



# U.S. FORCES INDOPACIFIC **CULTURE GUIDE**

**Singapore**



# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 introduces “Culture General,” the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on Southeast Asia in particular.

Part 2 presents “Culture Specific” information on Singapore, focusing on unique cultural features of Singaporean society.



This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location.

For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at [AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil](mailto:AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil) or visit the AFCLC website at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/>.

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# PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

## What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story

of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.



## Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

### **Cultural Domains**

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains” – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see Worldview) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.



### **Social Behaviors Across Cultures**

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of



unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are

foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

### Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are

## 12 Domains of Culture



“people like me” or “people not like me.” Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the “like me” category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

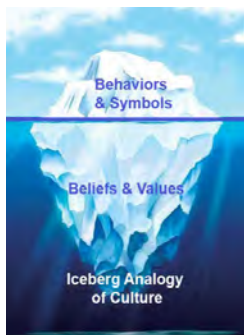
### **Cultural Belief System**

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community’s belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

### **Core Beliefs**

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of



their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout Southeast Asia, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

## CULTURAL DOMAINS

### 1. History and Myth

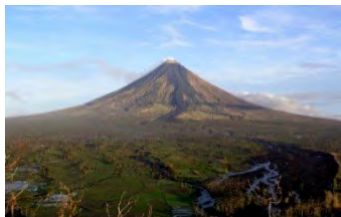
History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.



Southeast Asia includes 5 countries on the mainland (Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam) and 5 maritime



countries in the North Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea (Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Brunei). As early as 150 BC, the scattered communities on the mainland traded with and paid tribute to the dominating kingdoms of China and India. China maintained a presence in Vietnam for over 1000 years, while's India's influence was felt mainly as its inhabitants spread Hinduism, Buddhism, and later Islam across the region. Southeast Asia's most famous ancient empire, the Khmer, ruled for 4 centuries beginning around 800 AD from its



center at Angkor in Cambodia. Later, Thai kings expanded across the mainland, while a Hindu kingdom from India united the Indonesian archipelago.

China began to halt its expeditions to the region

in mid-15th century, just as European nations began sending theirs. The Portuguese were the first to conquer a Southeast Asian settlement in 1511, although their influence in the region was short-lived. Observing their success, the Dutch and English moved into the area as well. The Europeans sought to acquire trade routes and territories, and from the 17th through the 19th centuries the Dutch worked to consolidate their power in today's Indonesia, the Spanish their control of the Philippines, the English their hold over Burma and Malaysia, and the French their control over Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. By the beginning of the 20th century, virtually all of Southeast Asia was controlled by colonial powers; only Thailand remained independent.

During World War II, Japan invaded and occupied portions of Malaysia, Burma, Thailand, and the Philippines. After the war, independence movements regained traction, and following years of struggle against the occupying Americans, the Philippines became the first country in Southeast Asia to gain its independence in 1946. Other countries endured years of instability and conflict on their way to independence. In Vietnam, communist rebels battled and defeated the French but then engaged the US in a controversial war. A civil war in Cambodia ended in the rise to power of the Khmer Rouge, during whose



reign in the late 1970s almost 2 million people died. A few years after the Dutch ceded power in Indonesia, a dictator took control in a coup and ruled for 32 years before resigning in 1998. Similarly, a military junta wielding absolute power has ruled Burma since 1962. Since the 1990s, Southeast Asia has largely enjoyed renewed stability. Both Thailand and Malaysia now have an affluent, educated middle class; Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam are well on the road to recovery from decades of conflict; and even Burma has recently held elections and initiated reform to a civilian democracy.

## 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

Differences in the physical environment affected the social and political structures that historically developed in Southeast Asia. Where people were nomadic or semi-nomadic, systems of government were less permanent and bureaucratic. In areas where populations were more settled, a reliable tax base allowed the development of more elaborate and permanent governing structures. These early states, though, often found it difficult to extend their authority into the remote highlands, where small tribal groups resided, and the islands, where some groups lived permanently in water communities of small boats.

Significant changes occurred in Southeast Asia around 2000 years ago as peoples from China and India began to move into the region (see *History and Myth*). New leaders formed new

empires and states, and spiritual beliefs and practices changed as religious leaders introduced new religious traditions (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Many colonial-era governments, fearing

the threat that an educated class might hold, largely denied education and civil liberties to most Southeast Asians and



discouraged political activities. Political participation swelled around the time of independence, although many post-independence political structures in the region were dictatorial and repressive. While most countries are healing from their 20th century conflicts, many governments continue to reflect authoritarian elements. Elites across the region continue to seek to control access to the political system. They are typically from the country's dominant class, which is often comprised of members of a particular ethnic group.

Some countries, such as Vietnam and Cambodia, are somewhat ethnically homogenous, while others, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, are much more diverse. Many countries also have minority communities of ethnic Chinese and Indians. So-called hill tribes, minority groups with distinct ethnic and linguistic identities, are found in Burma, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), formed in 1967, is a regional intergovernmental organization whose goal is to promote economic and political cooperation among its members, including the creation of a free trade community. ASEAN priorities include fostering economic and diplomatic relations with India and China, which have been strained due to longtime territorial disputes in the region. The European Union has a strong relationship with the organization and has taken steps to deepen trade and business links. The US also has close political, security, and economic relations with most of the member states.

The relationship between Japan and the countries of Southeast Asia has improved

significantly since World War II, and Japan is a crucial economic and aid partner today.



### 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

The earliest populations of Southeast Asia were animists, which means they believed that many different spirits inhabited elements in the natural environment, such as trees and rocks, or were represented in natural phenomena, such as thunder and lightning, or represented deceased ancestors. In many areas today, these traditional beliefs are still very important, and many Southeast Asians incorporate them in their practice of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity.

Indian traders and priests first brought Hinduism to Southeast Asia in the 1st century AD, where it eventually became the dominant religion in several kingdoms. In the 14th century the influence of Hinduism began to wane as people turned to Islam. Today, although there remain only small communities of Hindus in Indonesia, the Hindu principles of absolutism and hierarchy remain significant in politics across the region.

Indian merchants also brought Buddhism to Southeast Asia beginning in the 1st century AD where it became well established in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Later, Chinese immigrants introduced Buddhism to Vietnam and Singapore. Many Southeast Asian mainlanders



are Buddhist today, although their beliefs and practices may also include some animist and Hindu traditions.

Chinese people spread the teachings of Confucius primarily in what is today Vietnam and Singapore. These teachings embody a

complex belief system emphasizing stability, consensus, hierarchy, and authority that still influences ideas of social harmony across the region.

Islam reached Southeast Asia beginning in the 10th century through Muslim traders from the Middle East, China, and India, with a large number of Southeast Asians converting to Islam beginning in the 14th century to escape the Hindu caste system. The largest population of Muslims in the world, approximately 240 million, lives in Indonesia today. Muslim minority communities in Thailand and the Philippines have historically suffered economic and political marginalization.

Christianity was introduced to the region by European colonizers beginning in the 16th century. Today, although parts of Indonesia have Christian communities, the Philippines is the only predominantly Christian country in Southeast Asia.

#### 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).



Family life is very important to Southeast Asians and relationships among family members are highly valued. As in the US, kinship is generally traced through both parents. Children are

generally very respectful of their parents, and parents are devoted to their children, making economic or other sacrifices as a matter of course to ensure their well-being.

Traditionally, close proximity of kin was a valuable resource in Southeast Asia's agriculturally-based villages. Families were large and close-knit as individual members supported each other economically and socially and the rhythms of family and village life mirrored those of the agricultural cycle.

Family life in Southeast Asia has changed in recent decades as societies have become more economically and socially diverse due to industrialization and urbanization. Today, a much wider variety of occupations is open to both men and women, and the middle class is growing in cities across the region. Women have

fewer children today than they did 3 decades ago, and many households in the cities no longer contain 3 or 4 generations of extended family but are mostly nuclear families.

Many Southeast Asian countries that have large rural hinterlands, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, also have large metropolises, such as Jakarta, Manila, and Bangkok. In these sorts of countries, there is a sharp rural-urban divide in economic and educational opportunities that results in stark differences in rural and urban family life. In rural villages, extended families may remain intact whose activities revolve around agricultural production, while in urban centers the household is usually much smaller and family structures are much more diverse.

Although arranged marriages are much less common today, most Southeast Asians depend on their family's input when choosing a marriage partner. The ages of both the bride and groom have increased as young people postpone marriage to pursue economic and educational opportunities, and divorce rates have risen in recent decades. Of note, in Indonesia and Malaysia Muslim men are allowed to practice polygyny, or have more than one wife, if they can afford to support them all. For these Southeast Asians, matrimony and divorce are under the jurisdiction of Islamic law.

## 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

Southeast Asia's dominant philosophies and religions (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity) privilege the male's role as provider and stress female subordination. Despite most countries' commitment to gender equality, women across Southeast Asia may find participation in the business and political spheres difficult, and in some countries, there is still a marked preference for sons over daughters.



Despite these challenges, there is widespread acceptance of women in the workplace, though women usually receive less pay than men. Industrialization has provided new opportunities for women, and many Southeast Asian women continue to work beyond marriage and children. Hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asian women even relocate to other countries to work as nurses and domestic workers.

Within the agricultural sector, women produce about 50% of food in the region and represent a significant share of the agricultural labor force. They are particularly involved in harvesting rice, tea production, and working on rubber and fruit plantations. Women generally have access to education and training, and in Thailand and the Philippines there are actually more post-secondary female graduates than males.

Opinion on sexual orientation and gender identity is most liberal in the Philippines, where homosexuality is legal and there have been attempts to pass anti-discrimination legislation to protect sexual minorities. But in many parts of Southeast Asia homosexuals suffer discrimination and stigmatization. Malaysia criminalizes homosexuality and cross-dressing, and in Indonesia transgender individuals are often the victims of violence and exploitation.

## 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction,

both verbally and non-verbally.



Southeast Asia is linguistically very diverse; of the approximately 6000 languages spoken in the world today, about 1000 of them are found in Southeast Asia.

Many of the ancient indigenous languages that were present in the region have become extinct as a result of war, cultural and economic domination, and small population size.

The languages of mainland Southeast Asia belong to 3 groups: Austro-Asiatic (such as Cambodian and Vietnamese), Tai (such as Thai and Lao), and Tibeto-Burmese (including highland languages and Burmese). Languages that belong to these 3 groups are also found in India and China. Conversely, most of the languages spoken on the islands of Southeast Asia belong to the Austronesian family, a group of languages originating from southern China and Taiwan.

The colonial powers that controlled Southeast Asia until the 20th century primarily promoted and used their own languages including French, Dutch, English, and Spanish. Since independence, several states have named one local linguistic variety as the “standard,” such as Bahasa Indonesian and Bangkok Thai, and promoted its use over both European and other local languages. Recently, after years of aggressively promoting their national languages, many Southeast Asian countries have re-introduced English as a language of instruction in school and allowed ethnic Chinese and Indians to attend school in their own languages.

Ancient Southeast Asians developed their own writing systems based on scripts from India and China. Today, Vietnamese, Malaysian, Indonesian, and Filipino, like English and most western European languages, use the Latin alphabet, while Burmese, Laotian, Thai, and Cambodian use writing systems derived from ancient Indian scripts.



Southeast Asians are rarely confrontational or highly demonstrative and emotional in their communication. They value respect as a key component in maintaining social harmony, and conveying respect is a significant aspect of both verbal and non-verbal communication. For example, proper greetings, such as pressing the palms together and slightly bowing as is common in Thailand, are extremely important across Southeast Asia.



## 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Throughout their history, the cultures of Southeast Asia have willingly borrowed and adapted ideas, practices, and institutions from beyond the region. This willingness is evident in the history of education. Prior to colonization, both Hindu and Muslim traders and migrants from India and beyond brought their own traditions of education to the region, and local Southeast Asian communities adopted these curricula and educational methods to their needs.

Later, during the colonial period, the European powers were largely uninterested in providing education to Southeast Asians because they viewed them principally as agricultural laborers. If



the colonial powers did provide educational opportunities, they were largely confined to members of privileged groups.

Still later, as populations across the region began to resist colonization, the lack of educational opportunities became a topic around which to rally. In many countries, local activists adopted western educational methods but also drew on local traditions to devise new educational opportunities through which they articulated their arguments for independence.

Today, education in Southeast Asia is viewed as both a tool for developing the region and as a human right. Consequently, in most countries' education is open to every citizen regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic background. Rapidly

growing populations challenge most national governments in their goals of providing 12 years of basic education to all, often forcing a sacrifice in the quality of services. Students in both urban and rural areas often suffer from a lack of adequate classrooms, teachers, and good text books, although primary school enrollment averages an excellent 96% in the region.

## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, in most Southeast Asian cultures establishing and maintaining relationships within the group can take precedence over accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner.

Southeast Asians' emphasis on the well-being of the group and maintaining social harmony often means people will deliberately avoid



embarrassment of themselves and others, a strategy often referred to as “saving face.” Many Southeast Asians try to manage their time efficiently while still showing respect to their co-workers and maintaining “face.”

Time is maximized by multi-tasking, and engagements usually start when scheduled. Networking is very important in Southeast Asia, and new contacts are often best made through a high status third party who knows both parties well. Only after the establishment of a good rapport can business negotiations proceed.

Public and private spaces often overlap in a way that is unfamiliar to Americans. Shop owners may also live at their place of business, so entering into a public space can also mean entry into an individual's private space. Consequently, customers and clients should always show proper respect.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of Southeast Asia's forms of creative expression, such as art, architecture, dance, music, and theater, reflect the diversity of cultures and ethnicities of the region as well as the influence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Ancient and



elaborate Hindu temples and highly symbolic statues of Buddha are found in many countries. Similarly, across Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, Islamic art and architecture

intermingle with examples of Hindu and local animist traditions.

Traditional classical dance and theater are enjoying a revival after some forms came close to extinction during the wars and conflicts of the 20th century. These traditions trace back to the ancient kingdoms of the region and often include dancers dressed in elaborate masks and costumes. Ancient forms of shadow-puppet theater, in which paper puppets are manipulated against a lighted backdrop, are also popular in several countries.

Combat sports of Asian and Western origins are popular in Southeast Asia today. With the end of the colonial-era ban on martial arts, indigenous forms such as *Pentjak Silat* and *Bersilat* combined with other Asian forms to make up *Muay Thai*, *Pencak Silat* and *Kali*, the main components of today's Mixed Martial Art fighting.

The Southeast Asian Games are an important regional sporting event. These biennial games bring together over 4,000 athletes for 11 days of competition in the Olympic sports and promote regional cooperation and understanding.

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease

and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

As expected from Southeast Asia's location on the water, more fish is consumed than any other form of animal protein. Rice, a grain that has been cultivated in the region for thousands of years, is the primary food staple. Everyday meals are typically simple, consisting of chopped pieces of meat and vegetables that are fried or steamed and served with rice, often accompanied by spicy chili condiments. Influences from India and China are obvious in popular dishes such as spicy curries and rice noodle soups. Members of Muslim communities in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines typically do not eat pork or drink alcohol.

Malaria, HIV/AIDS, and the lack of clean drinking water are the main health concerns in Southeast Asia. With an estimated 10% of worldwide new cases coming from the region in 2022, malaria is a major problem. The HIV/AIDS epidemic was delayed in reaching Southeast Asia but turned into a major cause of death throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Since then, due to successful HIV prevention programs including those aimed at



sex workers and their clients, transmission rates have steadily declined, and recent HIV/AIDS incidence rates have been similar to those of the US. Access to clean water has increased in most regions but in Burma, Cambodia, and Laos 11-15% of the population still lacks access to improved drinking water sources. All countries are faced with the rise of non-communicable diseases among their aging populations, and most face the threat of emerging infectious diseases, such as the avian flu.

The countries of Southeast Asia confront many challenges in providing health care for their growing populations. Rapid but unequal socioeconomic development has resulted in significant disparities in health and access to healthcare. Despite these

challenges, most countries have experienced a continual increase in life expectancy since the 1950s.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Most Southeast Asian communities practiced wet-rice and slash-and-burn agriculture for centuries before the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century. In addition, Southeast Asia's geographical location between China and India as well as its position on navigable waterways which connect the West and Middle East with Asia and Australia made the area an important center of trade well before European presence.

With European expansion into the area came the introduction of plantations and the mechanization of agriculture as well as the entry of the region into the global marketplace. Worldwide demand for rice increased dramatically in the 19th century, further changing the agricultural landscape of the region. Today, all 3 agriculture types – wet-rice, slash-and-burn, and plantation – are still practiced in the region and all have caused serious ecological damage such as massive deforestation and an increase in the production of greenhouse gases.



Beginning in the 20th century the region experienced a dramatic industrialization process with growth rates exceeding even those of developed nations. Explosive growth in exports such as textiles, electronics, auto parts, and petroleum lead to double-digit economic growth, greatly increasing local GDPs. Though in 2022 roughly 10% of the population currently lives below the poverty line of \$2.15 per day, regional economies have grown and now supply both skilled and semi-skilled workers to other countries.

The 2008 global financial crisis caused damage to the economies of Southeast Asia. While the financial sector did not engage in high-risk lending practices, there was a severe drop in exports due to a global reduction in spending from which the countries are still recovering.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. After the colonial period, the countries of Southeast Asia have expanded at different rates and currently experience varied levels of economic development. Their places in the global market range from Singapore, which has the second-highest GDP per capita worldwide, to Burma and Cambodia which are ranked among the poorest countries in the world.



