**WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A FEW HOURS/ONE DAY/A WEEKEND IN SINGAPORE, EVEN IF THIS IS NOT YOUR FIRST TIME HERE - THE REVISED BENEVOLENT DICTATOR’S GUIDE TO SIGHTSEEING & SHOPPING IN SINGAPORE**

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# I. SIGHTSEEING

## If you like museums

* The [**Singapore Art Museum**](http://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/)(Bras Basah Road; doable in an hour) – small but excellent collection of Asian art, housed in an old building that used to be a Catholic boys’ school (my dad went there!). Has a nice café ([**Dome**](http://www.olio.sg/domecoffee/)) and a decent Italian restaurant ([**La Fiandra**](http://www.lafiandra.com.sg/)).
* The [**National Museum of Singapore**](http://www.nationalmuseum.sg/NMSPortal/)(Stamford Road, a short walk across from the Art Museum; allow up to 2 hours) – a good collection of exhibits about Singapore’s history and culture, housed in an old Colonial building with a café and incidentally also two of Singapore’s best restaurants: [**Flutes**](http://www.flutes.com.sg/) (Western) and [**Chef Chan**](http://www.chefchanrestaurant.com.sg/) (Chinese).
* The [**Peranakan Museum**](http://www.peranakanmuseum.org.sg/home/home.html)(Armenian Street, around the corner from the National Museum; doable in an hour and can be combined as a nice morning/afternoon) – small but fascinating collection of artifacts showcasing the unique heritage of the Straits-Chinese community in Singapore and Malaysia.
* The [**Asian Civilizations Museum**](http://www.acm.org.sg/home/home.html)(Empress Place, on the riverbank in the heart of Singapore’s Colonial District; allow 1-2 hours) – a beautifully curated collection of art, sculpture and ceramics from across South East, East and North Asia.
* The [**Chinatown Heritage Centre**](http://www.singaporechinatown.com.sg/)(Pagoda Street; doable in an hour) – housed in a restored old building in Chinatown, with exhibits telling the story of Chinese immigrants to Singapore

## If you’re interested in history and culture (outside of a museum)

* Besides the various museums, it’s worth taking a short walk around one or more of the traditional “ethnic areas” of Singapore, where the various immigrant groups settled after arriving here:
* The [**Malay & Arab Quarter**](http://www.yoursingapore.com/content/traveller/en/browse/see-and-do/culture-and-heritage/a-touch-of-history/heritage-trails/kampong-glam.html): start at the impressive [**Sultan Mosque**](http://www.ghettosingapore.com/sultan-mosque-masjid-sultan/)in the heart of the Arab Street neighborhood, take a quick stroll around the traditional buildings nearby, pop into the [**Malay Heritage Centre**](http://www.malayheritage.org.sg/MHCPortal/) and finish up with a coffee at one of the trendy cafes that have popped up or a Middle Eastern meal at one of the many restaurants. Best in the mornings.
* [**Chinatown**](http://www.chinatown.sg/): walk around Smith/Pagoda/Temple/Mosque Streets (can be combined with a visit to the **Chinatown Heritage Centre** (see above)) to see the traditional shophouses; notice (and maybe visit) the elaborately-decorated [**Sri Mariamman Temple**](http://www.yoursingapore.com/content/traveller/en/browse/see-and-do/culture-and-heritage/places-of-worship/sri-mariamman-temple.html)(Singapore’s oldest Hindu temple); pop into the traditional “wet market” in Chinatown Complex and sample hawker food at the food centre, or finish with some cheap souvenir shopping and simple street food along the pedestrianized alleys. Can be done any time but may be more pleasant in the evenings. NOTE: For 2015 you’ll be here in the run-up to the massive Chinese New Year celebrations, so the street vendors, decorations and atmosphere should be lots of fun!
* [**Little India**](http://www.lisha.org.sg/): start at [**Tekka Market**](http://sassymamasg.com/tekka-centre-in-little-india-how-to-shop-the-wet-market/)(a noisy, boisterous market) and venture into some of the side roads on either side of Serangoon Road such as Campbell Lane, which has some traditional Indian shops (here’s where you can get your Indian sari, flower garlands and spices); visit the colorful [**Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple**](http://www.sriveeramakaliamman.com/)and wind up at the most unique shopping mall in Singapore – [**Mustafa's**](http://www.mustafa.com.sg)– a huge no-frills discount emporium where you can buy just about anything from cheap luggage and towels to real gold jewelry and cameras (and it’s open 24 hours). If you’re hungry, there are plenty of excellent restaurants in the area, from refined North Indian cuisine to cheap Indian curry houses. These are clustered around/near Mustafa’s and along Race Course Road (which run parallel to the main drag, Serangoon Road).
* [**Katong/Joo Chiat**](http://www.yoursingapore.com/see-do-singapore/places-to-see/joochiat-katong.html): a quiet, residential neighborhood in the east of Singapore that somewhat unexpectedly boasts an increasing number of excellent cafes, hipster restaurants and interesting bars. It also has a large number of historic Peranakan shophouses and some excellent Peranakan restaurants, well worth a stroll around if you’ve already done the “big” sights.

