focal point of Alley Bar has to be the large gilded mirror hanging at the far end of the room, while the decor reflects the name of the bar, which has been done up to look like a street, with fake shopfronts, parking meters and street signs.

BRAUHAUS RESTAURANT & PUB Map pp74–5 German Beer House

☎ 6250 3116; brauhaus@signet.com; Basement, United Square, 101 Thompson Rd; Novena

The brick walls and dark wooden furniture in this basement pub, a hidden favourite for over 20 years, give it a distinctly Teutonic vibe. But what really makes the Brauhaus a slice of basement Bavaria is the vast selection of beers from all over the world, 150-plus including obscure names like Old Peculiar Stout, König Ludwig and Strong Suffolk Vintage Ale. Easily the most well-stocked beer house in the area, Brauhaus also boasts live bands from Monday to Saturday from about 8pm until 2am. It also boasts an outdoor pool table and a good menu featuring continental fare.

DOWNUNDER BAR Map pp74–5 Pub/Bar

☎ 6238 8492; downunder_connection@yahoo.com.sg; 400 Orchard Rd, 04–24 Orchard Towers; Orchard

Located inside the famous (or infamous) Orchard Towers, Downunder is probably one of the few pubs in the building that isn't specifically a cheap clip joint for picking up. This Australian pub has beer on tap, a pool table and a dart board, making it a nice oasis from the building's usual climate and clientele.

DUBLINERS Map pp74–5 Irish Pub

☎ 6735 2220; 165 Penang Rd; ☎ 11.30am–1am Sun–Thu, 11.30am–2am Fri & Sat; 📍 Somerset
In a quieter section of Orchard Rd, Dubliners is one of the friendliest Irish pubs in Singapore, with the usual range of Irish beers at reasonable prices and an outstanding menu (go in hungry; the portions are huge). The front veranda is a great spot for balmy nights and the service is excellent.

ICE COLD BEER Map pp74–5 Bar

☎ 6735 9929; 9 Emerald Hill Rd; ☎ 6pm–2am Sun–Thu, 6pm–3am Fri & Sat; 📍 Somerset
A raucous, boozy establishment at the top of the Emerald Hill bar strip, offering a huge range of chilled beers from around the world to a rock soundtrack. Like most bars in Emerald Hill, it's housed in a 1900s Peranakan shophouse, though the frontage is pretty much all that remains.

MUDDY MURPHY'S Map pp74–5 Bar/Irish Pub

☎ 6735 0400; Orchard Hotel Shopping Arcade, 442 Orchard Rd; ☎ 11.30am–1am Mon–Thu, 11.30am–2am Fri & Sat, 11.30am–midnight Sun; 📍 Orchard
Located below street level in a courtyard, Muddy's is more appealing than the standard fake-Irish pub. The quieter Ballymoon top bar is narrow and smoky, and only opens in the evening.

QUE PASA Map pp74–5 Bar

☎ 6235 6626; 7 Emerald Hill Rd; ☎ 6pm–2am Sun–Thu, 6pm–3am Fri & Sat; 📍 Somerset
An extremely pleasant wine and tapas bar with a convincingly run-down interior reminiscent of a real Spanish bar – except for the icy air-con. The wine list is impressive and, in keeping with the rest of Emerald Hill, extravagantly expensive. Tapas are uniformly excellent – try the mushrooms and the ubiquitous spicy sausage.

THUMPER BAR Map pp74–5 Bar/Live Music

☎ 6737 3845; reservations@thumper.com.sg; 22 Scotts Rd; 📍 Orchard
Taking up a fair chunk of the 1st floor of the beautiful and *très* elegant Goodwood hotel, Thumper is as high-class a joint as you'd expect – collared shirts, no shorts, and for god's sake, if you're wearing Crocs,

don't even think about it. Thumper offers live bands five nights a week (Wednesday is quiet night, and Sundays it's closed), and has a lovely dance-floor attracting a hip twenty-something crowd.

ZOUK Map pp74–5 Club

☎ 6738 2988; www.zouklub.com; 17 Jiak Kim St; 📍 Somerset
Considered by many to be one of Singapore's best clubs (it was actually voted best club in Asia not long ago), the name Zouk stands for Ziggurats of Unbelievable Colours. While it doesn't make much sense, we have to admit that it has a cool ring. The club, built inside a restored waterfront warehouse, pulses nightly, its dance-floors filled with Singapore's beautiful people gyrating to house and techno beats. Zouk plays host to some of Asia's hottest and trendiest DJs and musicians; even its website is cinematic (and noisy). If it's party people you're looking for, look no further.

HOLLAND ROAD & BUKIT TIMAH

Chic, serene and mostly undiscovered by the tourist crowd, Holland Village is an eating and entertainment zone tucked away inside a quiet residential neighbourhood a couple of miles west of the crowded concrete valleys of Orchard Rd. Lorong Mambong (the main chill-out street) is closed to traffic evenings and weekends, making it a good place to stroll while tipsy. There are a number of restaurants and bars in the area, as well as a hawker centre that stays open late for the party crowd.

DEMPSEY'S HUT Map pp92–3 Bar

☎ 6473 9609; 130E Minden Rd; 📍 7 from Orchard Blvd
This jovial open-air bar is deep in the thickly forested former British army barracks around Dempsey Rd. Like its nearby wine-bar rivals, it's worth a visit as one of the few places near the city where you can enjoy a spot of unbridled nature – at a reasonable price too. The tables are laid out under the trees (bring repellent) and the beer costs a meagre \$5 per mug, or \$20 a jug. There's also a decent menu.