Prior to colonial rule, the region's inhabitants were expert farmers, having adopted domesticated rice from India and China and developed complex rice-farming techniques, or mariners who traded across the region. European colonists brought additional skills in metalworking, agriculture, sailing, and navigation. The introduction of commercial agriculture, mining, and an export-based economy during the colonial period placed Southeast Asia on its current technological path.

Southeast Asian nations are generally open to trade and investment, having transformed from inward-looking economies dominated by agriculture to outward-looking, market-oriented economies in just a few years. As China's "backyard," Southeast Asia is often seen as the site of economic competition between China and the US and between India and Japan. Despite lingering mistrust of China because of several unresolved maritime territorial disputes, some Southeast Asian nations welcome China's investment in infrastructure, energy, agriculture, and mining. About 20% of Southeast Asia's total trade is conducted with China. By comparison, about 7% of Southeast Asia's trade is conducted with the US.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Southeast Asian society at large, we will focus on specific features of Singaporean society.

## PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

### 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

#### Overview

A small city-state located off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia, Singapore gained international prominence after the arrival of European merchants in the early 19th century. Under British rule, the city and its port went from a regional to a prominent global center for trade, attracting immigrants from around the region, particularly from present-day China, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia. In 1959, after a long transition from colonial rule, Singapore came under control of the powerful People's Action Party. Lee Kuan Yew, the country's founder and longtime leader, helped modernize Singapore and turned it into a highly developed global financial hub and regional power.

#### Early History

Archeological and written sources offer minimal and often contradictory information regarding Singapore's early history. Some of the earliest records reveal that in the 3rd century AD, Chinese traders noted the existence of an island named ***Pu Luo Chung***, a variation of the Malay term (see *Language and Communication*) ***Pulau Ujong*** ("island at the end," referring to Singapore's location at the tip of the Malay Peninsula and the current name for Singapore's main island). Aside from this record, surviving written sources from the time make little or no reference to the island for many centuries.

Scholars believe the island and its inhabitants were likely vassals (secondary to a dominant state) of various South and





Southeast Asian empires during subsequent centuries. Among these dominant powers was likely the Srivijaya Empire, based in present-day Indonesia and prominent from the 7th-14th centuries. Likewise, the Chola Empire, a powerful dynasty based in present-day India, which ruled from around 850-1279, likely had influence over the island. After the fall of the Chola dynasty, a 1365 epic poem, the **Nagarakretagama** (or **Nāgarakṛtāgama**), mentions the existence of a settlement in

present-day Singapore named Temasek (or Temasik). The poem notes that the island was a subordinate of the Majapahit, a Hindu-Javanese empire based in present-day Indonesia.



In the 14th century, notes related to Singapore's history began to appear in

multiple written sources. However, details about specific events remain unclear due to discrepancies among the various records. Malay epics state that Prince Sang Nila Utama, also known as Sri Tri Buana, from the island of Sumatra (in present-day Indonesia), founded a settlement on Temasek after seeing a creature that looked like a lion while he was hunting. Notably, this creature is the origin of the Merlion. Accordingly, he named the village **Singapura** (Lion City). Other sources state that Prince Parameswara (or Paramesvara) of the Srivijaya Empire traveled to Temasek in search of more territory, killed the local leader, and renamed the existing community **Singapura**.

Multiple accounts agree that the island became a notable regional port soon after its founding by the Indonesians. Benefiting from proximity to India and China, and its convenient location on trade routes, the Kingdom of **Singapura**, as it was known in later Malay sources, experienced a brief trade boom.

### Decline in Influence

Multiple sources suggest that attacks from the Majapahit or Ayutthaya Empire (based in present-day Thailand) expelled a Sumatran Prince, Iskandar Shah, from **Singapura** in the late 14th

century. However, historians disagree about the identity of *Singapura's* early leaders. Some claim that Sang Nila Utama, Parameswara, and Iskandar Shah all refer to the same figure, who used various titles and changed his name after converting to Islam (see *Religion and Spirituality*), ruling briefly in *Singapura* before being ejected. Others claim that Sang Nila Utama and Parameswara are the same prince, who founded a dynasty that ruled *Singapura* for several generations. According to the latter theory, Iskandar Shah was a descendant of Sang Nila Utama/Parameswara and the final ruler of this dynasty.

Regardless of which theory is accurate, historians agree that after the Majapahit or Ayutthaya expelled Iskandar Shah from *Singapura*, the settlement declined in population and influence. Much of the trade that previously benefited the island went to other ports, particularly in the Malacca Sultanate, a new empire that Iskandar Shah established on the Malay Peninsula to the northwest of *Singapura*. In the early 16th century, Portuguese traders noted that much of the island was in ruins, with a small trading post left as the only remains of the previous settlement.

In 1511, Portuguese attacks on the Malacca Sultanate pushed it southeast to Johor, closer to *Singapura*, which proved beneficial for the small community on the island. This proximity to the Johor Sultanate's power center and resultant modest economic growth helped provide the trading post renewed wealth and importance. Nevertheless, a Portuguese attack on the port in 1613 relegated it to near abandonment for the next 2 centuries.

### **Arrival of the British**

In the early 19th century, competition between European powers for influence in Asia led to increased attention to the region. British commercial interests, represented by the British East India Company, sought a port that would allow them to compete with the Dutch, who controlled lucrative colonies in present-day Indonesia. In 1819, a Company



official, Sir Stamford Raffles, identified *Singapura*, which the British called Singapore, as a potential commercial base for Britain due to its deep-water port (see *Technology and Material*) and strategic location between China and India.

Britain purchased the island from the Johor Sultanate and installed its **temenggong** (senior judge) as a figurehead in the city. While originally a small settlement with some local traders, the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 that recognized British interests on the Malay Peninsula brought more resources to the island. Colonial officials oversaw Singapore from British India as part of a larger colony named the Straits Settlements, which comprised the island and parts of the Malay Peninsula. Raffles also implemented a city plan to prioritize orderly growth and urban planning for the new colony, helping attract more commercial investment.



### Colonial Settlement

The colony soon became a diverse commercial hub. Malay traders arrived from the Johor Sultanate, and colonial officials sent Indian laborers to build much of

the region's infrastructure. Waves of Chinese traders and workers also arrived in the 1820s, largely from the Fujian and Guangdong provinces in southeastern China. Likewise, the **Peranakan** ("local born" in Malay, often called Straits Chinese, see *Political and Social Relations*) community began to arrive in Singapore during this period. This group descended from Chinese traders who had settled in the Malay Peninsula over the previous centuries. The *Peranakans* were typically wealthy, well-educated, and soon occupied a privileged position in the newly established colonial city.

Raffles' planning and the arrival of settlers set the stage for rapid economic growth in Singapore. The advantageous location made the city's port a regional trading hub, and the growing rubber and tin trades (see *Economics and Resources*) brought in significant foreign capital. While the Malay Peninsula periodically experienced tensions between British officials and

Malay leaders, Singapore remained a stable and reliable British possession. Nevertheless, high crime rates, disease, frequent animal infestations, and a rampant opium trade marked the first decades of Singapore's colonial founding, as officials struggled to govern and accommodate the rapidly expanding city.

**Regional Rivalries:** After experiencing swift economic and population growth in the first decades after its founding, colonial Singapore encountered competition from rival ports in East and Southeast Asia. In 1842, the British began to invest significantly in their outpost of Hong Kong (in present-day China), drawing resources and attention away from Singapore. Similarly, the 1859 capture of Saigon (present-day Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) by French troops attracted much of the trade that once centered around the Malay Peninsula. Around the same time, the Dutch built more ports and developed trade routes throughout their neighboring colony of the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia), posing a direct threat to Singapore's newfound role as a trade and economic hub.



**Economic Growth:** The 1869 opening of the Suez Canal, which connected the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea (via the Red Sea), ushered in another trade boom. As Asian goods no longer needed to round the southern tip of Africa to reach Europe by sea, demand for goods from the region increased, making up for the shortfall that the colony had experienced during the prior 2 decades. Likewise, in 1867, the Straits Settlements became a Crown Colony (governed directly by the British government in London), marking the start of more proactive European involvement in governing Singapore. While many British officials had been content to delegate daily governance of the local population to business or society leaders within each ethnic community (see *Political and Social Relations*), direct British rule became increasingly common. This change coincided with the decreased power of the *temenggong*, whose family had lost influence in the Johor Sultanate, leaving the British as the primary authority figures in Singapore.

With Singapore's economic position once again secured and governance system updated, the British began to invest more in the colony's infrastructure. Colonial officials built larger ports and depots to accommodate increased demand for trade, along with military installations to defend the strategically placed colony. The latter took on increased importance after World War I (1914-18). While the conflict was primarily in Europe and hardly involved Singapore, it underscored the need for British forces to maintain a regional foothold in case of future war. During this period, the government built many schools, hospitals, and roads.

### The Pacific War

In 1937, Japan invaded China, igniting the Second Sino-Japanese War that eventually became part of the greater conflict of World War II (WWII). In late 1940, Japan entered WWII on the side of the Axis Powers (Nazi Germany and Italy), pitting it against the Allies (Britain, France, the US, and the Soviet Union, among others). About a year later, on December 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise air attack on US naval forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, then Singapore on December 8, as well as other

locations. This event triggered the Pacific War, a term that refers to WWII events in the Pacific and East Asia.



**Japanese Occupation:** Seizing on its naval supremacy, Japan began invading British colonies in the region. The Japanese landed on the Malay Peninsula in late 1941 and had surrounded Singapore by January 1942. Despite the investments made to strengthen their defenses of the island, the British surrendered Singapore to invading Japanese

forces on February 15, 1942, only a week after the latter crossed the Johor Strait (the body of water separating Singapore and the Malay Peninsula).

Japanese troops enacted harsh rule in Singapore, which they renamed Syonan. Many Chinese residents were surveilled by the *kempeitai* (or *kenpeitai*, the Japanese secret police), which conducted a *dai kensho* (great inspection, also termed *sook*

**ching**, among the Chinese community) that required all Chinese men to report to the occupying government for questioning about potential subversion. Many of those found to have anti-Japanese sentiment were imprisoned and later massacred, with scholars estimating the death toll ranging between 6,000-45,000 victims. Likewise, the Japanese captured British soldiers and other Europeans as prisoners of war, subjecting them to squalid conditions, malnourishment, routine torture, and deportation.

### British Return

With Japan's surrender in WWII in September 1945, Singapore reverted to British control. While many residents were relieved to be rid of the Japanese occupiers, Britain's inability to defend its colonies during WWII had caused a loss of goodwill regarding European control of the city.



Consequently, the British government began to disengage from many of its colonies, as it was unable to maintain its vast overseas holdings. Meanwhile, nationalism had surged during WWII and its immediate aftermath, with many in Singapore and British Malaya (the newly established colony in the Malay Peninsula) demanding unified local rule. Nevertheless, British officials refused to permit unified Malay rule, largely due to the ethnic differences between the two colonies. Singapore was predominately Chinese with Indian and Malay minorities. Instead, a British-appointed governor aided by a partially elected legislature ruled Singapore immediately after the war.

### People's Action Party and Self-Rule

In the 1950s, a group of Singaporeans led by Lee Kuan Yew and other wealthy *Peranakans* formed the People's Action Party (PAP). The political group advocated regional self-rule and had support from trade unions and socialist organizations, which had become increasingly popular among the many of Singapore's poor Chinese residents. Despite depending on working-class and left-wing support to win several seats in the 1955 legislative

elections, Lee envisioned a more moderate party than many other PAP leaders. After the British-appointed governor arrested several prominent communists in the PAP, Lee positioned the party as a more centrist force and consolidated his control over the political movement.

In 1957, British officials amended the local constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) to allow the legislature self-rule after the 1959 elections. As Lee's prominence in local politics increased, the PAP won a majority of seats in 1959 (as it has in every subsequent election) by campaigning on an anti-colonial and anti-communist platform. Lee initially refused to assume the title of Prime Minister (PM) unless the British released left-wing PAP members. He hoped to rule in a coalition government with the leftists and form a broadly popular cabinet, despite their political differences. After the British agreed to his terms, Lee became Singapore's first PM on June 5, 1959.



### Union with Malaysia

For several years, many politicians in Singapore championed a merger with Malaya, which had declared independence from Britain in 1957. Singapore declared Malay the official language to facilitate a potential unification. Lee believed political union with the neighboring country could help solidify control of Singapore,

secure its military protection, and provide access to natural resources, of which the island had few. However, because many Malay politicians feared that pro-communist sentiment in Singapore would threaten Malaya if the PAP collapsed, they sought to coopt the country to neutralize its leftist movements.

In 1962, Singaporeans voted to join the newly established Federation of Malaysia. However, rifts in the new union began to emerge almost immediately after it formed as Malaysia in 1963. Malaysian officials feared that Singapore's Chinese population could outnumber Malay citizens on the mainland,



threatening their privileged legal status. As a result, the Malaysian government asked Lee not to run PAP candidates for office outside of Singapore, allocated fewer seats in the legislature for the city-state, and pushed Lee to imprison left-wing politicians. Likewise, many Malay citizens resented the wealth and privileged position of many *Peranakan* Singaporeans, increasing racial tensions that broke out into deadly riots in 1964.

As these differences mounted, Malaysian officials became increasingly wary of union with the city-state and distrusting of Lee, who refused to follow the terms of the merger that the central Malaysian government demanded. When the situation seemed unsolvable, Malaysia expelled Singapore from the union on August 9, 1965, today considered Singapore's Independence Day (see *Time and Space*).

### Independence

Expulsion from Malaysia dealt a blow to Singapore, so much so that Lee famously cried on television after the separation. Much larger neighbors surrounded the country, and its lack of natural resources worried many in the government. Nevertheless, after an electoral victory in 1968 handed the PAP control of the entire legislature, Lee used his near-total power to modernize the nation. In 1967, Singapore became a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (see *Political and Social Relations*). After British troops withdrew from the region in 1971, Singapore joined a military alliance with several neighboring nations, cementing its role as a regional diplomatic power.



Likewise, the government made large investments in trade and exports, bolstering the local economy. Singapore began a public housing project (see *Family and Kinship*) to replace the city's shanty towns and introduced compulsory savings accounts to help reduce poverty (see *Economics and Resources*). Lee also

helped implement robust governmental institutions meant to combat corruption and ensure adherence to social codes (see *Political and Social Relations*). Over the subsequent decades, Singapore's residents would experience some of the world's highest living standards, largely thanks to strict governmental controls and a booming economy.

### Political Transition

After about 3 decades in power, Lee retired as PM in 1990. While Goh Chok Tong, his deputy, took over as head-of-state (see *Political and Social Relations*), Lee remained immensely influential in government as a senior cabinet minister. However, in the 1991 elections, opposition parties won 4 of 81 seats, highlighting a small yet persistent opposition to PAP rule.

Years of stability and rising living standards were interrupted during the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, which severely impacted Singapore, as the country depended on a sustained flow of trade and finance with its East Asian neighbors (see *Economics and Resources*). However, the economic uncertainty did not last, as the country's manufacturing sector had compensated for the setbacks by the early 2000s.

### Social and Financial Changes

Once the economy recovered, Goh resigned his post as PM in 2004 in favor of his deputy, Lee Hsien Loong, the son of former PM Lee. The new PM somewhat relaxed the government's strict libel laws and media control in the face of mounting calls for greater political and cultural freedom. Nevertheless, his administration continued its aggressive use of anti-defamation

lawsuits to silence critics (see *Technology and Material*), which drew critiques from global human rights groups.



Like Goh, Lee was forced to deal with economic upheaval a few years into his term.

The 2008-09 global financial crisis impacted the country's economy and cost the PAP political support. However,

Singapore's growing financial and tourism sectors (see *Economics and Resources*), which were among Asia's most robust, helped the economy recover rapidly.

Following the financial crisis, Lee faced calls for greater representation in government. In response, the elder Lee and Goh resigned from their advisory cabinet roles in 2011. PM Lee then implemented policies to raise the quality of life for Singapore's poorer residents and make improvements to public services like education (see *Learning and Knowledge*), healthcare (see *Sustenance and Health*) and housing.

In 2015, Lee Kuan Yew died, eliciting a public outpouring of respect for the country's founding father. Almost half a million Singaporeans attended funeral events for the late leader, and pressure on PM Lee for increased reforms subsided temporarily. Nevertheless, a high-profile libel case that the PM brought against a teenage blogger later that year gave renewed attention to Singapore's strict media controls.

### **Uncertainty in the PAP**

Amid a positive electoral showing for the PAP in 2015, the party began preparing for its fourth generation of leaders, with PM Lee announcing his intention to retire in early 2022, before turning 70. Nevertheless, the late-2019 outbreak of COVID-19 (see *Sustenance and Health*) interrupted these plans, and Lee announced his intention to remain in power until Singapore recovered from the public health crisis.



Perceived government inaction in preventing the spread of the pandemic, particularly among migrant workers, led to disappointing results for the ruling party in the 2020 general election. While the PAP retained the same number of representatives in the legislature, due largely to government control of its constituencies (see *Political and Social Relations*), the election had some of the largest showing for opposition groups in several decades.

