

DESTINATIONS

SINGAPORE SWINGS!

SINGAPORE



Singapore

WHERE ON EARTH

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD

Lau Pa Sat market at night;
Pedestrians in
Singapore's
Bugis district.

Singapore

eSwings!

by ELYSE GLICKMAN

«**A**T FIRST GLANCE, Singapore fits the description of a 21st-century utopia, from its futuristic skyscrapers to its impressive use of green space, abundance of luxury hotels and shopping, and its progressive embrace of its multicultural roots. But its historic and cultural underpinnings could not be more down to earth.

One of Southeast Asia's great port cities began taking shape in the 14th century thanks to its auspicious location in the Melaka Straits, connecting several important maritime trade routes. Over the centuries, groups from China, the Malay Peninsula and India took full advantage of this commercial hub, as did the Portuguese, Dutch and British.

Today, Singapore's museums and historical sites remind residents and visitors about its proudly multicultural underpinnings, as well as the legacy of Sir Stamford Raffles, who founded the city of Singapore with a progressive vision. Raffles was anti-slavery, wanted peasants and working people to benefit from the area's rising prosperity, and was determined to keep Singapore a free port to further encourage the region's growth. The legendary hotel named in his honour evolved into the standard bearer for luxury travel in the region, and is in the process of being retooled for a late summer 2019 reopening.

Although a wide swath of the 20th century was filled with political and cultural turmoil for the island nation, Singapore ultimately became an independent republic in 1965, and from there, transitioned into a new era of prosperity, drawing to its shores interest from multinational corporations and numerous entrepreneurial opportunities for both technical and creative individuals. Tourism, of course, is a major industry as the area maintains its lush, tropical appeal and its image on the world stage is undeniably glamorous.

As one would expect from the city that gave the world the first Raffles luxury hotel, upscale restaurants, bars and nightlife are all part of the appeal. However, Singapore's greatest asset is its long-standing and deeply rooted multiculturalism, which informs practically everything that will pass your lips. Case in point are the historic Muslim/Arab enclave Kampong Glam and the Little India neighbourhood, which are awash in casual cafes specializing in vegetarian, halal, and even Turkish fare, reinforcing Singapore's identity as a crossroads to the world.

The city's food halls and hawker markets, meanwhile, offer generous tastes of the Singaporean melting pot for just a few dollars each, generating as much excitement as buzzy brasseries and restaurants built on the reputations of the world's top chefs. An early scene in the hit rom-com *Crazy Rich Asians* underscores this, as New York City-bred protagonist Rachel, her fiancé Nick and his friends head straight from Changi Airport to the Newton Food Centre, tempting viewers with a montage of laksas (Malay curries), noodles and seafood dishes. Long before Rachel fully digests the fact that Nick is the Prince Harry of Singapore, food is represented as a great equalizer.

In the real world, hawker centres live up to the hype. While they score points with their standards of cleanliness and efficiency (thanks to government monitoring), the quality-to-price ratio is even more amazing when one considers that they've thrived generation after generation in a city that's famously expensive. Newton, of course, benefitted from its recent Hollywood turn, and while some locals may consider the Lau Pa Sat Festival Market a little too manicured and clean to be authentic, it is incredibly popular with lunchtime and evening crowds. Although the Maxwell Food Hall's Tian Tian stall (doling out a deceptively simple chicken-rice dish) got the late Anthony Bourdain's seal of approval, the market maintains street cred through its simple layout and array of specialized vendors, some who have been in business for decades.

Although Maxwell is clean and well-organized, the effort is clearly put into the food rather than the ambiance. Our guide steers us toward Tong Fatt Hainanese Boneless Chicken Rice (in the #01-17 slot), whose sauce adds an extra depth of flavour to the chicken by harmonizing with its natural juices and the fluffy rice. After we try another vendor's chicken rice for comparison's sake, my friends and I sweep around the aisles of the former supermarket to find the most aromatic examples of Malay halal *nasi goreng* (fried rice) and Thai green curry with eggplant. Food here is truly a labour of love.»



...Globalization
has impacted
Singapore's food
culture ...



RAFFLES HOTELS & RESORTS

SINGAPORE

SERVES 1

Singapore Sling

MIXOLOGISTS in Singapore's high-end cocktail bars are crafting world-class, modern libations but the classic Singapore Sling, with its perfect balance of sweet, sour and assertive flavours, takes a lot of beating. Created in the early 1900s by a bartender at the legendary Raffles Hotel, it's a deliciously refreshing summer drink.

