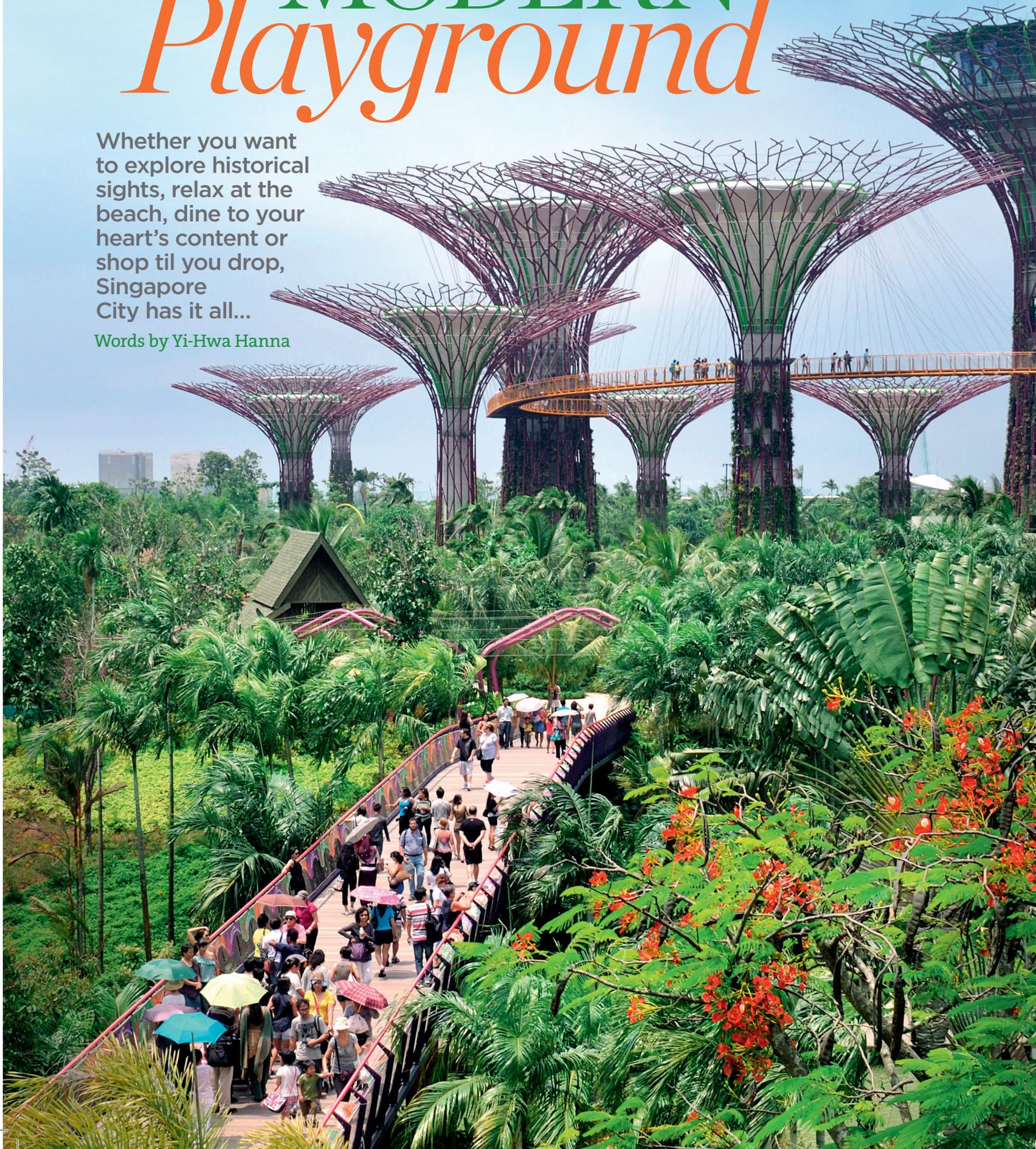


# ASIA'S MODERN *Playground*

Whether you want to explore historical sights, relax at the beach, dine to your heart's content or shop til you drop, Singapore City has it all...