Likewise, Deputy PM Heng Swee Keat, who many observers believed would become Lee's successor, barely held onto his constituency, shedding doubt on the future of PAP leadership. Unusual for Singapore's ruling elite, the political instability led to

further critiques of the government's strict controls over political participation and freedom of expression.



### Myth

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on

verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Many Singaporean myths reflect the country's historically diverse population and long tradition of trade and exchange with neighboring cultures.

**Singapore Stone:** One popular myth recounts the history of the Singapore Stone. The story tells the tale of a poor fisherman, Badang, who one day realized that a *djinn* (mischievous spirit) was stealing fish from his daily catch. To end the thefts, Badang waited patiently and caught the *djinn* in his net. The *djinn*, desperate to escape, granted Badang one wish in exchange for his freedom. The fisherman accepted the *djinn*'s deal and used his wish to gain superhuman strength.

Soon after, news of Badang's powers reached local rulers, who appointed him as a warrior and alerted neighboring states of his capabilities. The ruler of an Indian kingdom heard of Badang and sent his own strongman to challenge the former fisherman in a duel. While the match was hard-fought, Badang was declared victorious after hurling a large stone at the mouth of the Singapore River. The stone, inscribed with still-undeciphered text, remained for centuries in the spot where it was said to have landed. During British rule, workers defaced the stone before colonial officers salvaged the remaining pieces and moved them to the National Museum, where they remain today.

## 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

### Official Name

Republic of Singapore (Singapore)

**Republik Singapura** (Malay)

新加坡共和国 (Chinese)

சிங்கப்பூர் குடியரசு (Tamil)

### Political Borders

Coastline: 120 mi

### Capital

Singapore

### Demographics

Singapore's population of about 6 million is increasing at an average annual rate of around 0.87%, after a steep decline in 2020-21 primarily due to COVID-19 pandemic-related immigration restrictions (see *Sustenance and Health*). Experts predict the population will age rapidly in the coming years, largely due to falling birth rates (see *Sex and Gender*) and long-life expectancies (see *Sustenance and Health*). Because Singapore is a city-state, 100% of Singaporeans live in urban areas (see *Family and Kinship*), and the population generally concentrates along the southern coast.



### Flag

Adopted in 1959, the Singaporean flag consists of two equal horizontal bands of white (bottom) and red (top),

with a white crescent moon and five stars in the upper left-hand corner (on the hoist side). The red represents equality and universal brotherhood, while the white symbolizes purity and virtue. The waxing moon signifies the young country's growth, and the stars represent Singapore's ideals of democracy, peace, progress, equality, and justice.

## Geography

Located off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia, Singapore is bounded by the Johor Strait to the north and Singapore Strait to the south, between Malaysia and Indonesia.

Singapore consists of a main island called **Pulau Ujong** (“island at the end”) and some 62 islets, the largest of which are Jurong in the Southwest and Tekong in the Northeast. Singapore’s total land area is about 278 sq mi, making it about 3.5 times the size of Washington, DC and slightly smaller than New York City. Despite its small size, Singapore has increased its land mass by some 25% since independence and continues to reclaim land, primarily by filling in swamps and building artificial islands.

Singapore is mostly flat, and nearly two-thirds of its land is less than 50 ft above sea level, making it one of the world’s lowest-lying countries. The highest point is Bukit Timah Hill (545 ft) in the center of mainland Singapore. The Kallang River is the country’s longest (6.2 mi).



## Climate

Located about 85 mi north of the Equator, Singapore has a tropical climate. Temperatures hardly vary, averaging 90° F in the day and 75° F at night, and May and June are hottest. Singapore is humid year-round. While annual rainfall averages about 95 in, the northeast monsoon period from November-March tends to be rainier and windier than the southwest monsoon from May-September.

## Natural Hazards

Singapore is vulnerable to floods, heatwaves, and hailstorms. The country rarely experiences earthquakes, but rather light tremors from earthquakes in neighboring Indonesia. Flash floods are increasingly common, occasionally resulting in traffic jams and fatalities. In 2021, over 6.3 in of rain fell in only a 3-hour period, causing significant flooding, and making it one of the heaviest recorded rainfalls in Bukit Timah.

## Environmental Issues

In part due to its rapid industrial development (see *History and Myth* and *Economics and Resources*), Singapore has industrial, water, and air pollution; limited freshwater resources; deforestation; and waste disposal issues.

Singapore experiences periods of air pollution, primarily derived from industry, vehicles, and forest fires on neighboring islands that pose a risk to public health. Singapore's air quality tends to deteriorate in late summer due to forest fires in Indonesia that cause poor air quality, smoke, and haze. In 2019, when air quality reached its worst level in years, Singapore ranked 52 of 98 countries for air pollution. Today, Singapore monitors air pollution to inform residents of exposure and provide air quality forecasts.



## Government

Singapore is a parliamentary republic that divides into five community development councils (CDCs): Central Singapore, North East, North West, South East,

and South West. The CDCs focus primarily on grassroot social programs and are led by district mayors appointed by the People's Association, a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth led by the Prime Minister (PM). CDCs do not provide political representation. Instead, Singaporeans elect political representatives based on Constituencies that the PM establishes (see "Legislative Branch" below).

The current constitution was adopted in 1965 after Singapore gained independence from Malaysia (see *History and Myth*) and last amended in 2022. It outlines citizens' rights, such as freedom of speech and religion, and also separates political power among three branches of government.

## Executive Branch

The current President, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, took office in September 2023. Elected by simple majority vote for 6-year



terms, the President is head-of-state. The President appoints the PM based on advice from Members of Parliament (MPs), and cabinet members based on advice from the PM, making the role partly ceremonial. The constitution reserves the Presidency for members of different communities (Chinese, Malay, Indian, or other minority groups) (see “Ethnic Groups” below) that were not represented in the past 5 terms. The 2017 presidential election was reserved for candidates from the Malay community.

Eligible candidates must meet strict financial or political requirements. For example, a candidate from the private sector must have experience leading a company with at least \$370 million in capital, and a candidate from the public sector must have held a public service role for at least 3 years. Running as a Muslim Malay, former President Yacob’s election was uncontested, in 2017 as she was also the only candidate to meet these strict requirements.

PM Lawrence Wong was appointed in 2024 and serves as head-of-government and Chairman of the Cabinet, with no term limits. The PM has many responsibilities, such as overseeing policies and suggesting cabinet members, and wields the most political authority of any position.

### Legislative Branch

Singapore’s legislature is the single-chamber Parliament. After the President calls for an election based on the PM’s advice, the PM determines the number of electoral divisions – Single Member Constituencies (SMCs) of candidates from the same political party and Group Representation



Constituencies (GRCs) of independent candidates. Elected MPs belong to either an SMC that sends a single MP to Parliament or a GRC that sends three-six MPs. They are elected on a first-past-the-post basis, meaning the candidates with the most votes win. Of the 31 Constituencies in the 2020 election, 14 were SMCs and 17 GRCs, from which 92 MPs were elected.

The constitution also allows for the inclusion in Parliament of up to 12 non-constituency MPs (NCMPs), who received the most votes among the unelected candidates from opposition groups. Because the constitution mandates that Parliament must have at least 12 opposition MPs, the number of NCMPs is subject to change depending on how many MPs are elected from



opposition parties in GRCs. Elected MPs and NCMPs serve 5-year terms. The constitution also permits up to nine nominated MPs (NMPs), recommended by the Special Select Committee of Parliament and appointed by the President, to serve a term of 2.5 years. Of the non-

elected MPs who took office in 2020, 2 were NCMPs and 9 NMPs, resulting in 103 total MPs in Parliament.

The Parliament controls most legislative powers, such as lawmaking and approving treaties. However, the Presidential Council for Minority Rights must approve bills to protect against discrimination before the President approves the bill. Although the President may veto a bill, Parliament can overrule the veto by two-thirds majority vote.

### Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes the Supreme Court, which consists of the Court of Appeal and High Court, and lower courts like the Arbitration Court, Intellectual Property Court, Admiralty Court, State Courts, International Commercial Court, and Family Justice Courts. Singapore's judicial system also includes the Syariah Court, which is based on **shari'a** (Islamic law) for cases involving Muslim parties in personal matters like marriage and divorce cases (see *Family and Kinship*).

As the highest court, The Supreme Court issues rulings on constitutional cases and hears both civil and criminal cases. The High Court is the lower court, while the Court of Appeal is the upper court and highest appellate court. Appointed by the President based on advice from the PM, the Supreme Court consists of 29 judges (including the Chief Justice, judges of the

Court of Appeal and High Court), 2 Judicial Commissioners, and 3 Senior Supreme Court Bench judges.

### Political Climate

Since the end of British colonization in 1959 (see *History and Myth*), the center-right People's Action Party (PAP) has dominated Singapore's politics. Founded by PM Lee Hsien Loong's father, Lee Kuan Yew (see *History and Myth*), PAP ideology historically focused on promoting industrialization and economic prosperity. Today, the PAP still focuses on generating economic growth, along with social welfare. Singapore has compulsory voting for every registered adult.

As of 2023, the PAP has won every election since Singapore's independence, making it one of the world's longest ruling parties. The PAP maintains control through the electoral system and



government structure that favors the ruling party. In 2011, the PAP lost a GRC for the first time, demonstrating how it has consistently controlled both SMCs and GRCs. At times, the government has reduced the number of GRCs to manage and cap the participation of opposition groups, while increasing the number of SMCs to favor and maintain PAP dominance. In the 2020 election, the PAP won 83 of 93 seats in Parliament, winning 89% of the total votes. Consequently, the structure of the system grants significant power to the PAP, making Singapore's form of government akin to a one-party system.

While most Singaporeans support the PAP, the government also suppresses opposition parties. The PAP maintains an unfair advantage, notably due to government control of most media (see *Technology and Material*) and greater financial resources. The PAP also suppresses opposition parties through the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, which enables censorship of opposition campaigning by restricting free speech and large public rallies. In addition, opposition groups often struggle to form a GRC, which must have up to six

candidates, with one from the Malay, Indian, or another minority community. Further, candidates must pay to run in an election, which disproportionately affects the opposition.

Despite the PAP's political dominance, Singapore's center-left Worker's Party (WP) gained 10 seats in Parliament in the 2020



election. The WP supports higher taxes on the wealthy and lowering the age of eligibility for unwed people seeking to live in government-managed affordable housing (see *Family and Kinship*).

Although the government exerts control over society and politics, Singapore has developed rapidly and maintains a robust economy (see *Economics and Resources*) and foreign relations (see “Foreign Relations” below), with minimal

corruption. In a 2021 corruption perceptions index, Singapore ranked 4 of 180 countries. Corruption is punishable by up to 7 years in jail and/or fines. Founded by the PAP in 1959, Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) spearheads anti-corruption laws and enforcement. While the CPIB reports directly to the PM, it claims to operate independently from the government and often is perceived as an effective anti-corruption agency.

## Defense

The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) are a unified military force consisting of army, navy, air, and paramilitary forces, with a joint strength of 51,000 active-duty troops and 252,500 reserve personnel. Military operations focus on domestic stability and defense. Since 1967, Singapore has had 2-year compulsory conscription for 18-year-old men.



**Army:** As the SAF's largest branch, the Army consists of ,000 active-duty troops, organized into 5 Command divisions with a special forces battalion, 29 maneuver battalions (including reconnaissance, armored, mechanized, light, and others), 14 combat support battalions, and 8 combat service support battalions.



**Navy:** Composed of 4,000 active-duty personnel, the Navy includes 2 special forces groups and a combat support group.

**Air Force:** Composed of 6,000 active-duty troops, the Air Force is divided into 5 commands and includes 4 fighter/ground attack squadrons; 1 maritime patrol squadrons; 1 airborne early warning and control squadrons; 1 tanker squadrons; 1 tanker/transport squadrons; 5 training squadrons and units; 1 attack helicopter squadron; 1 anti-submarine warfare helicopter squadron; 3 transport helicopter squadrons; 3 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicle squadrons; 9 air defense squadrons and battalions; and 4 other maneuver squadrons.

**Paramilitary:** Singapore's Paramilitary consists of the National Cadet Corps, comprising high school and college students, and the Peoples' Defense Force, composed mainly of reservists. Additionally, 6,100 Civil Defense Force troops in 12 battalions align



under the Ministry of Home Affairs and provide emergency services in homeland defense. Comprising 1,800 personnel, the Gurkha Contingent, a paramilitary unit for riot control, operates under the Singapore Police Force.

# SINGAPORE

## Air Force



Lieutenant  
General



Major  
General



Brigadier  
General



Colonel



Senior  
Lieutenant  
Colonel



Lieutenant  
Colonel



Major



Captain



Lieutenant



Second  
Lieutenant



Senior  
Warrant  
Officer



Master  
Warrant  
Officer



First  
Warrant  
Officer



Second  
Warrant  
Officer



Third  
Warrant  
Officer



Master  
Sergeant



Staff  
Sergeant



First  
Sergeant



Second  
Sergeant



Third  
Sergeant



Corporal  
First  
Class



Corporal



Lance  
Corporal



Private  
First  
Class

## Security Issues

**Social Unrest and Human Rights:** Public demonstrations and protests are rare. Laws limit public assembly and require a police permit for public gatherings. In 2017, hundreds of protestors held a silent protest (to avoid needing a police permit) against the uncontested presidential election and unfair political process that includes strict eligibility rules.

Although the constitution guarantees the freedoms of expression and movement, labor laws do not protect migrant workers, who often live in unsafe conditions, essentially as second-class citizens (see *Family and Kinship* and *Sustenance and Health*). Restricting freedom of expression is also common (see *Technology and Material*). In 2021, police arrested three demonstrators outside the Ministry of Education for protesting the treatment of transgender students (see *Sex and Gender*). In 2022, a rare protest erupted against capital punishment. About 400 people demonstrated against the death penalty of a drug trafficker carrying 0.5 oz of heroin. Some representatives from the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU) have

criticized

Singapore's severe penalties for drug crimes.

Many international human rights groups condemn Singapore's capital and corporal punishment.



Singapore practices hanging for numerous offences including drug trafficking, unlawful discharge of firearms, and murder. In 2023, the country executed 6 people, higher than neighboring Indonesia and Malaysia (0), but lower than the US (24). Other offences, such as eating on public transportation and not flushing a public toilet after use, are subject to fines. Vandalism may result in a fine and caning – a form of corporal punishment that evokes pain and humiliation. Men over the age of 50, and women of all ages, are spared from caning.

## Foreign Relations

Singapore is a member of international economic and peace organizations like the UN, Commonwealth of Nations (a group of former territories of the British Empire, see *History and Myth*), World Health Organization, Group of 77 (G77, a coalition of developing countries), and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Although not a member of the Group of 20 (G20, comprising the world's largest economies), Singapore often participates in G20 summits. Singapore is also a member of the Five Powers Defense Arrangement, a mutual assistance agreement between Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (UK). Further, Singapore maintains close ties with the US, UK, India, and China.

## Regional Relations:

Despite periods of strained relations with Indonesia and Malaysia, Singapore maintains close economic and political ties with its Southeast Asian neighbors as an active member of



Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an economic and political bloc, whose other members include Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. In 2020, ASEAN members joined Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a free trade agreement whose members contribute 30% of the world's GDP, making it the world's largest trading bloc. ASEAN also has trade agreements with India, China, the EU, and the US. As of 2024, ASEAN members' combined GDP was about \$3.8 trillion, making it one of the world's largest economic blocs.

In 2006, Singapore and 13 other countries, like China, Burma, India, Japan, and Thailand, launched the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) to combat increased piracy in the region. Today, ReCAAP includes 21 countries, Australia and the US among them. Despite collaborative efforts, in 2022, half the



world's piracy and robbery attacks against commercial shipping occurred in Southeast Asia and a third in the Singapore Strait.

**Relations with Indonesia:** Singapore and Indonesia established diplomatic relations in 1967 and continue to cultivate trade ties, notably in APEC and ASEAN. Despite a maritime boundary dispute in the eastern region of the Singapore Strait, Indonesia and Singapore signed treaties in 1973, 2009, and 2014, last ratified in 2017, demarcating their maritime border. In 2013, Indonesia apologized to Singapore for causing hazardous pollution levels that continue to affect Singapore's air quality and haze. Nevertheless, Singapore is one of Indonesia's largest foreign investors. In 2022, Singapore and Indonesia signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on green economic development and energy cooperation, with Singapore investing some \$9.2 billion in Indonesian renewable energy and sustainable development. Singapore and Indonesia also cooperate on fugitive extradition and airspace management.

**Relations with Malaysia:** Since Singapore's independence from Malaysia in 1965 (see *History and Myth*), the two countries have experienced periods of tense relations, mainly over land, water, and airspace disputes. While a 1962 agreement granted Singapore rights to use water from Malaysia until 2061, Singapore's reliance on water from Malaysia's Johor State sparks occasional disputes between officials. In 2008, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled on land claims of

uninhabited islets, granting Singapore sovereignty of Pedra Branca and Malaysia of the Middle Rocks, both in the South China Sea.