WINE NETWORK Map pp92–3

Bar

- ☎ 6479 2280; Block 13, Dempsey Rd;
 🕒 11am-midnight Sun-Thu, 11am-1am Fri & Sat;
 🚶 7 from Orchard Blvd

Tucked away in the Dempsey Rd furniture and antiques ghetto, this is a real find. A small, intimate bar with rough wooden floors and crumbling brick walls lined with wine bottles, where the wine is as cheap or expensive as you like (bottles start at \$18, or it's \$7 a glass). Sit inside, or enjoy the sight of the semiderelict colonial barracks and the sound of twittering birds on the deck. Pizzas, German sausages and cheese platters fight off hunger. Get off the bus at stop B03 on Holland Rd; from here it's a 10-minute walk.

WALA WALA CAFE BAR

Map pp92–3

Bar/Live Music

- ☎ 6462 4288; www.imaginations.com.sg;
 31 Lorong Mambong; taxi

This two-storey restaurant and bar is increasingly popular with the smart set in Holland Village, not least because it features an excellent bar on the 1st floor (complete with highway billboard-sized flat screens broadcasting live sporting events from around the world) and a smoking-hot rock band on the second.

2AM: DESSERT BAR

Map pp92–3

Wine/Dessert Bar

- ☎ 9173 4340; 21a Lorong Mambong; taxi

Hip, sweet and chic are the three words that best describe this concept bar and restaurant that pairs the finest wines with some of the best desserts you'll find in Singapore. The menu itself is fantastic, offering suggestions for what combinations work best, be it tiramisu and Shiraz or caramel mousse and Pinot Noir. Comfort-

able couches ensure you'll want to hang around for seconds.

EASTERN SINGAPORE

The designation 'Eastern Singapore' covers a huge swath of real estate, from Geylang and Joo Chiat, to East Coast Park, to Changi Village, which has a few interesting watering holes, on the far eastern end of the island. (Geylang, though chock-full of bars, has few we can readily recommend in a family guidebook. See our Geylang section, p77, for more on this.)

CALIFORNIA JAM Map pp46–7

Bar

- ☎ 6542 2139; Block 1 Changi Village Rd; 🚶 2

A cool little rock 'n' roll bar in Changi Village. Jimi Hendrix posters, beer on tap and the occasional transvestite hooker gives this place a 'Walk on the Wild Side' vibe. California Jam is part of the strip of bars on Changi Village Rd that's somewhat popular with locals looking to escape the trendy crush of central Singapore.

ARTOHOIC Map p80

Bar/Club

- ☎ 6348 7793; www.artoholic.sg;
 422 Joo Chiat Rd; taxi

It would have been all too easy for the proprietors of Artoholic to have opened up in an already-happening neighbourhood, but they chose instead the more challenging route of the pioneer. As well as being a showcase for local artists, this cool happening space on Joo Chiat Rd also hosts small-space music performances, open-mic nights, and even the occasional comedy performance starring our friend, Singapore-based comic Jonathan Atherton (p154). Beer, wine and cocktails flow freely (but not for free) all night.

ST JAMES POWER STATION

The new poster child of Singapore's night scene, **St James Power Station** (☎ 6270 7676; www.stjamespowerstation.com; 3 Sentosa Gateway; 🚶 HarbourFront) is a 1920s coal-fired power station ingeniously converted into an entertainment complex. All the bars and clubs are interconnected, so one cover charge (men/women \$12/10) gets access to all of them. Some bars – the Bellini Room, Gallery Bar, Lobby Bar and Peppermint Park – have no cover charge at all. Minimum age is 18 for women and 23 for men at all except Powerhouse, where the age is 18 for both.

The bars include **Bellini Room** (🕒 8pm–3am Mon-Thu, 8pm–4am Fri & Sat), a stylish jazz and swing club; **Dragonfly** (🕒 6pm–6am), a Mandopop and Cantopop club; **Movida** (🕒 6pm–3am), a latin live-band dance club; **Powerhouse** (🕒 8pm–4am Wed, Fri & Sat), a large dance club aimed at the younger crowd; and the **Boiler Room** (🕒 8.45pm–3am Mon-Thu, 8.45pm–3am Fri & Sat), a mainstream rock club featuring live bands.

SUNSET BAY GARDEN BEACH BAR

Map p80

Bar/Restaurant

☎ 6448 9060; sunbay@pacific.net.sg;

1300 East Coast Park (Car Park F2); taxi

What could be finer than relaxing with cocktails in a car-free beachside park in the early evening? Sunset Bay offers just that, and with an excellent menu you can show up for dinner and while the night away to the far-off thrumming of hundreds of cargo ships moored just off Singapore's southern shore. A rare find, indeed!

SENTOSA ISLAND

Fans of Groove Armada ('If you're fond of sand-dunes and salty air') might not find exactly what they're looking for in Sentosa, but the island's artificial beaches and tankering ocean air is about as close as Singapore gets to the beach vibe. Thanks to the recently built monorail system, Sentosa's laidback ambience isn't much further from

the downtown hubbub than Holland Rd or Joo Chiat.

SUNSET BAY Map p100

Bar/Club

☎ 6275 0668; www.sunsetbay.com.sg; 60 SilosoBeach Walk; shuttle bus from  HarbourFront

A bona fide beach bar where it's perfectly OK to wear very little – most of the young customers seem to. For groups of at least 20, they'll throw a mini beach-games tournament, and for \$750 you can have your own DJ Dance Party on weekdays.

KM8 Map p100

Club

☎ 6274 2288; Tanjong Beach; ☎ 11am-midnight

Sun-Thu, 11am-1am Fri & Sat; shuttle bus from

 HarbourFront

If you're in the mood for sea, sand, thumping music and oily tanned bodies punching the air, this is the place. It's successfully staked a claim as Sentosa's top party spot – with its late closing time, free-for-all Jacuzzi, shamelessly Ibiza design and expensive alcohol.

