



choice
TRAVEL

Destination Guide: Singapore

What to know before you go
Essential preparation and planning tips
Accommodation and transport

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Who is CHOICE? Set up by consumers for consumers, **CHOICE** is the [consumer advocate](#) that provides Australians with information and advice, free from commercial bias.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

SINGAPORE OVERVIEW

Best time to go, culture, language, health, safety, laws, watchouts, scams, emergency contacts and more.

Travel-size tips

- › Australians can [fly to Singapore](#) in as little as five hours.
- › The temperatures are high all year round, with little variation in seasons.
- › Australian passport holders don't need a visa to enter Singapore provided they meet the [necessary entry requirements](#).
- › [Singapore Airport](#) is considered one of the best in the world, so it's worth setting aside some extra time to explore it when you arrive or depart.
- › English is the [official language](#) in Singapore.

Know before you go

- › Singapore has [strict laws](#) on drugs, homosexuality, smoking, chewing gum, littering and even flushing the toilet.
- › Mosquito-borne [illnesses](#) such as dengue fever are a risk. Do what you can to avoid insect bites.

- › Singapore sometimes experiences extreme levels of [air pollution](#). If you have respiratory problems, speak to your doctor before you go.

Best time to go

Wetter months: November - January

Drier months: May - July, February

[Check average temperatures and rainfall.](#)

- › Singapore is only 137km north of the equator, so it has no summer or winter - just year-round balmy temperatures.
- › The country has no definitive wet or dry season either, but rainfall is usually greater from November to January. The driest months are May to July, and February - May and June are the hottest months.
- › Rain tends to come in brief daily downpours rather than setting in for days on end.
- › Singapore's infamous 'haze' (i.e. smog) can reach [extreme levels](#) when illegal slash-and-burn land clearing takes place in nearby Indonesia during

its dry season, generally between June and September.

- Peak tourist times include Christmas, Chinese New Year (January - February), the Great Singapore Sale (May - July) and the Singapore Grand Prix (September).

Culture

- Singapore's multicultural population is mostly made up of ethnic Chinese, Malay and Indian people, as well as people from all over the world who migrate there for work.
- Singapore is a wealthy and modern society, but it still places great importance on traditional values.
- Singaporeans are generally more conservative and formal than Australians, so keep in mind that our 'easy-going' nature could be misconstrued as impolite.
- Public displays of affection, such as kissing, are not appropriate.
- Homosexual acts are illegal, so public displays of affection between same-sex couples aren't recommended. That said, Singapore has an emerging (albeit low-key) [gay scene](#).
- It's considered rude to touch a person's

head, point at them, or show them the bottom of your feet.

- 'Face' is very important in Singaporean culture. That means Singaporeans don't like to be embarrassed or make a scene, and they'll sometimes even be reluctant to say 'no' to you or admit that they don't know something.
- Tipping is not necessary, but it is appreciated. Some restaurants add a service charge to the bill – but this is not a tip for the service staff. Even if you leave money on the table the restaurant owner may pocket it, so make sure you hand your tip directly to the staff member.

Official language: English

Mandarin, Malay and Tamil are also recognised as official languages. Most people speak English as their first language.



Health and safety

- The tap water in Singapore is safe to drink and food hygiene standards are generally high.
- Singapore has an excellent health care system. Hospital bills for non-citizens can be high, though, so make sure you're covered by [travel insurance](#).
- There is a low risk of catching malaria in Singapore, but dengue fever is still a concern. Both diseases are spread by mosquitos, so pack repellent and take steps to minimise mosquito bites.
- Singapore's air quality is often poor. You can check daily pollution levels at haze.gov.sg. When levels are high, you may need to limit your time outdoors, particularly if you have respiratory problems or if you're pregnant, elderly or travelling with children.
- The air quality can occasionally reach very dangerous levels between June and September when mass land-clearing and forest fires in Indonesia send smoke northward to Singapore.
- Masks for outdoor use are available from pharmacies and supermarkets. Singapore's [Ministry of Health](#) recommends the N95 mask, which has 95% filter efficiency. The masks are not suitable for children (it's best to keep kids indoors).
- For the latest health and safety advice on Singapore, check smartraveller.com.au

[Do I need vaccinations to travel to Singapore ?](#)

[➤ Page 6](#)

Tip: Have you registered your plans with [Smartraveller](#) and checked the latest safety advice on the region you're travelling to?



