

Singapore

Gone are the days when outsiders struggled to pinpoint Singapore on a map; this equatorial city-state is making waves across myriad sectors from health to logistics. Its skyline has taken shape at a blistering pace with numerous attention-grabbing architectural flourishes. Singapore can still surprise though: quaint colonial-era shophouses sit alongside skyscrapers; temples, mosques and churches share the same streets and open-air food courts sell tasty street food just steps from fine-dining establishments. Decidedly global in its outlook, the country embraces all things hi-tech and modern while having a foot firmly rooted in tradition.

The Monocle Travel Guide to Singapore will equip you with the know-how to explore beyond the obvious. We've scoured the city-state for the top restaurants and *kueh* (confectionery) shops and listed the independent retailers selling goods that embody the best of "brand Singapore". Get ready to experience everything that the Garden City has to offer.

This guide will help you make a tidy job of navigating Singapore



The Travel Series

Monocle reports from around the globe in print, on radio and online. As our editors and correspondents dart from city to city they get to know the best places to rest their heads, stretch their limbs and kick back with a contact in a hard-to-find cocktail bar. That information is now available in Monocle's Travel Guide Series; a line-up of titles that speaks to you in an informed but informal way about everything from architecture to art, late-night bars to early-morning markets.

These are books that go beyond the traditional tourist beats to make sure you get the best out of a city no matter how short your stay. Designed to be compact and collectable, they are also discerning; we won't list a hundred places to eat but we will tell you where's best for everything from some tasty fast food to something truly celebratory.

Cities are fun. Let's explore.

The MONOCLE Travel Guide Series



Singapore

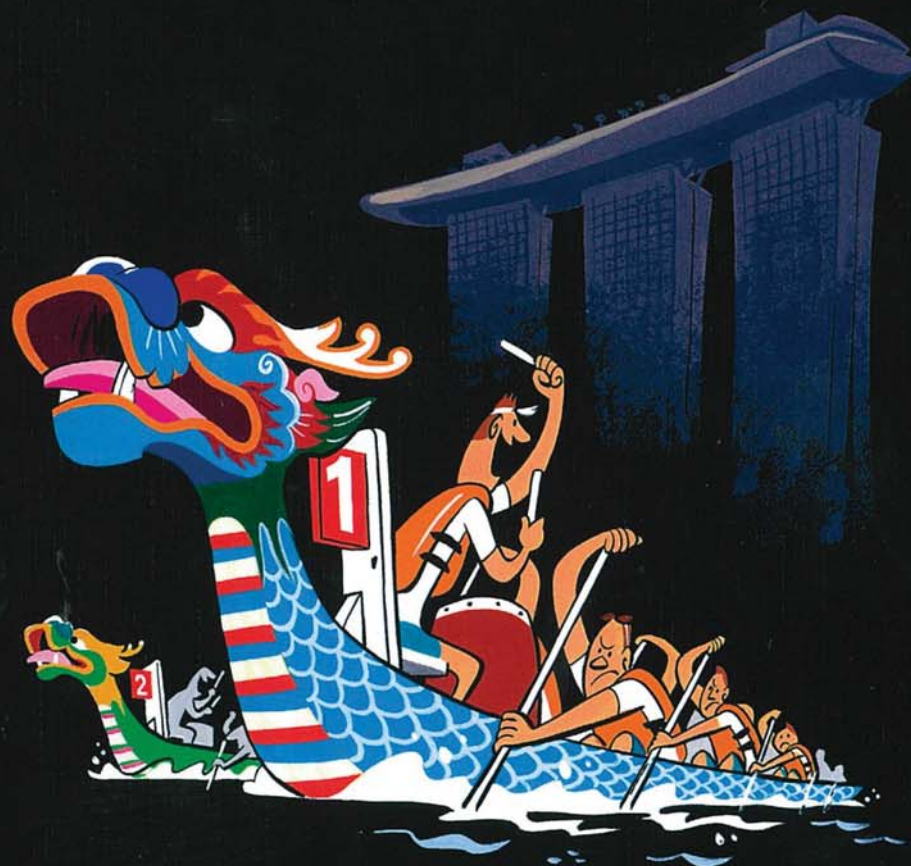
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Singapore

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Shops. Books. Records — Kuehs. Hawker centres. Bars — Architecture. Galleries. Museums



... On your marks! Tackle the city's outposts of good food, design, retail and more. Full steam ahead! ...