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ARTS & LEISURE

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- Aramsa, Bishan Park (p156)

ARTS & LEISURE

What puts Singapore at the top of the 'cities beloved by tourists' list year after year? Astounding quantities of amazing cuisine? Hot and cold running shopping night and day? A plethora of possibilities for arts, entertainment and nightlife?

Well yes, these things probably are factors. But the Lion City's charms run deeper than that, deeper even than the words and images found in the myriad tourist brochures that await travellers in airport kiosks and hotel lobbies. Good things come in small packages, and Singapore's strength lies not in any one specific monument, neighbourhood or attraction, but in its endless wealth of activities offered in the space of one easily traversed (by metro, bus, foot, bicycle, rollerblade or any combination thereof) metropolitan area. Art fans will enjoy checking out numerous small and medium-sized galleries offering glimpses into Singapore's burgeoning art scene. Film-lovers won't have any problem finding excellent venues in which to watch, and theatre-goers may be a bit surprised at how far the boundaries of polite speech in this once-circumspect society have been pushed over the past decade.

Those looking for less-cerebral, more physical gratification will find no shortage of activities, from bicycling, jogging (or even skating) on well-maintained park roads to water parks, swimming pools, sailing and even skiing (on an enclosed indoor slope, probably more of an equatorial novelty than anything else). Golfers will be surprised at the number of driving ranges and golf courses boasted by the tiny city-state, and there are plenty of schools and studios offering short-term rates and drop-in packages for visiting yoga enthusiasts. Naturally, Singapore has great spas and massage parlours for relaxation seekers of all budgetary levels.

THE ARTS

Visiting culture vultures needn't worry about artistic starvation in Singapore; indeed, the main challenge will be figuring out how to cram so much into a limited timeframe. Though once thought of as a cultural desert ('New York City without artists' was one less-than-charitable description bandied about in the 1990s), the Lion City's cultural renaissance seems to be well underway; from galleries to museums, comedy to symphony, Singapore has something for almost everyone (as long as it's not politically, religiously or sexually controversial!).

GALLERIES

In addition to having excellent museums – many of which we've listed in the appropriate neighbourhood sections – Singapore is also home to myriad smaller galleries. Most galleries in Singapore keep casual hours of around 11am to 7pm, but some stay open later for various events. Published monthly and available for \$3.90 at most bookstores, the *Singapore Art Gallery Guide* (www.sagg.com.sg) is an excellent resource for current happenings in the local arts scene. The following reviews are just a smattering of what you'll find in Singapore.

ART SEASONS Map pp62–3

☎ 6221 1800; www.artseasons.com.sg;
5 Gemmill Lane; 📍 Chinatown

You can't miss this gallery, located as it is inside the distinctive architecture award-winning steel-and-glass building known locally as 'The Box'. Art Seasons offers sculpture and painting, primarily that of artists from Singapore, China and Burma.

ART-2 GALLERY Map pp52–3

☎ 6338 8713; www.art2.com.sg; 140 Hill St;
📍 Clarke Quay or City Hall

A smaller gallery in the same building as Gajah, Art-2 offers a melange of mediums ranging from sculpture and ceramics to painting and paperwork from Southeast Asia.

ARTOHOLIC Map p80

☎ 6348 7793; www.artoholic.sg; 422 Joo Chiat Rd;
📍 Paya Lebar, walk to Joo Chiat Rd, head south
6 blocks

This new venue over in the Joo Chiat neighbourhood takes up the 1st floor of a beautifully renovated and retrofitted shop-house. In addition to doubling as a bar and a performance centre, Artoholic also showcases original works of some of Southeast Asia's ultratented painters, sculptors and print artists.

GAJAH GALLERY Map pp52–3

☎ 6737 4202; www.gajahgallery.com; 140 Hill St;
 ☑ Clarke Quay or City Hall

One of Singapore's most respected galleries, Gajah has been around since the mid-1990s, and specialises in contemporary art from South and Southeast Asia. The gallery hosts regular exhibits and forums; in 2008 Gajah played host to the International Buddhist Film Festival.

ISAN GALLERY Map p80

☎ 6442 4278; www.isangallery.com.sg;
 42 Jalan Kambangan; ☑ Kambangan

The home gallery of Percy Vatsaloo showcases intricately crafted and exquisitely beautiful clothing and other textiles made by tribal craftspeople of Isan in northeast Thailand. Visitors are welcome by appointment, and most of the items on display are also for sale. Percy works closely with the craftspeople themselves, and half of the sale price goes directly to them.

KETNA PATEL STUDIO GALLERY

Map pp92–3

☎ 6479 3736; www.ketnapatel.com; 35 Jalan Puteh Jerneh, Chip Bee Gardens, Holland Village;
 taxi

Ketna Patel and her husband Jonathan run a home gallery best described as a 'residential laboratory for like-minded people'. The studio's specific goal is to promote dialogue between developed and developing nations, using art as the means of communication. While the gallery is open by appointment only, like-minded artists visiting Singapore should consider contacting Ketna (ketna@ketnapatel.com) to find out about ongoing projects and happenings.

LUKISAN ART GALLERY Map pp62–3

☎ 6410 9663; www.lukisan-art.com; 26 Smith St;
 ☑ Chinatown

Lukisan provides a venue for contemporary Asian artists both known and emerging. At the time of writing, Lukisan was featuring the works of renowned Filipino abstract artist Carlo Magno; check the website for upcoming events.

XUANHUA ART GALLERY Map pp52–3

☎ 6339 3836; www.xuanhuaart.com; 231 Bain St
 02-71; ☑ City Hall

Dedicated to showcasing the finest works of contemporary Chinese ink painters

from Singapore and China, Xuanhua also hosts exhibitions and other events. Lovers of sweeping charcoal-and-ink landscapes featuring the karst mountains of Guilin and other picturesque scenes of middle-kingdom splendour, this is the place for you.

