

Singapore



Map



Background

- **Land and Climate:** Singapore is an island nation off the southern tip of Malaysia. It covers 244 square miles and is about 85 miles north of the equator. The country consists of Singapore Island (about 93% of the total area of Singapore) and around 50 smaller surrounding islands. Singapore is a city-state (along with Monaco and Vatican City). There are no rural areas. It is the smallest country in Southeast Asia. The climate is similar throughout the year. Humidity is high, and temperatures range from 75° F – 91° F. Rainfall is lowest in July and highest between November and January.

People

- **Population:** Singapore has a population of around 4.8 million. It is the second-most densely populated country in the world. About 76% of the population is Chinese, 14 % Malay, and 8% Indian. The fertility rate in Singapore recently has been one of the lowest in the world. To overcome this problem, the government has encouraged foreigners to immigrate to Singapore.
- **Language and Greeting:** Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English are all official languages. Most Singaporeans are bilingual. English is the language of administration and is used in science, technology, commerce, and tourism. A colloquial dialect called *Singlish* combines English with elements of Malay, Chinese, and Tamil, but it is considered a sign of low education. To greet one another, Chinese people shake hands, and may bow for elders. Malays greet with *salaam*, and bring their right palms together and touch their palm to their heart. Indians may join their palms together in a prayer position, bow slightly, and say “*vanakkam*” (Tamil for hello).
- **Religion:** Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and some smaller religions are practiced. Nearly all Malays (14% of population) are Muslim. Singaporeans are guaranteed freedom of worship through their constitution.
- **General Attitude:** Singaporeans hold traditional Asian values and also support modern and progressive advancements. There is a strong work ethic in the country. High moral and ethical values, including honesty, humility, education, discipline, and self-control are promoted in government and business practices. The government promotes an ideology of five “shared values”: nation before community and society above self; family as the basic unit of society; community support and respect for the individual; consensus, not conflict; and racial and religious harmony. The government stresses a well-ordered society, and cultural ideals and traditions are enforced by law. Shaming another person in public also shames the offending individual and is a breach of social courtesy.
- **Personal Appearance:** Most Singaporeans wear lightweight Western-style clothing. However, traditional attire is also worn, including the *sari* (Indian wraparound dress worn by women), *salwar kameez* (long shirt and pants that are tight at the ankles), *cheongsam* (Chinese dress), and *kebaya* (Malay dress).

Lifestyle

- **Diet and Eating:** Most families sit around a table to eat, but Malays and Indians may sit on the floor for traditional meals. In traditional meals, each person takes a small portion of meats and vegetables from serving dishes and places it in an individual bowl. Accepting seconds, but leaving a little food behind on the serving dishes (not in one’s own bowl) is polite and shows that one has been well fed. Muslims do not eat pork and require that all other meat be *halal* (cooked according to specific customs with separate utensils). Hindus and Buddhists do not eat beef, and many are vegetarian. Rice is eaten daily. An Indian bread (*roti prata*) is eaten for

breakfast. Chinese noodles are popular for lunch, and *dim sum* (Chinese dumplings) are also common to eat during the day. *Poh piah* (spring rolls), fish head curry, and spicy Malay food are frequent dishes as well. Pineapple, papaya, bananas, durians, and mangoes are some of the most common fruits.

- **Recreation:** Singaporeans enjoy soccer, badminton, basketball, tennis, golf, water sports, and martial arts. There is a wide variety of cultural arts available in Singapore. Strolling through maintained parks and botanical gardens are also a common pastime.
- **Holidays:** Public holidays in Singapore include the International New Year, Chinese New Year, Easter, *Vesak Day* (a celebration of the birth, enlightenment, and nirvana of Buddha), Labor Day, and Singapore National Day (August 9th). Other various Chinese celebrations occur throughout the year. Muslim holidays include *Hari Raya Puasa* (a feast to end Ramadan), and *Hari Raya Haji* (celebrating the pilgrimage to Makkah in Saudi Arabia). For Hindus and Sikhs, *Deepavali* (the festival of lights) celebrates the triumph of light over darkness.
- **Commerce and Currency:** Singapore has a strong entrepreneurial economy. Manufacturing, petroleum refining, wholesale and retail, financial services and business services are important sectors in the economy. Agriculture plays a minimum role because almost all land is urbanized. The currency is the Singapore dollar (SGD).

Society

- **Transportation and Communication:** Singapore has well maintained, paved roads. The Mass Rapid Transit subway serves many areas. Most newspapers are privately owned, but some are partially government owned. The government operates the radio and television facilities.
- **Health:** Singapore's health care facilities and services are very good. Singapore is sometimes referred to as the cleanest city in Asia.