

CITY BREAK

SINGAPORE

A melting pot of global cuisines, this city state is home to Michelin-starred restaurants, UNESCO-recognised street food and creative cocktail bars

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It may be diminutive in size, but Singapore is a gastronomic powerhouse, with a dining scene that reflects its unique cultural fabric. During its days as a trading post in the 19th and 20th centuries, immigrants from across the globe — including China, India and the Malay Archipelago — travelled to its shores, bringing with them the unique culinary traditions of their home countries.

This cultural diversity remains a distinctive feature of Singaporean cuisine, nowhere more so than at the ubiquitous hawker centres — open-air food complexes where vendors serve an array of cuisines at affordable prices. Here, you can feast on dishes with Chinese origins, such as Hainanese chicken rice (poached chicken served on a bed of rice cooked in chicken fat) and Teochew bak kut teh (pork rib soup), or Malay nasi lemak (coconut rice served with various toppings) and Indian rojak (a salad of eggs, tofu, fritters and vegetables drenched in a spicy-sweet sauce) — each for less than £5.

At the other end of the spectrum, there's also an abundance of fine dining restaurants, including three-Michelin-star establishments Odette and Les Amis. And like any major city worth its salt, Singapore is home to its fair share of celebrity chef-led establishments, including Gordon Ramsay's Bread Street Kitchen and Daniel Boulud's db Bistro & Oyster Bar.

While many long-standing venues have been forced to shut for good as a result of the pandemic, exciting new entrants are springing up in their place, much to the delight — and relief — of food-loving Singaporeans. And some are positively thriving: Restaurant Euphoria, which showcases homegrown chef Jason Tan's unique brand of 'gastro-botanica' cuisine, debuted on the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants 2021 list, despite having only opened its doors at the end of 2020.

Be it at a fancy restaurant, a bustling hawker centre or no-frills kopitiam (traditional coffee shop), there's nothing Singaporeans enjoy more than getting together with friends or family over a hearty meal. In a city-state where food is a national obsession, dining out is a beloved communal pastime and a fundamental way of life.



IMAGE: GETTY

Evening at Marina Bay, with a lily pond and buildings of the Central Business District

A DAY IN

TIONG BAHRU

Singapore's oldest housing estate also happens to be its hippest neighbourhood. In the early 2010s, businesses began setting up shop in Tiong Bahru, breathing new life into the area. Today, the sprawling estate's pre-war art deco buildings house an eclectic array of indie boutiques and cool cafes, making it one of the most fascinating places in the city.

Start at **Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre**, where you can order chwee kueh (steamed rice cakes topped with preserved radish) or mee siam (spicy rice vermicelli) for a hearty breakfast. Then, check out the lively wet market on the ground floor, where stalls sell all manner of fresh produce — from fish and poultry to spices — with the sounds of haggling a constant backdrop.

Next, walk to **Yong Siak Street** for a spot of shopping. Visit **Woods in the Books** for picture books and graphic novels, and **Nana & Bird** for chic apparel and jewellery. Be sure to also pop into **ArtBlue Studio**, which showcases works by Vietnamese artists.

For a light lunch, head to French-style boulangerie **Tiong Bahru Bakery**, whose artisanal breads and pastries are among the best in town (the sticky, buttery kouign-amann is a must-try). Or for something more substantial, photogenic cafe **Merci Marcel** serves up brunch plates such as quinoa beetroot salad and crab tartine with avocado on sourdough.

Just around the corner is **Nimble/Knead**, a day spa housed across several shipping containers. Decompress with a Swedish or Balinese massage, or opt for an invigorating body scrub.

For dinner, book a table at buzzy **Bakalaki**, which dishes up authentic, rib-sticking Greek cuisine: keftedes (beef meatballs stuffed with mint and lemon), moussaka, souvlaki (grilled meat skewers) and more. Wash it all down in classic Greek style with a shot or two of ouzo.

Clockwise from top: Nana & Bird; rosemary smoked organic egg, Odette; Atlas' extensive bar; chwee kueh (steamed rice cakes with preserved radish)



BARS

Jigger & Pony

Officially the best bar in Singapore (at least, according to Asia's 50 Best Bars 2021), Jigger & Pony shakes up creative cocktails in a friendly setting. Try signature drinks such as the yuzu whiskey sour or opt for something more adventurous, like the Korean-inspired make it rice — a vodka-based creation featuring red rice yeast. jiggerandpony.com

Atlas

This glamorous bar is renowned for its gilded art deco interiors, but it's not just a pretty face. Atlas also houses more than 1,300 labels in its enormous gin library (said to be the largest in the world), with varieties from as far afield as Iceland and Bolivia. Some bottles are so rare that guests are only allowed a single shot per visit. atlasbar.sg

