

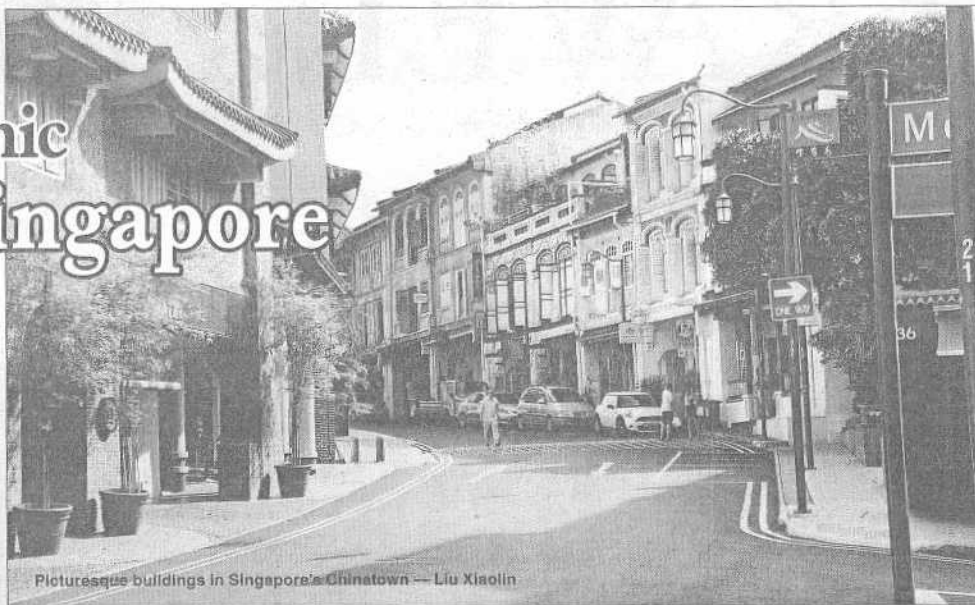
# 5 free things to do in Serene, scenic cultural Singapore

## Heng Yi Ling

Arriving in Singapore and looking for free things to do, you will find a wide range of sights and pastimes.

The city-state itself is a harmonious blend of different architectural styles, ranging from traditional to contemporary, diversified cultures and rich. Get your camera ready, put on your shades and feel the enveloping warmth of this tropical country with litter-free streets.

Here are five free things to do.



Picturesque buildings in Singapore's Chinatown -- Liu Xiaolin



Singapore Botanical Gardens epitomize the Tropical Garden City.

## Singapore Botanical Gardens

If you stressed by the city, escape to the quiet of the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Walk down quiet paths surrounded by trees, plants and colorful, fragrant flowers. As you stroll, notice the little things like the morning glory wrapped around a tree like a ribbon on a gift, and the ripples left by ducklings following their mother on a lake. Relax on the grass if you get

tired. This is one of the best places to appreciate Singapore's success in building itself into a Tropical Garden City. Check the website for events. There are free guided tours and concerts on certain days. Everything is free, except for admission to the National Orchid Garden (US\$5). The Botanical Gardens is open from 5am to midnight daily.

## Raffles Hotel

As the oldest and one of the most iconic buildings in Singapore, Raffles Hotel is far more than a place to rest your head. It's considered a national monument, filled with history, charm and understated grandeur. Established in 1887, it is still standing while nearby buildings were bulldozed for new construction. It witnessed colonial days and dark days of occupation during World War II. Be sure to check out the Raffles Hotel Museum on the third floor. It's a time machine that enables you to travel back into Singapore's colorful past. There are old photographs, postcards, letters from famous politicians and celebrities, furnishings, an old rickshaw and many more items. You may learn things that even Singaporeans may not know.

Admission is free. The museum is open daily from 10am to 7pm.



The brilliantly illuminated Raffles Hotel

## Orchard Road

Shopping on Orchard Road can burn a hole in your pocketbook, but window shopping and sightseeing is fun and free. Visit ION Orchard and 313 Somerset, the latest additions to the shopping malls collection. They are near the Orchard and Somerset MRT stations and a 15- to 20-minute walk apart.

When you get sick of looking at clothes, bags and shoes, go outside to catch the scenic city view. Join the pedestrians, shop mascots and

street performers on the lively street. The multicolored lighting at night is magnetic; make sure to snap a picture or two. Feel the hustle and bustle of Singapore, appreciate the architecture and stroll down Orchard Road as far as your legs will carry you.

As you pass Orchard Central Shopping Mall, take the incredibly high escalator outside the mall up to the rooftop, where you get a panoramic view of Singapore and all its landmarks.

## Marina Bay

Marina Barrage, a dam at the confluence of five rivers, is a key part of the Marina Bay project. It's a great place for picnics and kite flying. The upper deck offers an unobstructed view of the cityscape.

Tourists and locals flock to the newly built Marina Bay Sands to appreciate the engineering wonders and jaw-dropping Singapore skyline. These include the waterfront Art-Science Museum, Singapore Flyer and Marina Bay Financial Center.

Marina Bay Sands stages nightly light and water shows at 8pm and 9:30pm from Thursday through Sunday. There's an additional show at 11pm on Friday and Saturday. The 15-minute shows are free, featuring the convergence of colorful laser lights from buildings, dancing streams of water and original music composed for the spectacular shows. The video-worthy show named Wonder Full is best viewed at the Marina Bay Sands event plaza by the water, outside the



Marina Bay Sands and nearby waterfront buildings by day and night.

luxury shopping mall. Get there early to grab a good seat, since it's often packed before the show starts.

Marina Bay encompasses many other free attractions within walking distance.

## Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India

Besides interesting landscape and architectural masterpieces, Singapore is a melting pot of cultures. As a multi-racial society, what makes it truly amazing is that people of different cultures, languages and religions are able to co-exist amicably with mutual respect. Walk around different ethnic quarters to get a feel of it all, notably Chinatown, Kampong Glam, a Malay community, and Little

India. There the cultures and traditions are represented by food, shops, architecture and people. You can join in festival celebrations at various seasons. Religion is important in all three quarters where there are many temples, churches and mosques, and admission is free. There's no better place than Singapore for visiting various religious shrines without paying a few. There's so much to discover.



Sampling Chinatown's distinctive culture