Today, Singapore and Malaysia maintain robust economic and



security ties. The two countries are connected by the Johor-Singapore Causeway and Malaysia-Singapore Second Link bridge, also known as Tuas Second Link, making Malaysia the only country with road connections to Singapore. Along with the

Philippines, both countries collaborate and share information on Jemaah Islamiyah – a radical Islamic terrorist organization – to improve regional security and counterterrorism efforts. Further, both countries are members of the Five Power Defense Agreement, APEC, and ASEAN.

**Relations with China:** Singapore and China established diplomatic ties in 1990. While the two countries share close relations, they sometimes become strained over Singapore's ties with the US and Taiwan. For example, in 2016, Chinese authorities seized Singaporean infantry vehicles used in a joint military exercise with Taiwan. Nonetheless, China and Singapore maintain strong economic and trade relations, notably with the China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed in 2009. Since 2013, China has been Singapore's largest trading partner, and Singapore is China's largest foreign investor.

**Relations with the US:** Singapore and the US established diplomatic relations in 1966. Despite a brief period of tense relations, when in 1994, an American teenager was sentenced to caning, jail time, and a fine for vandalism; the two countries have shared close relations. Notable areas of bilateral cooperation are education, infrastructure, security, terrorism, defense, and trade.

The US and Singapore signed an FTA in 2004, making Singapore the first Asian country to establish an FTA with the US. In 2021, Singapore was the US' largest trading partner in Southeast Asia, and the



US is Singapore's largest foreign investor, with total investments worth about \$424 billion in 2023. In 1990, Singapore and the US signed an MOU, renewed in 2019, granting the US access to Singapore's air and naval bases. The countries also collaborate on counterterrorism efforts, military forums on science and technology, disaster relief, and biannual naval operations. Since 1981, the US and Singaporean Armies have participated in the annual Tiger Balm exercise, their oldest bilateral training.

## Ethnic Groups

About 74% of Singaporeans are ethnically Chinese, 14% Malay, 9% Indian, and 3% other in 2021. Official languages include English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil (see *Language and Communication*). Singapore is also home to many Eurasians –peoples of mixed European and Asian ancestry – and large immigrant communities, namely Filipinos, Indians, Japanese, Vietnamese, and others.



Beginning in the 1820s, many unskilled laborers immigrated to Singapore from southern Chinese provinces, such as Fujian and Guangdong (see *History and Myth*). Today, ethnic Chinese represent a majority in

the country. Singapore's Chinese culture has often blended with that of other groups, and many Singaporeans, regardless of ethnicity, celebrate Lunar New Year (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

As the second largest ethnic group, Malays originally arriving from the neighboring Malay Peninsula and Indonesian islands. Most Malays are Muslim (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Indians are the third largest ethnic group. Many arrived in the 1800s, mostly from southern India (see *History and Myth*). Today, Tamils comprise the largest portion of the Indian ethnic group that includes Sikhs, Malayalis, Pakistanis, and Sinhalese.

Eurasians first arrived during British colonization in the early 1800s (see *History and Myth*), mostly from other British colonies. Today, comprising less than 1% of the population, many Eurasians are the result of intermarriage between peoples of European ancestry, namely Dutch, Portuguese, or English, with those of Asian ancestry, such as Chinese, Malay, or Indian.

**Peranakans** ("local born" in Malay, often called Straits Chinese) are another small community, which usually refers to people of mixed Chinese and Malay or Indonesian ancestry. Their origins tend to be a blend of Chinese traders and local Malay women

that dates to the 15th century. Today, *Peranakans* also include **Chitty Melaka** (or *Peranakan* Indian), which refers to a mix of South Indian Hindu merchant men and local women, and **Jawi Peranakans**, a mix of South Indian Muslim men and local women.

## Social Relations

During British rule, society was strictly divided among ethnic-group lines. Although some stereotypes still classify Chinese and Indian Singaporeans as the dominant political



and economic groups, with Malays less focused on economic prosperity, Singaporean society is less divided by ethnicity and religion today. Instead, society is relatively multicultural and divided more by class. Singaporeans often joke about the “Five Cs” (car, condominium, club membership, credit card, and career) that symbolize a person’s status and wealth.

A 2017 study showed that social classes are defined largely by housing and school type (see *Learning and Knowledge*). High-income Singaporeans usually attend elite schools and live in private properties, granting the upper class more resources, social mobility, and access to opportunities than their lower-income counterparts. About 20% of Singaporeans live in private properties, and as of 2023, the wealthiest 1% holds about 34% of the country’s wealth. On the other hand, about 80% of Singaporeans live in subsidized government-built apartments that range in affordability and amenities. Although public housing is typically affordable, new housing often commands long wait times.

In 2022, Singapore’s budget outlined increased taxes to combat high inflation, which disproportionately affects low-income earners. Singapore also imposed tax increases on the highest earners, property owners, and a 220% tax on luxury cars’ market values. Despite these changes, Singapore’s wealthy typically retain most of their wealth in stocks and dividends that remain tax free.

### 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

#### Overview

Singapore is about 31% Buddhist, 19% Christian, 16% Muslim, 8% Taoist, 5% Hindu, 20% non-religious (including atheists and agnostics), and less than 1% Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Jains, Jews, and several other religions.

The constitution protects religious freedom, though it is subject to public-order, public-health, and morality restrictions. While religiously tolerant, the government restricts activity that it considers detrimental to “religious harmony” and bans organizations such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Unification Church.



#### Early Religion

While few surviving sources document early religious practices in Singapore, its location between powerful Hindu, Islamic, and Buddhist empires means that various religious traditions made their way to Singapore over the centuries before the arrival of British merchants in 1819 (see *History and Myth*).

#### Arrival of Buddhism

From the 7-13th centuries, Srivijaya, a Buddhist maritime empire based on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, dominated much of Southeast Asia, including the Malay Peninsula and Singapore (see *History and Myth*). With robust ties to China and India, the Srivijaya Empire adopted Mahayana Buddhism, which emphasizes universal ethics and that all followers can achieve nirvana, a state of peace and unity with the universe. They built Buddha statues across the region and hosted a major Buddhist pilgrimage site that attracted pilgrims from India and China. Scholars believe that Taoism, a religious philosophy that acknowledges a universal singular force behind all things known as the **Tao**, also likely arrived in the region from China during these early waves of Chinese pilgrims and migrants.

As early as the 10th century, Srivijayan Singapore had a small but permanent Chinese population, many of whom had arrived along Buddhist pilgrimage routes. Chinese travelers described a village in present-day Singapore called Danmaxi, also known as Temasek in Malay (see *History and Myth*), where Malays and Chinese lived together and likely exchanged (see *Learning and Knowledge*) religious beliefs. Excavated ceramics and coins that date back to China's Song Dynasty are further evidence of Buddhist Chinese settlement in Singapore.

When it became a British colony in 1824 (see *History and Myth*), Singapore attracted **Peranakan** ("local born" in Malay, often called Straits Chinese) Buddhists from Malaysia. Other Chinese Buddhists from Guangdong, Fujian, and Macau brought their beliefs to Singapore, setting up Chinese associations, schools, and temples (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

From the mid-1900s to the early 2000s, Buddhism spread on the island. In 1940, Mahaweera Maha Nayaka Thero, a high-ranking Buddhist monk, founded Singapore's first Sunday Dhamma School for Buddhist education to meet the demands of the growing population. In 2002, Singapore also hosted the golden Buddha tooth, a physical relic believed to be the actual tooth of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. This short hosting period attracted over 200,000 pilgrims to the country, and in response, Singapore constructed the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple in 2007. Although Singapore's census designates Taoism as a distinct religious category, many Taoists in Singapore also consider themselves Buddhist.



### Arrival of Hinduism

Around the 7th century, subjects of the Srivijaya Empire brought Hinduism to Temasek, though its primary focus on Buddhism did not aid in Hinduism's adoption in the region. As the Srivijaya Empire gradually fell to India's Tamil Chola Dynasty (see *History and Myth*), this new influence

reinforced Hinduism in Singapore. While scholars debate the exact date when the Chola reintroduced Hinduism to the island, the Singapore Stone, which laid in the center of the Singapore River and may have Tamil inscriptions (see *History and Myth*), possibly dates to 11th-century Chola rule.

The Malacca and Johor sultanates' powerful Islamic influence through the early 1800s (see "Arrival of Islam" below) prevented Hinduism from spreading further in Singapore. However, when the British colonized Singapore in the 1820s, they brought Hindu laborers from India (see *History and Myth*), who reestablished Hinduism's foothold on the island. Narayana Pillai, a clerk to Sir Stamford Raffles, British Singapore's founder, opened the country's first Hindu religious institution, the Sri Mariamman Temple, in 1827.

The percentage of Hindus in Singapore declined as the country's independence led to a withdrawal of British military forces and Indian base workers (see *History and Myth*). Many of the primarily male Hindu migrants returned home to their families in their old age, and new immigration restrictions curtailed worker migration from India for years. In absolute terms, however, the Hindu population continued to grow, as new generations were born locally. During the 1960s-70s, Singapore's People's Action Party (see *Political and Social Relations*) adopted policies of national integration to promote Indian ties to Singapore and cut nationalistic ties abroad. The government integrated public housing across Hindu castes (see *Family and Kinship*) and instituted a 2-year compulsory military service requirement for all 18-year-old men. In turn, many Hindu migrants adopted a new national identity as Indian Singaporeans.

Since the 1980s, Singapore has pursued policies encouraging racial harmony, relaxing its strict immigration limits, and inviting a wave of migrants, particularly from India, to the island. Today,



Hinduism is one of Singapore's fastest growing religious groups, increasing from 3.6% to 8% of the population from 1980 to today.

### Arrival of Islam

While historians disagree about some details, after the Srivijaya Empire declined in the 1300s, Iskander Shah, possibly known as Parameswara of **Singapura** (Lion City, the Malay name for Singapore), founded the Sultanate of Malacca in 1400 (see *History and Myth*). As world leaders sent economic envoys to the Sultanate in the early 1400s, Raja Tengah, leader of Malacca from 1424-44, met with Saiyid Abdul Aziz, a Muslim scholar, who came to Malacca to spread Islam. Shortly after, Raja Tengah adopted the name Muhammad Shah. His family converted to Islam and introduced Islamic administration, such as royal protocols, bureaucracy, and commerce, to *Singapura*.

After the Malacca Sultanate fell, the Johor Sultanate absorbed Singapore from 1528-1824 (see *History and Myth*), and Islam flourished. Syed Omar bin Ali Aljunied, an Arab merchant, established Singapore's first mosque, the Omar Kampong Melaka Mosque, in 1820. After the British purchased the island from the Johor Sultanate in 1824, Raffles paid for the construction of the Sultan Mosque to honor Hussein Shah, the Sultan of Johor. Britain later took greater control over Johor and local Islamic practices by granting Johor protectorate status and creating the Mohammedan Advisory Board to counsel colonial leaders on matters related to Islam in the region (see *History and Myth*).



After Singapore gained independence from Malaysia in 1965 (see *History and Myth*), its constitution included special protections for Muslim Malays,

notably a ban on missionary activity seeking to convert Muslim Malays to other religions. Singapore's Parliament also adopted the Administration of the Muslim Law Act (AMLA) in 1966, defining the roles of the Islamic Religious Council, the Syariah Court based on **shari'a** (Islamic law) (see *Political and Social Relations*), and the Registry of Muslim Marriages. The Syariah



Court is still the preeminent institution of Muslim personal laws in the country, retaining jurisdiction over marriage, divorce, and disputes defined under the AMLA.

### Arrival of Christianity

In 1819, Raffles brought Anglican (Church of England) missionaries to the region, and by 1821, Catholic priests had arrived in Singapore. Meanwhile, as Christian missionaries of different sects had set up missions across the Malay Peninsula in the preceding century, some *Peranakans* also brought their own Christian beliefs to Singapore around this time (see *Political and Social Relations*).

In 1843, Reverend Benjamin Peach Keasberry, an Anglican missionary, founded the Malay Mission Chapel (today known as the Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church), the first permanent church in present-day Singapore. Similarly, Father Jean-Marie Beurel, a French Catholic priest considered Singapore's first Catholic leader, established the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in 1847, Singapore's first permanent Catholic institution. *Peranakans* living in Singapore also cemented their Christian beliefs, as families settled permanently in the 1850s and assumed leadership roles at the Malay Mission Chapel and St. Andrew's Cathedral.



Throughout the 1900s, local-born church leaders gradually assumed running the various ministries and set up theological colleges to educate the next generation of Singaporean Christian leaders. As the number of Christian institutions grew, so too did the proportion of Christians in the country, from nearly 13% of the population in 1990 to 17% today, making Christians one of the country's fastest growing groups.

### Religion Today

According to the 2020 Global Religious Diversity Index, Singapore is the world's most religiously diverse country. To ensure religious harmony Singapore, the government closely regulates religious activity to preserve positive relations among religious groups. Various laws, such as the 1966 Societies Act

and the 1990 Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, authorize Singapore to register all permitted religious groups and issue restraining orders against any religious leader who the state believes is causing hostility among religious groups.

Singaporeans' relations with religion are diverse and evolving. Survey results show that a growing number of Singaporeans do not identify with a religion, rising from 15% to 17% from 2010-20. In the same period, the number of Singaporeans who trust someone from another religion decreased from 59% to 50%.

As of early 2023, Singapore plans to adopt stronger religious harmony laws. Henceforth, religious groups must fill leadership posts with Singaporean citizens and declare any affiliations with foreign persons or groups in a position of authority. Further, the government expanded its ability to issue religious harmony restraining orders to online communications, banning individuals that it considers harmful to public peace from promoting their religious beliefs or affiliation online.

**Buddhism:** Singapore is home to some 1.9 million Buddhists, making it the country with the world's fourth-highest percentage of Buddhist residents. Buddhists in Singapore have many unique celebrations and traditions, such as Vesak Day, a major festival celebrating the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha with community service and candlelight processions. Kathina Day is a festival, occurring between rainy seasons, in which adherents bring donations to their temples.



**Christianity:** With about a million Christians, Singapore is home to Southeast Asia's third largest per-capita Christian population. While Christians receive the same respect as other religious groups, the government bans Jehovah's Witnesses and Unification Church members due to their opposition to compulsory conscription (see *Political and Social Relations*). Christians in Singapore hold various celebrations, though many, like Christmas Wonderland at Gardens by the Bay, a Santa-themed lights festival, are not inherently religious.

**Islam:** With 946,400 followers, Islam is Singapore's third most prevalent religion. Singaporean Muslims are primarily Sunni and tend to follow either the Hanafi or Shafi'i Madhab schools of thought. Many in Singapore's Pakistani community adhere to the Hanafi school that emphasizes community consensus and the primacy of the Qur'an over later Islamic teachings. The country's Malay community generally follows Shafi'i Madhab, which emphasizes both the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad through worship. Singapore's Asatizah Recognition Board, a body of Muslim leaders under government control, must approve all Islamic teachers in the country, ensuring that they teach only state-approved versions of the religion. Singaporean Muslims hold many celebrations, like ***Hari Raya***

***Puasa*** (Festival of Fast-Breaking) to mark the end of Ramadan, a month-long period for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God (see *Time and Space*).



**Hinduism:** Concentrated in the Little India neighborhood, the country's 382,300 Hindus host an array of unique celebrations, such as the Singapore Festival of Hinduism, an annual inter-faith event to promote an understanding of Hindu beliefs and customs. ***Thaipusam*** (Celebration of ***Thai***, a Tamil month) is a Hindu festival that celebrates the deity Lord Murugan with a chariot procession across town. As many Hindus are vegan or vegetarian, Singapore has many plant-based food options to meet the dietary needs of this growing religious minority (see *Sustenance and Health*).

**Other Religions:** Singapore is home to other religions, such as Taoism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Judaism. Non-religious Singaporeans are one of the country's fastest growing groups. About 25% of young Singaporeans do not identify with any religion. Sikhism, a religion originating in Punjab, India that emphasizes spiritual and moral harmony, has over 12,000 adherents in Singapore, many of whom pray at the country's seven Sikh temples.

## 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

### Overview

While Singapore has become cosmopolitan in recent years, traditional values like respect, loyalty, and honor still infuse family life, and extended family networks remain important.

### Residence

Beginning in the 20th century, Singapore began to experience rapid urbanization. As of 2018, all Singaporeans live in urban areas, mostly along the city state's southern coast, making it one of the world's most urbanized countries.

About 77% of residents live in public housing that Singapore's Housing and Development Board (HDB) manages. Despite long wait times for HDB apartments, residents receive a 99-year lease akin to ownership. The HDB regulates tenants by ethnicity (see *Political and Social Relations*) to avoid self-segregation or ethnic grouping.

Mostly in high-rise buildings, HDB apartments range from about 650-1,200 sq ft, often with a living room, kitchen, two bathrooms, and three bedrooms. Apartment buildings usually have a "void deck," a communal area where residents can hold social events. HDB housing ranges from small two- to five-room apartments to jumbo apartments that include a balcony and up to 7 bedrooms.

The remaining 13% of residents live in private housing. HDB Executive Condominiums (EC) are public-private hybrid luxury apartments that usually include a communal gym, swimming pool, and gated security. EC are available for Singaporeans with higher incomes, who are not eligible for HDB apartments. Similar to EC, private condominiums have luxury amenities and are the least expensive type of entirely private housing. For upper-class Singaporeans (see *Political and Social Relations*), who can afford high property taxes, housing types range from semi-detached houses to row houses, townhouses, shophouses, and



bungalows. “Good class bungalows” are the most luxurious properties, similar to mansions in the US. They typically feature extravagant gardens and swimming pools.