Native

As the name suggests, Native shines the spotlight on local and regional ingredients, from tapioca and turmeric to... ants. One of its most popular cocktails is antz: Chalong Bay rum, aged sugarcane juice and coconut yogurt, garnished with the zingy insects. There's also a huge range of Asian spirits, including sake from Japan and arrack from Sri Lanka. tribenative.com

A DAY IN

JOO CHIAT & KATONG

'Easties' — residents of east Singapore — often declare that their side of the island is home to the best food, and you'd be hard-pressed to argue. A case in point is the vibrant Peranakan (Straits Chinese) enclave of Joo Chiat and Katong. Amid the neighbourhood's colourful shophouses and colonial bungalows, you'll discover traditional cafes alongside modern restaurants and hip bakeries.

For the quintessential Singaporean breakfast, grab a table at **Chin Mee Chin Confectionery**, where you can sink your teeth into kaya toast (charcoal-grilled bread slices slathered with handmade coconut jam). Reopened in July after a two-year closure, the coffee shop retains its old-school decor, right down to its distinctive green-and-white tiles.

Next, cross the road to **Cat Socrates**, a quirky boutique purveying books, stationery and locally designed trinkets. From here, it's a 10-minute walk to what's undoubtedly the neighbourhood's most-photographed attraction: a row of pretty, pastel-coloured heritage shophouses along **Koon Seng Road**.

Once you've taken your photos, head back to East Coast Road for lunch at **328 Katong Laksa**, where you can slurp up its namesake dish: noodles in a spicy coconut soup, topped with prawns, beansprouts and cockles. Then, cool down with a refreshing scoop of gelato from **Birds of Paradise** next door. The botanical-inspired range of flavours on offer includes strawberry basil and white chrysanthemum, both of which pair perfectly with the shop's signature thyme-infused cones.

For an immersive history lesson, check out **Katong Antique House**, an impeccably preserved Peranakan abode filled with antiques and artefacts such as crockery, jewellery and lanterns. Visits are by appointment only.

Come evening, walk over to East Coast Park for dinner at **Long Beach UDMC**, which is famed for its black pepper crab. Order additional dishes such as barbecued cuttlefish, crispy whitebait and steamed razor clams for a decadent seafood feast.



FINE DINING

Odette

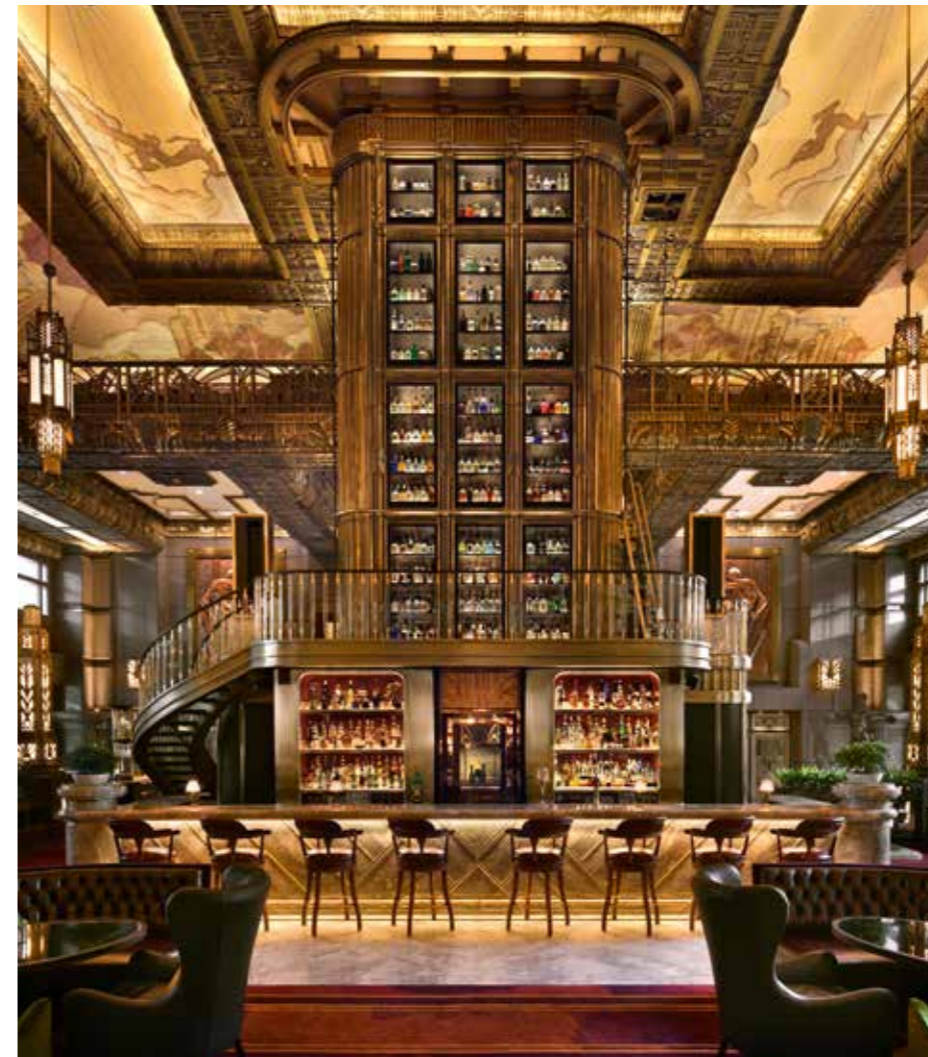
Three-Michelin-starred Odette is arguably Singapore's most celebrated restaurant, and with good reason. Chef Julien Royer sources top-notch ingredients from artisanal producers to create immaculate French-Asian plates such as the signature Normandy brown crab with wasabi oil and nashi pear. The interiors — a combination of pale pink terrazzo, grey velvet and natural timber — are equally delectable. odetterestaurant.com

