

The Travel & Leisure Magazine

FOR HIM, FOR HER, FOR YOU!

AUTUMN
2008
ISSUE

DIVE INTO NEW ZEALAND

- Adventure Capital of the World

SINGAPORE

- Somewhere Special

DON'T FORGET FLORENCE

- A Holiday With
A Difference

YOUR HEALTH

- Could Magnets Help?

ALL THAI-ED UP

- Recreating Those
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Content

T R A V E L

FROM THE EDITOR

Name-dropping exotic countries they've never visited and sites they've never seen - the little white travel lies told by British holidaymakers are being exposed. New research from easyCar.com reveals close to one in six Brits have told fibs about their travel experiences to impress someone.

In fact just under half of countries visited are actually just airport stopovers.

This issue is packed full of seasonal goodies. If you're Out & About, Don't Miss: The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (13 December 2008 until 1 January 2009) is celebrating a special Christmas and New Year this winter; the beginning of twelve months of festivities to mark the prestigious botanical institution's 250th anniversary. The Gardens will look even more spectacular and its glorious history and important contribution to plant conservation will be celebrated.

Or try a luxurious Christmas with a trip to Spirit of Christmas Fair, (5-9 November 2008, Olympia, London) the most exclusive annual shopping experience. Those wanting to be well prepared and stylishly equipped for the festive season will revel in the Fair's selection of fabulous gifts, exquisite decorations and gourmet food and wine. The Fair is the ideal place to meet up with friends for lunch and the perfect retail experience for anyone looking for beautiful gifts but short on time. Boasting hundreds of unique carefully selected ideas for both friends and family from exclusive traditional to contemporary, you will find gifts you simply won't find on the high street. www.spiritofchristmasfair.co.uk