The government provides migrant workers, who comprise some 5% of the population, with “dormitories.” As small dorm-style apartments

with shared facilities on the city outskirts, the dormitories have traditionally been overcrowded with unsanitary living conditions.

### Family Structure

In Singaporean families, the father is traditionally the primary breadwinner and head-of-household. While the mother is often responsible for domestic tasks and childcare, many women also work outside the home today (see *Sex and Gender*). Couples increasingly share domestic tasks and support the household financially. Families are often close-knit, and children typically live with their parents until marriage. Singaporeans of all ethnic backgrounds tend to highly respect their elders. Adult children typically bring their parents and extended family members into their households and care for them as they age.

**Polygyny:** Legal only for Singaporean Muslims, polygyny is the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. In accordance with **shari’a** (Islamic law) (see *Political and Social Relations*), a Muslim man may have up to four wives if he can treat them all equally. Although official data reports that only 1% of Muslim marriages are polygynous, this data does not include unregistered marriages performed outside of Singapore.

### Children

While Singaporean families historically had many children, they have fewer today (see *Sex and Gender*). Parents’ involvement in their children’s lives often varies by social class and ability or desire to employ domestic help. When both parents work, grandparents often help with childcare, while some other families hire nannies. Many parents expect their children to work directly after graduating from university (see *Learning and Knowledge*), in part to provide their parents with a monthly

allowance. While older generations' parenting styles tend to be strict with rigid rules, younger parents are often less strict about various social rules such as dating ages and curfews.

**Birth:** Many Singaporean mothers practice confinement after birth to restore the mother's wellbeing. During this time, the mother must rest and not leave the home, while either her mother, mother-in-law, or nanny manages domestic tasks. Traditionally, confinement was 1 month to 45 days. Today, most women self-confine for 30 days before they return to their career, domestic work, errands, and regular daily tasks.



Rituals after birth vary by ethnic and religious group. In the Muslim community (see *Religion and Spirituality*), the father often recites the **adhan** (call to prayer) in the baby's right ear. In the Tamil Indian community, many pray to Sri Periyachi Amman, a deity that protects infants.

**Circumcision:** Although most males are not circumcised, common practice among Singaporean Muslim communities is to circumcise males before puberty. As of 2023, about 15% of Singaporean men are circumcised. Further, about 60% of Malay women have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting (see *Sex and Gender*).

**Dating & Courtship:** Singaporeans typically begin dating in their mid-teens, and many traditionally aimed to marry in their early to mid-20s. Consequently, dating was a serious affair. Today, Singaporeans increasingly engage in casual dating.

## Weddings

Singaporean wedding rituals vary by religion and ethnic group. For non-Muslim couples, a solemnization, or a civil marriage ceremony, is required. Couples must have two witnesses and book a solemnizer to perform the civil ceremony at their desired venue. Traditionally, Chinese weddings include numerous ceremonies. Today, most couples have a wedding banquet.

Other rituals include burning incense to honor their ancestors, lighting firecrackers outside the groom's home to dispel bad aura, and holding a tea ceremony with family and extended relatives at the groom's home, where the couple expresses their respect and gratitude to their parents.

Muslim Malay couples often hold an engagement ceremony, known as **adat bertunang**, that features a big meal and gift exchanges between the bride and groom. The **akad nikah** (wedding ceremony) takes place at a mosque, the Registry of Muslim Marriages, or the bride's family home, where the couple signs the marriage contract and often exchanges more gifts. The wedding reception includes the **bersanding** ritual, in which the couple sits on thrones as family and friends offer blessings and have a feast.

**Peranakan** ("local born" in Malay, or Straits Chinese, see



*Political and Social Relations*) weddings traditionally lasted 12 days with numerous ceremonies.

Today, celebrations and duration vary. The pre-wedding feast, known as **t'ng tok** (long tables), usually includes

traditional dishes and sweets, such as rice-based **kueh** (see *Sustenance and Health*). Some weddings feature **dondang sayang** (poetic love ballads, a blend of Malay music and chants) (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Hindu weddings often include many ceremonies. For the formal engagement, the families of the bride and groom gather to confirm the marriage. Before the wedding, the groom typically gives bangles to the bride, who receives intricate **mehndi** (also called henna, temporary tattoos) designs on her hands, arms, and legs the day before the wedding. On the wedding day, the couple sits in front of two **kuthu-vilakku** (lamps) and trays of fruits and flowers, as the priest performs the wedding rituals of chanting and blessing. Guests often throw rice at the couple as blessings, and the bride and groom exchange colorful garlands. The couple also walks around a ceremonial fire that symbolizes eternal love.

## Divorce

Although legalized in 1961, divorce remains highly stigmatized. By law, a couple can only divorce if they were married for at least 3 years, unless they obtain special court permission. Muslim couples can only divorce through the Syariah Court (see *Political and Social Relations*) based on *shari'a*. Divorce rates remain relatively low, at 1.7 per 1,000 inhabitants in 2024, similar to Malaysia (2), but lower than the US (2.4).



## Death

Funeral customs differ by religious affiliation and ethnicity. By law, all graves are exhumed after 15 years, and bodies are reburied in smaller plots or cremated to save space. In line with Islamic tradition, Muslim Malays typically bury the deceased as soon as possible, usually within 24 hours. The deceased's family and friends typically gather for 3 days following the death.

Hindus often embalm and place the deceased in an open casket for relatives to pay their respects for 2-3 days. A priest performs funeral rituals of chanting and blessing. The family then has the deceased cremated and typically spreads their ashes over a meaningful or sacred body of water.

Many Chinese stay with the deceased until burial or cremation. Funerals are often held in the "void deck" or home. Buddhist or Taoist (see *Religion and Spirituality*) priests usually recite prayers and funeral rituals. Many Chinese observe a 49-100-day mourning period, during which relatives wear *xiao* ("mourning pins," small pieces of cloth pinned on shirt sleeves). During the annual **Qing Ming Jie** (Clear and Bright Festival, also called the Tomb Sweeping Holiday) in spring, many Chinese visit relatives' graves to clean them and leave offerings of flowers, food, and incense. They also burn joss paper printed with seals, stamps, or other designs, also known as "ghost money," as a symbol of their support and care for their ancestors. During the Hungry Ghost Festival (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*), relatives return to the graves and give offerings to honor their ancestors.



## 5. SEX AND GENDER

### Overview

Traditionally, Singapore has been a male-dominated society. The Singaporean social system is patriarchal, meaning men hold most power and authority. Women's equality has progressed rapidly in recent decades, and female workplace opportunities are among the most abundant in the Asia-Pacific region.



### Gender Roles and Work

**Domestic Work:** Women traditionally hold responsibility for childcare and household duties, and typically retain those responsibilities even if they work outside the home. However, men in some households increasingly assist with domestic chores.

**Labor Force:** As of 2023, some 62% of women worked outside the home, higher than the US rate (57%) and those of neighboring Malaysia (52%) and Indonesia (53%). While women dominate some fields such as education, sales, customer service, and administrative work, they hold about 39% of senior and middle management positions. As of 2023, women represent about 14% of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and 26% Chief Financial Officer (CFO) roles, significantly higher than the Asia-Pacific average for CEOs (4%).

### Gender and the Law

Women are guaranteed 12 or 16 weeks of maternity leave that is either paid by their employer and the government or is unpaid, depending on factors such as whether the child is a Singaporean citizen. Men are eligible for 2 weeks of paternity leave. Although the penal code does not explicitly cover sexual and workplace harassment, the 2014 Protection from Harassment Act includes various forms of harassment. In 2022, Singapore passed a law against workplace discrimination. Despite this legislation, the authorities and employers often neglect workplace protections (see *Time and Space*). A 2022 survey by the Association of

Women for Action and Research (AWARE, a Singaporean nonprofit organization) found that about 55% of workers experienced workplace discrimination, with race and gender discrimination the most common forms.

### Gender and Politics

Although Singapore's constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) does not explicitly mention voting rights, men and women have exercised the right to vote since the country's first general election in 1959 (see *History and Myth*). As of early 2023, women represent about 29% of parliamentary seats, equivalent to the US and higher than Indonesia (22%) and Malaysia (14%). Halimah Yacob became Singapore's eighth, and first woman, President in 2017. She acquired this national position of power not so much by popular election as by means of a legal



constraint based on her social status.

### Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is widespread and became more prevalent due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (see *Sustenance and Health*). The law specifies sentences of up to 20 years imprisonment and fines or caning (beating) for offenders guilty of rape. As of 2020, husbands can be charged with marital rape, and the law protects male survivors of sexual assault. Rape convictions only apply to male offenders, though women can be charged with sexual assault.

Although a 2010 survey reported 1 in 10 women experience physical violence, some 71% of Singaporean women are unlikely to report abuse, partly due to social stigma. Accordingly, about 83% of Singaporeans believe women should stay in abusive relationships under some circumstances, notably for their children. Prosecution and protective measures are often ineffective. As of 2021, only 1,368 of some 6,988 reported cases of sexual assault led to prosecution and 931 convictions. Various services assist GBV survivors, such as government-funded

crisis shelters that provide temporary housing for women and their children. AWARE provides a women's helpline and sexual assault care center, as well as training for corporations and the community to educate them about gender equality.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** Also known as female genital cutting or female circumcision, FGM is any procedure whereby a woman's external genitalia or genital organs are cut or removed for non-medical reasons. Singapore does not have legal protections against FGM. Although not widely practiced, FGM is most prevalent among the Malay community (see *Political and Social Relations*), which commonly performs it on newborn girls. About 60% of Malay women in Singapore have undergone FGM.

### Sex and Procreation

Singapore's fertility rate has decreased from 5.8 births in 1960 to 1.0 in 2022, lower than the US (1.7), Indonesia (2.2), and Malaysia (1.8). Singaporeans tend to have children later in life, with the average pregnancy age increasing from 25-29 in 1980 to 30-34 today. Largely due to comprehensive sex education and other resources, as of 2020, Singapore's adolescent fertility rate is 3 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19, much lower than the US (16) and Indonesia (34). Abortion is legal, does not require parental consent for minors, and is only permitted after 24 weeks if the mother's life is in danger.

### Homosexuality in Singapore

In 2022, Singapore repealed a law from the British colonial era (see *History and Myth*) that criminalized sexual relations between men. However, the constitution still dictates that marriage is

between a man and woman, making same-sex marriage and civil unions illegal. Singapore hosts LGBTQ+ Pride Month every August. Since 2009, Singaporeans have celebrated Pink Dot in Hong Lim Park, a gay pride event that features activities such as films and discussions. Attendees wear pink and gather to form a "pink dot" in support of the LGBTQ+ community.



## 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

### Language Overview

Singapore's national languages are English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. While Malay is Singapore's constitutionally protected indigenous language, English is the principal language of business, government, and education. Though not an official language, most Singaporeans also speak Singlish, a local pidgin language (a simplified means of communication) that mixes English, Mandarin, and Malay.

### English

Due to the 19th-century British colonization of Singapore (see *History and Myth*), English has been a de facto language there for over 200 years. Today, English tends to serve as a *lingua franca*, or shared language, among

Singapore's diverse ethnic groups (see *Political and Social Relations*). Since English is the primary language of instruction in schools (see *Learning and Knowledge*) and media, many Singaporeans learn to speak it as their first language. From 2010-20, the number of English speakers grew by 16%. Singapore's 2020 census also correlated an increase in English-speaking Singaporeans with a decrease in mother-tongue literacy. Around 48% of residents speak English as their primary language.



### Mandarin Chinese

Standard Mandarin, locally called *Huayu*, is Singapore's primary Mandarin dialect. It is based on a simplified and standardized version of the dialect from Beijing, China. Some aspects of Mandarin grammar – notably its lack of conjugated verbs, cases, genders, and articles – make the language straightforward to learn. However, Mandarin's use of tones to show meaning can make it difficult to speak correctly. When written in the Latin alphabet, each of the five Mandarin tones is marked by a symbol. For example, the sentence “*Mā mà mǎ ma?*” demonstrates how

a change in tone alters the meaning of the basic sound “ma” and translates as “Did mother scold the horse?”.

Historically, Chinese settlers and laborers who spoke a variety of Chinese dialects used Standard Mandarin as a *lingua franca*. **Peranakans** (“local born” in Malay, or Straits Chinese, see *Political and Social Relations*) and Chinese laborers from the Fujian and Guangdong provinces spoke varieties of Min Nan (Hokkien, Teochew, and Hainanese), Yue (Cantonese), Hakka, and Mandarin. In 1979, Singapore’s government launched the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* to encourage Chinese-speaking populations to jointly speak Mandarin. Consequently, the use of Mandarin at home increased from 10% in 1980 to 47% in 2010.

Today, about 30% of Singaporeans speak Mandarin as their first language. Many Chinese families speak the language at home, though the percentage of at-home speakers declined by 6% to 41% from 2010-20. Schools also offer Mandarin as a language of instruction for native speakers (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

## Malay

Singapore’s constitution acknowledges Malay as the country’s native language. Of the roughly 10% of Singaporeans who speak Malay, most use **Bahasa Melayu** (Malay language), a dialect from the Malay Peninsula. Although Malay is Singapore’s historic language, Singaporeans are increasingly moving away from it, as the number of speakers declined by 3% between 2010-20. Schools teach Malay to native speakers.



## Tamil

A South Indian language, Tamil became a common language in Singapore when British colonists brought Indian laborers to the island in the mid-1800s (see *History and Myth*). Today, about 3%

of Singaporeans report Tamil and its related dialects as their primary language. While Tamil is the official language of Singapore’s Indian community, only around 2.5% of Singaporeans speak it at home.

## Other Languages

Singapore is home to many other languages, most of which are of Chinese, Southeast Asian, or Indian origin. Chinese dialects of Min Nan, Min Dong, Pu-Xian, Yue, Hakka, and Min Bei collectively include nearly 600,000 speakers. Singapore is also home to speakers of Bahasa Indonesia (160,000 speakers), Bengali (150,000), and Hindi (72,500), among others.

**Singlish:** Neither a census-designated nor official language, most Singaporeans speak Singlish. Although the number of Singlish speakers is unknown, many residents speak it informally with friends or family. Singlish is also a social marker, as many residents perceive a person who can effectively switch between Singlish and English as more educated than one who can only speak Singlish. Singlish grammar mirrors Malay in that it does not use prepositions, verb conjugations, and the plural form.

## Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Singapore requires knowledge of English and the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.



## Communication Style

Singaporeans' communications reflect their regard for close personal relationships, family, and respect for elders. Singaporeans are typically polite and reserved among strangers, though they tend to be more talkative once they establish a relationship. In their interactions, Singaporeans strive to emphasize respect for their conversation partners, while avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others, particularly in

business meetings and interactions with elders or social superiors. As Singaporeans view silence as a form of respect, foreign nationals should allow for conversational pauses instead of striving for uninterrupted dialogue.

Singaporeans' emphasis on politeness is evident in a widely held preference for indirect or non-specific answers. As such, Singaporeans often offer a positive response to most requests. However, this "yes" answer is not necessarily a promise of action. Foreign nationals should not interpret an affirmative or noncommittal answer to a request as neutral, as neutrality is a means to keep conversational harmony. Instead, such an answer might be negative. Some Singaporeans, especially those in the Muslim Malay and Hindu communities, avoid prolonged eye contact with those in superior social positions (see *Time and Space*). Further, Singaporeans may regard extended eye contact as challenging or aggressive.



### Greetings

Singaporean greetings vary by ethnic group and age. The eldest or the person with the highest social status typically introduces himself first in conversation. Generally,

Singaporeans are not accustomed to receiving physical affection from strangers and tend to reserve touching, particularly back-slapping or hugging, for close friends and family. While a handshake is a common greeting, some people, including some Muslim Malays and Indians, may prefer not to touch a person of the opposite gender. In lieu of a handshake, some Malays greet others with **salaam** (peace) and a head bow. When Singaporeans shake hands, they often opt for a light handshake of relatively long duration, lasting at least a few seconds, compared to short, firm American handshakes. Older Singaporeans may use both hands to shake, placing the second hand on the person's wrist or the clasped hands. In many business settings, foreign nationals should exchange business cards by using both hands, bowing slightly, and looking at the received card briefly to demonstrate interest and respect.

Singaporeans may verbally greet each other with, “Hello, have you eaten yet?” or similar phrases in the same way one might say “Hello, how are you?”. Some polite responses are, “Yes, thank you” or “I’m going to, thank you.”

## Names

Naming practices in Singapore generally differ by ethnic group. Many Singaporeans believe a good name brings luck and an unfit name bad luck.

Some parents across Singapore’s ethnic groups visit fortunetellers to find the luckiest name for their child.

Chinese naming conventions consist of a family name



followed by a generation name (shared with members of the same generation in one family, like siblings) and given name, as in the name of PM Lee Hsien Loong, whereby Lee is his family name, Hsien is his generation name, and Loong is his given name. Family names are patrilineal, meaning fathers pass them to their children. Parents choose their child’s given name as their personal identifier and typically write the name using one word per syllable. Women generally do not change their names at marriage but may choose to place their husband’s family name before their full name. To refer to an individual in their Chinese name, one should use their full name, not just their given name, as the latter is the most intimate way to refer to someone.