MUSIC

Although not a musical city on the level of London or New York City, the Lion City does have a fair number of venues for concerts and other musical happenings.

ESPLANADE – THEATRES ON THE BAY

Map pp52–3

☎ 6828 8222; www.esplanade.com; 1 Esplanade Dr;
 ☑ City Hall

The 1800-seater state-of-the-art concert hall at the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is the home of the highly respected Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), but it also plays host to scores of music, theatre and dance performances. Check out their regularly updated website, especially for information on upcoming free shows and other programs.

SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA

☎ 6557 4034; www.sco.com.sg;
 Singapore Conference Hall, 7 Shenton Way;
 ☑ Tanjong Pagar

A performance by SCO, Singapore's only classical Chinese orchestra, is definitely worth catching for anyone interested in Asian music. Befitting their position as an orchestra in multi-ethnic Singapore, the orchestra also plays Indian and Malay music.

SINGAPORE INDIAN ORCHESTRA & CHOIR

☎ 6340 549; 9 Stadium Link; ☑ Kallang

Under the baton of Mrs Lalitha Vaidyanathan, the SIOC performs classics from all over the Indian subcontinent on traditional Indian instruments such as the sitar and tabla.

FILM

Take an affluent society with a highly educated citizenry somewhat lacking in creative outlets and chuck it in the sweltering sun for 12 months a year and blammo, you've got the perfect recipe for country full of movie

buffs. Singaporeans love to watch movies, and at around \$8.50 per ticket, it's great value. Multiplex cinemas abound, and you can find city centre ones at Parco Bugis Junction (Map pp52–3), Shaw Towers (Map pp52–3) on Beach Rd, Suntec City (Map pp52–3), Marina Square Complex (Map pp52–3), Cathay Cineleisure Orchard (Map pp74–5), Plaza Singapura (Map pp74–5) and Shaw House (Map pp74–5), all on or near Orchard Rd, among other places. For screening times, check the *Straits Times*. Singapore's cinemas are notoriously chilly places, so bring something warm to wear.

See also p33 for more on Singapore's home-grown film scene.

ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE Map pp74–5

☎ 6737 8422; www.alliancefrancaise.org.sg;
1 Sarkies Rd; M Newton

Screens classic and contemporary French films Tuesday at 8pm. Tickets are \$8 for nonmembers. Check the website for screening times. The [British Council](#) (Map pp92–3; ☎ 6473 1111; 30 Napier Rd; M Orchard) has occasional screenings of British movies.

GOLDEN VILLAGE Map pp74–5

☎ 6735 8484; www.gv.com.sg;
1 Kim Seng Promenade; M Somerset

For the ultimate pampered cinematic experience, \$25 gets you a ticket to this 'gold class' cinema on the 3rd floor of the Great World City mall. There are seats that can be reclined and adjusted with little levers, little tables for your food and drinks, and waiters who take your order. It also has regular theatres (some with huge screens) with normal-priced tickets.

PICTUREHOUSE Map pp74–5

☎ 6235 1155; www.thepicturehouse.com.sg;
levels 5 & 6, 2 Handy Rd; M Dhoby Ghaut

The first 'art-house' cinema in Singapore, the Picturehouse is the place to go for screenings of independent films from A to Z. Check the website for screening times.

LECTURES & READINGS

All-night partying aside, Singaporeans are studious folk with great appreciation of didacticism; thus, it's no surprise that even on a Saturday afternoon, scheduled lectures and talks on myriad subjects may wind up standing room only. Museums are the best places to catch a talk.

BOOKS ACTUALLY Map pp62–3

☎ 6221 1170; www.booksactually.com;
5 Ann Siang Rd; M Tanjong Pagar

Opened by three friends with a shared passion for books and located on the 2nd floor of a renovated shophouse south of Chinatown, this neat little bookstore holds poetry readings and open-mic sessions. Call or check the website for scheduling.

OPERA

CHINESE THEATRE CIRCLE Map pp62–3

☎ 6323 4862; www.ctcopera.com.sg; 5 Smith St;
M Chinatown

A low-key introduction to Chinese opera can be had at one of the teahouse evenings organised by the nonprofit opera company, the Chinese Theatre Circle. Every Friday and Saturday evening at 8pm there is a brief talk (in English) on Chinese opera, followed by a short excerpt from a Cantonese opera classic, performed by professional actors in full costume. Delicious lychee tea and little tea cakes are included in the price (\$20). The whole thing lasts about 45 minutes and you are able to take photos. Some Cantonese operas are even sung in English, though how much is lost in translation we can't say. Bookings are recommended. For \$35, turn up at 7pm and you can enjoy a full Chinese meal beforehand.

THEATRE

The [Singapore Arts Festival](#) (www.singaporeartsfest.com), which features many drama performances, is held in June. Music, art and dance are also represented at the festival, which includes the Fringe Festival, featuring plenty of street performances. Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay (p51) is one of the brightest spots in Singapore's vibrant theatre and dance scene.

ACTION THEATRE Map pp52–3

☎ 6837 0842; www.action.org.sg; 42 Waterloo St;
M Dhoby Ghaut

Set in a two-storey heritage house, this established theatre group shows local and international plays with contemporary themes in its small, 100-seat upstairs theatre and in the two open-air venues.


NECESSARY STAGE Map p80

☎ 6440 8115; www.necessary.org; B1-02 Marine Parade Community Bldg, 278 Marine Parade Rd;
☎ 12, 14 or 32

Since the theatre's inception in 1987, current artistic director Alvin Tan (see also p35) has collaborated with resident playwright Hareesh Sharma to produce over 60 original works such as 'Good People', 'Frozen Angels', and 'Top or Bottom'. Innovative, indigenous, and often controversial, the Necessary Stage is one of Singapore's best known theatre groups.