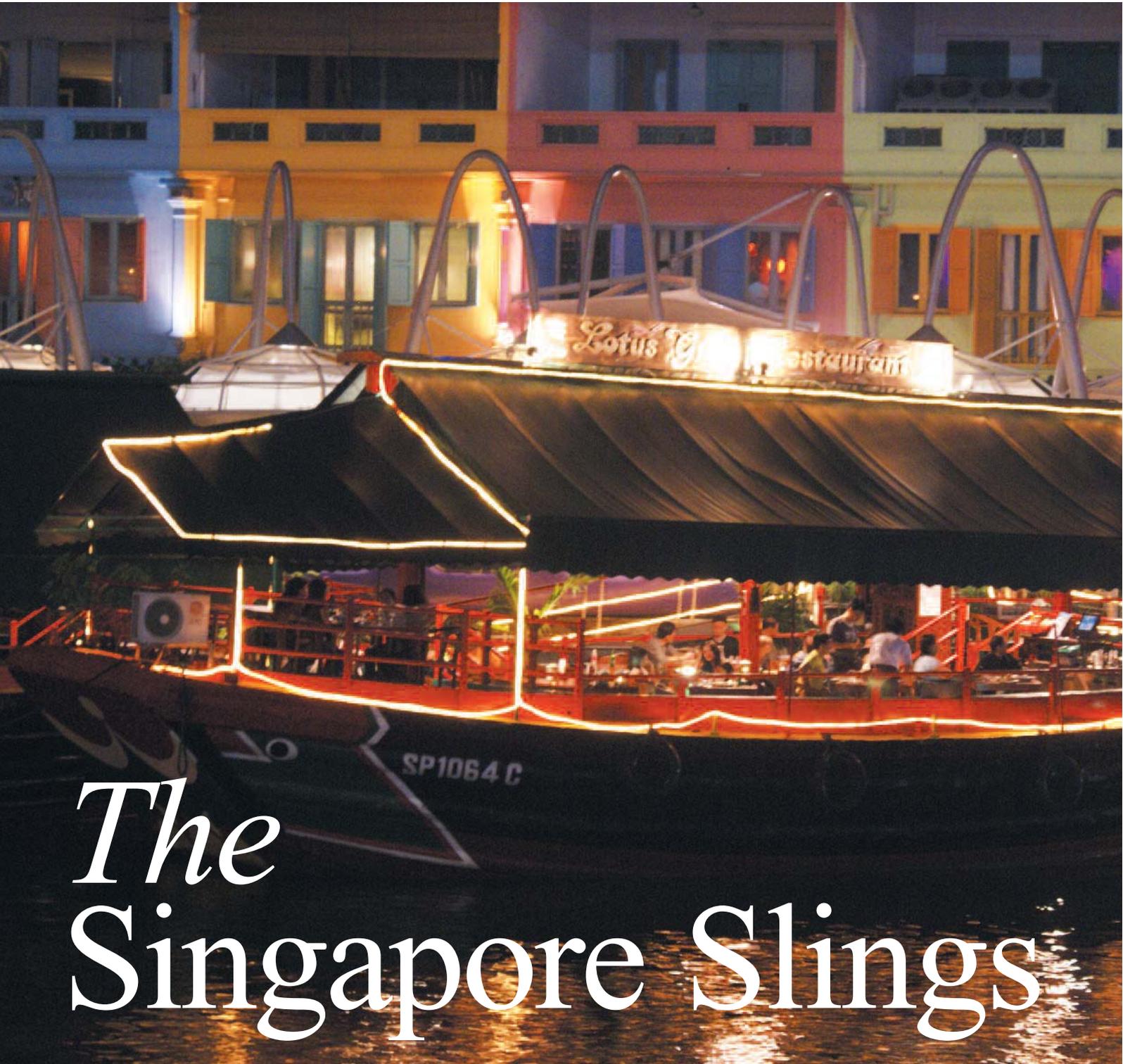
Reader Giveaway

One of 5 Pairs of Tickets to Spirit of Christmas Fair, pictured right, can be yours. Just visit www.choicetravelinfo.com and click on the competitions & giveaways button

Helene Hodge

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The Singapore Slings

Little India. More than 60 islets. Cable car restaurants. Fried carrot cake. **Philip Rix** says there's more to Singapore than camera shops and great value tailors.

Quickly, what is the first thing that comes into your head when you hear the word 'Singapore'? Sling? Rugby Sevens? No spitting? The trouble with countries you have not visited yet is that it's hard to get past years and years of accumulated clichés. Just as France is not full with cyclists in stripy tops with garlic round their necks carrying baguettes under their arms, not everybody in Singapore heads for cocktails at Raffles (well, not all the time).

The sea has always played a key part in Singapore's history, largely because it occu-

pies an excellent natural spot on major sea routes on the edge of the Malay Peninsula. During the Middle Ages it was called Temasek or 'Sea Town' as well as Singa Pura ('Lion City'). Its strategic importance was not lost on the empirebuilding British during the 18th century in their continuing battles against the empirebuilding Dutch and consequently Sir Stamford Raffles (yes, it was named after him) turned Singapore into a world famous trading city. More recently, it became a famous theatre of war during World War II when it was taken by the Japanese forces and held by them from 1942 until 1945. Today, there are plenty of locations around the country where you can find



■ Restaurant at Clarke Quay



■ Pulau Ubin

out more about these often dark times.

One of the most interesting is Changi Chapel and Museum which include artefacts, photographs and drawings from the time of the occupation which meant imprisonment for over 50,000 soldiers and civilians. Visitors can stay for a service on Sundays at 9am. Interestingly, outside in the Museum's garden are native plants and vegetables grown by residents during the war to improve their diets. More details at www.changimuseum.com

You can also tour the restored Battle Box at Fort Canning. This is the vast underground command centre – 22 rooms along a main corridor, with recycleable air supply equip-

ment and naturally bomb proof – of the British Malaya Command Headquarters during World War II.

Back to the sea. Another cliché that needs correcting is most people's image of Singapore. Let's try again. Close your eyes and picture it. Are you picturing somewhere with 63 islets? I bet you're not. Kusu Island, for example, has the lovely Tua Pekong Temple which is the focus for an annual Taoist pilgrimage as well as the Malay shrine Kramat Kusu for Muslims. Kusu's lagoon is great for swimming.

Or take a step back in time on the very relaxing and deliberately basic Pulau Ubin which is being transformed into a nature



■ Laksa



Shopping

Having said that there is more to Singapore than its smart suits and electronic bargains (especially cameras), it's also true that this is a good place to invest in both as well as jewellery, silverware and leatherware (I'm told it's also a great place to buy a wig but I can't vouch for this personally).