ESSAY 01

Reach for the sky *Green architecture*

With a growing population putting pressure on space, the city's buildings are looking up, with sky gardens and high-rise greenery making 'vertical urban living' a reality.

by Jason Pomeroy,
architect

Spending the early years of my working life living in low-rise London, Amsterdam and Brussels hardly prepared me for life in comparatively vertiginous Singapore. Yet the concept of high-rise living, working and playing are ideas that I am now all too familiar with in my professional and academic pursuit of a "vertical urbanism" for the 21st century.

Relocating to Singapore in 2008, and establishing a sustainable-design studio, gave me the perfect platform to apply both design and research in a city-state increasingly heralded as a model "vertical garden city". Singapore is viewed as a blueprint for many a developing global city seeking to increase its green spaces in a short period of time. Its island location means that outward spread is restricted, resulting in an urban density of 8,350 persons per kilometre. An increasing population, set to grow from 4.98 million in 2010 to 5.5 million by 2050, further pushes urban development

skywards, with ever more high-rise buildings and structures each year. But these have come at a price: many of the centrally located low-rise shophouses that once characterised colonial trading in Singapore were eradicated to make way for the "city of towers" that characterise modern "financial" Singapore.

With increased urbanisation, many of the public places that locals currently use to rest, relax and socially interact will be incrementally removed. In a bid to counteract this, a slew of new social spaces, from air-conditioned hotel lobbies and shopping centres (which are popular social spots among expatriates and tourists) to void decks beneath public housing blocks – which offer a setting for social interaction among Singaporeans – have sprung up.

However, rapid urbanisation does not come without social and spatial pressures. Post-independence, communities accustomed to low-rise environments were relocated to high-rise social housing projects, known locally as HDBs. These still characterise much of the perimeter of the island and are home to approximately 80 per cent of the population. Singapore could learn a few lessons from the traditional shophouses with their verandahs and their five footway pedestrian walkways.

Skycourts and skygardens have become a notable addition to Singapore's urban vocabulary. The Pinnacle, a public

Tallest skyscrapers

- 01 **One Raffles Place**
The city's joint tallest building at 280 metres high.
- 02 **Republic Plaza**
Completed in 1995, also at 280 metres.
- 03 **United Overseas Bank**
67 floors in the CBD.

housing project, stands out for its 12 skygardens that interconnect seven 50-storey blocks with mid-level recreational skycourts and a rooftop skygarden.

If you think all this sky-rise greenery is simply reserved for the residents, think again. The Singapore government is committed to turning the garden city into a "city in a garden" and is increasingly embracing entertainment and leisure as a catalyst for urban regeneration and generating income through tourism. Marina Bay Sands – an integrated bay-front resort comprising a multi-level retail arcade, museum, casino and hotel – is a good example of how this can work well. The 1.2-hectare sky park crowns the hotel's three towers. At 191 metres above

"The Singapore government is committed to turning the garden city into a 'city in a garden'"

the ground, it also contains the world's longest rooftop pool. The development is adjacent to Gardens by the Bay: a public garden that contains 18 man-made "Supertrees" made of concrete and steel. These structures range in heights of between 25 and 50 metres and are home to more than 162,900 tropical plants, comprising some 200 tropical species.

Singapore comes as close to realising my vision of a vertical urban theory as any other Asian city. It's a fusion of old, contemporary and futuristic. The vestiges of the 19th-century colonial city (the ubiquitous shophouses of Telok Ayer, for example) have been retained as urban artefacts of nostalgia. The layering of the contemporary (the tall buildings and new structures), however, is a reminder of economic progress and technological advancement in the 20th century. The 21st-century layer has come as a result of climate change, inner-city migration and population increases and further technological advancement.

The skycourts, skygardens and skybridges were a socio-environmental necessity given the need for alternative social spaces for people to interact in such increasing inner-city densities. These vertical gardens also provide an increasing opportunity for urban farming to cater for the food needs of an ever more populous city centre, as well as a means of reducing the searing heat of the city.

Despite Singapore's resolutely modern architectural outlook, an awakening to its cultural heritage is giving a new lease of life to its surviving colonial buildings. The General Post Office is now the luxurious Fullerton Hotel and features the original post office counter as its bar. City hall is now the new National Art Gallery – a celebration of Asian art.

To think that Singapore was once a humble fishing village yet is today a 21st-century global city is remarkable – and a success story made more poignant given its lack of natural resources. Conservation and preservation of its colonial past, juxtaposed with daringly forward-thinking architecture, make this one of southeast Asia's most dynamic cities. — (M)



ABOUT THE WRITER: Jason Pomeroy is the founding principal of Singapore-based urbanism, architecture, design and research firm Pomeroy Studio. Two years after authoring *The Skycourt and Skygarden: Greening the Urban Habitat*, Pomeroy designed Singapore's first carbon-negative residence in 2015.