Malay naming conventions use an individual’s given name, a patronymic noun (an indicator of a father, like **bin**, “son of”), and the father’s given name, as with Yusof bin Ishak, Singapore’s first President. As Malays use their father’s given name as their last name, most women do not change their names at marriage.

Some Indian naming conventions use a first, middle, and last name, while others use a given name, patronymic phrase, and the father’s given name. Some Indian Singaporeans do not have family names, as children inherit their father’s given name at birth. Indian Singaporean patronymic phrases are either “son of”



or “daughter of,” often abbreviated as “s/o” or “d/o,” respectively, as in Siva s/o Bhaskaran. Individuals may also write their names by placing the initial of their father’s first name before their first and/or family name. After marriage, some Indian Singaporean women change their father’s for their husband’s personal name.

Many Singaporeans also have an “English name” that they use in various international or English-speaking contexts. Formal documents, including passports and licenses, often use one’s English name. Likewise, Singaporeans typically introduce themselves with their English name and use others’ English names in casual conversation, particularly when in groups of

people with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

### Forms of Address

Though varying by ethnic group, forms of address depend on age, relationship, and social status, but are generally formal and courteous.

Singaporeans use

honorifics to address elders or individuals whom custom dictates require respect. The titles are Mr. or Mrs./Ms. in English, **Hsiensheng** (“Mr.”) and **Shih** (“Mrs./Ms.”) in Chinese, and Uncle and Auntie in Singlish. Different from American English, “Uncle” and “Auntie” do not signal family ties but convey a sense of closeness and respect.

### Conversational Topics

After greetings, Singaporeans typically engage in polite conversation about family and work. Generally, conversational topics that preserve harmony, such as one’s occupation or the wellbeing of one’s family members, are most common. Due to their emphasis on courtesy and desire to save “face” (avoid embarrassment to themselves or others), many Singaporeans prefer indirect communication, especially in public. As a result, Singaporeans often talk around contentious personal and public issues, such as religion, race, and ethnicity, to save face. The Singaporean government recommends that foreigners avoid conversation on such topics to preserve social harmony.



## Gestures

Though varying by ethnic group, Singaporean gestures tend to be infrequent and restrained, as body language is often limited and modest during interactions. The most common physical gesture is the head nod, to either signal understanding or point to an intended direction. Malay Singaporeans, particularly Muslim Malays, consider the head a sacred part of the body and never touch another's head. Some Malay Singaporeans also consider feet unsanitary and typically refrain from showing their soles, using their feet to point, or moving objects with their feet. Many Singaporeans also consider it rude to point with the index finger and instead use their whole hand.

## Language and Training Sources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at [www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/) and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

### Useful Words and Phrases

English	Singlish
Oh dear!	Aiyo!
Oh my god!	Alamak!
Pinpoint or pick on	Arrow
Confused	Blur
Is that okay?	Can?
Yes! That is okay!	Can!
For sure!	Confirm!
To reserve	Chope
Difficult	Cheem
Absolutely, no matter what!	Die, die!
To reverse	Go stun
Coffee	Kopi
A commonly used ending phrase that can translate to "okay," though it has no real meaning	Lah
That's great!	Shiok!
Excellent!	Steady lah!
To come along	Follow

## 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

### Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 98%
- Male: 99%
- Female: 96% (2021)

### Early Education

Before the arrival of the British East India Company in 1819 (see *History and Myth*), the inhabitants of Singapore informally transmitted values, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations through stories, proverbs, fables, myths, and legends (see *History and Myth*). Likewise, local island residents passed crafts and trades through the generations.

Early inhabitants of Singapore were exposed to the cultures and customs of various empires based in present-day China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand through trade networks and conquest. Scholars believe the visitors exchanged information and technology with locals in Singapore. As early as the 13th century, Malays and Chinese lived together on the island and likely exchanged religious beliefs (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

### Colonial Education

British colonial officials introduced European-style education to their colony soon after its establishment as a trading post. While Sir Stamford Raffles (see *History and Myth*) set aside funding for a school in 1823, the first formal educational institution was founded over a decade later, in 1834. This school, known as the Singapore Free School (or the Raffles Institution), offered courses in English and local languages. However, a lack of funding and low interest among the local community led to the termination of lessons in Chinese, Malay, and Tamil (see *Language and Communication*).



During much of the 19th century, British officials did not invest significantly in developing the local educational system but did finance English institutions and a few Malay and Tamil schools. In the first decades of settlement, the British helped establish a few Malay schools, such as a teachers' college in 1878. However, education among many members of the Malay community consisted primarily of religious education that focused on Islamic principles and Qur'anic studies (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

The British also invested minimally in Tamil schools. The few schools that they established suffered from low enrollment rates and school closures.



Meanwhile, private investments helped establish Chinese schools in the colony, with civic associations and wealthy

patrons opening institutions for Singapore's growing Chinese population (see *Political and Social Relations*). Most of these schools closely mirrored traditional curricula taught in China and primarily consisted of calligraphy and arithmetic courses. Others, like the Anglo-Chinese School that catered to wealthier residents, taught half the curriculum in Chinese and half in English. Religious institutions also assumed an increasingly proactive role in establishing schools for Singaporeans. Several Roman Catholic orders and Methodist missionaries (see *Religion and Spirituality*) established prestigious schools for the children of wealthy residents.

## Education in the 20th Century

While education remained largely unchanged during the first half of the 20th century, World War II (see *History and Myth*) significantly impacted the Chinese schooling system. Japanese occupation forces suspected these schools of fostering anti-Japanese sentiment during the 1942-5 occupation, discouraging residents from enrolling for fear of government reprisals. After the British returned to Singapore in late 1945, the government

invested in educational policies to prepare the colony for eventual self-rule. These changes included the institution of 6 years of free primary school and a plan to eventually integrate the various schooling systems.

In 1960, the newly elected government (see *History and Myth*) introduced a policy of bilingualism, whereby it required schools to teach English along with students' native languages. After Singapore gained independence in 1965 (see *History and Myth*), English-language instruction took on a more significant role in education. The government adopted a policy of "survival-driven education" that aimed to prepare the labor force quickly with skills required for the rapidly industrializing and globalized economy (see *Economics and Resources*). In this period, school integration began to occur, primarily between Chinese- and English-language schools.

During the 1960s and 70s, so-called Vernacular Schools that taught predominantly in Chinese, Malay, or Tamil, began to experience a decline in enrollment, as many Singaporeans considered English-language schools more prestigious and rigorous. In 1983, the government announced that all schools must teach predominantly in English and secondarily in each native language, a transition that was complete by 1987.

### Modern Education System

By law, education is free and compulsory for all citizens, with a mandated minimum of 10 years of schooling starting at age 7. Generally, state-run public schools dominate the educational system, although some international schools, often European or North American, teach according to the curricula of their home countries. In 2021, some 4% of primary school students were enrolled at private, fee-based institutions, lower than the average of East Asian and Pacific countries (11%) and neighboring Malaysia (6%).



Exams at the end of primary school determine how students are sorted into three bands for their secondary school education – an “express” program for advanced students, or “normal” tracks for academic or technical studies. Students in the express program complete secondary school in 4 years, while those in the normal academic and technical tracks in 5. After secondary school, many students seeking to continue to post-secondary studies enroll in a 2-year junior college. Notably, the Ministry of Education (MoE) plans to introduce subject-based banding in

2024, allowing students to choose levels for individual subjects instead of the three generalized tracks currently in use.

The MoE oversees all school accreditation and is responsible for assuring that educators

meet national benchmarks. Scholars have praised Singapore’s educational system for its rigor, breadth, and the synchronization among curricula, lesson plans, and standardized examinations. In periodic assessments of student performance in reading, math, and science, Singaporean students consistently have been the highest-ranking scorers, outperforming peers from all the 79 other evaluated countries.

As of 2023, Singapore spent about 2.2% of its GDP on education, lower than the rates in neighboring Indonesia (1.3%), Malaysia (4%), and in 2022 the US (5.4%), despite achieving much better educational outcomes. Seeking to further improve the country’s already excellent academic performance, Singaporean officials implemented a series of programs in 2018 and 2019 focused on introducing Singaporean students to more holistic educational models. These models seek to promote “lifelong learning” and the development of “21st-century competencies” by placing more emphasis on social studies and modifying competition-driven academic systems. The MoE also introduced the “Teach Less Learn More” program, which seeks to reduce educators’ reliance on rote learning and memorization and instead foster independent study and problem-solving skills.



**Pre-Primary:** Singaporean children under 7 years old can enroll in pre-primary schools. While kindergartens overseen by the MoE accept students aged 3-6, daycare centers run by cooperatives, private businesses, or employers take younger children, often as young as 18 months. As of 2020, 96% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in pre-primary programs.



### **Basic Education:**

Primary schooling comprises six grades beginning at age 7.

Most schools follow the national curriculum, which includes courses in English, a native language, natural sciences, social sciences, math, art, music, physical education, and citizenship. At the end of students' fourth year, they take exams that place them in a mix of advanced or normal classes for the final 2 years of primary school. Depending on the level of the course, students are graded either on a 100-point scale or on a scale of four bands that comprise a varying range of percentages. Upon completion of primary school, students sit for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). As of 2017, 100% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in primary school.

**Secondary Education:** Based on PSLE scores, students are sorted into one of the three bands. While all the tracks offer similar curricula that represent a continuation of primary schooling, students have the option to take elective courses, and technical band students take courses geared towards vocational training. Students on the express band take Ordinary Level (or O-Level) exams to continue to junior college programs. Those in the normal track take Normal Level (or N-Level) exams at the end of 4 years. Afterwards, these students have three options: studying for an extra year to take O-Level exams, enrolling in private lessons to prepare for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (an international secondary school finishing certificate), or taking a year of courses to prepare for entry to a technical school.

Junior college programs last 2 years and offer a general curriculum to prepare students for a variety of university courses. Junior colleges offer third-language classes and independent study projects meant to teach research methods. To graduate at the end of the 2 years, students take either the Advanced Level (or A-Level) exams, or exams proctored by the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program, a rigorous global diploma program and assessment. As of 2017, 100% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary school.

**Post-secondary Education:** Singapore has a large network of public universities, with the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, and Singapore Management University among the country's most prestigious institutions. The Singapore Institute of Management, an elite private university, came under government control in 2017 as the Singapore University of Social Sciences. Universities, which determine admission through A-Level or IB scores, often rank highly in international university rankings and attract students from across



East Asia. While public universities require students to pay tuition to attend, the fee amount varies by department and degree.

Some private institutions also grant

degrees through external partnerships with universities abroad, primarily schools in the United Kingdom (UK). Traditionally, many wealthy Singaporeans study at universities abroad, with the UK a common destination for students, given the similarities in language and structure of the countries' educational systems. Likewise, several foreign universities have local campuses in Singapore, particularly various US university programs and France-based Paris-Panthéon-Assas University International Law School.

For students who studied in the normal technical track, several polytechnic institutions offer degrees in vocational studies fields, such as hospitality, mechanics, retail, and facility services.



## 8. TIME AND SPACE

### Overview

Singaporeans typically devote long hours to work and school and value punctuality and efficient time management. Singaporeans' personal space preferences vary by degree of familiarity and ethnic background, although touching tends to be limited in social and professional settings.

### Time and Work

Singapore's workweek runs Monday-Friday, during which normal business hours are 9am-6pm, with an hour break in the afternoon for lunch. Post offices and government offices generally open to the public in two shifts, from 8-9:30am, and again from 4-6pm. Shops typically open from 10am-6pm, though larger stores and shopping centers often remain open until 9:30pm. Many public and private offices and retailers open for reduced hours on the weekends.

### Working Conditions:

Singaporean labor laws establish a 44-hour workweek, paid overtime benefits, paid vacation, sick leave, severance pay, and other benefits. Many employers also pay an annual wage supplement, which is 1-3 months of additional salary, as a fringe benefit. The country sets a minimum wage only for some foreign workers, cleaners, and security guards. Unlike in neighboring countries, Singapore has a relatively small informal economy. Most businesses are registered with the government and subject to Ministry of Manpower oversight. About 10% of the economy is informal and comprises primarily foreign migrant workers. In informal employment, labor codes such as set working hours and other workplace standards are inapplicable. Further, despite Singapore's labor regulations, employers and officials often ignore workplace protections, especially for the country's sizeable migrant community.



**Time Zone:** Singapore's time zone, Singapore Time (SGT), is 8 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). SGT is 13 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST), and since Singapore does not observe daylight saving time, it is 12 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) during part of the year.

**Date Notation:** Like the US, Singapore uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar for daily life and official business. Unlike Americans, Singaporeans write the day first, followed by the month and year.

**Calendars:** For religious celebrations, some Indian Singaporeans use the Hindu calendar (see *Religion and Spirituality*), a lunisolar timekeeping system that divides the year into 12 alternating months of 29 or 30 days. The calendar is calculated according to the sun's position to fixed stars, starting in April when the sun is in Aries. Buddhist Singaporeans use their own calendar for religious festivals. This calendar is based on the Hindu calendar, but instead marks the date starting with the birth of the Buddha. According to the Buddhist calendar, 2023 in the Western calendar corresponds to the years 2566-2567.



Muslims (see *Religion and Spirituality*) use the **Hijri** (Islamic) calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar.

The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

Sikh Singaporeans (see *Religion and Spirituality*) use their own calendar, a solar system of 12 months, which starts every March 14 according to the Gregorian calendar. The Sikh calendar is fixed and does not shift in relation to the Western calendar.

However, it marks the year starting at the birth of their religious leader, Guru Nanak. According to this timekeeping system, 2023 corresponds to the years 554-555.

### National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- January/February: Lunar New Year (dates vary)
- May 1: Labor Day
- August 9: National Day
- December 25: Christmas Day

Variable dates according to religious calendars:

- Good Friday
- ***Hari Raya Puasa***: End of Ramadan (often called ***Eid al-Fitr*** in the US and many Muslim countries)
- ***Vesak Day***: Buddha Day
- ***Hari Raya Haji***: Festival of Sacrifice (often called ***Eid al-Adha*** in the US and many Muslim countries)
- ***Deepvali***: Hindu Festival of Lights (often called ***Diwali*** in the US and India)

Any holiday that falls on a weekend is observed on the following Monday.

### Time and Business

Though sometimes varying by ethnic group (see *Political and Social Relations*), many Singaporeans value punctuality and generally adhere to deadlines, especially when dealing with foreigners. They also consider interpersonal relations key to conducting good business, and meetings frequently begin with polite conversation and the exchange of business cards to establish rapport (see *Language and Communication*). Singaporean businesses tend to be hierarchical in structure, with chief executives setting agendas and starting and ending meetings. Final decisions usually require top-level approval, which can slow the pace of business.

## Public and Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Singapore depends on the nature of the relationship. Most Singaporeans maintain an arm's length when conversing with strangers but stand closer to family and friends.

**Touch:** In business settings, greetings usually include minimal touching beyond the initial handshake, and some devout Muslims refrain from touching members of the opposite sex. Singaporeans usually reserve physical affection for family and friends (see *Language and Communication*).

**Eye Contact:** Singaporeans typically make brief but direct eye contact during greetings and maintain eye contact throughout conversations to demonstrate interest and respect. However, some Malay and Indian Singaporeans refrain from making prolonged eye contact with superiors as a sign of respect (see *Language and Communication*). Likewise, some Singaporeans consider prolonged eye contact as threatening or a sign of aggression.

## Photographs

Some places of worship, museums, landmarks, transit stations, and military installations prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should acquire a Singaporean's consent before taking his photo. Explicit permission is particularly important when photographing women and children.

## Driving

Roads tend to be well-lit and maintained (see *Technology and Material*). Most drivers obey traffic laws, and transit police have a prominent presence in many areas. However, urban density sometimes results in road congestion and aggressive driving. Unlike in the US, Singaporeans drive on the left side of the road. In 2021, Singapore's rate of traffic-related deaths was 2 per 100,000 people, lower than the US rate (14) and that of neighboring Indonesia (11) and Malaysia (14).



## 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

### Overview

Singapore's traditional dress, recreation, music, and arts reflect its multiethnic and multilingual diversity, history, and modern global influences.

### Dress and Appearance

**Traditional:** Some Singaporeans wear traditional dress daily, while others wear it only for holidays and special events. Traditional dress varies significantly by ethnic group (see *Political and Social Relations*). Chinese women's dress is typically a **cheongsam** or **qipao**, a slim fitted dress of varying lengths with decorative motifs and fasteners on the collar lapel. Traditional dress for men is a **changshan**, a jacket equivalent to the *cheongsam*, often worn with trousers.

Traditional **Peranakan** ("local born" in Malay, or Straits Chinese, see *History and Myth and Political and Social Relations*) dress for women includes a **kebaya** (blouse with intricate embellishments and embroidered flowers) and a colorfully patterned **sarong** (a long cloth sewn at the ends to form a tube). *Peranakan* men often wear trousers with a *changshan*.



Malay men usually wear a **songkok** (brimless hat) with a **baju melayu** outfit that consists of a long-sleeved shirt, trousers, and *sarong*. Many Malay

women wear **baju kurung**, comprising either a **teluk balanga** (collarless blouse) or **cekak musak** (standing collared blouse) with a long skirt, and sometimes a **hijab** (headscarf).