A good first stop for shopping therapy is Orchard Road, the main shopping street, which has a whole string of well looked after, multi-level shopping complexes. You will probably come to know this area quite well because it is also where many of the best restaurants are located.

For something more old-fashioned, head for Bugis Street, home to Singapore's largest permanent street bazaar, or one of the quarters such as Little India mentioned elsewhere. This is the spot to hone your haggling skills if you are after a carpet or other antique.

■ Shopping in Orchard Road

park ideal for walking and cycling as well as featuring rubber plantations, mangrove swamps and prawn farms. The best beach to head for, but only at low tide, is Chek Jawa which has a particularly impressive population of sealife including peacock anemones.

Singapore is not only the busiest port in the world for business shipping and fishing boats, it is also a hub for many cruise ships. As well as what are called 'cruises to nowhere' (popular three day circular trips that depart and return to Singapore without stopping anywhere else), you can take cruises around islands such as Kusu mentioned above and its southern neighbours St. John's, Sisters and Lazarus. And of course many longer cruises take in a stop at Singapore too with many international lines such as Silversea Cruises (www.silversea.com) and Cunard (www.cunard.com) calling in here on their Asian routes which link Singapore to, among others, Mumbai, Phuket, and Hong Kong. There is lots more detail online at www.singaporecruise.com

If you're travelling as a family, there's certainly plenty to enjoy in Singapore, especially if you all like animals. Singapore Zoo (www.zoo.com.sg) has plenty of your favourites including lots of orang utans, baboons, snakes, elephants and excellent behind the scenes tours. Another excellent



and intriguing option is to visit the Night Safari (www.nightsafari.com.sg), set in 40 acres of forest and home to more than 900 animals from 135 species (think wolves as well as owls). This claims to be the world's first wildlife park built specifically for nocturnal visits (i.e. it's not just an illuminated zoo) and recreates varied geographic zones like the Southeast Asian rainforest, African savanna, Nepalese river valley, South American pampas and Burmese jungle around which you can walk or take a tram ride. It certainly makes a lot of sense: most

tropical animals are nocturnal so it's simply easier to spot them, sunset is reasonably early, nights in Singapore are not usually roasting and it doesn't rain much. And naturally some of the action also takes place in the water: visit the Underwater World (www.underwaterworld.com.sg) Asia's largest tropical oceanarium complete with 83-metre-long moving travelator, over 2,500 marine animals and more Sand Tiger Sharks than you can shake a stick at.

They take a lot of things very seriously in Singapore. Yes, spitting is of course one of



Teri's TOP TIPS

If you've travelled in Asia before you'll be familiar with eating al fresco at very cheap and cheerful street stalls. This tradition in Singapore has paved the way for the rise of the 'hawker centre', an open air complex which is home to dozens of stalls. There are more than 100 on the island where you can find around 17,000 stalls. It's a great way of getting a feel for Singaporean delicacies since you can pick and choose and help yourself to small portions if you're not entirely sure. Each hawker centre offers a wide range of cuisines, Chinese, Malay, Indian, even British if you're really, really must. When you visit, bag a table then take turns to nip up and have a good look around to see what's on offer. If you're not sure what to go for, either ask the hawkers for more information or simply see where the locals are gathering and follow their lead. When you've decided on something, tell the hawkers at the stalls what you want.



A 'hawker' food centre

Let them know your table number and they'll deliver your food or head for self-service stalls for a takeaway. If you take plates and utensils from Muslim and Chinese stalls, keep them separate as a matter of religious respect. A good place to have a try is the famous Chomp Chomp at Serangoon Gardens,

