

## **Singapore**

### **Location**

Singapore, the so-called “Gateway to the Orient”, is located in Southeastern Asia, lying between 1° 22' N, and 103° 48' E. The Republic of Singapore measures 647.5 km<sup>2</sup>. Singapore’s strategic location, at the entrance to the Strait of Malacca, is one of its unique characteristics that helped to make it a prosperous country. It is located north of the equator between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Singapore is situated at the crossroads of some of the world's major sea-lines. It is separated from Indonesia to the south by the Singapore Strait and from Malaysia to the north by the Johore Strait.

### **Geography**

Singapore is an island city-state with a lowland terrain. The country’s gently undulating central plateau contains its water catchments area and nature reserve. The Republic of Singapore consists of the main island of Singapore, which is off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, and 58 adjoining islands.

### **Climate**

Singapore lies within a tropical climatic zone. The country is characterized by hot, humid, and rainy weather conditions. It neither has pronounced rainy nor dry seasons. The country experiences thunderstorms 40 percent of all days and 67 percent of days in April.

## **History**

The inhabitants of the Malaysian Peninsula and the Island of Singapore first migrated to the area between 2500 and 1500 B.C. British and Dutch interest in the region grew with the trade in spice. Following this interest, the trading post of Singapore was founded in 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles. Singapore was declared a separate crown colony of Britain in 1946 following the dissolution of the former colony of the Straits Settlements. Two settlements on the peninsula, Penang and Malacca, became part of the Union of Malaya, while the small island of Labuan was transferred to North Borneo. The Cocos (or Keeling) and the Christmas Islands were transferred to Australia in 1955 and 1958 respectively.

Singapore attained self-governance in 1959, and Lee Kwan Yew, consequently, became its first prime minister. Lee Kwan Yew was an economic visionary with an authoritarian streak. On September 16, 1963, Singapore joined Malaya, Sabah (North Borneo), and Sarawak in the Federation of Malaysia. The country withdrew from the Federation on August 9, 1965, and proclaimed itself a republic one month later.

Under Lee, Singapore developed into one of the cleanest, safest, and most economically prosperous cities in Asia. However, Singapore's strict rules of civil obedience attracted scathing criticisms from many who argued that the nation's prosperity was achieved at the expense of individual rights and liberties.

## **Political and Legal System**

Singapore has a parliamentary system of government. The country's legal system is also based on English common law. Singapore has not accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

## **Population**

Singapore is one of the world's most densely populated countries with about 12,000 people per square mile. Singapore's current (2004) population is approximately 4,353,893 with a growth rate of 1.7 percent. A massive urban renewal program, commenced in the 1960s, has replaced virtually all of Singapore's slums with modern housing units. As a result of birth control and a strict immigration policy, the annual rate of population increase has declined to just over 1 percent, down from 4.5 percent in the 1950s. Singapore's population consists of a variety of races. The racial composition of the Singaporean population is as follows: Chinese 76.7 percent; Malay, 14 percent; Indian 7.9 percent; and other ethnic groups, 1.4 percent. Some other demographic characteristics of the Singaporean population for the year 2000 are as follows: birth rate, 9.6/1000; mortality rate, 4.1/1000; and life expectancy, 81.5.

## **Currency**

The monetary unit of Singapore is the Singapore dollar (SGD).

## **Education**

By 2003 Singapore's literacy rate was 93%. Singapore has one of the world's highest literacy rates (a product of a fine uniform education system conducted in all the official languages of the country).

## **Languages**

Singapore has four official languages: Malay, Chinese (Mandarin), Tamil, and English. English is the language of business and administration. It is widely spoken and understood. Most Singaporeans are bilingual, speaking their mother tongues as well as English.

## **Religion**

Singapore is a multireligious country. The most common religions are Islam (mainly practiced by Malaysian population), Christianity, Buddhism (mainly practiced by the Chinese population), Hindu, and Taoism.

## **Agriculture and Natural Resources**

Singapore's agricultural land is 2 percent of its land area. This is used intensively to produce tropical fruits and vegetables. The agricultural land is also utilized to raise poultry and hogs. Some of the products of Singapore's agriculture include rubber, copra, fruit, orchids, vegetables, poultry, eggs, fish, and ornamental fish.