## If you’re curious about World War II and/or the Japanese Occupation of Singapore

* The [**Changi Museum**](http://www.changimuseum.sg/)(Changi) – a well executed and touching exhibit illustrating the lives and stories of British and Singaporean soldiers and civilians held captive during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore.
* [**Reflections at Bukit Chandu**](http://www.nhb.gov.sg/NHBPortal/Museums/ReflectionsatBukitChandu?_afrWindowId=v90lbqvxp_1&_afrLoop=2235852423592899&_afrWindowMode=0&_adf.ctrl-state=v90lbqvxp_4)(Pepys Road, Pasir Panjang) – interpretive exhibit about Singapore’s war experience, housed in an old Colonial bungalow close to where a small Malay regiment fought Singapore’s last stand against over 10,000 Japanese soldiers.
* [**Memories at Old Ford Factory**](http://moff.nas.sg/moff/public/html/)(Bukit Timah) – an excellent exhibit created from first-hand oral accounts of the hardships suffered by ordinary Singaporeans during the Japanese Occupation.
* There are several other locations and parks around Singapore where you can stroll around and see the remains of British cannons and fortifications, including the [**Labrador Nature Reserve**](http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_visitorsguide&task=naturereserves&id=48)(near Bukit Chandu) and [**Fort Canning Park**](http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_visitorsguide&task=parks&id=16Th)(near the National Museum). There’s also the [**Kranji War Memorial & Cemetery**](http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2004200/KRANJI%20WAR%20CEMETERY), a quiet and moving site in the north of Singapore.

## If you’d like to take a gentle nature walk or enjoy strolling around a park or garden

* The [**Singapore Botanic Gardens**](http://www.sbg.org.sg/) and [**National Orchid Garden**](http://www.sbg.org.sg/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=34&Itemid=58)(inside the Botanic Gardens) make for a pleasant morning excursion, especially if you are interested in horticulture and flowers. The [**Halia**](http://thehalia.com/sbg/halia-at-sbg/about-the-halia/) restaurant in the Ginger Garden makes for a lovely midday lunch break while [**Food for Thought**](http://www.foodforthought.com.sg/restaurant.php?branch=sbg) is a pleasant café that donates its proceeds to a variety of eco-friendly causes.
* The [**Canopy Walk**](http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/popup/canopy.html)is a gentle but unique boardwalk through a secondary forest canopy at eye-level that can be combined with a visit to Reflections at Bukit Chandu (see above under WWII); it’s part of the highly recommended [**Southern Ridges**](http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/index.php?Itemid=73&id=62&option=com_visitorsguide&task=attractions)series of walks that also include panoramic views of some of the outlying islands, including the [**Faber Trail**](http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/popup/faber.html)that winds around Mount Faber Park.
* The [**Gardens by the Bay**](http://www.gardensbythebay.com.sg/en/home.html)is Singapore’s newest attraction – over 100 hectares of open gardens, walking trails, the impressive Sky Trees (with a fun swaying elevated walkway connecting them), and the two climate-controlled Flower Dome and Cloud Forest bio-domes. It can be reached via a longish walk from the [**Marina Bay Sands**](http://www.marinabaysands.com/index.html) hotel and casino complex (the iconic “boat in the sky”) which itself is a landmark on a walk around the [**Marina Bay**](http://www.marina-bay.sg/attractions.html)area – from the[**"helix" bridge**](http://www.marina-bay.sg/Funfinder/directory/view/the-helix?category=sightseeing-and-attractions) at Marina Bay to the [**Marina Barrage**](http://www.pub.gov.sg/marina/Pages/default.aspx). There are a few pleasant-enough dining options in the Gardens.
* If you’d like to go “off the beaten track”, take a stroll through peaceful, atmospheric and historic [**Bukit Brown**](http://bukitbrown.com/main/), the largest (now abandoned) Chinese cemetery in Southeast Asia; or visit the [**Sungei Buloh Wetlands Reserve**](https://www.sbwr.org.sg/)if you’re a birder; it’s where you’ll see many migratory birds and waterfowl in a very quiet, rural mangrove setting.