SINGAPORE DANCE THEATRE

Map pp52–3


☎ 6338 0611; www.singaporedance theatre.com; 2nd fl, Fort Canning Centre, Cox Tce;  Dhoby Ghaut This top dance company performs traditional ballets and contemporary works. The group's Ballet under the Stars season at Fort Canning Park is very popular. There are regular classes in ballet, jazz ballet and Pilates.

SINGAPORE REPERTORY THEATRE

Map pp52–3


☎ 6221 5585; www.srt.com.sg; DBS Arts Centre, 20 Merbau Rd;  54 from  Clarke Quay Based at the DBS Arts Centre, but also performing at other venues, this theatre group offers up repertory standards such as works by Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, as well as some modern Singaporean plays.

THEATREWORKS Map pp52–3

☎ 6338 4007; www.theatreworks.org.sg; Black Box, Fort Canning Centre, Cox Tce;  Dhoby Ghaut This is one of the more experimental and interesting theatre companies in Singapore. Theatreworks often performs at the Black Box theatre, as well as other venues around Singapore.

TOY FACTORY THEATRE ENSEMBLE

Map pp62–3

☎ 6222 1526; www.toyfactory.com.sg; 15A Smith St;  Chinatown A cutting-edge bilingual theatre company (in English and Mandarin, naturally), Toy Factory is known for staging controversial overseas plays, as well as producing Singaporean works. Where else could you see a performance like *Shopping and F***ing?*

WILD RICE Map p68

☎ 6223 2695; www.wildrice.com.sg; 3A Kerbau Rd;  Little India

Possibly Singapore's most accomplished theatre group, due in no small part to the talents of artistic director Ivan Heng. Wild Rice's productions range from farce to serious politics and fearlessly wade into issues not commonly on the agenda in Singapore.

COMEDY

Despite the absence of a dedicated comedy club (the city's only comedy club, 1NightStand in Clarke Quay, shut its doors as this book was going to press), comedy is alive and well in Singapore. A number of venues host travelling comics, and Singapore is a major stop-over for touring stand-ups heading from England to Australia and New Zealand. Check local papers for listings of upcoming shows.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Lest the reader assume a trip to Singapore is an excuse to give the body short shrift, the Lion City also boasts a thousand different paths to exhaustion, and nearly as many spas and massage parlours to work out the kinks after a hard day's workout.

CYCLING & SKATING

Sweltering heat and humidity doesn't drive everyone into the cool embraces of the nearest mall or movie theatre, and Singapore has plenty of high-speed outdoor activities for those undaunted by climate. Somewhere in the region of a quarter of the island is taken up by parks, many of which are joined by a series of underground park connectors and overhead bridges. This means that you can bicycle or skate through much of the city without having to fight traffic. Most hostels rent bikes, and there are a few places in the city to rent in-line skates as well.

BIKE BOUTIQUE Map pp62–3

☎ 6298 9528; www.thebikeboutique.com; 98 Amoy St;  Raffles Place Though few casual visitors to Singapore will spend their time shopping for bicycles, those who lust after bicycles might want to drop into this shop just to salivate over its beautiful high-end machines. The shop is also noteworthy for offering bike storage and showers to office workers commuting in from the outskirts.

WHAT MAKES SINGAPORE LAUGH? *Jonathan Atherton*

I've often heard it said that Singaporeans lack a sense of humour; I say bollocks to that. While it may be true that Singapore's political system is a tad authoritarian and somewhat lacking – devoid, really – when it comes to having a sense of humour, really, aren't all governments wet blankets when it comes to fun? But stuck-in-the-mud governance or not, your average Singaporean is always up for a good laugh.

Laughter, after all, is the best stress reliever, and in a society as focused on work, materialism and endlessly getting ahead in life, stress relief ranks high on the must-have list. In Singapore, a lot of humour can be gotten out of poking fun at the system. Now of course, actually complaining about the system is discouraged. For this reason, Singaporeans have elevated *whingeing* about the system to the status of a national sport.

Singapore is an ethnic stew, and while laws forbidding racism are very much enforced, friends of different ethnic groups have no problem poking fun at each other's customs or languages. It's all done in fun, with any jokes made out of shared experience rather than ignorance. Singaporeans genuinely respect the tenets of multiculturalism – you have to in a place so crowded with cultures. Singaporeans appreciate the distinction between an archetype and a stereotype, and this is just one of the things that I really like about the country.

But herein lies a comedic dilemma: the very multiculturalism that distinguishes Singapore from many other states also makes it difficult to pinpoint the essential character of its wit. Singapore is made up of dozens of cultures. 'Chinese', 'Malay' and 'Indian' are often cited as the main ethnic groups, but even within these groups lie marked differences.

Not to overgeneralise – it's politically incorrect, I know – but after 14 years as a touring stand-up comic in Southeast Asia, I feel it's safe to say that there are some observable patterns in what the various Singaporean subcultures find funny. The Hokkien Chinese enjoy ribald, bawdy humour, while their Cantonese cousins tend to favour slapstick more. Punjabis have a highly developed sense of irony, whereas Tamils love puns and word play. Gujuratis are fond of anecdotal material but Sindhis prefer a more philosophical slant. And Malays – they're a crowd any comic would appreciate. A fun-loving bunch, Malays will laugh at anything (as long as it's funny, that is!).

So the idea that Singaporeans lack senses of humour is nonsense; most folks you'll meet here will likely have a great sense of humour, so have some fun with locals over a cold beer or a hot cup of tea. But if you're hoping to get a laugh as a put-down comic, better think twice. Singaporeans have a strong sense of respect, both for themselves and for others. Nothing will fall flatter than fishing for laughs at the expense of others.

Australian-born comic Jonathan Atherton was Resident Master of Ceremonies at the now-closed 1NightStand. If anyone knows what makes Singapore laugh, it's him.