There are no exploitable natural resources in the country. Its power is generated by thermoelectric plants. Water is supplied from a number of reservoirs.

The Singaporeans are employed primarily in manufacturing, the service industries, and in commerce. A negligible proportion of the population is engaged in agriculture. Statistics show that Singapore's labor force was 2.19 million in 2000; 35 percent employed in the financial, business and professional areas of the service sectors; 21 percent was accounted for by the manufacturing sector; 13 percent was accounted for by the construction and transportation sector; 9 percent by communication, and 22 percent by others.



## **Trade**

Singapore's strategic location at the entrance to the Strait of Malacca has helped it to become one of the most important shipping centers in Asia. The Port of Singapore, the world's busiest in terms of shipping tonnage, is a key component of Singapore's prosperity and economic health. In fact, commerce has historically been the chief source of income.

According to the statistics of 2002, Singapore's export earning was \$122 billion and imports bill \$113 billion (2002 est.). Singapore is a free port and an entrepôt that re-exports more than half of what it imports, notably rubber, petroleum, textiles, timber, and tin. It also exports locally manufactured goods such as computer and telecommunications equipment, petroleum products, oil drilling equipment, plastics, and rubber products. Singapore is also a leader in new biotechnologies, and the manufacturing of computer components. Singapore's major trading partners include: Malaysia, U.S., Hong Kong, Japan, China, Taiwan, Thailand, and South Korea. Singapore signed a free-trade agreement with the United States in 2003.

## **Food**

Like its diverse population and cultures, Singapore is characterized by a diversity of food and dishes. Some of the main dishes found in Singapore include Malay, Chinese, Indonesian, Peranakan, Indian, Thai, Japanese, Korean, Western, Vietnamese, and Mongolian. Among the most popular dishes in Singapore are Spicy Potato Samosas, which is Singapore's favorite snack; a traditional Indian savory pastry stuffed with spicy vegetables. Other Singaporean dishes are Satay (which is a barbecued skewered meat, usually beef, chicken or mutton, served with thick, peanut gravy); Mee, (noodles); Hokkien mee (thick yellow noodles and vermicelli fried with

pork and prawns in a thick, rich gray); mee pok (flat noodles made from wheat and egg usually served with minced pork, mushrooms, and fish balls). Bak kut the, Taufu "Taufu" and Rojak are other popular dishes in Singapore.

### **Important Dates**

Some of the important dates in Singapore are the national day or Independence Day, which is August 9, 1965 (from Malaysia). This day is observed as a national holiday. Another important date in Singapore is the Constitution day observed on June 3 commemorates the country's constitution day of June 3, 1959). This is not, however, observed as a national holiday.

### ***Landmarks***

The Singaporean island is low-lying and composed of a granitic core which rises to 580ft (166m) at Bukit Timah, the country's highest peak. This peak is surrounded by sedimentary lowlands. The island was once covered by rain forest, which is now limited to Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. The coast is broken by many inlets. Keppel Harbor, the heart of the port of Singapore, is a natural deepwater anchorage between Singapore and the islands of Brani and Sentosa (Blakang Mati), off the central coast of the Singapore island.

Singapore's landmarks are mainly mountains: Bukit Timah 162m, Bukit Gombak 133m, Bukit Batok 106m, and Faber 105m. Islands are also characteristic of the country and include: Palua Tekong, Palau Ubin, Sentosa and numerous smaller islands. Sentosa Island has been developed as a recreation, amusement complex and tourist attraction.

Some other important landmarks in Singapore are, Kranji War Memorial, which is a beautifully landscaped ground dedicated to the Allied troops who died in the battle for

Singapore during World War II. Another is the Merlion Park, which is the tourism symbol of the country. The Merlion is a mythical beast, said to be half lion and half fish. The eight-metre high Merlion statue stands guard at the mouth of the Singapore River.

Formerly a convent, CHIJMES is a unique blend of historical architecture and modern restoration. The Gothic chapel, erected in 1890, is a showcase of plasterwork, delicate wall frescoes and stained glass. Aside from the chapel, CHIJMES also boasts the Caldwell House (the oldest free-standing house in Singapore) with a sunken forecourt, waterfalls and fountains. The grounds of CHIJMES are home to art galleries, boutiques, and a lavish selection of fine dining restaurants, wine bars, and cafes.

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