

MY CITY*

SINGAPORE

LOCAL JACLYNN SEAH REVEALS THE SURPRISING ART
AND NATURE TO BE FOUND IN THIS METROPOLIS



** There's no better way to get to the heart of a city than through the people who live there. Every month we ask someone, clearly in love with their city, to take us on a personal tour and tell us what makes it so special. You may feel inspired to visit one day or to rediscover the charms of a city closer to you, but for now just sit back, relax and enjoy some armchair travel.*

How long have you lived in the city?

I'm Singaporean born and bred. I've lived here 35 years. I really can't think of anywhere else I'd call home.

Tell us what makes your city unique

Its diversity is something I've grown to appreciate the more I've travelled – so many nationalities and ethnicities together in one tiny country. I love how you can find temples next to churches, people of different colours talking in shared languages and speaking each other's dialects and, of course, the variety of the food.

What's it like in January?

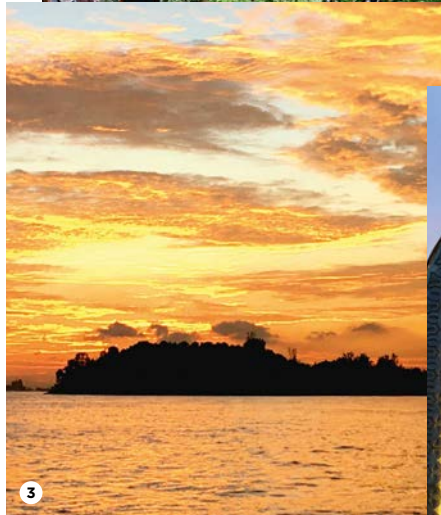
The Chinese are just gearing up for Chinese New Year, which falls on 25 January this year. You know it's coming when Santa gives way to God of Fortune and zodiac animal statues, and carols turn into traditional Chinese New Year tunes. Singapore enjoys a rare two-day public holiday at Chinese New Year. The majority of the Chinese population spend it visiting each other or heading back to their home towns. We sometimes joke that the working year doesn't officially start until after Chinese New Year!

What time of day do you most enjoy and why?

To me, Singapore is at its prettiest in the evening, just after the sun sets. It's not as swelteringly hot, and I love how the city is transformed into a sea of lights – that's why the Formula 1 race is held at night here. I've always been a night owl; there's something special about the quiet stillness of a perpetually busy city like Singapore.

What's the nature like?

Singapore is a concrete jungle filled with tall buildings to house its population of almost six million, but it is also very much a garden city. Many might think it doesn't count as proper nature, but I appreciate the trees lining our expressways and the flowers on our overhead bridges – small things like these make a big city much more liveable. Not all the nature has gone – I visited Kranji in the north-western corner of Singapore and found a cluster of farms. I also took a walk in Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, a lovely mangrove forest area with a well-maintained boardwalk, where I came up »



- 1 Find yourself a good spot for nighttime city views.
- 2 Even Singapore's Changi Airport is a greened up space.
- 3 An archipelago of more than 60 islands, you're never far from the sea in Singapore.
- 4 The golden domes of Sultan Mosque are a must-see.
- 5 Little India is just one area of the city with some great street art

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“Singapore is a concrete jungle filled with tall buildings, but it’s also very much a garden city”



close with hornbills. In one of the parks, among joggers and cyclists, I saw a rare pangolin waddling by.

Where’s your favourite outdoor space?

Singapore is pretty hot throughout the year – you can tell who the tourists are as they’re usually lounging in the parks at midday while the locals make a beeline for the air-conditioned shopping malls. I like walking around the Kampong Glam area for its mix of history, culture and street art. I love that two back alleys were recently converted into an outdoor gallery.

Tell us about the light and colours of your city

Green for the trees, flowers and plants that Singapore has planted within its city infrastructure. And shades of yellow because of our perpetual sunny weather.

Tell us about the people who live in Singapore

Half of Singapore’s population were descended from the intrepid immigrants who first found their way here generations ago, largely from the Malayan Peninsula, China, India and the European continent. The other half have come here to work from all around Asia and the rest of the world. The official Singaporean nationalities are Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others.

Where are your favourite places to gather with friends?

