

A complete guide to Singapore's distinct districts

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Singapore's multicultural neighbourhoods offer up a wealth of unexpected, diverse, and unique experiences

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Neighbourhood watch: Singapore's districts are as enticing as they are diverse Credit: Singapore Tourism Board

Don't get us wrong – we'll always have a soft spot for places such as neon-drenched Orchard Road, with its colourful art installations and groundbreaking architecture, and Marina Bay, with its water-spouting Merlion statue. But there are also numerous lesser-known neighbourhoods perfect for those keen to gain deeper insights into the Singapore's history, food scene and culture. Here are the ones to have on your radar.

Kampong Gelam

Kampong Gelam, just a short hop from Orchard Road, is a vibrant neighbourhood with a rich history. Visit the stunning Sultan Mosque, built in 1824 by Sultan Hussein Shah, for a guided tour of one of Singapore's most prominent religious buildings. At the neighbourhood's heart is Haji Lane, a mural-adorned avenue lined with some of Singapore's best independent boutiques. You'll find several thrift stores here, and it's a

great place for Singaporean-made jewellery (top purchases include jewellery studio [SSFW](#)'s quirky necklaces). There are plenty of cafés at which you can restore energy levels – try [Lima](#) for Middle Eastern treats.



Gold standard: Sultan Mosque is one of Kampong Gelam's architectural highlights Credit: Getty

Chinatown

This is one of the world's oldest [Chinatowns](#), and it's another great place for a history fix. Keep an eye out for the beautiful murals painted by Yip Yew Chong, a Singaporean street artist commissioned by the Urban Redevelopment Authority to daub Chinatown's walls with scenes from its past. One of his most famous pieces is Temple Street's Clogmaker mural, depicting a tradesman at work in his shophouse. This is the only Chinatown with a Buddhist temple, mosque and Hindu temple on a single street, and you can learn more about the way different religions left their mark on Singapore at the [Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum](#).



Religious education: the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum explores how different faiths have shaped Singapore Credit: Singapore Tourism Board / Lim Wei Xiang

Chinatown is also a magnet for foodies who flock to its fine dining restaurants (including [Meta](#), for French-Japanese fusion cuisine) and wallet-friendly hawker centres such as the [Maxwell Food Centre](#), where specialities include Singaporean classic Hainanese chicken rice. Visit Banda Street's [Chinatown Visitor Centre](#) to sign up for various walking tours – the Hawkerwalk Old School Snacks Walking Tour is a great way to get a flavour of the neighbourhood.

Little India

Another paradise for foodies, [Little India](#)'s hotspots include the Tekka Food Centre, a hawker centre which dates back to the early 1900s, and [Banana Leaf Apolo](#), a restaurant founded in 1974 by Chellapan Sankaranathan, who served food on banana leaves as a nod to his homeland (the tradition continues to this day). Don't miss another Singaporean dish, the fragrant fish head curry. Wander through this neighbourhood and you'll be forgiven for thinking you've teleported to Mumbai or Calcutta – you'll pass market stalls piled high with rainbow-hued pyramids of Indian spices, and numerous shops selling Indian sweets. [Serangoon Road's Moghul Sweet Shop](#), Little India's oldest confectioners, is an essential stop-off for anyone with a sweet tooth.



Singaporean special: fish head curry is a must-try dish at Banana Leaf Apolo Credit: Singapore Tourism Board / Danny Santos

Katong

A colourful neighbourhood packed with heritage buildings (including numerous pastel-hued shophouses built in the late 1800s), Katong is one of Singapore's most Insta-friendly areas. Many of its shophouses have been transformed into bars. Keep an eye out for the narrow passageways squeezed between these buildings as you stroll around – these historic thoroughfares were where traders gathered to barter and ply their wares. There are numerous nods to Peranakan (Singaporeans with Malay or Indonesian heritage) culture, and it's a great place to pick up traditional Peranakan souvenirs, including beautifully woven floor mats. Architectural gems worth checking out include the Senpaga Vinayagar Temple – head inside to admire its granite statues of Lord Shiva.



Maximalist marvel: explore the ornate interiors of the Senpaga Vinayagar Temple Credit: Frederic Araujo / Alamy Stock

Joo Chiat

Joo Chiat is a neighbourhood best explored on leisurely wanders – ideally while sipping a *kopi peng* (iced coffee) from one of its many cafés. Several places specialise in Nonya cuisine, Singaporean dishes prepared using Malay and Chinese techniques. The area’s name is a nod to Singaporean philanthropist Chew Joo Chiat, who once owned a coconut plantation here. Joo Chiat has some of the finest examples of Peranakan shophouses, and a large number of these have been lovingly restored to their former glory, complete with the original paint jobs and ornate roof tiles. Top spots include Humble Origins Coffee Roasters (try the fruity Burmese coffee) and Rye, a slow fashion boutique tucked inside one of Joo Chiat’s oldest shophouses.

Jalan Besar

Jalan Besar translates as “big wide road” – in this case one best explored after a wander around Little India, through which part of it passes. This is where you’ll find the Jalan Besar ActiveSG Stadium, although most people come here for the independent stores, bars and restaurants housed in art deco buildings, dating back to colonial times.

Where to stay

The Clan Hotel is close to Raffles Place, Marina Bay and Chinatown (get lucky and you’ll bag a room with a view of its quaint shophouses). Take the time to check out the various artworks, which include The Pact, a 50-piece aluminium art installation by Grace Tan.



Room with a view: the Clan Hotel puts you in striking distance of Raffles Place, Marina Bay and Chinatown Credit: Singapore Tourism Board