Laws and watchouts

Laws

- Singapore has strict (and sometimes bizarre) laws with tough punishments, ranging from hefty fines to canings and even the death penalty.
- Drugs are highly illegal in Singapore and convictions can result in capital punishment. Authorities have been known to conduct random drug tests on locals and visitors, and even if you took drugs before you entered the country, you're breaking the law if they're still in your system.
- Many medications that are legal in Australia are restricted in Singapore. This includes some painkillers, cold and flu medications and ADHD medications. If you're planning to travel with medication, you may need to apply for approval from Singapore's [Health Sciences Authority](#).
- **Tip:** No matter where you travel, you should carry all medications (even vitamins) in their original packaging, along with their original prescription. It's also a good idea to carry a letter from your doctor explaining what the medications are (using generic names) and what they're for.

- Homosexual acts are illegal, and even though kissing could land a same-sex couple in prison, fortunately the law is rarely enforced.
- Pornography is banned, as is public nudity – even in your own home or hotel room, if the curtains are open.
- Littering, spitting, eating on public transport or jaywalking could earn you a hefty fine or community service.
- Smoking is banned in all public indoor areas and many outdoor areas including playgrounds, bus stops and pedestrian bridges.
- Chewing gum is banned. If you bring it into the country you could be fined \$1000.
- Using somebody else's Wi-Fi is an offence, as it's considered 'hacking' under Singaporean law.
- It's even illegal not to flush a public toilet. Yes, police do sometimes check.
- The legal drinking age is 18.
- The blood alcohol limit for driving is .08. Drink driving carries a prison sentence of up to four years.

More tips on [driving in Singapore > Page 13](#).

Watchouts

Crime rates in Singapore are extremely low (see the above laws and punishments for an idea as to why). Scams and petty theft do still happen, though, so keep your belongings close and be as cautious as you would be at home. Always cover the keypad when using ATMs, and never let your credit card out of your sight when paying at restaurants.

Making a complaint

If you fall victim to theft or any other crime, contact the police (numbers below).

If you have a dispute with a local business or service and you're unable to reach an agreement, you can contact the Singapore Tourism Board:

feedback@stb.gov.sg or 1800 736 2000.

Alternatively, you can lodge a complaint with the Consumers Association of Singapore: case.org.sg.

If your gripe is with an Australian or international tour operator, airline, or booking site, check online at choice.com.au for the usual procedures for making a complaint or seeking compensation.

Emergency contacts

If you are calling from your Australian mobile, use Singapore's country code +65 or dial 112 to be redirected to the police emergency (999) number.

➤ **Police:** 999

➤ **Non-emergency police:** 1800 225 0000

➤ **Ambulance and fire:** 995

➤ **Non-emergency ambulance:** 1777

Hospitals, clinics and dentists

Singapore has high-quality health care. The Australian High Commission website lists the contact details of [doctors](#), [hospitals](#) and [dentists](#).

Australian High Commission in Singapore

singapore.embassy.gov.au

25 Napier Rd, Singapore

+65 6836 4100

24-hour Australian Consular Emergency Centre: +61

2 6261 3305 or 1300 555 135 or SMS +61 421 269 080

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Visas, vaccinations, phone roaming, SIM cards, internet, power adapters, money, travel insurance, handy apps and more.

Visas and passports

Australian passport holders do not need a visa to visit Singapore, provided they:

- have a passport with at least six months' validity from your entry date
- have a return or onward ticket
- have the correct visa for their onward destination (if applicable)
- have sufficient funds for their stay in Singapore.

Visa rules may change. For up-to-date information check with the Singapore High Commission:

mfa.gov.sg.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations aren't essential for travel to Singapore, but you may need them, depending on your health status and your travel plans. The Travel Doctor recommends you make sure your routine vaccinations are up to date, and that you consider shots for typhoid, hepatitis A and B, and Japanese encephalitis. See their

[Singapore health planner](#) for more information or speak to your doctor.

If you are entering Singapore from a country with [high risk of yellow fever](#) (Australia is not a high risk country) you must provide proof that you've been vaccinated.

Some bats in Singapore carry rabies but the virus hasn't spread to dogs and cats, so unless you're planning on coming into close contact with bats, you shouldn't need a rabies shot.

Tip: Some vaccinations need to be given four to six weeks before departure, so get in early.

Phone and internet

Global roaming and coverage

Singapore has great mobile phone coverage and your Australian mobile phone should work well on the country's extensive GSM network.

If you plan on using your phone a lot, especially if you'll be using data, be prepared for some big bills.

Check global roaming rates with your telco:

› [Telstra](#)

› [Vodafone](#)

› [Optus](#)

› [Virgin](#)

Tip: Switch off data roaming on your phone before you leave Australia. Also switch off your voicemail and ask friends and family to text you rather than calling (you'll be charged if you answer incoming calls).

