

# travel

**HAWAII'S BACKYARD**  
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SIGNS OF HAWAIIAN LIFE >> G6  
LAS VEGAS ADVISOR >> G6



PHOTOS BY JULIE KESSLER / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

Top photo: Festive banners along Serangoon Road welcome visitors to the Little India section of Singapore. The city skyline at the Marina, above. The roof of Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple, Singapore's oldest Hindu shrine, features colorful figures constructed in Tamil style, right.

## WHERE culture MEETS cuisine



Singapore is a paradise for dedicated diners while offering many other enjoyable activities

### IF YOU GO

#### Singapore

- >> **The best way:** China, China Eastern, Philippine, Korean, United, American and Japan airlines all offer round-trip connecting service from Honolulu starting at \$1,088.
- >> **Telephones:** The country code for Singapore is 65.
- >> **Getting around:** Public transportation in Singapore and environs will get you everywhere easily and inexpensively, including from Changi International Airport to Singapore in 20 minutes. Tickets can be purchased on arrival at the airport.
- >> **Where to stay:** The Fullerton Hotel, 1 Fullerton Square, www.fullertonhotel.com. Tel. 6733-8388. Historically significant, first-rate hotel centrally located within walking distance of many sights of interest. Rates start at \$248 per night.
- >> **Information:** yoursingapore.com

#### WHERE TO EAT

- The Fullerton Hotel** breakfast buffet is not to be missed, even if the hotel is full. The Fullerton Hotel, 1 Fullerton Square, www.fullertonhotel.com. Tel. 6733-8388.
- Little Saigon Bar & Restaurant, Bik E,** Clarke Quay, #01-02, River Valley Road, info@littlesaigonasia.com. Tel. 6337-5585.
- Flutes Restaurant at National Museum of Singapore,** 93 Stamford Road, flutes.com/sg. Tel. 6338-8770.
- Lau Pa Sat Festival Market,** 18 Raffles Quay
- Chinatown Complex,** 335 Smith St. Crystal Jade Golden Palace, 290 Orchard Road, crystaljade.com. Tel. 6734-6866.
- Maxwell Food Center, 1 Kadayannallur St.** Raffles Hotel Long Bar or Writer's Bar for world-famous Singapore Sling, 1 Beach Road, raffles.com. Tel. 6412-1180.

By Julie L. Kessler  
Special to the Star-Advertiser

SCAR Wilde once said, "I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them." Nowhere is this truer than in Singapore, where the marriage of cultural diversity and cuisine results in a veritable mecca for all things culinary. It is also a place of natural beauty and architectural feats. A blend of East and West, and history and modernity, perhaps second to no other city. It thus makes a perfect stop for several days while in Asia, or a wonderful destination unto itself.

Arriving at Singapore's high-tech Changi Airport — arguably one of the world's best — containing salons, spas, shower facilities, movie theaters, kids playgrounds, gardens, world-class shopping, restaurants and everything in between, it was tough to leave, but leave we finally did. Fifteen minutes later we arrived at the neoclassical Fullerton Hotel, a gorgeous and historically significant hotel strategically located on the banks of the Singapore River overlooking Marina Bay and recently named as Singapore's 71st National Monument. It's also difficult to not be impressed by a world-class hotel with consistently impeccable service that houses on its lobby level

both a delectable chocolate buffet and a separate cake boutique that would make Marie Antoinette swoon with pleasure.

Just in time for dinner, my travel partner George and I walked to nearby Lau Pa Sat Market, a popular, atmospheric locale, for a meal of tender roast chicken with mouthwatering hoisin, soup and sauteed bok choy, followed by char siu bao chasers. Happily satiated, the tab was just \$13 for two, and we waddled back to the Fullerton for a great night's sleep.