If you’d like something a bit more strenuous

* The [**Treetops Walk**](http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_visitorsguide&task=attractions&id=64&Itemid=73)in Macritchie Reservoir Park is the highlight of a pleasant hiking trail within the reservoir park; it’s a suspension bridge linking the park’s two highest points.
* The [**Bukit Timah Nature Reserve**](https://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/?option=com_visitorsguide&task=naturereserves&id=46&Itemid=75)is home to some lowland forest and has a “hill” which provides a moderately vigorous walk; it’s also a popular weekend mountain biking venue.
* If you have a day and want to get away from the “concrete jungle”, take a[**old-fashioned "bumboat"**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bumboat)from Changi Pier to [**Pulau Ubin**](http://christianrusso.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/whatve-ubin-doin-a-day-trip-to-singapores-pulau-ubin/comment-page-1/), a pleasant, undeveloped island, and rent a bicycle to explore the small village, forests and quarries – a throwback to “kampong” (village) life in Singapore in the 60s.

## If you like animals and zoos

* The [**Singapore Zoo**](http://www.zoo.com.sg/)is justifiably world-famous – it’s an “open concept” zoo with no cages; its design replicates the landscape and habitat of each species housed, which is given space seldom found in zoos anywhere. The animals are treated well and the handlers very competent and friendly.
* The [**Night Safari**](http://www.nightsafari.com.sg/)is also deservedly renowned – a rare opportunity to see nocturnal animals in their natural habitats (including through one of the highly recommended walks).
* The [**River Safari**](http://www.riversafari.com.sg/) is the newest attraction in the zoo area – you’ll see manatees, fish, birds, monkeys and the biggest attraction of all: the largest [**panda exhibit**](http://riversafari.com.sg/giant-panda-forest/giant-panda-forest.html#ad-image-0) in South East Asia; as well as a boat ride through various landscapes inspired by the great rivers of the world.
* The [**Jurong Bird Park**](http://www.birdpark.com.sg/) is often somewhat unfairly overlooked in favor of the blockbuster attractions that are the Zoo and Night Safari – but it is actually a wonderful place to wander and see some amazing birds, including in the world’s largest walk-in aviary and some great shows.