Local SIM

A pre-paid Singaporean SIM card will save you money on calls and data. The country has three main telcos: Singtel, M1 and StarHub, all of which work on the GSM network and will be compatible with your Australian handset as long as it's unlocked. You can buy SIMs from phone stores, post offices or convenience stores.

At Changi Airport, you'll find an [M1 store](#) in Terminal 3, or you can buy a SIM from one of the money changers. You'll need to register your SIM using your passport as ID, the easiest way to do this is at a phone store where staff can help you.

You can top up your credit online, through an ATM, or with vouchers from convenience or phone stores.

Travel SIM

If you'd prefer to be organised before you go, a pre-paid travel SIM is an easy option, though the rates probably won't be as cheap as with a local SIM. Travel SIMs are available online and from some travel agents and post offices. Check that the SIM you're buying has coverage in Singapore.

Remember: Your phone will need to be unlocked to accept a SIM from another network.

[Beat global roaming bill shock](#) - our guide to unlocking your phone and changing your global roaming settings.

Wi-Fi

You'll find free Wi-Fi almost everywhere in Singapore through the Wireless@SG program run by the government and the country's three telcos, but you'll need a Singaporean phone number to register and access it.

Almost all hotels offer free or paid Wi-Fi, and some cafes also serve as hotspots.

Tip: Always ask permission before connecting to a network. Under [Singaporean law](#), helping yourself to Wi-Fi is considered computer hacking. The Singaporean government restricts access to some online content, including pornographic and media pirating sites.



Power plugs

Standard voltage: 230V

Frequency: 50Hz

Singapore's voltage and frequency is the same as Australia's, so you can use your Australian appliances without fear of frying them.

Power sockets:



Singapore's power sockets and plugs are different to Australia's, so you'll need an adapter.

Money

Currency: Singapore dollar (\$ SGD)

Check [xe.com](https://www.xe.com) for the latest exchange rates.

Important: Tell your bank about your travel plans two weeks before you leave. Card activity in a foreign country could be mistaken for fraud and you could find your account frozen.

ATMs are widespread in Singapore and you'll rarely have trouble finding one. Remember, you'll pay a transaction fee and a conversion fee every time you use your Australian card.

Tip: Citibank and ANZ operate in Singapore, so Australian customers can save on some fees by using their ATMs. You'll still pay more than you would in

Australia, though, thanks to conversion fees.

Credit cards are accepted almost everywhere, including hotels, shops and restaurants, but a minimum spend of \$20 often applies. Most taxis accept credit cards, but charge a hefty 10% fee. Remember, you'll be charged higher rates by your bank for using your Australian credit card overseas.

Money changers can be found at Changi Airport, in hotels, shopping malls and in popular tourist areas like Orchard Road and Little India. It's better to change most of your money once you're in Singapore, rather than in Australia, as Singaporean money changers don't charge commission (but will obviously make money from their choice of exchange rate). You're unlikely to get the best rates at the airport or in hotels.

Travellers' cheques aren't widely used these days, but you'll still find some places in Singapore that will cash them. You'll often get a better rate with money changers than with banks or hotels, since the money changers don't charge commission.

Travel money cards can be pre-loaded with foreign currency and cancelled at any time, giving you the security of travellers' cheques with the versatility of a debit or credit card. Read our article on [travel money cards](#) to find out if they could save you money on your trip.

Tip: Carry at least two cards and more than one cash currency (Australian and Singaporean). Split your money and cards between separate bags. That way if you lose one, you have a back-up.



For more advice on overseas spending see our [travel money guide](#).

Sales tax of 7% is included in the price of most goods and services. Tourists can [claim a GST refund](#) on some purchases over \$100 SGD when they leave the country.

Tipping is not necessary, but it is appreciated. Some restaurants add a service charge to the bill - but this is not a tip for the service staff. Even if you leave money on the table the restaurant owner may pocket it, so make sure you hand your tip directly to the staff member.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance is essential, even when you're travelling to a relatively safe country like Singapore.

Buy insurance at the same time as you book your trip, that way you'll be covered if you have to cancel for some reason before you go.

For more information, read our [buying guide](#), and to choose the best cover, see CHOICE's [travel insurance reviews and comparisons](#).

Check with your insurer about exclusions that may affect you, including sports and pre-existing medical conditions.

Be aware that anything that happens to you [while under the influence](#) of drugs or alcohol is unlikely to be covered by insurance.

Tips:

- Keep a print-out of your travel insurance details with you at all times while on your trip.
- Share your insurance details with family or friends before you leave.





Handy links and apps

Consider adding these links and apps to your phone, tablet or laptop before you go.

