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**SINGAPORE:  
THEN AND NOW**

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A EXELBY

# SINGAPORE: THEN AND NOW

**THE LION CITY HAS COME A LONG way** since 1819, when British statesman Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles declared the tip of the Malay Peninsula a prime location for a trading station. Back then, one could hardly have imagined that from the swampy shores of the Melaka Straits a cosmopolitan metropolis would rise to become a global financial centre and one of the world's leading commercial hubs. And yet between the shadows of slick high-rises, traces of Singapore's fascinating past – a history of spices and cocktails, and colour and tradition – still linger. Here are some of our favourite haunts, old and new.

**SPICE ROUTE:** pulled tea, roti and curry sauce from Al-Tasneem Indian restaurant on North Bridge Road.



## EXPLORE

### Singapore then: Kampong Glam

At 714 sq km, Singapore is a small island (Hong Kong is 1,104 sq km). Urban planning would be vital for an efficient city, Raffles realised, so he set up a development plan that included separate areas for different ethnic groups. Kampong Glam, once a fishing village at the mouth of the Rochor River, was allocated among Hussein Mohammed Shah, the Malay sultan of Singapore, and Malay and Arab traders. It soon became a thriving merchant village, and its colourful character remains today, with many of the old buildings restored and converted to vintage-inspired fashion stores, family-run restaurants, fabric stores and hip places that attract the peckish late into the night. [kampongglam.org.sg](http://kampongglam.org.sg)

### Singapore now: The Bayfront

The Bayfront is an ultra-chic area built on reclaimed land. Explore the Shoppes at Marina Bay, a high-end mall; view Singapore from the Skypark Observation Deck; and wander through the exquisite Gardens by the Bay. Bayfront Avenue, [marinabaysands.com](http://marinabaysands.com)



**GO GLAM:** (left and above right) the streets around Kampong Glam, the old Malay quarter, are a haven for the city's creatives.



## DRINK

### Singapore then: The Long Bar, Raffles Hotel

There are many tales of the origin of the Singapore Sling – a cocktail of gin, cherry brandy, pineapple juice, lime juice, Cointreau, Benedictine, grenadine and Angostura bitters. Raffles Hotel claims that one of its bartenders, Ngiam Tong Boon, mixed the original Singapore Sling in the Long Bar in 1915. More than 1,000 are mixed each day and served to thirsty tourists for S\$30 (HK\$175). Raffles has become an institution in Singapore, and what started out in 1887 as a small bungalow-style building has flourished into a grand hotel that epitomises Singapore's colonial past. 1 Beach Road, [raffles.com](http://raffles.com)

### Singapore now: Boat Quay and Clarke Quay

The area that was once Singapore's port has become a collection of bars and restaurants. Boat Quay and Clarke are favourite post-work hangouts for many Singaporeans. River Valley Road, [clarkequay.com.sg](http://clarkequay.com.sg)



**MIXED BLESSING:** the Long Bar at Raffles Hotel (left) serves 1,000 Singapore Slings (above) to tourists every day at HK\$175 a glass.



## EAT

### Singapore then: Al-Tasneem

Malay, Indian and Chinese roots have produced dishes that are synonymous with Singapore: Hainanese chicken rice, Hokkien mee, laksa, fish head curry. You'll find good old-fashioned fare at the hawker centres and small places around Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam. Many of the small eateries with tables that spill out onto the street have managed to retain that old-time vibe, allowing patrons to soak up the atmosphere of the old quarters. For a breakfast of teh tarik (pulled tea) and roti canai, head to Al-Tasneem (709 North Bridge Road, tel: +65 6291 1718); for lunch, grab a table at popular Kampong Glam Cafe (17 Bussorah Street, tel: 6294 1697); and order a fish head steamboat dinner at Nan Hwa Chong (808 North Bridge Road, [nanhwachong.com](http://nanhwachong.com)); or feast on Pakistani food at Usman Restaurant in Little India (238 Serangoon Road).

### Singapore now: Wild Rocket

At hilltop restaurant Wild Rocket, chef Willin Low puts a modern spin on traditional Singaporean dishes. The menu includes pomelo salad with tiger prawns and frozen coconut dressing; tandoori rack of lamb with apalam and cucumber yogurt. 10A Upper Wilkie Road, [wildrocket.com.sg](http://wildrocket.com.sg)

## SHOP

**Singapore then: The Heritage Shop**

An authentic antique shop will always give you a very personal glimpse into a city's cultural past. At The Heritage Shop, which counts the sultan of Qatar as one of its recent customers, you can trawl through an eclectic collection of old family photographs, tiffin pots, typewriters, vases, signs, records, lamps, luggage, teapots and toys. 93 Jalan Sultan, facebook.com/theheritageshopsg

**Singapore now: Ngee Ann City**

Orchard Road is Singapore's shopping mecca. At seven-storey Ngee Ann City, you can shop for everything from luxury fashion brands to groceries. 391 Orchard Road, ngeeanncity.com.sg



**PAST MASTER:** The Heritage Shop on Jalan Sultan is an antique hunter's dream.

## SLEEP

**Singapore then: The Sultan and Naumi Liora**

While Singapore's steel-and-glass CBD looks like a place where business is king, its older areas are thriving, too. Many of the shophouses, which have become an architectural reminder of the region's trade roots, are now listed as protected buildings, and savvy companies are buying them up – for about HK\$19,400 per sq ft – and converting them into hip shops, bars, offices and boutique hotels. The Sultan (thesultan.com.sg) is a stately hotel of grand columns, arches and full-length windows that was created from 10 shophouses. It's a beautifully preserved building on the fringe of now-trendy Kampong Glam. Another boutique heritage hotel is Naumi Liora (naumiliora.com). Here, along

Keong Saik Road in Chinatown, the uneven corridors and small rooms are a reminder of just how precious space is in Singapore.

**Singapore now: Naumi**

Across the road from the Raffles, Naumi (naumihotel.com) is a modern, luxury boutique hotel with a rooftop bar and swimming pool that offers exceptional views across the skyline of the central business district.



**TWO FACES:** lobby of the Naumi Liora (far left) and The Sultan (left).



**DIFFERENT STROKES:** brightly painted shophouse in Chinatown (above); the more restrained façade of the Chinatown Heritage Centre (below).

## LEARN

**Singapore then: Chinatown Heritage Centre**

The city's shophouses might show what Singapore looked like at street level, but to get a feeling of what life was really like for the immigrants, spend some time at the Chinatown Heritage Centre. Here, within three old shophouses, Singapore's gritty past has been recreated to give you a tangible sense of Chinatown's family spaces, gambling and opium dens and shop interiors. Note: it's under renovation, but due to open in the second half of this year, so check before visiting. 48 Pagoda Street, chinatownheritagecentre.sg

**Singapore now: Singapore City Gallery**

The Singapore City gallery is a fascinating, and free, museum space showing how the city was planned in the past, and what's in store for the future. It's well worth a visit, for putting the physical spaces of Singapore into context. 45 Maxwell Road, ura.gov.sg