Gin
1 ¼ oz

Cherry Brandy
½ oz

Benedictine ¼ oz
Cointreau ¼ oz

Grenadine
¼ oz

Pineapple Juice
4 oz

Fresh Lime Juice
½ oz

Angostura Bitters
a dash

Pineapple Wedge
1, for garnish

Maraschino Cherry
1, for garnish

- 1 PLACE** a few ice cubes in a cocktail shaker. Add the liquid ingredients, cover and shake energetically for a few seconds.
- 2 FILL** a tall glass with ice cubes. Strain the liquid from the shaker over the ice in the glass. Garnish with a pineapple wedge and maraschino cherry.

PHOTO THIS SPREAD View
of Wet market.

«We also get a tasty vocabulary lesson in Singaporean snacks, one shared plate at a time. This includes *hokkien mee*, an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink mix of egg and rice noodles, pork, prawns and squid; and *char kway teow* that is akin to chow mein, with an interesting fermented taste flavouring up morsels of chicken and pork. We add in other finger foods such as fish balls, spring rolls and fritters with spicy-sweet dipping sauces, and to balance everything out, fresh coconut water, aloe juice and other refreshing libations crafted from regional fruit.

A few blocks away in Chinatown, dozens of food booths dish up familiar forms of Cantonese and Szechuan fare as well as packaged snack foods that make interesting souvenirs. Most Singaporeans eat out rather than dine in because of the reasonable prices and high quality of hawker food. Yet the sprawling wet market in the basement of the Chinatown Market is always packed with people haggling over fresh produce and proteins. Later, I learn that many of those shoppers are chefs or staff of restaurant kitchens.

As one would expect from a place that's an international crossroads in every sense of the word, pretty much every genre of cuisine can be had in Singapore, from hamburgers to tacos, pasta, French haute cuisine, fish-and-chips, and anything else the heart desires. Many of the city's best cocktail bars also offer incredible menus. If you're going to spend \$20 and up for cocktails in bars that have received international awards, the food has to be on a par with the impeccably crafted libations.

Idlewild at the Intercontinental Hotel Singapore impresses with complimentary snacks artfully wrapped in newsprint cones to keep the spicy and savoury nibbles fresh. The creative minds behind Employees Only and 28 Hong Kong Street offer generously portioned noshes enlivened with unique »



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Laksa; Peranakan house; Sim Lim
minced meat noodle; Folklore fried
rice; Indian fritters with dipping
sauce; Little India; Roast duck rice.



Singapore's Snacks Without Borders

MANY COUNTRIES have the 'melting pot' label, but kitchens across Singapore take the idea literally. Here are some dishes from around Asia that Singaporeans have made their own.

LAKSA: This dish from Malaysia, consisting of rice noodles, vegetables and choice of protein in a rich and spicy coconut gravy is a touch sweeter and milder in Singapore.

CARROT CAKE: As opposed to the carrot cake we order for dessert in North America, carrot cake in Singapore doesn't actually contain any carrots at all, but it got its name because it's made with daikon radish, which in a Chinese dialect can refer to both daikon radish and carrots.

CHAI TOW KWAY: Rice flour and shreds of daikon radish are transformed into a delicious 'carrot' cake fried in lots of pork lard and eggs. Various recipes may include sauce of dark soy sauce, shrimp paste, a bit of chili, and often some Chinese sausage and blood cockles. The result is a snack food that's gooey and crispy all at the same time.

HOKKIEN MEE: This fried noodle staple dish surfaces in many hawker stands throughout Singapore, which means there may be dozens of expressions. It's a dish with roots in China's Fujian province that has now been adopted and adapted to the palates of Malaysia and Singapore. It contains a mixture of both yellow egg noodles and white rice noodles that are fried in a wok with egg, often pieces of seafood (usually squid and shrimp), and bean sprouts.

CHICKEN RICE: Boiled chicken, paired with flavourful rice and sauce. This Hainanese influenced dish is deceptively simple for how tasty and popular it is.

