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Entertainment

Boring Singapore? Forget it. For a tiny island, the country packs in a remarkable number of things to do. It's not just drinking either – though the nightlife is among the best in Asia. There's a thriving theatre scene, music from indie to jazz and classical, and plenty of cinemas showing Hollywood, Bollywood, Hong Kong and everything in between.

Thanks to the Singapore government's tight control over development zoning, there are numerous areas given over almost entirely to bars, clubs and restaurants. The most popular strips, where a bar crawl means you won't have to walk more than 300m all night, are Mohamed Sultan (drop the 'Rd' if you don't want to sound like a tourist), Chijmes in the Colonial District, Clarke Quay, Robertson Quay and Boat Quay (including Circular Rd), Club St in Chinatown, Emerald Hill and, to a lesser extent, the expat ghetto Holland Village.

The once ascendant Boat Quay has fallen out of favour in the ever-fickle world of drinking fashion, though it still heaves with people. Despite its ludicrous gumdrop makeover, Clarke Quay is the place to go (though how cool you can look sitting on a giant lily pad is debatable). Robertson Quay is also popular. Mohamed Sultan is perennially packed, though for our money the road is too wide to give the area much atmosphere.

Emerald Hill, a strip of former Peranakan shophouses off Orchard Rd, houses a number of very tastefully renovated bars with a great atmosphere. Similarly, Club St is full of mostly excellent bars inside old shophouses and clan headquarters.

Sentosa's nightlife scene has become much more lively in recent years as part of a seemingly successful attempt to make this once unfashionable island popular with the club crowd, for whom the prospect of partying on a beach, artificial or not, has proven too good to resist.

Activity junkies won't be disappointed either. Singaporeans are very keen on sport and, without a winter to keep them indoors, there's a whole range of opportunities throughout the year to jump around, skim across, run about and hit back and forth.

Tickets & Reservations

SISTIC (☎ 6348 5555; www.sistic.com.sg) has a virtual monopoly on event ticket sales in Singapore and its outlets can be found all over the city, including the DBS Arts Centre (Map pp224–5), Parco Bugis Junction (Map p232), Suntec City (Map p230), Victoria Theatre & Concert Hall (Map p230) and Wisma Atria (Map pp226–7) on Orchard Rd. The website provides a convenient rundown of all the major events coming up in Singapore.

SLEAZE SINGAPORE

It comes as quite a surprise to many, but Singapore has a seedy underbelly of some repute. Prostitution is legal, but there are still large numbers of illegal sex workers, particularly from China. Meanwhile, an unintended offshoot of the budget airline boom has been the number of prostitutes flying down from Thailand, earning money they only dreamed of back home, then flying back before their visas run out.

The sleaze centre of the city is undoubtedly Geylang, where it is officially restricted to the even-numbered Lorong. There is also a significant pocket of activity along Joo Chiat Rd. Both of these areas are popular mainly among ethnic Chinese.

The Indian sleaze hotspot is Desker Rd, the successor to the famous Bugis St, where prostitutes and transvestites ply their trade.

Orchard Towers – the famous 'four floors of whores' – is the venue of choice for Europeans, though it has recently become a fashionably ironic hangout for trendy Singaporeans as well. The escalators of the towers are usually patrolled by transvestites trying to pick up men before they reach the bars.

For a fascinating insider's look into the high-class sex industry, read *Invisible Trade* by Gerrie Lim, available in most bookshops.

THEATRE

The **Singapore Arts Festival** (www.singaporeartsfest.com), which features many drama performances, is held in June. Music, art and dance are also represented at the festival, which includes a Fringe Festival featuring plenty of street performances.

The opening of the **Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay** (Map p230; ☎ 6828 8222; www.esplanade.com; 1 Esplanade Dr) has thrown the spotlight on Singapore's vibrant theatre and dance scene. Other performance venues include the following:

Black Box (Map p230; ☎ 6338 4077; Fort Canning Centre)

DBS Arts Centre (Map pp224–5; ☎ 6733 8166; 20 Merbau Rd)

Drama Centre (Map p230; ☎ 6336 0005; Canning Rise)

Guinness Theatre (Map p230; The Substation, 45 Armenian St)

Jubilee Hall (Map p230; ☎ 6331 1732; 3rd fl, Raffles Hotel Arcade, 328 North Bridge Rd)

Kallang Theatre (Map pp224–5; ☎ 6345 8488; Stadium Rd)

Substation (Map p230; ☎ 6337 7800; www.substation.org; 45 Armenian St; ☎ box office 4–8.30pm Mon–Fri)

Victoria Theatre & Concert Hall (Map p230; ☎ 6345 8488; 11 Empress Pl)

ACTION THEATRE Map p230

☎ 6837 0842; www.action.org.sg; 42 Waterloo St; Dhoby Ghaut MRT

Set in a two-storey heritage house, this established theatre group shows local and international plays with contemporary themes in its small, 100-seat upstairs theatre and in the two open-air venues.

NECESSARY STAGE Map p236

☎ 6440 8115; www.necessary.org; B1-02 Marine Parade Community Bldg, 278 Marine Parade Rd; bus 12, 14 or 32

One of Singapore's best-known experimental theatre groups; does some great interactive and collaborative works with schools.

NRITYALAYA AESTHETICS SOCIETY

Map p230

☎ 6336 6537; www.nas.org.sg; 01-01 Stamford Arts Centre, 155 Waterloo St; Dhoby Ghaut MRT
Singapore's only full-time Indian dance and music troop. The society also holds an annual drama festival.

SINGAPORE DANCE THEATRE Map p230

☎ 6338 0611; www.singaporedance theatre.com; 2nd storey, Fort Canning Centre, Cox Tce; Dhoby Ghaut MRT

This top dance company performs traditional ballets and contemporary works. The group's Ballet under the Stars season at Fort Canning Park is very popular. There are regular classes in ballet, jazz ballet and pilates.

SINGAPORE REPERTORY THEATRE

Map pp224–5

☎ 6221 5585; www.srt.com.sg; DBS Arts Centre, 20 Merbau Rd; bus 54 from Clarke Quay MRT

Based at the DBS Arts Centre but also performing at other venues, this theatre group offers up repertory standards such as works by Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, as well as some modern Singaporean plays.

THEATREWORKS Map p230

☎ 6338 4007; www.theatreworks.org.sg; The Black Box, Fort Canning Centre, Cox Tce; Dhoby Ghaut MRT

One of the more experimental and interesting theatre companies in Singapore. Often performs at the Black Box theatre.

TOY FACTORY THEATRE ENSEMBLE

Map pp234–5

☎ 6222 1526; www.toyfactory.org.sg; 15A Smith St; Chinatown MRT

The cutting-edge bilingual Toy Factory Theatre Ensemble gives foreign works a local spin and brings plays such as *Shopping and F***ing* to Singaporean audiences. It also stages traditional Chinese performances.

WILD!RICE

☎ 6223 9081; www.wildrice.com.sg

Possibly Singapore's most accomplished theatre group, due in no small part to the talents of artistic director Ivan Heng. Wild Rice's productions range from farce to serious politics and fearlessly wade into issues not commonly on the agenda in Singapore.

CINEMAS

Movie-going is hugely popular in Singapore, and, at around \$8.50 per ticket, it's great value. Multiplex cinemas abound, and you can find city centre ones at Parco Bugis