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Social Profile

Food & Drink: Singapore is a gourmet's paradise, ranging from humble street stalls to 5-star restaurants. There are over 30 different cooking styles, including various regional styles of Chinese cuisine, Indian, Malay, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Italian, Swiss, American, Russian, French and English. Malay cuisine is a favourite, famed for its use of spices and coconut milk. *Satay* (skewers of marinated chicken cooked over charcoal) served with peanut sauce, cucumber, onion and rice is popular. Hot, spicy or sweet Indonesian cuisine includes *beef rendang* (coconut milk curry), *chicken sambal* and *gado gado* (a fruit and vegetable salad in peanut sauce). One of the best ways to eat in Singapore is in the open, at one of the ubiquitous street foodstalls. Some are quiet and casual while others are in areas bustling with activity. All have a vast selection of cheap, mouthwatering food. Newton Circus and Rasa Singapura are food centres where all types of Asian food can be sampled cheaply. Although there are many self-service establishments, waiter service is more common in restaurants. Bars/cocktail lounges often have table and counter service. There are no licensing hours. 'Happy hours' are usually from 1700-1900.

Nightlife: Singapore has a vibrant and exciting nightlife. Entertainment ranges from bars, clubs, discos, karaoke pubs, street opera, night markets, river cruises, multiplex cinemas to theatre productions and international stage shows. Boat Quay and Clarke Quay are popular riverside landmarks which offer exclusive restaurants, alfresco dining and lively bars. Moored Chinese junks have been refurbished into floating bars and restaurants. Bugis Street, Changi Village and Holland Village, known as Holland V, are popular areas for food, drink and entertainment. Muhammad Sultan Road is one of the latest entertainment hubs in Singapore with a wide variety of pubs, nightclubs and wine bars.

Shopping: The vast range of available goods and competitive prices have led to Singapore

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rightly being known as a shopper's paradise. Special purchases include Chinese, Indian, Malay, Balinese and Filipino antiques; batiks; cameras; Chinese, Persian and Indian carpets; imported or tailored clothing; jewellery and specialised items made of reptile and snake skins, including shoes, briefcases, handbags and wallets. Silks, perfumes, silverware and wigs are other favourite buys. The herding of shop owners from 'Chinatown' into multi-storey complexes lost some of the exciting shopping atmosphere, although these huge centres do provide an air-conditioned environment. Orchard Road is the main shopping street, although many of the large hotel complexes, such as Marina Square, have shopping centres attached. Although most outlets operate Western-style fixed pricing, bargains can still be made in some places but generally only after good research and shrewd negotiating. Electrical equipment of all types can be bought at Sungei Road, but caution is advised as there are many imitation products around. For more information on shopping in Singapore, see the *Singapore Shopping* brochure published by the Singapore Tourism Board. **Shopping hours:** Mon-Fri 1000-2100; Sat 1000-1000. **Note:** A three per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) is levied on most goods and services purchased from taxable retailers. Tourists whose purchases total S\$300 or more from a single retailer participating in the Tourist Refund Scheme are eligible for a refund of the GST paid on goods not consumed in Singapore. Refunds may be received at the airport, prior to departure flights.

Special Events: The cosmopolitan character of Singapore means that a great number of festivals and special events are regularly celebrated; visitors staying for more than a few days would be unlucky not to catch at least one. For more information and for exact dates, see the *Singapore Calendar of Festivals* leaflet published by the Singapore Tourism Board. The following is a selection of the main festivals taking place during 2002:

Jan 20 2002 *Singapore International Marathon*. **Jan 26-Mar 2** *Lunar New Year Light Up*. **Jan 28-Feb 11** *Chinese New Year Celebrations*. **Feb 8-17** *Singapore River Hong Bao*. **Feb 12-13** *Chinese New Year*. **Feb 16** *Chingay Singapore 2002* (street parade). **Mar 1-Apr 30** *Take Art!* **Mar 16-31** *Fashion Festival*. **Mar 17-Apr 8** *Singapore International Comedy Festival*. **Mar 29-Apr 30** *Singapore Food Festival*. **Apr 7-13** *World Gourmet Summit*. **Apr 15th** *Singapore International Film Festival*. **May 12** *Singapore Airlines International Cup*, Singapore Turf Club. **May 24-Jul 7** *The Great Singapore Sale* (islandwide shopping extravaganza). **Jun** *Singapore Arts Festival 2002* (fringe festival with eclectic performances). **Jun 1-15** *Dumpling Festival*. **Jun 15-16** *Singapore*

International Dragon Boat Race. Oct-Nov
Deepavali (Hindu Festival of Light), Little India,
Serangoon Road. Nov-Dec Christmas Light
Up.

Social Conventions: Handshaking is the usual form of greeting, regardless of race. Social courtesies are often fairly formal. When invited to a private home or entering a temple or mosque, remove your shoes. For private visits a gift is appreciated and, if on business, a company souvenir is appropriate. Dress is informal. Most first-class restaurants and some hotel dining rooms expect men to wear a jacket and tie in the evenings; a smart appearance is expected for business meetings. Evening dress for local men and women is unusual. Each of the diverse racial groups in Singapore has retained its own cultural and religious identity while developing as an integral part of the Singapore community. Over 50 per cent of the population is under 20 years of age. Laws relating to jaywalking, littering and chewing gum are strictly enforced in the urban areas. Smoking is widely discouraged and illegal in enclosed public places (including restaurants). Dropping a cigarette end in the street or smoking illegally can lead to an immediate fine of up to S\$500. **Tipping:** Officially discouraged in restaurants, hotels and the airport. A ten per cent service charge is included in restaurant bills.

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