SKATELINE *Map pp52–3*

☎ 6339 7707; www.skateline.com.sg; Peninsula Shopping Centre, 3 Coleman St 04-37A; 📍 City Hall
Inline skating is very popular in Singapore and with five shops throughout the city Skateline is a great place to buy your blades. Skateline also run the rental kiosk at East Coast Park (near Burger King and car park C3).

BODY MODIFICATION

Art is no mere spectator sport, at least not to those who consider their body to be art's mobile canvas. To these, Singapore offers many fine places in which to be inked, pierced, studded, or otherwise corporeally modified. Probably the best place to shop for artists is at Far East Plaza (p113), which has about half a dozen shops to choose from.

Visitors looking for a tattoo shop with a definite pedigree should know about **Exotic Tattoo** (*Map pp74–5*; ☎ 6834 0558; 04-11 Far East Plaza 14 Scotts Rd; 📍 Orchard), for it's here that you'll

be able to get exquisite work from Sumithra Debi. One of the few female tattoo artists in Singapore, Sumithra is also the granddaughter of Johnny Two-Thumbs, probably Singapore's most legendary tattoo artist. Though there's another shop in the plaza bearing the Two-Thumbs name, Exotic Tattoo is the actual heir to the Two-Thumbs lineage. In addition to ink work, the shop also does piercing.

BOWLING

Tenpin bowling is popular in Singapore, though it seems that several bowling alleys have closed down over the past few years – not surprising in a city where indoor space is at such a premium. The cost per game is between \$4 and \$4.50 per person per game, depending on the time of day you play (it's also more on weekends and less on weekdays). Shoe hire is around \$1 and operators will even sell you a pair of fetching white ankle socks for \$0.50.

Orchid Bowl @ Elhub (*Map pp46–7*; ☎ 6583 1622; base-ment, Downtown East Mall; 🕒 closes 2am)

Victor Superbowl (Map pp48–9; ☎ 6223 7998; 7 Marina Grove, Marina South; ☎ 9am–3am Sun–Thu, 24hr Fri & Sat; 🚇 Marina Bay)

GOLF

Opening a golf course in a tiny city-state with extremely limited resources and open space seems an act of hubris against nature. Really, wouldn't miniature golf be more appropriate? If you're really intent on golfing, you're better off heading across the Causeway to the wide-open spaces at Seban Golf and Marina Resort (p184). If you must golf in Singapore, most clubs are members-only so they charge visitors a premium and usually don't allow you to play on weekends. Expect to pay around \$100 per game on weekdays and up to twice that on weekends.

Jurong Country Club (Map pp46–7; ☎ 6560 5655; www.jcc.org.sg; 9 Science Centre Rd; 🚇 Jurong East)

Marina Bay Golf Course (Map pp48–9; ☎ 6345 7788; www.mbgc.com.sg; 80 Rhu Cross)

Laguna National Golf & Country Club (Map pp46–7; ☎ 6541 0289; www.lagunagolf.com.sg; 11 Laguna Golf Green; 🚇 Tanah Merah)

Raffles Country Club (Map pp46–7; ☎ 6861 7655; www.rcc.org.sg; 450 Jalan Ahmad Ibrahim; 📻 SBS 182 from 🚇 Boon Lay)

Sentosa Golf Club (Map p100; ☎ 6275 0022; www.beaufort.com.sg/resort_golf.html; 27 Bukit Manis Rd, Sentosa Island; 🚌 shuttle bus from HarbourFront MRT)

HORSE RACING

SINGAPORE TURF CLUB Map pp46–7

☎ 6879 1000; www.turfclub.com.sg; 1 Turf Club Ave; 🚇 Kranji

This is a hugely popular day out – not nearly as manic as Hong Kong, but a rousing experience nonetheless. There is a four-level grandstand with a seating capacity of up to 35,000. Admission to the non-air-conditioned seating is \$3, or \$7 for the upper air-conditioned level (and foreigners must bring their passports to get in). For \$15 tourists can access the air-conditioned Gold Card Room, or for \$20 the exclusive@ Hibiscus lounge. Like Raffles, dress code is enforced: smart casual in one section and suits and ties in another.

Races take place on Friday, Saturday or Sunday during racing months (check the *New Paper* for details and coverage), starting at 6.30pm, 2pm and 2.30pm respectively.

ROCK CLIMBING

DAIRY FARM QUARRY Map pp46–7

📍 65, 170, 75, 171

Near Bukit Timah, Dairy Farm Quarry, which boasts 20 routes, is the only legal place to rock climb in Singapore. Most routes are bolted and can be done with a 50m rope; you'll need to bring your own gear. To find out about joining up with climbers who come here regularly on weekends, or to learn about indoor venues to climb in Singapore, check out www.indoorclimbing.com/singapore.html for a complete list of climbing walls in Singapore.

SKIING, SNOWBOARDING & TUBING

SNOW CITY Map pp46–7

☎ 6560 1511; www.snowcity.com.sg; 21 Jurong Town Hall Rd; adult/child per hr \$15/13;

🕒 9.45am–5.15pm Tue–Sun; 🚇 Jurong East
A hangar-sized deep freeze chilled to a numbing -5°C, Snow City features a slope three-stories high and 70m long, accessed via a silvery *Star Trek*-style air-lock. Each session gives you an hour to throw yourself at high speed down the slope on a black inner tube and throw snowballs. Two-hour ski and snowboarding lessons are available in the evenings for \$55 from **Snow Line** (☎ 6425 0801), located in the same building as Snow City. Snow Line also rents jackets and other equipment.

SWIMMING

Care for a dip in the world's most crowded waterways? Many do, despite the fact that none of Singapore's beaches are particularly great for swimming. Should you feel like joining them, the most popular beaches in Singapore are on Sentosa Island and East Coast Park.