BEE HOON: Another hawker staple, this dish is said to originate in Guilin, China. The base is a broth is made with fish and fish bones, with an assortment of vegetables and light herbs added. Although some vendors in Singapore serve a clear version, fish soup bee hoon, milk is added in most recipes to thicken the soup and make it more hearty and flavourful.



SERVES 2, OR 4 AS A SIDE DISH

Chicken Kerabu

A KERABU is a Malay-style salad, fresh with herbs, tangy with lime and often with a little fresh chili for kick.

Chicken Breast
1 large, bone-in,
skin on

Star Anise 1

Bay Leaf 1

Coriander Seed
½ tsp

White Pepper
1 tsp

Fresh Ginger
2" piece

Garlic 1 clove,
unpeeled

Salt 1 tsp

Cabbage 1 lb,
cut into squares

Green Onion
2, sliced

Red Thai Chili 1,
finely chopped

Fresh Basil
Leaves ½ cup,
julienned

Fresh Lime
Juice from 1 lime

Coconut Cream
¼ cup

Fried Shallots
for garnish
(optional)

- 1 PLACE** the chicken breast in a saucepan just large enough to hold it and fill with water to cover the chicken. Add the star anise, bay leaf, coriander seed, white pepper, ginger, garlic and salt.
- 2 BRING** to a boil and skim off any foam that rises to the top. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cover the pan. Cook for 30 minutes.
- 3 TURN** off the heat and allow the chicken to rest in the cooking liquid until cool enough to handle.
- 4 WHILE** the chicken is cooling, bring a pot of water or a kettle to the boil. Place the cabbage in a sieve and pour the boiling water over it. Allow to drain and then place in a mixing bowl.
- 5 REMOVE** the chicken from the liquid. Strain the stock and reserve, refrigerated, for another use. Discard the aromatics.
- 6 REMOVE** the skin from the chicken and discard. Pull the chicken off the bone and shred the meat.
- 7 ADD** the chicken to the cabbage, along with the green onion, basil and chili. Add the lime juice and coconut cream and toss to combine. Taste for seasoning and add salt if needed. Garnish with fried shallots if using.
- 8 SERVE** the salad at room temperature.



SERVES 8

Eurasian Roast Chicken

SINGAPORE'S Eurasian community traces its lineage to the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonials who arrived in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Inter-marriage with local people led to a mashup of culinary and cultural styles, with some delicious results. Here the classic European roast chicken gets a lacquer-like Chinese glaze. Feel free to serve with rice or potatoes!

Chicken 1 whole	Sherry 1 Tbs	White Pepper ½ tsp
Soy Sauce 3 Tbs	Sesame Oil 1 tsp	Salt ½ tsp
Honey 1 ½ Tbs	Chinese Five Spice ½ tsp	

- 1 PREHEAT** the oven to 375°F and line a roasting pan with foil.
- 2 TO** butterfly the chicken, use poultry shears or robust kitchen scissors, cut down both sides of the chicken backbone and remove it, along with any giblets retrieved from the chicken.¹
- 3 FLIP** the chicken over and snip through the wishbone. Press down firmly on the breast to flatten the chicken. Work your fingers or the handle of a wooden spoon under the chicken skin to loosen it from the flesh.
- 4 IN** a mixing bowl, whisk together the remaining ingredients. Stand the chicken on end and pour some marinade into the loose pockets under the skin. Massage the rest of the marinade all over the chicken and its cavity.
- 5 ROAST** the chicken until the skin is burnished and the juices run clear, about 60 minutes. Remove from the oven and tent with foil to rest for at least 15 minutes before carving.
- 6 SERVE** with rice or potatoes and a simple side of stir-fried vegetables.

¹ Save the backbone and giblets in a container in the fridge. Later you can boil them up with the leftover bones and juices from the roast chicken along with a clove of garlic and knob of ginger to make an Asian flavoured stock or base for noodle soup.

«condiments. The Capital Kempinski Bar by Alvin Leung offers rum flights artfully paired with different varieties of fine chocolate.

After working in restaurants around the world and spending considerable time in Israel and New York City, restaurateur Eng Su Lee returned to Singapore with a renewed sense of purpose and a unique goal — to elevate the food of his childhood while remaining true to its origins. Rather than create an expansive menu of “dressed up local food” in a rarified bistro setting, he wanted to see how far he could elevate *nasi lemak*, the most basic everyday dish in the Malay-Singapore diet.