## If you like lazing at the beach or island hopping

* Go to [**Sentosa Island**](http://www.sentosa.com.sg/en/)(the most scenic way is to ride the cable car from atop Mount Faber Hill) and pick one of the quieter beaches – **Palawan** tends to be less crowded (check out [**Bora Bora Beach Club**](http://www.borabeach.com/Pages/BBBB_home.html)) whereas **Tanjong** can be crowded; **Siloso** is more of a “party place” with some nice beach clubs and bars (perfect for sunset drinks –[**Coastes**](http://www.coastes.com/) **i**s a good choice). Ignore or avoid the manufactured tourist attractions – but then again you could also choose to explore the [**Resorts World**](http://www.rwsentosa.com/)complex, with its massive casino and the attached [**Universal Studios Singapore**](http://www.rwsentosa.com/Homepage/Attractions/UniversalStudiosSingapore)theme parkif you felt like it!
* Slightly more effort, but nice if you have a whole day (or better yet, a day and a night) and want to “get away” for a while – take the fast ferry over to **Bintan Island** in Indonesia (the journey about 45 minutes). You can negotiate a ride by taxi or rent a motorbike to get to the public beach at Trikora, or get a day pass to one of the [**Bintan Resorts**](http://bintan-resorts.com/visitors/), which have private beaches and a shuttle that runs between each property (if staying overnight, I like Mayang Sari’s rustic, slightly worn but comfortable chalets, RIGHT on the beach).
* Not a beach person or want something unusual and peaceful? Catch a ferry to island-hop around a few of Singapore’s offshore islands like [**Kusu or St John's Islands**](http://www.littledayout.com/article/islands-in-the-sun-hopping-on-to-st-johns-lazarus-seringat-and-kusu-islands.html). Unlike Sentosa or Bintan, these aren’t places to go to for beach resorts or activities; they’re tiny, quiet and don’t have cafes or many amenities but are tranquil spots to hang out with a good book and a picnic – just be sure to avoid major festivals when the usually-deserted temple on Kusu becomes a mob scene.

## If you like cruising along the river

* Take a leisurely (approx. 40-minute) ride along the [**Three Quays**](http://www.rivercruise.com.sg/ourriver.php)in a traditional “bumboat”; you’ll pass many landmarks of old Singapore and there’ll be a narrated tour describing their historic significance. End the ride at Clarke Quay or Boat Quay for a cool tropical drink afterwards.

# II. SHOPPING

If you like malls or designer fashion, you’re in the right place ☺ … but there are also places where you can pick up things ranging from interesting one-of-a-kind souvenirs to computer accessories you never thought you needed.

## Shopping Areas

Orchard Road:

The main shopping drag is [**Orchard Road**](http://www.orchardroad.org/)– a mile-long stretch of road lined on both sides with mega malls linked by walkway, underpasses and broad pavements. I think I counted over a dozen malls the last time I went by ☺ You’ll find almost every high street fashion brand here – from ***Topshop***, ***H&M*** and ***Zara*** to ***Uniqlo***, ***Victoria’s Secret*** and the ***Body Shop*** – and also every high-end designer you can name: ***Vuitton, Gucci, Prada*** et al all have huge store frontages facing the street. Start at [**ION Orchard**](http://www.ionorchard.com/en/) and shop till you drop across [**Wisma Atria**](http://www.wismaonline.com) and [**Ngee Ann City**](http://www.ngeeanncity.com.sg/), past the [**Heeren**](http://www.yoursingapore.com/content/traveller/en/browse/shopping/shopping-malls/the-heeren.html) to [**313 Somerset**](http://www.313somerset.com.sg/). There are plenty of food courts, cafes and fast food joints in all of these to refresh and rest up.

***RECOMMENDED****: Take the time to stroll up* [***Emerald Hill***](http://www.travelfish.org/blogs/singapore/2012/04/02/a-walk-along-singapores-emerald-hill/) *to admire the traditional Peranakan houses (then have a drink and snack at one of the bars at the Orchard Road end ☺)*

Two department stores on Orchard are worth checking out if you have time: [**Tangs**](http://www.tangs.com.sg/main.php) (with an excellent housewares department in the basement and a nice little café on the 4th floor serving tasty local food) and [**Robinsons**](http://www.robinsons.com.sg/robinsons-orchard/)(huge new flagship store smack in the middle of Orchard Road, at the Heeren mall).

Given the dominance of international brands, it’s not that easy to find special, unique souvenirs or gifts in these malls – look out for Japanese, Taiwanese or Korean fashion boutiques and Asian-based brands; many are available only in small stand-along stores or “curated” in quirky boutiques specializing in emerging designers or cult brands. “Pop up” stores are all the rage and it can be hard to keep up with the many openings and closings - in the Orchard Road area, there’s a cluster in [**Orchard Central**](http://www.orchardcentral.com.sg/index.aspx?key=home). Elsewhere, wander around trendy [**Haji Lane**](http://blog.travelshopa.com/2013/02/01/singapores-most-talked-about-shopping-strip-haji-lane/) or equally hip [**Tiong Bahru**](http://is.asia-city.com/city-living/article/hippest-hood)or check out some of the individual stores listed below.