Words by Yi-Hwa Hanna



**Widely known as** a great expat city to live in, Singapore City is much more than a great place to settle down—it's also a fantastic destination for a holiday. With its ancient temples, modern buildings, museums, wildlife reserves, greenery, beaches, and countless places to dine and shop, it makes for a truly exciting trip. And while many have affectionately nicknamed it “The Fine City” due to its reputation for handing out strict fines for everything from spitting to not flushing toilets, it's thanks to its various protective government programmes that Singapore City remains free from heavy pollution (there's a cap on the number of vehicles allowed there) and dirty streets (fines are issued to anyone caught littering) despite being a major hub. Whether it's for a quick stopover to a nearby country or the main destination itself, it's not to be overlooked.

### MUSEUMS, TEMPLES AND PARKS

For a city that's so full of cutting-edge, modern architecture, Singapore has a surprising number of green spaces, with its Botanic Gardens being one of the most popular. The Gardens celebrates their 150th birthday this year, and welcomed an astounding 4 million visitors last year. From delicate orchids to heritage trees, and even a swan lake, they're soon set to include a brand-new “learning forest” of tropical trees and a marshland. Don't miss the fascinating evolution garden, where you can learn about how plants helped to create and sustain human life—visit with the entire family and we guarantee this will be one lesson the kids won't forget!

If you're after a unique treat, the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden is a haven for little ones. Asia's first garden exclusively designed for kids, it welcomes children up until the age of 12 and the adults that accompany them—grown-ups actually can't enter unless accompanied by a child—and there's everything from a spice garden and photosynthesis learning area to separate water and sand play areas. Everything from the pathways to the mini mangroves are kid-sized, and admission is free. Beach lovers, on the other hand, will find their groove at Sentosa Island's calm, tropical beaches just outside the city; while adventure-seekers will love exploring Mount Faber Park—one of the oldest in Singapore—where you can go trekking, hiking and take a cable car that offers superb aerial views. City slickers are bound to be impressed by the innovative, brand-new supertree

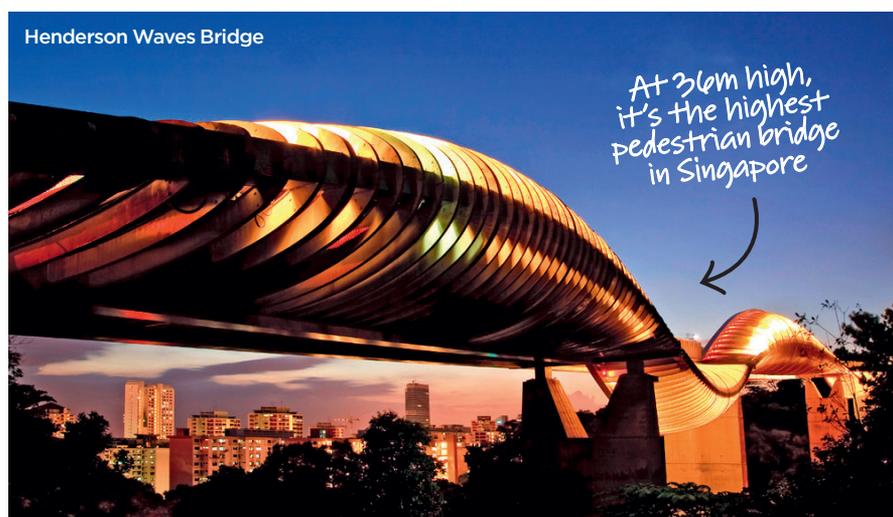
development in the Gardens by the Bay. These incredible 25-to 50-metre high man-made structures, dubbed “supertrees,” are solar-powered, collect rainwater and act as air vent ducts for the nearby Cloud Forest and Flower Dome conservatories—biomes that house plants and flowers from various locations all over the world. And it's not all horticultural projects either: There are also skywalks, outdoor gardens, lakes, several planned concerts and events, and plenty of places

“Singapore City has a surprising number of green spaces for a place that's so full of modern, cutting-edge architecture”

to relax and unwind in.

Culture vultures needn't feel robbed of their history fix, with a fair amount of historically significant sights to see as well. As a melting pot of cultures and religions, Singapore boasts everything from Hindu temples to Buddhist temples, churches and mosques. Visit its oldest Hindu temple, Sri Mariamman Temple, and marvel at the intricate carvings and figurines that reach all the way to the top, or if it's the Chinese temple style you'd like to see, make sure the Goddess of Mercy Temple (also known as the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple) is on your list—there, you can even have your fortune told. The majestic Abdul Gaffoor Mosque is another must-see, with its grand towers, delicate minarets and beautiful décor.