Going out typically involves finding a nice restaurant or café, or heading to a movie or festival. As my group has grown older, our afterwork drinks hangouts have shifted to chilling at someone’s house with a takeout.

What’s eating in your city like?

The government moved all the street stalls indoors for hygiene reasons, and these food courts are the best places for cheap, good quality food. I love the variety – when in doubt, look for the longest queue as it’s bound to be special. We talk about food all the time – at breakfast we’ll be discussing what to eat for lunch, and at lunch there will be a debate on where to go for dinner.

What’s your favourite way to get about the city?

Take the subway, or MRT (Mass Rapid Transit). You can get just about anywhere on the subway.

What types of shop do you most like to visit?

Singapore is the land of shopping malls – Orchard Road is lined with malls in all shapes and sizes. Most areas now have their own mall, where locals flock for groceries, meals or to escape the heat. I like the small boutiques and pop-up markets that showcase local designers and brands (see Personal Tour).



Where do you like to escape to?

Singapore is an archipelago of more than 60 islands. Sentosa is the tourist island, with a theme park and our nicest beaches – but to really get away from it all, I like to hop on a boat to Pulau Ubin, Kusu Island, Saint John’s Island or Lazarus Island, where it’s a lot quieter. Alternatively, people head across the causeway to Malaysia, where a strong Singaporean currency makes a seafood dinner, massage, shopping or café-hopping really affordable.

What has been your best discovery about your city?

Despite Singapore’s fearsome reputation for strict regulations, we have some talented street artists and great art in our streets. I’ve spent many hours hunting down cool murals and graffiti, which I’ve documented on my blog and on Instagram @singaporestreetart

What do you miss most if you’ve been away?

I spent six months in Europe and South America and anyone who met me then would attest to how much I missed Asian-style soup noodles and Singaporean food. When I get back from trips, I head straight for my local favourites: Hainanese chicken rice, peppery bak kut teh (pork bone soup) and savoury roti prata with curry. Singaporean food isn’t really done right outside of Singapore. Also, Singapore noodles is an abomination and one of those things that doesn’t actually exist here!

What would surprise a newcomer to your city?

Most people are surprised that we speak English. The school system emphasises bilingualism so most young people learn English and another language. People are surprised by Singlish – an English-based creole language with regional slang. Combine this with the local accent and visitors are sometimes not sure if we’re actually speaking a form of English at all.

If you could change one thing about the city?

I wish people would be more environmentally aware. We have a reputation for cleanliness, but only because we have a lot of bins, cleaners and stringent laws – often it’s not because people genuinely want to keep the place clean as they care about the environment.

Where would you recommend somebody to stay?

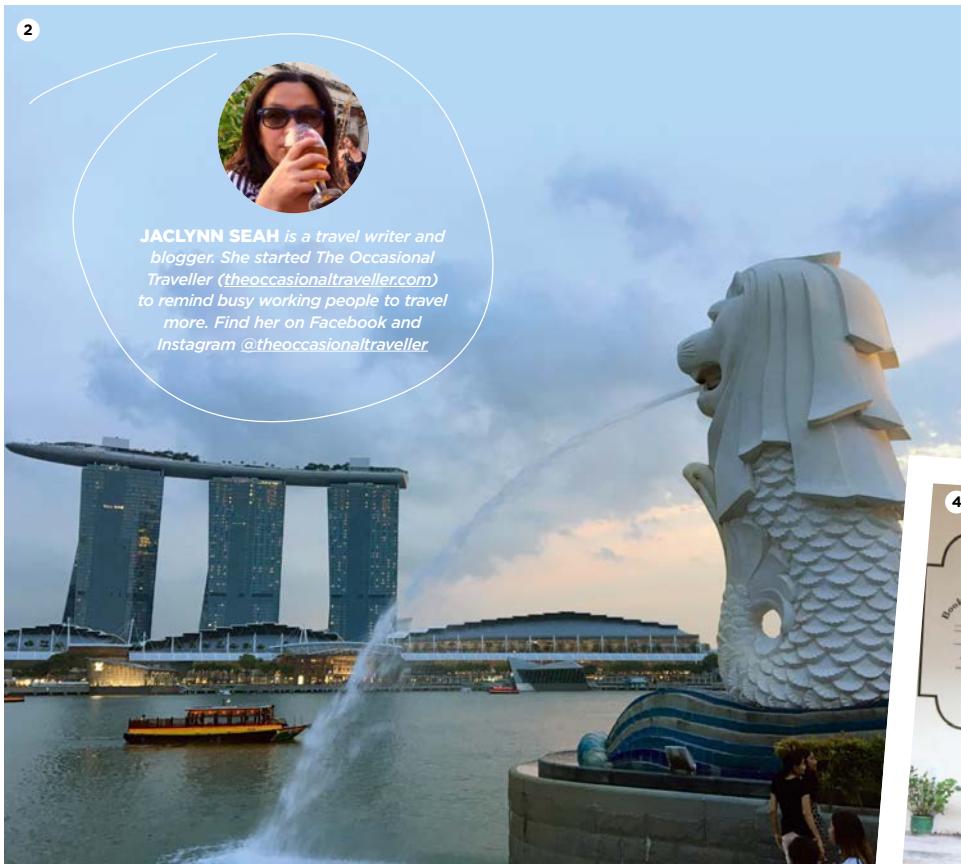
Singapore is quite small so half an hour by car will get you across the island, but I would recommend Bugis or Chinatown for sheer convenience to tourist attractions, or neighbourhoods like Little India or Jalan Besar for something a little more colourful.