20 Kensington Park Road, which has everything from barbecue stingray to the traditional fried carrot cake, rice flour and radish quick-fried with soy sauce, eggs, garlic and pickled radish. There's an excellent blog too devoted to the subject of hawker food called 'I eat, I shoot, I post' at <http://ieatishootipost.sg>

them (don't spit in public places – it's not just rude, it is an offence). But arguably nothing is closer to the country's heart than its food. So you could take breakfast at the very traditional Chin Mee Chin, with its mosaic floor tiles, ceiling fans and delicious freshly-baked goodies including kaya, a kind of jam made from eggs, sugar and coconut milk. It's all served in porcelain cups and saucers, not paper cups and plastic plates. Then have lunch in one of the many seafood restaurants on the waterfront at the East Coast Seafood Centre or at Boat Quay. And finish off with dinner in a cable car, 70m above the sea slap bang middle in the Singapore skyline: Sky Dining has special cabins seating four adults and one child under 12 which are available for two hour round trips with dinner in the air. You need to book a day in advance, two for weekends. More details at www.mountfaber.com.sg/main-skydining.htm. If you're still feeling

lively, then nip over for a nightcap at BLU, the snazzy bar and restaurant on the 24th floor of the Shangri-La Hotel with spectacular night views of the city (www.shangri-la.com).

So what kind of specialities should you look for? Arguably the national dish is laksa, a mixture of rice, noodles, shrimps, chilli, and even cockles, all in a coconut soup. There are four stalls (47, 49, 57 and 328) along East Coast Road which serve up delicious traditional versions.

But there's so much diversity in Singapore's cuisine that you'll find something delicious here from pretty much every continent. For example, there's a thriving Chinatown area (the Tanjong Pagar is great for traditional teashops) and visiting the Little India quarter is like making a swift stopover in the country itself - Indians have migrated here in numbers since the 19th century and now even have their own expan-

sive web site (www.littleindia.com.sg) – and as well as shops selling lovely wood carvings and bright saris, colourful temples and Henna artists, there are many excellent food shops, especially if you are looking for high quality good value spices. Serangoon Road and its neighbouring side streets are the heart of Little India and Singapore Walks have an interesting two-and-a-half hour walking tour on Wednesdays called Dhoobis, Saris & a Spot of Curry which is well worth taking (www.singaporewalks.com).

There are plenty of other Singapore specials including chilli crab (usually eaten with bread dipped into its thick sauce), satay kebabs, and spicy pork ribs in a soup with dough fritters ('Bak kut the'). Look out too for:

- the crispy Roti prata pancake served with curry
- 'Teh tarik' tea mixed with evaporated and sweet condensed milk
- fish head curry, which is exactly what it



■ Singapore slings at Raffles

Sarah Jansen

Something completely different...

A few ideas for some not so run of the mill holiday activities:

- You don't need to be a line dancing fanatic to take part in the Friday and Sunday evening get-togethers of the Country Line Dance Association of Singapore (www.cldas.com). They meet at Far East Square and get all dressed up for the occasion.
- Take a ghost tour of Singapore's haunted spots with the Asia Paranormal Investigators (www.api.sg).
- For extra added tradition at hawkers stalls (see separate box), ask for your food to be served in a leaf. Hawkers used to serve takeaways wrapped in opeh leaves until a cheaper paper option came along. Now the leaves (the insides of betel nut palm bark) are back adding a gentle little woody flavour to their contents.
- Get a foot massage. Foot reflexology is very big in Singapore and there are plenty of specialist centres.
- Buy a Singapore Special Edition Monopoly set with Singapore landmarks and tokens in distinct shapes, such as the three-wheeled trishaw cycle rickshaw
- Enjoy a panoramic view of the island city on a 30-minute trip in the huge observation Singapore Flyer wheel. There are 28 fully air-conditioned, UV protected pods which whizz you up to 165m high to give you a top view of the waterfront, skyscrapers and surprisingly green surroundings.

says on the tin

- wide white noodles with bean sprouts and clams in a sweet sauce

If you're here during July, head for the annual Singapore Food Festival which is a month-long celebration of the tastes of the country: it's not just for residents, as around a quarter of those attending were tourists last year and it is particularly aimed at younger visitors with special cooking classes.

Indeed if you literally want to spice up your holiday, consider signing up for a cookery course. There is a wide range of options, some of which also include wine tasting as well as health-related and cultural activities. One of the best is Shermay's Cooking School (www.shermay.com) run by famous regional chef and cookbook writer Shermay who herself runs many of the demonstrations. Her focus is Nonya cuisine, a type of ancient fusion cooking combining Chinese and Malay ingredients and styles and particu-