Despite lines running up the hilly street for a seat inside his restaurant The Coconut Club, Lee has been challenged by some critics to explain why he charges USD \$13 for the signature dish, a mini-buffet of fried chicken surrounded by rice, a fried egg and several fragrant garnishes. His reasoning is solid: As globalization has impacted Singapore's food culture, with people embracing all things foreign, he wants to demonstrate how interesting and beautifully crafted simple food rooted in long-established cultures can be.

Following the success of The Coconut Club, which earned a coveted spot in the Singapore Michelin Guide, Lee has a new restaurant in the works that will introduce (or reintroduce) diners to regional Javanese cuisine. He credits his team of open-minded, learning-on-the-job workers (who he pays about 40 percent above the average salary) for helping put his micro-regional culinary approach firmly on the radar.

“None of my cooks are professionally trained, and I chose them specifically for their willingness to work hard and for the pride they have in being from Singapore,” says Lee. “The goal is, after all, to get the public to rethink their embrace of foreign food, and reintroduce them to simple, traditional dishes.”

Meanwhile, the delicate, contemporary renderings of Peranakan (Straits Chinese) dishes at Candlenut restaurant have won chef/restaurateur Malcolm Lee international acclaim. Candlenut is all but hidden in a posh residential section of town and decorated in modern Asian style with a chic colour scheme. An ever-changing hit parade of dishes is presented in multi-course lunch and dinner sets — each bite worth every penny.

A restaurant called Folklore presents diners with an ambience reminiscent of a Portuguese cafe. Chef Damian D'Silva crafts family-style, heirloom dishes from scratch, blending various ethnic cuisines and cooking techniques based on the food he grew up with as a child of Eurasian-Peranakan parentage.

Jumbo Seafood and Kang Eng Kee (KEK) Seafood represent everything that's right with restaurants that have lasted precisely because they are not trendy. Every dish at Kang Eng Kee, now in its third generation in the residential Alexandra Village neighbourhood, tells the family's story. Founders Low Peck Yah and Koh Yok Jong came to

...Hawker centres live up to the hype...

SINGAPORE



THIS PHOTO Singapore's mascot, the mythical Merlion, on the banks of the Singapore River.

Singapore from Hainan Island, China in the 1950s with a dream to create their own expression of Hainanese seafood. The restaurant had several early incarnations as coffee shop and *zi char* (home-style cooking stall). Current owner Liew Choy (married to the couple's daughter, Koh Liang Hong) clearly enjoys explaining every dish that comes to our table. Our banquet-worthy meal included coffee pork ribs, cereal-coated prawns, black pepper crab, prawn rolls, moonlight mai fun noodles, mushrooms and water spinach.

The Riverwalk location of long-established restaurant

chain Jumbo Seafood resembles many Chinese family restaurants in the US, packed with people enthusiastically enjoying their food. Jumbo's biggest draw is its award-winning chili crab, though heaping platters of black pepper crab, crisp baby squid and golden egg salted prawns appear from the kitchen in equal measure. Several flat screen televisions show a looped video with recipes and demonstrations of how to make these signature dishes at home using Jumbo branded sauces and spice mixes. The five-senses approach to keeping Jumbo's appeal fresh is clearly effective!

Visit

Newton Food Centre
500 Clemenceau Ave Nth, Singapore

Lau Pa Sat Festival Market
18 Raffles Quay, Singapore

Maxwell Food Centre
1 Kadayannallur St, Singapore

Chinatown Food Street
www.chinatownfoodstreet.sg

Idlewild
www.idlewild.sg

Employees Only
www.employeesonlysg.com

28 Hong Kong Street
www.28hks.com

Capital Kempinski Hotel Singapore
www.kempinski.com/en/singapore/the-capitol-singapore

The Coconut Club
www.thecoconutclub.sg

Candlenut
www.comodempsey.sg/restaurant/candlenut

Folklore
www.parkhotelgroup.com/en/destinationbeachroad/folklore

Kang Eng Kee (KEK) Seafood
www.kek.com.sg/#!/home

Jumbo Seafood
www.chope.co/singapore-restaurants/restaurant/jumbo-seafood-the-riverwalk

Los Angeles-based writer **ELYSE GLICKMAN**'s last story for **TASTE&TRAVEL** was about the Seychelles.