- **Travel apps** such as [Triposo](#) and City Guides ([Apple](#)/[Android](#)) include maps and info about popular destinations in Singapore.
- **GrabTaxi** is Singapore's most popular taxi-booking app.
- **gothere** helps you plan how to get from A to B on public transport.
- **travelfish.org** lists their favourite free iPhone apps for Singapore's events, restaurants, shopping malls and airport.
- **Currency conversion apps** help you work out costs in Australian dollars.

Tip: Wherever possible, choose apps that work offline so they won't chew up your mobile data or stop working when you're not connected to the internet.

Tip: To save a map onto your mobile device for offline use, select the area on Google Maps then select 'Save offline map' from the menu and follow the directions on the screen. Your GPS positioning will still work on the saved map, even when you don't have access to the internet. Alternatively, go to 'Offline maps' in the menu and select a city.

Websites

- [yoursingapore.com](#) (Singapore's official tourism website)
- [singapore.embassy.gov.au](#) (Australia's High Commission in Singapore)
- [gothere.sg](#) and [mytransport.sg](#) (public transport planners)
- [wikitravel.org/en/Singapore](#) for crowd-sourced information on culture, travel tips and more (may not always be accurate).

ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Flights to Singapore, airport guides, key destinations, transport, car hire, accommodation, tours and more.

Flights

Flight time from Australia: 5+ hours

Singapore is a common stopover point for flights between Australia and Europe, and Changi Airport connects with almost every major destination in Asia. There are many direct flights to Singapore departing from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin and the Gold Coast.

Airlines include Qantas, Jetstar, Singapore Airlines, SilkAir, Virgin, Scoot, Tigerair, Emirates, Etihad Airways, China Eastern Airlines, Air New Zealand, British Airways, Iberia and Ethiopian Airlines.

At the airport

Changi is Singapore's only international airport and is a major international travel hub connecting more than 250 destinations worldwide. Changi often tops "[world's best airport](#)" lists, and with hotels, shops, restaurants, tropical gardens, a koi pond and even a cinema and swimming pool, it's considered a tourist destination in itself. If you have a long layover at

Changi, don't worry, this is one airport you won't mind being stuck in!

Tip: If you're bringing cigarettes into Singapore, even just a packet in your hand luggage, you'll need to [declare them at customs](#) and pay a duty. You can't buy duty free cigarettes at the airport on arrival; however, you can buy them on departure.

Departure tax **will be included in your airline ticket, so you won't need to pay in cash, as is the case in some countries.**

GST refunds can be claimed on departure from Changi Airport on [some purchases](#) made in the country.

Tip: If you're transiting through Changi Airport and your transit is five hours or more, there are [free tours](#) of the city available that can have you back at the airport within two hours.

Singapore Changi Airport (SIN)

- 20km east of Singapore CBD.
- **Taxis** leave from outside each terminal. The journey to the CBD takes about 30 minutes. There is a \$3 airport surcharge which increases to \$5 between 5pm and 12am, Friday to Sunday. Fares between 12am and 6am on any day attract a 50% surcharge.
- Limousines and larger taxis and vans can be arranged through the [ground transport desks](#) on arrival (tip: the desk at Terminal 3 is open 24 hours) or booked in advance.
- Trains connect Terminals 2 and 3 with downtown Singapore and the [MRT](#) underground network.
- **Bus number 36** runs from Terminals 1, 2 and 3 to the city. The journey takes about an hour and the fare is less than \$2. (Tip: Make sure you have some coins, as change won't be given.)
- Coaches can take you directly to Johor Bahru in Malaysia via the [Transtar](#) Cross Border Service (TS1).
- Car hire is available through [Avis](#) and [Budget](#) (desks at Terminals 1, 2 and 3) and [Hertz](#) (desks at Terminals 2 and 3).
- Airport website: changiairport.com

Key destinations

- [Chinatown](#)
- [Little India](#)
- [Orchard Road](#)
- [Marina Bay](#)
- [Clarke Quay](#)

➤ [Sentosa Island](#)

➤ [Singapore Zoo](#)

➤ [Singapore Botanic Gardens](#)

Getting around

Tip: Check if you need to pre-book any tickets,

Singapore has an excellent public transport system that's cheap, safe, clean and easy to use. It's a very small country, so almost everywhere is within reach by rail or bus. If you're planning to use public transport a lot, consider a [Singapore Tourist Pass](#) which gives you unlimited rail or bus travel for one, two or three days.

Trains

Singapore's [MRT](#) (Mass Rapid Transport) system covers much of the island, and you'll find train stations within walking distance of almost every major tourist attraction. Services are frequent and tickets are cheap and easy to buy at stations. All trains and stations are accessible to wheelchair users and parents with prams.