Ethnic Indian dress varies by origin in South Asia. Many women opt for a **sari** (long fabric worn around the body in various styles), while others wear a **salwar kameez** (long blouse with loose trousers). Many men wear a **kurta** (loose tunic), **dhoti** (*sarong*

that resembles loose trousers), **kameez** (long blouse), or **achkan** (knee-length jacket).

**Modern:** Most Singaporeans wear the latest Western or Asian fashion trends. While many Singaporeans dress for the hot climate (see *Political and Social Relations*) in casual clothes such as shorts, t-shirts, and jeans, older generations often dress more conservatively. In business settings, Singaporeans typically prefer formal styles, such as dark or subdued colored suits or dresses/pantsuits.

### Recreation and Leisure

Singaporeans often spend their leisure time with family and friends. Typical activities are sharing meals, watching movies, sports, concerts, and film festivals. Viewing horse races, playing the lottery, and gambling at casinos are also common pastimes.

**Holidays and Festivals:** Singaporeans hold a variety of festivals and community celebrations, many reflecting the country's ethnic and religious diversity (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Singaporeans typically celebrate Christmas by attending the Christmas Wonderland theme park at Gardens by the Bay and putting up holiday decorations and lights.

The country's largest celebration is Lunar New Year, also known as Spring Festival, which marks the beginning of spring. During this time, many Singaporeans visit family and friends and exchange gifts. Chinatown also hosts celebratory lion and dragon dances (see "Music and Dance" below).

Singapore hosts many other festivals annually. The Singapore Food Festival features numerous international food competitions and workshops. The Singapore Art Festival is held in galleries and public art walks. Many Buddhists and Taoists (see *Religion and Spirituality*) celebrate the Hungry Ghost Festival (**Zhongyuan** or **Yulan** Festival) in the seventh month of the



Buddhist calendar (see *Time and Space*). Some adherents believe their ancestors' ghosts make mischief during this time if their living family members do not give food and drink offerings, so relatives visit the ancestors' graves to provide these gifts. Other festivities include performances under large tents.

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in the country's history. On August 9, Singaporeans celebrate National Day to commemorate independence from Malaysia (see *History and Myth*). Celebrations usually include military parades, air shows, multicultural music and dance performances, and fireworks.

## Sports

Singaporeans participate in a wide variety of sports, such as soccer, rugby, swimming, bicycling, basketball, volleyball, water polo, tennis, and cricket. Some residents participate in various traditional sports, like **sepak takraw**, or kick volleyball, in which players use their feet and bodies to move a rattan ball over a net separating the two teams. Many Singaporeans practice **taekwondo**, a Korean martial art, or **taijiquan**, also known as **tai chi**, a traditional Chinese meditative martial art known for its



slow movements that groups often practice in public parks. Since 2007, Singapore has participated in Formula One, making motor sport racing increasingly popular in the country.

Singapore participates in numerous international competitions, such as the Summer and Winter Olympics, Netball World Cup, Asian Games, and regional soccer competitions, like the Asian Football Confederation Asian Cup and Association of Southeast Asian Nations Football Federation (AFF) Championship, which Singapore won in 2012 and hosted in 2020. Notable athletes are swimmer Joseph Schooling, who won Singapore's first Olympic gold medal in Brazil in 2016, weightlifter Tan Howe Liang, who won silver in the Rome 1960 Summer Olympics, and Chinese-

born table tennis player Li Jiawei, a four-time Olympian and bronze medalist in the London 2012 Summer Olympics.

**Soccer:** Commonly known as football, soccer is Singapore's national sport. The Singapore Premier League consists of eight teams. The national team, nicknamed the Lions, participates in regional games, having won four AFF Championships. Despite occasional regional victories, the Lions lack international success. Notable football players are Hariss Harun, captain of Singapore's national team, and retired player Fandi Ahmad, who played and coached internationally, making him one of Singapore's most successful athletes.

**Games:** Many Singaporeans, especially ethnic Chinese, play **mahjong**, a tile-based strategy game originating in mainland China. Other traditional games are **kampongs** (spinning tops with long ropes) and **batu seremban** (five stones), a catching game similar to jacks.

### Music and Dance

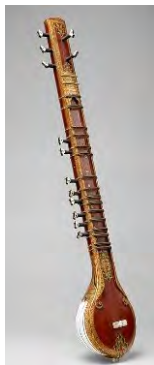
Singapore's rich musical and dance traditions reflect its ethnic diversity. Traditional Chinese music varies, notably by dialect and related style. Common traditional instruments

include gongs, **dizi** (horizontal flute), **qin** (seven-stringed zither), **sheng** (bamboo mouth organ), **suona** (a trumpet-like bamboo horn), **erhu** (two-stringed fiddle), and **pipa** (four-stringed lute). The Singapore Chinese Orchestra, or **Huayue Tuan** (Chinese orchestra), which blends classical orchestral music with Chinese melodies and instruments, is Singapore's only professional Chinese orchestra, counting over 80 musicians. During the lion dance, commonly seen during Lunar New Year and other celebrations, two dancers share an intricate papier-mâché lion costume and move to a fast drumbeat. Some believe the dance brings luck and fortune.





Some Singaporean Malay musical styles reflect Portuguese influence (see *History and Myth*). Examples are **dondang sayang** (poetic love ballads) and **keroncong**, similar to **fado** music in Portugal, with instruments, such as the **cuk** and **cak** (ukulele-like instruments), cello, violin, flute, guitar, and string bass. In the 1960s, Kartina Dahari, known as the queen of **keroncong**, was the first Malay singer in Singapore to record in English. Other styles are **bangsawan** (a Malay opera), vocalist music like **dikir barat**, and **ghazals**, Arabic-influenced poetic love songs. Men traditionally performed the Malay national dance, **zapin**. Today, pairs perform the dance accompanied by instruments like the **gambus** (pear-shaped lute), **rebana** (drum), accordion, violin, and **gendang** (two-headed drum). Couples traditionally perform the **joget**, known for its quick tempo influenced by the Portuguese **branyo** and **farapeira** dances, at festivals and weddings. Upbeat violin, flute, gong, and **rebana** music accompany **joget**, which the *Peranakan* community also performs.



Indian music varies by origin and religion. **Hindustani**, originally from northern India, features traditional instruments, such as the **sitar** (stringed instrument), **sarod** (flute-like instrument), **tabla** (drums), and **shehnai** (reed instrument). Originally from southern India, musicians perform **Carnatic** (or **Karnatak**) music on the **sitar**-like **vina**, **mridangam** (drums), violin, and **nadaswaram** (long oboe).

Today, **bhangra** (music from Punjab in northern India) has influenced many Malay and Chinese songs with the use of the **dhhol** (a two-headed drum), which is common in **bhangra** music. A notable traditional dance form is **Bharatanatyam**, a style that features deliberate footwork, hand movements, and facial expressions. Although traditionally rooted in Hinduism (see *Religion and Spirituality*), **Bharatanatyam** performances are often non-religious in Singapore today.

**Other Musical Genres:** Singaporeans listen to an array of musical genres, such as pop, classical, rap, electronic, hip hop, jazz, metal, and rock. In the 1960s, Singapore's and Malaysia's local genre of **pop yeh yeh** (psychedelic rock) blended British

pop and rock with Malay melodies. Singaporean **Mandopop** (Mandarin Chinese pop) stars like JJ Lin, who sings in three Chinese languages and English, and Tanya Chua, who has won Golden Melody Awards (the Grammys of Mandopop), are also popular. Other notable artists are Taufik Batisah, the Singapore Idol winner in 2004, and *Mandopop* star Stefanie Sun, who experiments with other musical genres like rock and folk.

## Theater

**Wayang** ("a theatrical performance employing puppets or human dancers" in Malay) and **jiexi** ("street show" in Mandarin Chinese) refer to traditional Chinese street opera in the country. In Singapore, *jiexi* has three main genres that correspond to Chinese dialects (see *Language and Communication*): **fujianxi** (Hokkien), **chaoju** (Teochew), and **yueju** (Cantonese) operas. Although different dialects reflect distinct *wayang* styles, they often share similar folk stories and costumes. Performers wear traditional, elaborate makeup and costumes with embroidery and beads. Professional troupes from China and local professional and nonprofit troupes often perform *wayang* today. Other forms of *wayang* are **wayang kulit** (shadow puppet theater) that features stories and music with ornately carved and painted puppets, and *wayang Peranakan*, a type of theater derived from *bangsawan*).



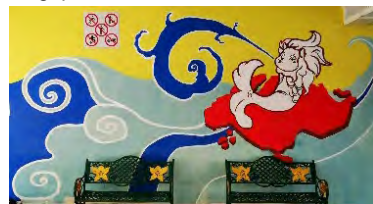
## Literature

Historically, Singaporeans primarily orally transmitted myths (see *History and Myth*), stories, and legends that explored a range of themes. Various ethnic groups and languages influenced oral traditions. Today, national languages (English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil) divide Singaporean literature, and each has its own literary award. Singapore also has the prestigious Singapore Literature Prize (SLP), awarded every 2 years to Singaporean authors having published outstanding works written in any of the national languages. Author Kanagalatha (known as Latha) writes in Tamil, producing stories that reflect British colonization and

imperialism. In 2008, her collection of short stories, ***Naan Kolai Seiyum Pengal*** (*Women I Murder*), received an SLP.

Authors often explore tensions between traditional and contemporary values, as well as history and the multicultural landscape of Singaporean society. Published in 1972 and often considered Singapore's first novel, Poh Seng Goh's *If We Dream Too Long* explores a young character's dreams to escape mainstream values and daily life. Alfian Sa'at's collection of nonfiction stories in *Corridor* won the SLP in 1998. The stories occur in Singapore's Housing and Development Board's public housing (see *Family and Kinship*). One of Singapore's most celebrated poets, Cyril Wong, frequently explores themes of loss, familial relations, love, and sexuality. A recipient of Singapore's National Arts Council's Young Artist Award in 2005, Wong continues to receive awards in Singapore and feature his work in festivals worldwide.

Other notable authors are Sonny Liew, whose graphic novel, *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* (2015), was a New York Times bestseller and the first graphic novel to win the SLP, and Singapore-born Kevin Kwan, whose first novel, *Crazy Rich*



*Asians*, was translated into 36 languages and adapted into a Hollywood movie in 2018.

### Folk Arts and Handicrafts

Singapore has a rich history of arts and crafts, including porcelain ceramics, textiles, jewelry, and preserved orchids. Singaporean Malay **batik** cloths are traditionally made by using wax and colorful dyes on cotton or linen fabric to create decorative animal and plant motifs. Influenced by Chinese blue and white porcelain, *Peranakan* porcelain includes hand-drawn motifs in pink, green, yellow, and blue. The Merlion is Singapore's national icon and a motif found around the country. The mythical creature features a lion head for the Lion City and fish body to represent the country's fishing village origins (see *History and Myth*). Merlion statuettes are also common keepsakes.

## 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

### Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events, when family and friends share conversation and companionship prior to eating. Singaporean cuisine is varied and features influences from southern Chinese, Malay, and Indian dishes, reflecting the country's diverse population (see *Political and Social Relations*) and location along regional trade routes.

### Dining Customs

Most Singaporeans eat three daily meals and snack throughout the day. While many Singaporeans typically eat informal meals made by hawkers at food courts; larger, more elaborate meals are reserved for celebrations and welcoming guests. At large meals or banquets, the hosts traditionally select all the dishes, which are placed on the table simultaneously and eaten communally, or "family style." It is impolite to eat before the hosts signal the start of the meal. Hosts usually insist on serving their guests, particularly elders, additional portions as a gesture of hospitality. They also tend to offer statements about the inadequacy of the food as a sign of humility. Politeness dictates that guests sample all dishes offered and praise the meal.



While many Malay hosts encourage second servings, Chinese etiquette discourages taking extra food. Because many Chinese consider leaving an empty plate rude, diners usually leave some uneaten food to commend the host's hospitality. A small belch signifies satisfaction with the meal. Guests usually bring the hosts a non-food related gift to thank them for their hospitality and leave promptly at the end of the meal with the other guests.

Many Malays and Indians eat with their right hand, using their fingers and thumb to scoop food into their mouths. They clean

their fingers in a small bowl of water as needed before and during a meal. Traditionally, many Malays and Indians reserve the left hand for sanitary purposes and do not use it to eat. Observant Muslims typically consume neither pork nor alcohol and adhere to specific rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is **halal** (allowed by Islamic law) (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Some Indians, especially practicing Hindus (see *Religion and Spirituality*), avoid beef, while others are strictly vegetarian.

While Malays and Indians often use chopsticks to consume noodles and some other dishes, Chinese also use chopsticks to pick up small morsels of food from communal bowls, placing the portion directly in their mouths or in small, individual rice bowls that they hold close to their faces. While Chinese use spoons to consume soup, they rarely use forks and knives. Chinese never use chopsticks to point or leave them lodged vertically in food –



a custom reserved exclusively for offerings to ancestors (see *Family and Kinship*).

### Diet

Nutrition typically varies by ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status.

Starches tend to feature prominently for their versatility and low cost. Among Malays, a common staple is **nasi** (rice), prepared fried, steamed, or boiled with coconut milk (**nasi lemak**). Many Chinese dishes include rice or **mee** (noodles) made from rice or wheat. Indian flatbread (**roti**) is a common accompaniment to curries or heavier meals. Animal protein is central to many dishes but varies significantly by ethnic background. Pork is a common meat in many Chinese and **Peranakan** (“local born” in Malay, often called Straits Chinese) (see *Political and Social Relations*) recipes, while beef features prominently in several Malay dishes. Chicken, fish, and shellfish are other common ingredients in Singaporean dishes, though many Muslims belonging to the Hanafi school of thought (see *Religion and Spirituality*) do not consume the latter.

Popular condiments and flavorings include lime, garlic, onions, ginger, lemongrass, chilies (such as **sambal** chili paste), coriander, and coconut. Sauces are also key components of many dishes. Soy, fish, or salted egg yolk sauce, and various curry blends accompany numerous meals. Fruits also feature prominently. Jackfruit (a large, fleshy fruit), mangosteen (a small purple fruit with a white, edible interior), lychee and spine-covered rambutan (small fruits with a white, edible interior), papaya, durian (a fruit encased in a large thorn-covered husk and famed for its pungent flavor and smell), and custard apples are popular varieties, among others.

### Meals and Popular Dishes

Breakfast options are numerous and wide-ranging in flavorings and size. Some bread-based options are *roti prata* (a flatbread fried in **ghee**, clarified butter) or toast with **kaya** (a sweet coconut spread) accompanied by soft boiled eggs. *Nasi lemak* served with dried anchovies; **belanchan** (dried shrimp paste), boiled egg, and roasted peanuts; or **congee** (rice porridge) served with minced pork, are other popular choices. For lunch, often served between 12-2pm, many Singaporeans go to food halls or hawker centers (large food courts with stalls around the perimeter) close to their workplaces. One widely popular dish is Hainanese chicken rice (poached chicken served with fragrant rice, chili sauce, and cucumber side dishes). Some others are chili crab (mud crabs stir fried in a tomato and chili sauce), salted egg crab (crab fried with salted egg yolk), and **laksa** (a *Peranakan* noodle dish served with fish, shrimp, or chicken and eggs in a sour coconut broth).



Busy working schedules (see *Time and Space*) have made hawker centers popular options for the evening meal. Dinner dishes are similar to those served at lunch. Other popular dishes are **satay** (skewered and grilled chicken or beef served with a sweet and spicy peanut sauce), or *roti john* (minced meat, eggs, and onions on a loaf of French baguette-style bread that is then

fried on a griddle). For dessert, fresh fruits are common, as are **kueh**, varied bite-sized sweets typically made from sticky rice or wheat flour; **pandan** (a sweet, aromatic leaf used for flavoring) cake; durian **pengat** (like a mousse); and ice cream, often served between a slice of bread or wafers.

## Beverages

Singaporeans drink coffee, tea, fruit juices, and other beverages throughout the day. **Kopi-o** (black coffee with sugar) is a popular drink in the morning, often garnished with evaporated or condensed milk or butter. Many Singaporeans drink **Teh Tarik** (sweetened black tea served hot with condensed milk), especially at **kopitiam** (coffee houses). Some other non-alcoholic options are sugarcane juice or “bubble tea” (made from blending cold black tea with milk, sugar, and various flavorings and adding small, chewy balls of tapioca). Tiger Beer, a local brew, is one of Singapore’s most popular alcoholic beverages, as is the Singapore sling, a shaken gin cocktail made with grenadine, several liqueurs, pineapple and lime juice, and bitters.



## Eating Out

Restaurants are popular options and range from upscale establishments and banquet halls to inexpensive hawker centers, food courts in

shopping centers, **kopitiam**, and **cze cha** (stalls that sell a single dish, often located within larger **kopitiam**). Some restaurants bill tea, starters, and snacks separately from meal costs, despite providing them to all patrons upon arrival. Many food stall owners do not expect a tip, while formal restaurants often include a 10% service charge as part of the bill.