As for the symbol that gives Singapore City its nickname, “The Lion City,” the Merlion should be on every visitor's list. This mythical creature with a lion's head and the body of a fish is the mascot and national personification of Singapore. Its lion's head represents Singapore's original name, Singapura, while its fishy body harks back to the city's origins as a fishing →

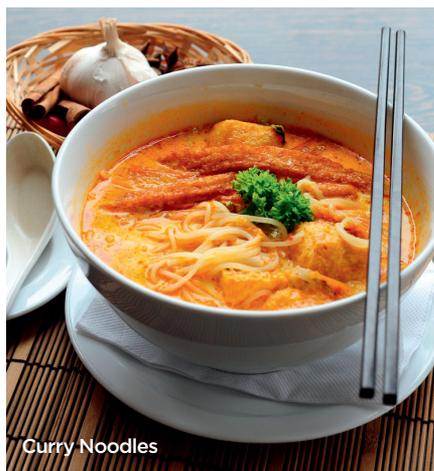


village. The Merlion is located in Merlion Park at the tip of the beautiful, modern Marina Bay area, and is one of the most iconic features of the city's skyline.

### FINE DINING & HAWKER HALLS

Singapore is a foodie paradise, boasting everything from fine dining to streetside stalls offering delicious eats that won't disappoint. For a truly tasty hawker food hall experience, Lau Pa Sat centre is a must. Here, you can browse stall after stall of various foodie offerings in a lively, bustling atmosphere, selecting everything from noodles and dim sum to grilled meat and stir-fries cooked fresh-to-order and for reasonable prices. We recommend the turnip cakes, spicy grilled sting-ray and, of course, the quintessential Singaporean dishes of whole chilli and pepper crab.

When you're in the mood for something more sophisticated, make your way over to Dempsey Hill, where the beautifully landscaped gardens and laid-back vibe



Curry Noodles

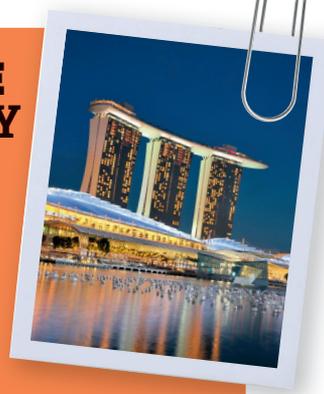
beg for you to spend hours lingering over a fine meal. The area is home to more than 20 restaurants, but our pick was local favourite PS Cafe. While the cafe can be found elsewhere in the city, the Dempsey Hill location is a peaceful garden paradise serving up deliciously fresh, wholesome and flavourful dishes and swoon-worthy desserts. We recommend the truffle fries, pastas and salads, before digging into some profiteroles or pecan pie for dessert.

If it's al fresco dining you crave, Boat Quay is another ideal destination. This historical quay is littered with restaurants and bars dotted along the waterfront, and the pedestrian-friendly area is the perfect place for an evening stroll. Peruse your options as you walk around and take in the glimmering lights, before settling down for a spot of dinner. Next, you'd be remiss not to enjoy some authentic dim sum and fortunately, the city plays host to a branch of one of the best spots for it in the world: Taiwanese restaurant Din Tai Fung Dumpling House. Order the *xiao-long-bao* and relish the hot, juicy soup bursting out of the dumplings with each bite, before savouring the perfectly al-dente stir-fried noodles with shiitake mushroom sauce. No trip to the city is complete without a taste of the legendary Singapore Sling cocktail, and there's no better place to go for one than the place where it was created—the Long Bar at the Raffles Hotel Singapore. After your aperitif, hop across the road to Chijmes, a historic complex that was once a Catholic convent school and is now an excellent dining destination. After dinner, jump in a taxi to beautiful Clarke Quay to take in the nightlife, go dancing or people-watch.



Singapore Botanic Gardens

## WHERE TO STAY



### ● LUXURY

If you're ready to splash out, look no further than The Hotel at MarinaBay Sands. With spacious rooms, top-notch service and spectacular views, the hotel is connected to the MarinaBay Sands complex housing a theatre and casino, and countless restaurants, cafes and shops. The futuristic-looking towers are some of the most iconic structures in modern-day Singapore, in large part thanks to the famous SkyPark where the stunning infinity pool located on the hotel's 57th floor offers a view like no other. The SkyPark and pool are only open to guests, and allow a birds-eye view of the city skyline below. From Dhs1,840 per night for a Deluxe Room, [www.marinabaysands.com](http://www.marinabaysands.com).