What keeps you in your city and where would you live if you couldn’t live here?

My family, my friends and everything that I know keep me here. I’d like to go overseas for a year or two, but I think I’d always want to come home. »



- ① Haw Par Villa, a magical theme park of legends and mythology.
- ② Mane event: lights to celebrate The Year of the Horse.
- ③ The Central Business District skyline from Esplanade Park.
- ④ New Year lanterns in Chinatown.
- ⑤ Kranji Reservoir Park, a favourite of picnickers and fishing enthusiasts.
- ⑥ Graffiti art on Queen Street



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JACLYNN SEAH is a travel writer and blogger. She started *The Occasional Traveller* (theoccasionaltraveller.com) to remind busy working people to travel more. Find her on Facebook and Instagram @theoccasionaltraveller.



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JACLYNN'S PERSONAL TOUR

Favourite shop

BOOKS ACTUALLY

I want to buy something, anything, every time I walk in. Ask the friendly staff for recommendations for good Singaporean literature. booksactuallyshop.com

Favourite gallery

LEE KONG CHIAN NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

It's fascinating to see how much nature we have around Singapore. Plus the sperm whale skeleton that washed up locally in 2015. lknhm.nus.edu.sg

Favourite bar

HOSPODA MICROBREWERY

This tiny outlet serves simple but great Czech beers. It's not too pricey and never crowded. *180 Albert St, #01-19*

Favourite restaurant

MELLBEN SEAFOOD RESTAURANT

I love the savoury goodness of the claypot crab bee hoon soup. *232 Ang Mo Kio Avenue 3, #01-1222*

Favourite market

EAST COAST LAGOON FOOD VILLAGE

A hawker centre by the beach with great food, including the famous Singaporean chilli crab and black pepper crab. *1220 East Coast Park*

Favourite hotel

AMOY HOTEL

I love the weird little hidden entrance in the back of a Chinese temple and that the rooms are housed in old shophouse units. theamoy.com.sg

Favourite by night

MARINA BAY

One Fullerton is the best spot for views of the famous Singapore night skyline. And it's free, too. thefullertonheritage.com

Best view

LEVEL 33

They call themselves the highest urban Microbrewery in the world, but it's just one of many rooftop spots around Marina Bay with a great view of the skyline. level33.com.sg

Favourite way to spend an hour

LOOKING FOR STREET ART

Graffiti is not something you expect to see in Singapore, but our local artists are awesome. Check out Kampong Glam, Little India or Chinatown. 5

- 1 Entrance to the Amoy hotel at the Fuk Tak Chi museum.
- 2 The Merlion: body of a fish, head of a lion. Not one you'd want to land on a fishing trip.
- 3 The East Coast Lagoon Food Village.
- 4 Lose yourself in Books Actually