A better option, if you're not staying at a hotel with its own pool, is the excellent public swimming complexes at **Farrer Park** (Map p68; ☎ 6299 1002; 2 Rutland Ave; 🕒 8am–9.30pm; 🚇 Little India) or **River Valley Swimming Complex** (Map pp52–3; ☎ 6337 6275; 1 River Valley Rd; 🕒 8am–9.30pm; 🚇 Clarke Quay) at the foot of Fort Canning Park. Admission to both is \$1/0.50 per adult/child (\$1.30/0.60 on weekends).

SPAS & MASSAGE

Spas, massage and paid-for relaxation are big business in Singapore. Telok Ayer St, right around the vicinity of the Thian Hok Keng Temple, seems to have become spa central, with at least half a dozen mid-priced spas and massage places on one short stretch of road.

Another place worth a visit is Chinatown's People's Park Complex (p109), which boasts several floors of stalls offering reflexology, shiatsu and even places where you can soak your feet in a pool of dead skin-eating fish for \$12. There are hundreds of others scattered around Singapore, with rates varying from around \$25 for a foot massage to more than \$200 for a full-day package.

AMRITA SPA Map pp52-3

☎ 6336 4477; www.amritaspas.com; Level 6, Raffles, The Plaza, 2 Stamford Rd; 📍 City Hall
Amrita boasts of being Asia's most extensive spa with 35 treatment rooms, a fitness

centre, a variety of plunge and bubble pools and a long menu of spa treatments; the day-spa escape package with back massage and express facial is \$150. There are branches at [Swissôtel](#) (p162), Merchant Court Singapore and [Raffles Hotel](#) (p56).

ARAMSA, BISHAN PARK Map pp46-7

☎ 6456 6556; www.aramsaspas.com; Bishan Park, 1382 Ang Mo Kio Ave 1, 📍 Bishan, 🚗 410
Aramsa has five different outlets in Bishan park, including an amazing spa, a vegetarian cafe, a huge dining room, and a Pilates studio. The serene park location makes Aramsa a scene unto itself, a place where locals and travellers alike can escape the busy mainstream and spend the day getting back to the garden of the soul.

KENKO WELLNESS SPA Map pp62-3

☎ 6223 0303; www.kenkofootreflexology.com; 211 South Bridge Rd; 📍 Chinatown

GETTING HIGH IN SINGAPORE

Who doesn't love to get high, especially on vacation? Despite a reputation for level-headedness, Singaporeans love being high, and the city offers a plethora of opportunity to visitors looking to get high. Floating 40 storeys above terra firma, the [DHL Balloon](#) (Map p68; ☎ 6338 6877; Tan Quee Lan St; adult/child \$23/13; ☎ 11am-10pm; 📍 Bugis) will leave you singing the Jimmy Webb tune 'Up, up and away in my beautiful balloon'. Filled with 6000 cu metres of helium, the bright yellow balloon with the DHL logo on both sides is a regular feature in the sky over Bugis – you can't miss it. There's a rumour that the balloon will be moving to a new location in 2009, so keep your eyes on the skies.

If you like your highs quick, intense and somewhat brutal, the [G-max Bungy](#) (Map pp52-3; ☎ 6338 1146; www.gmax.com.sg; 3E River Valley Rd; per ride \$30; ☎ 3pm-late Mon-Fri, noon-late Sat & Sun; 📍 Clarke Quay) might be for you. You and two other thrill-seekers will be strapped into padded chairs enclosed inside a metal cage, which is propelled skyward to a height of 60m at speeds exceeding 200km/h before being pulled back down by gravity. Though the ride offers spectacular views to those who can keep their eyes open, it's best avoided by people prone to velocity-induced vomiting.

A relatively gentle high ('relatively' is the key here) is offered right next door on the [GX5](#) (Map pp52-3; ☎ 6338 1146; www.gmax.com.sg; 3E River Valley Rd; per ride \$40; ☎ 3pm-late Mon-Fri, noon-late Sat & Sun; 📍 Clarke Quay). Whereas the G-max offers a straight-up face-peeling vertical trip, the GX5 swings riders up and over the Singapore River with somewhat less nauseating velocity. The trip also lasts longer, though which one provides more bang for your buck is a matter of personal choice.

But the most celebrated – certainly the most family-friendly way to get high in the Lion City comes via the newly opened [Singapore Flyer](#) (Map pp52-3; ☎ 6333 3311; www.singaporeflyer.com.sg; 30 Raffles Ave; adult/child/senior \$29.50/20.65/23.60; ☎ 8.30am-10.30pm; 📍 City Hall). Billed as 'The World's Largest Giant Observation Wheel', this monumental Ferris wheel carries riders up 165m before bringing them gently down into a rainforest covered park (part of a shopping complex, naturally – wouldn't want to get high and not be able to shop afterwards). Various packages are offered for those looking to get high in style, such as the signature cocktail flight for \$69, in which drinks are served for that extra lift.

Getting high in Singapore is anything but cheap, but those in the know can do it for close to nothing if they're willing to resort to humbler methods. One way, known mostly to locals, is to take a trip on bus 33; a London-style double-decker doing the east-west route, it skirts the southern edge of downtown on the seven-storey East Coast Parkway, offering impressive views of the skyscrapers to the north and the harbour to the south. Not quite the same rush as the reverse bungee, but for under a buck who's complaining? Grab a seat up top for some extra elevation!

Kenko is the McDonald's of reflexology, with outlets all over the city centre, including two on **Tanglin Rd** (Map pp74–5). This 'wellness boutique', located in Chinatown, is the most upmarket of its operations.

NGEE ANN FOOT REFLEXOLOGY

Map pp74–5

☎ 6235 5538; 4th fl, Midpoint Orchard, 220 Orchard Rd; M Somerset

Offers foot and body massage by visually impaired masseuses in friendly and refreshingly unpretentious surroundings.