### ● MID-RANGE

With its funky loft-style design and chic Italian décor, Studio M Hotel is simple yet sophisticated. All rooms offer complimentary WiFi, comfy queen beds, thanks to the unique loft designs, a separate work area, many complete with a sofa-bed. Tall windows let in plenty of light, while the bright and airy furnishings make even the cozier rooms seem larger. Staff are friendly and helpful, and its convenient location near Clarke Quay, Orchard Road and Robertson Quay ensures that great dining and entertainment is mere steps away. From Dhs800 per night for a Studio Loft, [www.studiomhotel.com](http://www.studiomhotel.com).

### ● BUDGET

Cheap and cheerful, the Santa Grand Hotel Bugis is one for those on a budget. This no-frills option is clean and comfortable with friendly staff and there's even a tiny rooftop swimming pool and a Jacuzzi. The rooms are well-sized and good value for money; there's also a café and a speedy wireless internet connection. It's just steps from busy Bugis Street with its many eateries and shops, historical temples and the bohemian Arab Street area, with the MRT, buses and plenty of taxis within easy reach. From Dhs400 for a Superior Room, [www.santagrand-hotels.com/bugis.asp](http://www.santagrand-hotels.com/bugis.asp).

Photography: Shutterstock.

Merlion Park



“Browse stall after stall of noodles, grilled meat, dim sum, stir-fries and more, cooked fresh to order in a bustling atmosphere”

#### SHOP TIL YOU DROP

After all that eating and sightseeing, it's time to indulge in a little retail therapy. Shopping in Singapore is practically a sport, with countless options to choose from at a wide array of prices. For your first stop head to Orchard Road, one of the city's main high streets where you'll find shoppers flitting from store to store at any given time. While there, pop into the quiet Emerald Hill area for refreshments and a snack, then hop into a taxi to Haji Lane to discover covetable vintage treasures among its many cute boutiques. If a mall is more your thing, try Bugis Junction—in addition to the indoor shopping area, the mall also has an air-conditioned semi-al fresco street shopping area, as well as an outdoor dancing fountain that kids will love to splash around in.

The MarinaBay Sands area is another can't-miss destination, where the main complex boasts not only a plethora of shops, but also theatres, a casino and an indoor canal complete with gondolas. While the entire waterfront area makes

for a lovely walk, we recommend stopping at the Art Science Museum. The lotus-shaped structure celebrates all forms of creativity, with a captivating permanent exhibit and hosting visiting exhibitions on everything from Salvador Dali and Andy Warhol to The Titanic and Harry Potter.

With a majority of the population able to speak English, it's a welcoming tourist-friendly destination that has something to suit everyone. And this well-connected city is only set to grow more attractive: A new initiative called TouristPads is set to provide visitors with iPads rentable by the day, connecting to unlimited high-speed 3G anywhere in the city, while two endangered giant pandas have recently arrived in Singapore on loan from China for 10 years. And the fun doesn't end in town, either—Singapore's Changi airport is renowned for its kid-friendly activities and innovative art exhibits that make it a destination in its own right, and it's only set to expand further with refurbishments planned over the coming years. We can't wait to see what they come up with next. ■

#### FAST FACTS

- **Getting there:** Emirates Airlines and Singapore Airways fly direct to Changi airport from Dhs2,400 and it takes approximately seven hours.
- **When to go:** Singapore is warm and humid all year round, and the weather doesn't vary greatly. Peak season falls between December and June, with super-peak running from mid-December until February.
- **Visas and vaccinations:** Nationals of the UAE, along with Australia, South Africa, the UK and the USA, are among those who don't require a visa for stays not exceeding 20-90 days depending on citizenship. For full details on visa entry requirements for Singapore, visit [www.ica.gov.sg](http://www.ica.gov.sg). Routine vaccinations are recommended, as well as vaccinations for Hepatitis A & B, Typhoid and Yellow Fever. Rabies vaccinations are only recommended for those planning to be in direct contact with bats, carnivores and other wild mammals.
- **Family Fun:** This family-friendly destination has countless things to do with kids. For great ideas, information and plenty more, visit [www.singaporeforkids.com](http://www.singaporeforkids.com).