Restaurant Euphoria

Despite being less than a year old, this elegant space — owned by acclaimed local chef Jason Tan — has become a destination restaurant. In line with Tan's 'gastro-botanica' culinary philosophy, plant-based ingredients take centre stage; even meat and seafood dishes like lamb and langoustine are elevated by sauces derived from vegetables. restaurant-euphoria.com

Nouri

This inventive restaurant specialises in what it calls 'crossroads cooking' — food that lies at the intersection of various cultures. A meal here will take you on a world tour: expect dishes such as acaraje (an Afro-Brazilian fritter), cha ca la vong (Vietnamese grilled fish) and pan-seared Hokkaido scallops, all served up at a marble communal table (there are also individual tables for small groups). nouri.com.sg



IMAGES: HOSANNA SWEE; GETTY; EK YAP



Michelin-starred
Hawker Chan, Chinatown
Complex Food Centre

SPOTLIGHT

HAWKER CENTRES

The lifeblood of Singapore's culinary landscape, hawker centres are markets crammed with stalls selling an array of affordable dishes, attracting a steady stream of hungry customers throughout the day. Expect to find retirees gossiping over steaming mugs of coffee in the morning, office workers refueling with roast duck rice or bak chor mee (minced meat noodles) at lunchtime, and families tucking into a spread of cai png (rice with various meat and vegetable dishes) in the evening. Hawker culture is such an integral feature of Singaporean life, in fact, that it was added to UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2020.

Maxwell Food Centre, in the Central Business District, is a perennial favourite among locals and

visitors alike. Brave the queues at Tian Tian Hainanese Chicken Rice for a stellar rendition of Singapore's unofficial national dish (Anthony Bourdain was a big fan), or go for a belly-warming bowl of Cantonese-style fish soup from Jin Hua.

A short walk away is **Chinatown Complex Food Centre**, where you'll find the cheapest Michelin-starred meal in the world. At Hawker Chan, you can try chef Chan Hon Meng's soy sauce chicken rice or noodles for a mere £2.

Alternatively, head to the newly refurbished **East Coast Lagoon Food Village**, in the east of Singapore. Order some smoky satay from Haron Satay, and stingray slathered in sambal (chilli paste) from Stingray Forever BBQ Seafood, before taking a stroll along the beach.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

Singapore Airlines flies from Heathrow and Manchester, while British Airways flies from Heathrow. singaporeair.com
ba.com

WHERE TO STAY

Doubles at Raffles Singapore start at \$989 (£529), room only. raffles.com/singapore

HOW TO DO IT

Travelbag offers an 11-day tour of Singapore and Bali from £1,449, including flights and accommodation. travelbag.co.uk

MORE INFO

visitsingapore.com

PERANAKAN FAVOURITES

National Kitchen by Violet Oon

The doyenne of Peranakan food (a mix of Chinese, Malay, Javanese and other influences), Violet Oon serves classics like ayam buah keluak (chicken stew with mangrove tree nuts) in this space, at the National Gallery Singapore. violeton.com

Candlenut

This Michelin-starred restaurant offers traditional Peranakan dishes made with premium produce. The beef rendang is made with Wagyu, while the kueh pie tee (filled, crispy pastry shells) is stuffed with Boston lobster. comodempsey.sg/restaurant/candlenut

Daisy's Dream Kitchen

For a more laid-back setting, this homely spot serves hearty, home-cooked favourites such as chap chye (mixed vegetable stew) and ngoh hiang (meat rolls wrapped in beancurd skin) at wallet-friendly prices. daisysdreamkitchen.oddle.me