Buses

Singapore's bus service ([SBS Transit](#)) covers even more ground than the train network, and it's even cheaper. Buses are air conditioned and comfortable. You'll need the exact fare, as change isn't given, or you can swipe your [Singapore Tourist Pass](#) when getting on and off.



Taxis

Taxis are everywhere in Singapore, since few people own private cars. You can hail one on the street or find



them queuing outside shopping centres, hotels and hawker centres. All taxis should be metered, and you might pay a surcharge if you travel during peak times or on a public holiday. Airport fares incur a surcharge of \$3 or \$5, depending on when you travel. To book a taxi, call the all-company hotline: 6-DIAL CAB (6342 5222) or use an app, such as [GrabTaxi](#).

Ferries and boats

Singapore is one of the world's busiest ports. Passenger ferries and cruise liners link the country with Malaysia, Indonesia and much of Asia. 'Bumboats' cruise the harbour and the Singapore River, and shuttle tourists to the island of [Pulau Ubin](#). Transport tip: [gothere.sg](#) is a great website for working out how to get from A to B by any means of transport in Singapore. It's also available as an [iPhone app](#).



Car hire

Car hire isn't a popular option for tourists, since Singapore is so easy to navigate by public transport or taxi. The country has a high tax on car ownership, so most locals don't drive either. If you do decide you need a hire car, you'll pay a lot for the privilege, and for the petrol and tolls.



Tip: Renting an electric car from Smove ([smove.sg](#)) at least saves you the cost of petrol.

Local car hire companies may offer slightly cheaper rates than the big international agencies. You can compare rates at [drive.sg](#).

Tip: If you're planning to travel into Malaysia, it's far cheaper to catch a bus across the border then rent a car once you're there.

Singapore has a [private car rental scheme](#) which allows car owners to hire out their vehicles on weekends and public holidays. The owner is responsible for making sure the car is insured, and the driver must meet the minimum age and licence requirements on the insurance policy. It's illegal for car hire agencies to offer these kinds of rentals, but they have been known to do it. If a rental price seems too good to be true, check that it's not a privately owned vehicle and ask to see the insurance certificate.

Driving in Singapore

As with everything else in Singapore, most drivers follow the rules - or else they face hefty fines and jail time.

- Vehicles drive on the left.
- You can drive in Singapore on your Australian licence (or a licence from any English-speaking country) for up to 12 months.
- The blood alcohol limit is .08. Drink driving carries a



prison sentence of up to four years.

- Seat belts are compulsory, as are child seats for children under eight.
- Mobile phones can only be used hands-free.
- Buses have right of way, and it's illegal to drive in a bus lane.
- Headlights must be turned on between 7pm and 7am.
- Keep left if you're not overtaking. 'Road hogging' is an offence.
- Road markings are different to those in Australia, and include white or yellow lines or zig zags to indicate parking rules. [See this explanation.](#)

Accommodation and tours

Tip: Have you booked your accommodation for at least the first night of your trip?

Accommodation options range from five-star hotels to cheap and crowded hostels. Bookings can be made on the usual sites, such as [booking.com](#), [hotels.com](#), [expedia.com](#) or [hostels.com](#), or you may find a more competitive rate through the hotel's own website. Check customer reviews on Tripadvisor before you book.

Airbnb can be a good place to find a bargain apartment, as many Singaporeans travel for work and rent out their pads while they're away.

Gay travellers: Homosexuality is illegal in Singapore, but fortunately the law is rarely enforced. Same-sex couples can search for gay-friendly hotels using filters on [Wotif](#) or [Lastminute](#) or on sites such as [travelgayasia.com](#) and [globalgaylodging.com](#).



Tip: If you're looking for a place to sleep off your jetlag during the day, you'll have trouble finding a hotel that allows you to pay by the hour (the assumption is that you're up to something illegal). The best place to sleep during the day is at one of the airport hotels, where rooms can be booked in six-hour blocks.

Tours can be organised once you've arrived in Singapore, or in advance through a travel agent or travel booking site. Search Tripadvisor or Viator for recommendations from other travellers. Boat tours of the harbour and river are always popular.

[Hop-on-hop-off bus tours](#) are another popular option with travellers. Although they cost more than standard public transport, they're the quickest and easiest way to see the sights, and they include commentary.

Tip: Changi Airport runs [free tours](#) of the city that last about two hours, and are great if you're on a tight schedule.

Package tours are a low-stress option for travellers who don't want to organise their flights, accommodation and on-the-ground transport separately. For deals, check airline and travel booking sites as well as travel agents. ■