## Health Overview

While the overall health of Singaporeans has improved in recent decades, they continue to face high rates of non-communicable “lifestyle” diseases and other serious health challenges. Between 2000-22, life expectancy at birth increased from about 78 to 83 years, higher than the average of East Asian and Pacific

countries (77) and the US (77), and one of the world's highest figures. During the same period, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased slightly from about 3 deaths per 1,000 live births to 2, a figure lower than the US rate (5) and those of neighboring Malaysia (7) and Indonesia (18).

### Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Singapore's diverse ethnic groups have a rich history of traditional medicines, which typically focus on nonsurgical methods to identify and treat the basic causes of illness. Some Chinese Singaporeans use traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which focuses on herbal treatments, acupuncture (a process in which a practitioner inserts very thin needles into a patient's skin), massage, or cupping (the process of applying suction cups to draw blood and pathogens to the skin's surface), among others. Traditional Malay medicine prescribes similar treatments to TCM but also includes **ruqyah**, Islamic medical traditions centered around Qur'anic prayer and recitation (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Likewise, some Indian Singaporeans rely on the **Ayurvedic** ("science of life" in Sanskrit) system, which seeks to stabilize and rejuvenate the three main bodily energies, or **doshas**, of air, bile, and phlegm. Treatments include eating foods based on body type, physical exercise, yoga, and meditation.

### Healthcare System

Singapore's healthcare system is composed of a three-way partnership that covers all citizens and permanent residents through a multi-payer network. Singapore's primary provider is MediShield Life, a universal insurance scheme that covers high-cost hospital visits and some outpatient procedures. Singaporeans are still responsible for co-payments at the point of service, as well as





deductible and premium costs, which they can pay through MediSave, a mandatory tax-exempt savings account. These MediSave accounts bear interest, and residents and employers are required to contribute between 8-10.5% of an individual's salary to the account, depending on age. The third element of the national insurance system is MediFund, a government-run endowment that subsidizes care for socioeconomically disadvantaged Singaporeans (see *Political and Social Relations*), who are unable to pay for treatment with their MediSave accounts. Established in 1993, MediFund periodically receives funding increases when the government has a budget surplus. Between the three systems, named the "3 M," most Singaporeans pay nothing or incur minimal charges not covered by their MediSave accounts.

Private insurance is available to many Singaporeans, either purchased independently or as a fringe benefit offered through employers. Most private policies are Integrated Shield Plans, which form part of the larger MediShield system but offer more robust coverage options. As such, many private plans are only accessible to citizens and permanent residents, around 67% of whom opted for complementary care as of 2017. Private



insurance unrelated to the "3 M" is also available, but premiums for these plans are not eligible as MediSave expenses.

Some 83% of hospital beds in Singapore are in public facilities, and wards are divided according to insurance coverage. Those with supplementary insurance typically have access to private facilities and generally experience shorter wait times to receive treatment, while those relying on MediFund assistance are often subject to dormitory-style care with shared rooms and bathrooms. Regardless, the quality of care is among the highest in the region.

### Healthcare Challenges

The leading causes of death are chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, which accounted for about 71% of deaths in

2022. Of these, cancer, cardiovascular and genitourinary and digestive diseases, are the most common. Preventable “external causes,” such as suicides, car accidents, and other injuries, resulted in about 3% of deaths, lower than the US rate (6%) and those of neighboring Malaysia (6%). About 21% of deaths in Singapore are from communicable diseases, prenatal or maternal complications, and nutritional or other conditions, higher than the US rate (5%) and the average of East Asian and Pacific countries (8%).

Public health experts have predicted that Singapore’s rapidly ageing population is a risk for its healthcare system. As of 2023, some 19% of the population is aged 65 or older, a figure that is estimated to increase to 25% of Singaporeans by 2030. As the system must expand to accommodate more elderly patients, healthcare administrators also have predicted that escalating costs will be required to ensure an equivalent quality of care in the future. In 2020, government officials announced that healthcare costs will account for the largest increases in government spending over the following decade. Consequently, they introduced a tax increase to help finance the projected growth in health services demand.

As of 2024, the Singaporean government has confirmed just over 3 million cases of COVID-19, resulting in over 2,024 deaths.

Also as of mid-2023, some 88% of Singaporeans have received at least two doses of a vaccine against COVID-19, and about 80% received an additional booster dose. During lockdowns in 2020 (see *History and Myth*), some observers criticized the Singaporean government for perceived inaction in preventing the spread of the virus among Singapore’s migrant workers, many of whom live in overcrowded dormitories (see *Family and Kinship*), are unable to work remotely, and lack access to the “3 M” system available to citizens and permanent residents.

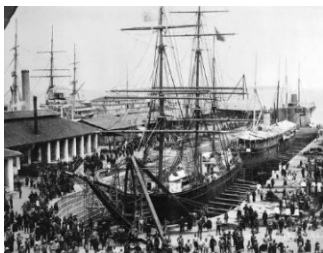


## 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

### Overview

Before British colonization in the early 19th century (see *History and Myth*), Singapore was economically insignificant, at least as compared to its much larger Southeast Asian neighbors. Chinese records from the 1300s describe Singapore as a small fishing village known as Temasek on **Pulau Ujong** (“island at the end,” referring to Singapore’s location at the tip of the Malay Peninsula), Singapore’s main island today (see *History and Myth* and *Political and Social Relations*). Inhabitants likely subsisted by fishing, foraging, and farming. Due to its position along the Strait of Malacca, many scholars believe the island’s early economy became dependent on regional trade.

Most records of Singapore’s economic development begin in the early years of British colonization. Sir Stamford Raffles, founder of British Singapore, sought a British port in Southeast Asia to compete with Dutch settlements in neighboring Indonesia (see *History and Myth*). Because the newly settled British had to buy expensive supplies from Malaccan traders, in 1824, they designated the island a free trade zone to increase competition and lower supply costs. As such, the British forbade Singapore’s first Governor from imposing tariffs on trade or selling land titles to raise funds. Instead, the government raised revenue primarily through opium and spirits sales. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the British had Indian and Chinese migrant workers and forced laborers build modern Singapore’s roads, bridges, and other.



Between 1942-45, Japan occupied Singapore and enacted harsh rule (see *History and Myth*), leading to a scarcity of many basic resources, particularly food and medication. The resultant hyperinflation plagued the Singaporean economy and caused the development of a black market, where locals could buy vital

goods like rice, meat, and medicine. While many Singaporeans celebrated the return of British rule after the end of Japan's occupation (see *History and Myth*), violence and looting destroyed much of the island's infrastructure, notably electricity and water supply systems. Further, high unemployment resulted in a series of strikes in 1947. Nevertheless, from 1948-51, the country's economy recovered as preparation for the Korean War caused global rubber demand to rise just as Malayan rubber production, shipped via Singapore, reached its peak in 1948.

After gaining independence in 1965 (see *History and Myth*), Singapore's nominal GDP per capita was around \$500, similar to that of Mexico. The British military's subsequent withdrawal from Singapore left thousands of residents without jobs and reduced economic activity by some 20%. In response, the government adopted policies promoting economic growth via export-led industrialization. It promoted the export of manufactured goods like matches, fishhooks, and mosquito coils, for which the country had a competitive advantage.



Singapore also sought to attract foreign investment to fuel this industrial growth. Its policies resulted in the development of a large industrial base, as manufacturing became increasingly important to the economy.

From 1970-85, Singapore developed vibrant electronic, petrochemical, and precision engineering sectors. During this period, Singapore became the world's leading producer of hard disk drives (external data storage devices). Further, financial, business, and communications services and the entertainment sector collectively grew from 16-24% of GDP between 1965-85.

Singapore's economy remained robust until the late 1990s, as the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-98 slashed GDP growth from an annual rate of 8% to 1.5% within a year. The manufacturing sector contracted in 1998, after having grown by 4.5% the prior year. With a contraction of 7.4%, Singapore's financial subsector

was hit hardest, as banks curbed local and foreign lending. By late 1998, Singapore had entered recession. In response, the government implemented policies to reduce business costs with corporate tax rebates and cut employer-mandated contributions to the state-run social security system. Such policies allowed for a significant economic recovery at the turn of the century.

Singapore was the first Asian country to succumb to the 2008-09 global financial crisis, as the country's sovereign wealth fund incurred massive losses. To address this crisis, Singapore pledged a collective \$17.6 billion for businesses to retain their employees. In part due to effective economic policy, Singapore's economy recovered and grew by 14.5% in 2010.

In 2020, Singapore's economy suffered its largest setback since independence, as the COVID-19 pandemic caused a recession, with GDP contracting by 5.4% (see *Sustenance and Health*). Nevertheless, Singapore's sound financial policies and its reopening to international business and tourism in 2021 allowed for an economic rebound of 7.2%.

Today, Singapore's economy is similar in size to Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, despite having far fewer people. The country has Southeast Asia's highest GDP per capita – \$84,714 in 2023 – and with its nearly 300,000 businesses, Singapore is the financial center of Southeast Asia. According to one study, Singapore has the world's best business environment, in part due to its government support for business activity and 90 active free-trade agreements. Further, the economy is positioned for sustained growth. Experts predict some foreign firms will move their Asian offices to Singapore from Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai as China shifts its policies amid rising tensions with the US.



## Services

By far the economy's largest sector, services accounted for nearly 70% of GDP and 85% of the labor force in 2023. Major subsectors are financial services, communications, and tourism.

**Financial Services:** Singapore is a global financial services hub that has attracted over \$2.5 billion in financial technology investments over the past decade. The country is home to 4 local and over 100 foreign banks, notably Singapore's DBS Bank, Southeast Asia's largest. Singapore also hosts the Singapore Exchange Limited (SGX), the largest regional stock exchange.

**Communications:** Singapore is Southeast Asia's technology hub. Experts estimate Singapore's communications subsector is worth about \$5.5 billion, and the country is home to the regional branches of many global technology firms such as Amazon, Google, and Meta. Various Singaporean telecommunications companies, notably Singtel, Southeast Asia's largest mobile network operator, have a major presence in India and Australia.

**Tourism:** In 2023, over 13 million tourists visited Singapore, accounting for about 9% of GDP. Popular sites are Marina Bay Sands, Gardens by the Bay, and the Tooth Relic Temple (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In 2023, China accounted for 3.6

million tourists, Indonesia (3.1 million), India (1.4 million) followed by Malaysia (1.2 million) and Australia (1.1million).



### **Industry**

As the economy's second largest sector, industry accounts for some 25% of GDP and 15% of employment. Manufacturing, shipping, and oil and natural gas refining and trading are Singapore's main industrial subsectors.

**Oil and Natural Gas:** Singapore is one of the world's top oil and natural gas trading and refining hubs, with total crude oil refining capacity of 1.5 million barrels per day. In 2021, the government valued the oil, gas, and petrochemical subsectors at \$60 billion. The main refineries operating in the country are Texas-based ExxonMobil, London-based Shell (formerly Royal Dutch Shell), and the Singapore Refining Company. The government also plans to expand liquefied natural gas terminals with a \$500 million investment, as it aims to turn Singapore into the primary hub for natural gas trading in Southeast Asia.

## Agriculture

This sub-sector accounts for less than 1% of GDP and the labor force. As Singapore imports more than 90% of its food and is 100% urban (see *Family and Kinship*), local agriculture is underdeveloped. The country produces some 26% of its eggs, 10% of fish, and 14% of leafy vegetables. Urban farms are the source of all local agriculture, much of which is on the roofs of buildings and skyscrapers. Nevertheless, the Singapore Food Agency has adopted the “30 by 30 Goal,” a plan to increase local food production to 30% of nutritional needs by 2030.

## Currency

The Singapore Dollar (S\$ or SGD) is issued in eleven banknote values, only five of which (2, 5, 10, 50, 100) are frequently used, and one coin value (1). The SGD divides into 100 cents issued in five coin values, four of which (5, 10, 20 and 50) are used. Between 2018-25, US\$1 fluctuated between S\$1.3-1.45.

## Foreign Trade

Singapore's exports, worth about \$379 billion in 2022, primarily consist of integrated circuits, refined petroleum, gold, gas turbines, and packaged medicine sold to Hong Kong (13.6%), China (13.5%), Malaysia (9.5%), the US (7.6%), and Indonesia (6%). In the same year, imports totaled \$424 billion and included integrated circuits, refined and crude petroleum, gold, and gas turbines from China (17%), Malaysia (13%), the US (10%), and Taiwan (9%). As a global entrepot (a port city to which goods are brought for import, export, and distribution), Singapore imports and exports many of the same products.



## Foreign Aid

While Singapore contributes funding for international agencies' efforts to support low-income countries, it has no foreign aid or development aid agency. As such, the country tends to provide bilateral and official development aid on an ad-hoc basis. Though not a major aid recipient, Singapore received \$95,000 of official US development aid in 2022 for the implementation of the International Non-proliferation Export Control Program.

## 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

### Overview

Singapore's physical and telecommunications infrastructure meets the needs of its entirely urban population. Singapore ranked 4<sup>th</sup> on the 2024 Global Innovation index behind Switzerland, Sweden, and the US, Singapore has minimal press freedom and uses its penal code to punish journalists for anti-government publications.

### Transportation

Most Singaporeans travel by public transport. Public transit fares are based on trip distance and tend to be cheap. Singapore's metros and buses typically



have consistent schedules and run on time. The country's 4 public bus operators run some 352 routes that carry nearly 2 million travelers per day. Its six-line metro and three-line light rail, together known as the MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) system, facilitates over two million daily rides. Personal vehicles are less common compared to some other Southeast Asian countries, as Singapore has a Vehicle Quota System (VQS) that caps the number new vehicles that may be registered on the island. Vehicle ownership is too expensive for many residents because the government requires drivers to own a Certificate of Entitlement that costs nearly \$37,000. Taxis and ride-sharing services are widely available. Cycling is also popular, and the government maintains multiple bike routes across the island.

**Roadways:** Singapore has paved all 2,157 mi of its roadways and limits their construction. All vehicle owners who drive on Singapore's roadways must pay a road tax to help maintain the country's roads to a high standard (see *Time and Space*).

**Railways:** The MRT comprises most of Singapore's 149 mi of railways. While the MRT system consists of nine lines, there are



plans to nearly double its rail network through extensions and new line construction by 2030. Singapore is also the final station for the Malaysian **Keretapi Tanah Melayu** (Malayan Railways Limited) railway service, the only passenger service from mainland Southeast Asia to Singapore. The Singapore-Kunming Rail Link, a passenger and cargo service linking Singapore with China via mainland Southeast Asia, is planned to be complete by 2026.

**Ports and Waterways:** Singapore's waterway infrastructure includes multiple canals and rivers that host water taxis, ferries, and recreational boating. The country's 120 mi of coastline are critical to trade. As of 2024, the Port of Singapore is the world's second busiest seaport, after only Shanghai, China.

**Airways:** All of Singapore's 9 airports have paved runways. While 2 of the country's airports are for commercial passenger use, Singapore Changi Airport is the main hub, which served over 67.7 million passengers in 2024. Surveys consistently rank Changi as the world's best airport due to its first-rate facilities,



timeliness, and amenities. The country has one cargo and three commercial airlines. Often ranked one of the world's best carriers, Singapore Airlines is the national flag carrier and flies to nearly 130 global destinations.

### Energy

As of 2022, Singapore generated over 95% of its electricity from fossil fuels, though the government plans to expand renewable energy production.

Singapore has untapped potential for solar power, a cornerstone of the country's Green Plan 2030 that seeks to position Singapore for net-zero emissions by 2050. Singapore also has about 2,001 mi of domestic gas, 697 mi of cross-border, and 5 mi of refined petroleum pipelines.

### Media

Singaporean law does not protect freedoms of press, speech, or association. Through the country's penal codes and anti-fake news laws, the government can arbitrarily imprison journalists or

remove their work from public view. Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP) (see *Political and Social Relations*) often employs regulations that allow government officials to directly appoint editors and board members to leading media outlets. Although Singapore has no imprisoned journalists as of 2022, many choose to self-censor or publish from exile when the PAP targets them with lawsuits or smear campaigns. Media ownership is also highly concentrated. Two large media groups, Singapore Press Holdings and MediaCorp, own all major print, radio, and broadcast media in the country.

**Print Media:** Singapore has limited print media. Popular dailies are Mandarin-language newspapers *Lianhe Zaobao* (Joint Morning Paper) and *Shin Min Daily News*, and English-language newspaper, *The Straits Times*.

**TV and Radio:** TV is a popular source of entertainment and news. Singapore has six major state-owned TV networks. Singaporeans can buy multi-channel cable packages and get international programming via satellite or Internet TV. Radio is also a popular source of information, as Singapore has 19 radio stations that offer news, entertainment, music, and sports content. Radio stations broadcast in all of Singapore's official languages (see *Language and Communication*).

### Telecommunications

Singapore's telecommunications network reaches all residents. The country has 32 landlines and 156 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people as of 2022.

**Internet:** Around 96% of Singaporeans access the Internet daily. With the continued growth of Internet use, Singapore has some 37 broadband subscriptions per 100 people, Southeast Asia's and one of Asia's highest rates. Most residents access the Internet on mobile phones. While Internet access is generally unrestricted, Singapore's government occasionally blocks access to websites that it believes to have "mass impact objectionable" material, such as pornographic content.





For more information on  
the Air Force Culture and Language Center visit:  
[airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC](http://airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC)

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