Chinatown:

The shops and street market around **Pagoda, Temple and Smith Streets** is the place for cheap souvenirs, from tee shirts proclaiming that “Singapore is a FINE city” to fridge magnets and all manner of colorful silk placemats and traditional Chinese clothing from China.

For more unique souvenirs, check out the traditional Chinese “medical halls” for ginseng and other herbal concoctions – **Eu Yan Sang** on South Bridge Road is a big modern version that sells excellent ginseng tea (there’s a small branch in the basement of the mall at the conference venue), while **Thye Shan Medical Hall** is the epitome of the old-fashioned Chinese apothecary.

Check out traditional Chinese jerky (seasoned and dried barbecued pork) in the shops along New Bridge Road – Singaporeans don’t agree on which is the best, but I like **Lim Chee Guan** ☺

For traditional Chinese women’s “qipao” the [**Yue Hwa**](http://www.yuehwa.com.sg/en-us) department store on New Bridge Road has better quality ones than the small street shops. If you want to take home some of the traditional “kopi tiam” teacups used in the “kaya toast” teashops or a real Chinese wok or Japanese claypot, head to [**Sia Huat**](http://www.siahuat.com/) on Temple Street and the few kitchenware stores nearby.

Little India:

[**Mustafa's**](http://www.mustafa.com.sg/mwsmain/) is a tourist attraction in itself – huge, chockfull of everything from Angry Birds squawky phones to high-end pure gold jewelry. You can get some lovely cloth and saris in this area as well as Indian spices and housewares.

Haji Lane/Arab Street:

This is fast becoming the “hip shopping neighborhood” in Singapore. Small back alleys and lanes are being converted into edgy boutiques and quirky stores at an astonishing rate – here’s where you’ll get carefully curated clothing collections from up-and-coming designers as well as unique handmade jewelry and other one of-a-kind items.

## Other Areas and Specialty Outlets

For genuine Asian antiques and one of a kind high-end collectibles:

* **Tanglin Shopping Centre**

For South East Asian housewares, lacquer, lamps, decorative items and silk cushion covers etc.:

* **Holland Village Shopping Center**

For a mind-boggling array of computer parts, peripherals, accessories and gadgets:

* **Funan Centre** (all five floors of it, and it’s less than 10 minutes’ walk from the conference venue)
* **Sim Lim Square** (somewhat more down at heel, has loads of household electronics (though some may have “fallen off the perennial truck”) but is also where serious video gamers and build-your-own-computer types go. Be warned, though, that some shops are known to engage in unscrupulous practices so if you’re buying a camera, smartphone, laptop or other expensive equipment, know the price you should be paying and do NOT purchase or sign any warranty agreement offered by the store – very few will have manufacturer’s warranties anyway)

## Some Interesting Shops and Brands Worth Seeking Out If You Like That Sort of Thing

### Books:

* [**Books Actually**](http://www.booksactually.com/) (Tiong Bahru) – recently crowned one of the ten best bookstores in the world; a hip independent bookstore stocking poems, plays and novels by Singaporean writers and other unusual literary gifts

### Clothing for the tropical climate:

* [**Pure Earth**](http://www.pureearth.com.sg/index.php) (Tanglin Mall or Centrepoint) – modern take on traditional Indian designs using 100% cotton and other natural fabrics
* [**British India**](https://www.facebook.com/BritishIndiaAsia)(Raffles City (venue mall); Tanglin Mall or Ngee Ann City) – Malaysian brand of linen and cotton tunics, separates and some nice men’s shirts with designs that hint at Asian touches (not cheap)
* [**Island Shop**](http://www.islandshopinternational.com/) (Tanglin Mall, Tangs Dept Store and elsewhere) – Singapore brand of cotton dresses, blouses, costume jewelry and pretty beach sandals

