

# How to Travel Singapore on a Budget

*by* Janice Green *on* July 29, 2019



When we were planning our grand exodus from India, we saw a flight from Amritsar (in Northern India) to Bangkok, and it included a 24-hour layover in Singapore... This was the first time we had considered Singapore as a possible destination on our 4 month trip. Since we didn't think 24 hours would be enough time to do anything, we decided to lengthen our stay by a couple of days—and we were so glad we did!

## Arrival and Visas

Instead of booking the flight with a 24-hour layover, we booked two flights simultaneously in order to lengthen our stay using Google Flights' multi-city option: one flight to Singapore, and a second flight to Bangkok three days later.

It only cost us a tiny bit extra to add this delay (an extra \$25 cad per ticket) on to our layover. This is a great tip for those who may want to see a city for just a few days, or if you have a layover in a place you want to visit, try booking the flights simultaneously with a longer gap in between. It might just let you book a multi-city trip with an extended layover for around the same price, with the obvious bonus that you get to visit two places instead of just one.



*Prancing around during the light show at the Gardens by the Bay (free!).*

**Visas:** If you're reading this, there's a good chance you can travel to Singapore Visa-free (you don't even need to pay for a Visa on Arrival). Check Wikipedia to make sure your country is included or if you might need to apply for an e-visa before arrival.

**Budget Tip:** Singapore is a hub in Southeast Asia, and the Changi Airport is consistently rated among the best airports in the world. If you're traveling in the area and looking for a cheap flight to Singapore, there's a good chance that booking a flight from, say, Indonesia to Thailand will include a layover in Singapore. Using a "multi-city" flight booking may allow you to book a multi-day layover in Singapore (or any other hub in the world) for the same price as the original layover flight to your final destination. For this flight, we booked with Scoot, which is a pretty good Singaporean budget airline.

## Where to Sleep

Going in, we knew Singapore was expensive. I mean, everyone tells you that it's one of the most expensive cities in the world. We knew we couldn't afford to stay in a hotel, or even a private room in a hostel, as most rooms cost upwards of \$200 CAD per night.



*Dan gazing up at an expensive hotel with a rooftop infinity pool—something we definitely could not afford.*

Instead, we found a double-pod hostel for about \$45 Singapore dollars per night (one Singapore dollar is approximately equivalent to one CAD). A pod is basically a hole in the wall, in a large room that has many holes in the wall. We shared our large room with about 20 others for the duration of our 3 day stay.

Our little pod had a double mattress (actually very comfortable), charging ports, and a small little place to put your belongings. There was a curtain covering our bed (top bunk),

and clean linens. This kind of accommodation doesn't boast the most privacy ever, and you'll absolutely hear people coming in and out of the room all night, but considering how expensive Singapore is, these inconveniences are minor. Our stay also included breakfast, use of washrooms/showers, a kitchen stocked with all the necessities, and A/C. Pretty good deal, I'd say!

**Budget Tip:** When in Singapore, take advantage of these types of hostels & accommodations. They are plentiful and you can find one in just about any area of the city. We stayed in an area known as "Little India"—a bit ironic since we had just left the real India. Often these hostels include breakfast. The breakfast is typically quite meager and includes things like toast, cereal, coffee/tea, and if you're lucky, bananas! But, in a city as expensive as Singapore, at least it's something. I like to use Booking.com to get the best deals on hostels. I find there are often "sales" on bunks/rooms that I can take advantage of.

## What to Eat



Singapore is a big ole' melting pot. It's got influences from all over Southeast Asia (particularly Malaysia), strong ties to China, and a decently sized Indian presence as well. It's one of the most multicultural places on the planet. And we loved it.

Eating in restaurants is just as expensive as it is back home, so we never did.

Instead we ate at the infamous Hawker Centres that are dotted around the city. Each one is different based on the demographics of the neighborhood, but you can find any cuisine. Hawker Centres are fascinating; the stalls are usually family-owned and operated, and

many have been in families for generations. A local told us the centre itself is often subsidised by the government.

*These Hawker Centers are bustling with activity all times of the day.*

These Hawker Centers are truly a way of life in Singapore—those who live and visit Singapore frequent these centres for delicious, healthy and affordable food. You can find almost any kind of Asian delicacy or dish in these centres. Often a stall will specialize in a certain dish, or a certain type of Chinese cuisine, like Szechuan. Or Indian cuisine, such as South Indian food.

Ya'll probably already know it, but can definitely be foodies under the right conditions. These centres were like a wonderland. We ate every meal here or at our hostel. A bowl of Pho would cost \$4. Pad Thai (vegan, ask for customizations) might cost \$3.50. We were able to eat a decent meal in Singapore for basically the price of what we'd pay for a meal in India. So our typical lunch in Singapore would cost us \$8. Or, an amazing Vietnamese feast would be \$12 - a fraction of what we'd pay back home.

**Budget Tip:** Don't eat anywhere but Hawker Centres! If you're staying longer, buy food at the grocery store or market and prepare a light meal for yourself at your hostel or accommodation. We buy fruit and nuts everywhere we go to have as easy snacks throughout the day!

## Transport

Getting around the city is incredibly easy. A 3-day metro pass was \$20 (plus a \$10 deposit you get back), and this gives you unlimited access to the whole city. We didn't get into a vehicle the whole time—we walked and took the metro, and it was super easy. Singapore is designed incredibly well and its metro system can take you anywhere in the city super conveniently.

However, if you do want to travel in a car, you can use apps like Grab, or hail a taxi. Uber does not currently operate in Singapore. The metro in Singapore is clean, comfortable, inexpensive, and extremely convenient.

**Budget Tip:** Stick to the metro. We love taking the metro in all cities we visit; not just because it's typically the cheapest way to get around, it's also the most local.

## Play

We did a lot in Singapore! It's surprising, but when you're on the look out for cheap or free attractions, you can always find plenty. Most of our best experiences have been free or cheap, and in Singapore this was no exception. Here are some free or cheap things for you to do on your next trip to Singapore:

- Walk around the different neighbourhoods like Little India, the Financial District, or China Town. We touched on this before, but the diversity in Singapore is what makes it particularly interesting—see this first hand as you roam the city. Bring sunscreen! We thought the Buddha's Tooth Temple (in Chinatown), which draws devotees from all over the world, was pretty cool.
- Wander through the Gardens by the Bay. You can pay to get into more attractions like the Flower Dome or the SkyWalk, but we didn't see a need. We saw the light show that happens each evening for free (multiple times), and it was awe-inspiring!
- Do some hiking at Fort Canning Park. And be prepared to sweat!
- Check out the Singapore Botanic Gardens.
- Take in some history, art, or culture at one of Singapore's many free or cheap museums. Budget Tip: Always bring a student ID for a steeper discount!
- Cool down at the mall. We love visiting malls when we're abroad. Why? I have no idea. I think it's a combination of A/C and familiarity. At home you'd never catch us in a mall!
- Soak up the sun with a beach day at Sentosa beach!

There are so many more things I could list, but you get the gist. Singapore has a lot to offer. There are many more things you can do if you wish to spend a little bit of money. This time around, we stuck to our budget and made our Singapore trip as economical as possible—and even so, we didn't feel like we missed out at all!

Singapore and travel in general don't have to be expensive. We try our best to live like the locals do: eating at local establishments (when we are able to), staying in more affordable accommodations like guesthouses, hostels, and home-stays, and buying groceries at local markets wherever we go. We don't need fancy or elaborate activities to be happy. We're

happiest just walking around exploring, and taking in the wonder of being so far from home.