ST GREGORY JAVANA SPA Map p68

☎ 6290 8028; www.stgregoryspa.com; Level 3, The Plaza, 7500A Beach Rd; M Bugis
With spas all over Asia, St Gregory's is a major player in relaxation. Its three facilities in Singapore are all inside upper-end hotels, we've listed the one at the Park Royal on Beach Rd; the other two are at the Marina Mandarin and the Conrad Centennial.

SANCTUM Map p68

☎ 6225 4381; www.sanctumsg.com; 11 Haji Lane; M Bugis

'Nourishment for mind, body and soul' is how this place bills itself, and with tarot readings, meditation events, past-life regression, shiatsu and reiki, we see no reason to argue. Sanctum has three beautiful and uniquely set-up rooms for sessions and chilling out, and offers online booking.

SPA BOTANICA Map p100

☎ 6371 1318; www.spabotanica.com; Sentosa Resort & Spa; ☎ 10am–10pm; 🚌 shuttle bus from Orchard Rd Paragon Shopping Centre

Singapore's original indoor and outdoor spa. The signature treatment here is the galaxy steam bath, a 45-minute wallow in medicinal chakra mud in a specially designed steam room. It also has a mud pool outside as well as landscaped grounds and pools.

WATER PARKS

ESCAPE THEME PARK Map pp46–7

☎ 6581 9112; www.escapethemepark.com.sg; adult/child/family \$17.70/8.90/42.80; ☎ 10am–10pm Sat, Sun & school holidays; 🚌 354 from M Pasir Ris

Who doesn't love a tropical waterslide, roller coasters, go-karts, bumper-boats and

wave pools? The wet and wild flume ride is said to be Asia's highest.

JURONG EAST SWIMMING COMPLEX

Map pp46–7

☎ 6563 5052; 21 Jurong East St 31; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 9am–7pm; M Chinese Gardens
The cheapest place in Singapore for swimming; has a lap pool, wading pool, wave pool, and three water slides.

WILD WILD WET Map pp46–7

☎ 6581 9135; www.wildwildwet.com; adult/child \$13.80/9.40; ☎ 1–7pm Mon & Wed–Fri, 10am–8pm Sat, Sun & school holidays; 🚌 354 from M Pasir Ris
Part of the same Downtown East complex occupied by Escape Theme Park, this water fun-park offers rides in a similar vein.

WATER SPORTS

CHANGI SAILING CENTRE Map pp46–7

☎ 6545 2876; www.csc.org.sg; 32 Netheravon Rd; 🚌 2 from M Tanah Merah

This centre rents out j-24s (24ft keel boats) on one-day charters for \$180 a day, including petrol. You will need to show a sailing proficiency certificate.

MACRITCHIE RESERVOIR'S

PADDLE LODGE Map pp46–7;

☎ 6258 0057; kayak rental per 1/2hr \$10/15; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Sun; 🚌 162

Offers paddle-boating and other water sports. For details, on which other parks offer water sports, see the website of the **National Parks Board** (www.nparks.gov.sg).

SCUBA CORNER Map p68

☎ 6338 6563; www.scubacorner.com.sg; 04-162 Kitchener Complex, Block 809 French Rd; M Lavender

Diving trips and courses can be arranged through the outfit Scuba Corner; it's office is located conveniently close to Lavender MRT station.

SKI360° Map p80

☎ 6442 7318; www.ski360degree.com; 1206A East Coast Parkway; per hr weekdays/weekends \$32/42; ☎ 10am–10pm Mon–Fri, 9am–midnight Sat & Sun; M Bedok then bus 401 (weekends only) 🚌 196, 197
What better way to cool off than strap on some water skis, a kneeboard or a wakeboard and get dragged around a lagoon

on the end of a cable? OK, you could just go swimming, but where's the fun in that? Best visited on weekday mornings, when there's usually hardly anyone there. The pose quotient goes through the roof at weekends, when it's just as entertaining sitting around hoping someone will come a cropper on the ramps.

YOGA

Yoga has caught on in a big way in Singapore – perhaps this accounts for the newfound mental flexibility of the denizens of this city-state once known for dogmatic stiffness. Most schools offer drop-in courses, but these aren't cheap; expect to pay between \$20 and \$30 for a 60- or 90-minute class. If you're in town for a few weeks and plan to practice regularly, you're better off purchasing a one-month or 10-class package. If you're just in town for a few days, you can take advantage of the 'first-timer' rates offered by some studios to attract new students, hopping from school to school for the duration.

Alternately, **Sri Muneeswaran Hindu Temple** (Map pp92–3; 3 Commonwealth Drive, Commonwealth MRT) offers free yoga classes on Sunday from 4pm to 5pm and 6pm to 7pm, and again on Monday from 7pm to 8pm.

The following schools offer short-term classes and drop-ins.

ABSOLUTE YOGA

☎ 6732 6007; www.absoluteyogasingapore.com

This large studio offers 'Hot Yoga', and has drop-in classes for \$34 and 10-class cards for \$270.

ANANDA MARGA Map p80

☎ 6344 6519; 1 www.anandamarga.org.sg;

Marine Parade Central, 07-01 Parkway Centre

In a world of corporate-run yoga studios, Ananda Marga is a breath of fresh air. Its Singapore studio offers small daily classes, dedicated instructors, and short-term class packages. Well worth coming east for.

TRUE YOGA Map pp62–3

☎ 6336 3390; www.trueyoga.com.sg;

20 Raffles Place, 27-00 Ocean Towers;

📍 **Raffles Place**

Probably the largest of Singapore's corporate yoga centres, True Yoga offers classes in a variety of styles and levels. It also has a branch on Orchard Rd, and often list one-time promotions on its website.

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