#### Eating again

The next morning, we ambled to the Fullerton's breakfast buffet. The word "buffet" does not do this experience justice. In a beautifully appointed ballroom with floor-to-ceiling windows, liveried chefs stood at massive stations of Chinese, Indian and Japanese cuisine, along with the full gamut of all things Western, including made-to-order eggs, an omelet bar, fresh waffles, French baked goods, salads, exotic fruits and Nespresso specialty coffees. At a certain point George revealed his deepest fear: that I would never depart the premises. Some fears are, in fact, legitimate.

To work off the feast, we walked along the promenade and arrived at the iconic Marina Bay Sands Hotel, developed by Las Vegas Sands, and per-

haps the world's most expensive freestanding casino and longest infinity pool. Taking the elevator to the Skypark Observation Deck rewarded us with glorious panoramic views. After strolling the adjacent shopping complex, we hopped on the MRT, Singapore's strikingly clean, inexpensive and efficient subway.

Exiting at Chinatown, silently I cursed that I wasn't hungry given the many tantalizing dining options. Instead, we walked up Pagoda Street where George engaged his inner shopper, buying numerous knickknacks, including handy travel umbrellas, which thankfully were not needed that day.

Walking onward, we stopped at Thian Hock Keng

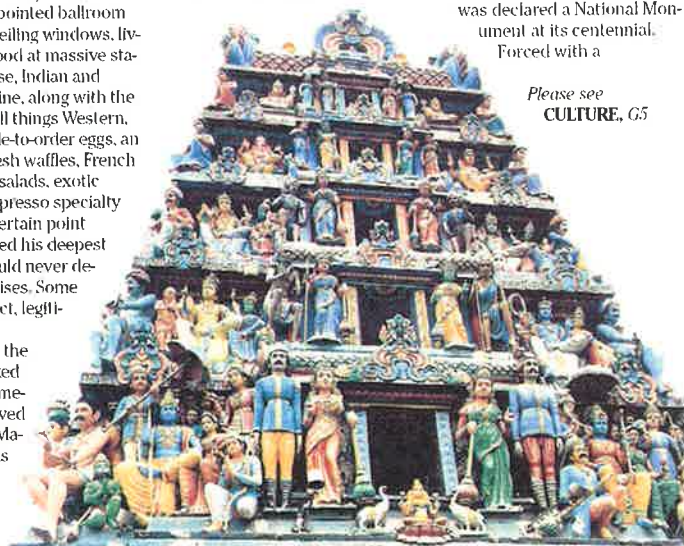
Temple, Singapore's first Taoist temple. Built in 1839 in tribute to sea goddess Ma Zu, it was constructed entirely without nails. It also houses statues of Confucius, eighth-century governor Chen Zhi Guang and goddess of mercy Gian Yin.

By then we were hungry and headed to Maxwell Food Centre for some tasty Hainan chicken rice. So fortified, we headed up Bridge Street, passing Hong Lim Park and St. Andrews Cathedral, until we arrived at the Raffles Hotel, named after Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the British statesman and founder of Singapore.

#### Then drinking

Established in 1887, Raffles was declared a National Monument at its centennial. Forced with a

Please see  
CULTURE, G5



# CULTURE

Continued from G1

dastardly decision between high-caloric, British high tea and a cocktail, we chose the second-floor Long Bar — source of the famous Singapore Sling. However, I preferred the quieter Writer's Bar, where one can, while sipping, channel literary luminaries and former guests Somerset Maugham, Rudyard Kipling and Ernest Hemingway. (Charlie Chaplin, Maurice Chevalier and Ava Gardner were among other notable guests.)

Heading north, we walked through Bugis Junction Mall

for a welcome dose of air conditioning and window shopping, continuing up Roche Road toward Little India, stopping along the way at open-air Albert Mall on Waterloo Street for quirky demonstrations of various kitchen products.

Little India is an authentic, colorful enclave with family-run shops of silks, gold, ceremonial treasures and henna parlors along Serangoon Road. There are also fresh flower garlands, spice markets, fortunetellers and, happily for me, cellphone repairmen everywhere a tiny stool could be squeezed — one deftly and swiftly repaired my cracked smartphone screen for next



JULIE KESSLER / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

## Beautiful fabric stores selling silks and saris line Serangoon Road in Singapore's Little India.

to nothing.

Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple, Singapore's oldest Hindu shrine, is dedicated to Hindu goddess Kali, the destroyer of evil. The roof's colorful figures were fashioned by South Indian tradesmen in Tamil style during extensive renovations and reconstruction. Heading inside after removing our shoes, we faced impressive and vibrant statues of Kali, Muruga — the god of war, and Hinduism's most

revered deity — and the remover of obstacles, elephant-headed Ganesha.

Then we meandered down to Clarke Quay, a lovely area along the river of restaurants, bars and entertainment options, such as — if you dare — the hair-raising G-Max Reverse Bungee and GX-5 Extreme Swing. I instead swung for excellent Vietnamese fare of prawns and rice paper salad, fresh spring rolls, fried tofu and pork chops at Little Saigon



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with views of the river, passing boats and sparkling lights.

Naturally, we had to make a return visit to the Fullerton's breakfast buffet the next morning to make heroic efforts to taste all of the things we missed before. My personal favorites were the miso-glazed salmon from the Japan table, the tandoori chicken and naan from the India table, the har gao from the Singapore table and, of course, the eggs Benedict from the Western table.

### Culture stirs appetite

Stepping outside to walk to Singapore's National Museum, the skies opened up so fast and so furious that those handy travel umbrellas purchased in Chinatown would've been useless, so we hopped into a cab for the quick ride. This museum is a great, interactive space with an excellent historical perspective of Singapore from its colonial background and the role of Sir Stamford Raf-

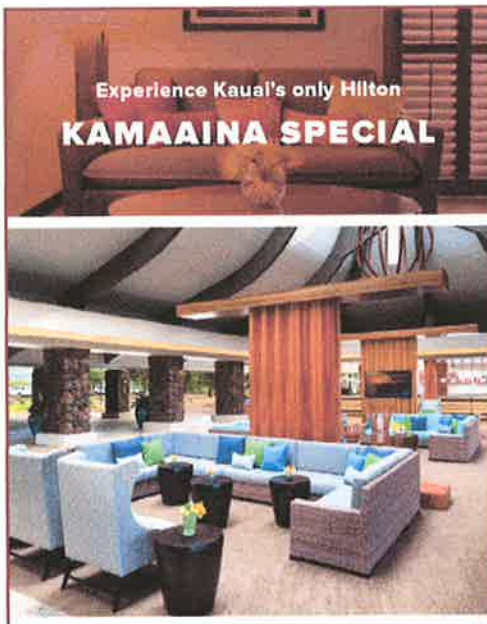
les in 1819, to the Japanese arrival in February 1942. World War II's impact, and onward to Singapore's complete independence in 1965 under Lee Kwan Yew, who ruled for 31 years and died March 23, 2015.

In celebration of 50 years of independence, we also were able to see a special "Salute to Pioneering Women of Singapore" exhibition at the museum. With all of that impressive talent in one city-state, Singapore's success is hardly surprising. Unfortunately, we were still so sated from "breakfast" that we could not have lunch in the museum's elegantly appointed Flutes dining room — presenting yet another reason to return.

The three-day piece de resistance ended with a visit to the Spa Artisan, where I tried their signature massage that fused Eastern meridian and Western massage techniques using essential oils selected from their vast menu. After 90 minutes and a cup of lotus tea, my name was no longer familiar to me. But during happy hour George generously offered to tattoo my name on my arm with a Sharpie pen.

Though sad to leave, we returned to Changi Airport for our next flight, knowing with absolute certainty that returning was inevitable. Singapore is a delicious reminder of George Bernard Shaw's wise words: "There is no love sincerer than the love of food."

*Julie L. Kessler is a travel writer, attorney and legal columnist based in Los Angeles and author of the award-winning book "Fifty-Fifty: The Clarity of Hindsight."*



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