### For unique, locally-designed jewelry:

* [**Madame Butterfly**](http://www.madamebutterfly.com.sg/) (Changi Airport (post-immigration departure area, all three terminals) – pretty and affordable costume jewelry in Asian designs featuring cloisonné, jadeite and beads);
* [**Risis**](http://www.risis.com/) (Tangs, Ngee Ann City, Singapore Botanic Gardens, Gardens by the Bay and Changi Airport Terminal 3) – gold plated orchids and other jewelry featuring unique Asian designs;
* [**Sulin Serio**](http://www.sulinserio.com/) (Tanglin Mall) – moderately-priced handmade pieces featuring semi-precious stones and silver jewelry;
* **Hanna Lee** (Cluny Court – moderately priced modern designs)
* [**Carrie K**](http://www.carriekrocks.com/CarrieK/Default.aspx) (Tangs and various independent boutiques, including [**Front Row**](http://www.frontrowsingapore.com/) at Raffles Hotel Arcade across from the ICANN venue) – quirky, modern jewelry made from a variety of materials.

### For men’s custom tailoring:

Note that most tailors are used to the British or American cut rather than the slimmer European cut; whatever you do, avoid the 24-hour tailors!

* [**Kingsmen**](http://www.kingsmenshop.com/) (Far East Plaza; been around since the 70s)
* [**Joe Tailor**](http://www.joetailor.com/index.html) (Market Street; expensive but popular with the professional crowd)
* [**Coloc**](http://www.coloc.com.sg/) (Raffles Hotel; established in the 50s)
* **Anson Tailor** (Hong Leong Building at Raffles Quay; not as expensive as Joe’s; popular with young professionals and expats)
* [**Swagger**](http://swaggerstore.co/) (Club Street – hip, fashion-conscious clothing and accessories as well as custom made attire)
* [**CYC**](http://www.cyccustomshop.com/) (Raffles Hotel – custom made shirts; my husband goes here ☺)

### For Asian artwork:

There are lots of art galleries in Singapore; even if you’re not buying it’s worth checking out the exhibits at some of the more established places as well as the smaller ones that feature unknown or younger Singaporean and Asian artists. There are some very well known international dealers and major galleries here; and dozens of excellent smaller galleries, including:

* [**Chan Hampe**](http://www.chanhampegalleries.com/) (Raffles Hotel) almost always has a small but top quality collection;
* [**Future Perfect**](http://futureperfect.asia/) (Malan Road) carries mostly contemporary Asian art;
* [**Yavuz**](http://www.yavuzfineart.com/) (Waterloo Street, near the Singapore Art Museum) carries Asian and Middle Eastern art;
* [**Drawing Room**](http://drawingroomgallery.com/venue/singapore/) (Gillman Barracks) carries contemporary Filipino artists;
* [**Gajah Gallery**](http://www.gajahgallery.com/default.php) (Hill Street) handles a few established Indonesian artists;
* [**Utterly Art**](http://utterlyart.com.sg/) (Mosque Street, Chinatown) features emerging Singaporean and Asian artists
* [**Tanjong Pagar Distripark**](http://www.timeoutsingapore.com/art/venues/other-spaces/tanjong-pagar-distripark) (several of Singapore’s most interesting small galleries are clustered here)

*(Note: prices for Asian art have risen very steeply in recent years so a good piece, even by a young, unknown artist, is likely to be expensive)*

### Others/Miscellaneous:

* [**Royal Selangor Pewter**](http://www.royalselangor.com/rs2/index.php) (in the Marina Bay Sands retail complex and various other malls) – elegant pewter jewelry, housewares and figurines often featuring Asian designs, from a brand originating in Malaysia
* [**Charles & Keith**](http://www.charleskeith.com/SGStore/CK/SGP/Home) (various malls nationwide including the conference venue) – inexpensive, to-the-minute shoes and handbags from a Singaporean design duo
* [**Front Row**](http://www.frontrowsingapore.com/) (Raffles Hotel Arcade) – curated boutique of designer fashion, accessories and jewelry from independent, up-and-coming designers including some Singaporean labels
* [**Quintessential**](http://www.quintessential.com.sg/) (Pacific Plaza near Orchard Road) – another curated boutique of fashion, accessories and jewelry from Asian and Singaporean designers