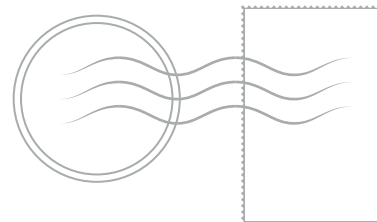


POSTCARD

Singapore



The buzzing enclave of Little India is best explored on foot, discovers **Nick Goodyer**

It's mid-morning, the temperature is already north of 30 degrees and the humidity much like that of a steam bath. I'm at the Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple in Singapore's Little India district, where a bewildering number of Hindu deities depict various expressions of one supreme being. Multiple personas, same person. It's a lot to take in, in the heat, noise and incense smoke.

I've arrived here on a walk through this lively district. I've long thought walking is by far the best way to see a city, granting a sense of intimacy, an up-close-and-personal look at what's really happening at street level. And Singapore is ideally suited for pavement-pounding: it's flat, safe, just about everyone speaks English, there's excellent public transport and, though it's famously hot and humid, there are plenty of air-conditioned malls and cafes for a cooling pit stop.

Singapore is nothing if not vibrant. Officially founded when colonial agent Sir Stamford Raffles planted the Union Jack on the island in 1819, it is a colourful, heady mix of British, Malay, Chinese and Indian influences.

I've already been to a garland store, where marigold, frangipani and jasmine petals are threaded into elaborate and fragrant necklaces used to decorate statues, people and buildings. And next I visit a modest museum focusing on Singapore's Indian heritage, and the Little India Arcade, a sensory overload of spices, music, street snacks, clothing, trinkets and arts and crafts. Our group have a go at tying saris, with mixed success.

Though the walking is not arduous, it has given me quite an appetite. Our next stop, and our last, is Komala Vilas, one of the oldest Indian vegetarian restaurants in the city and one which serves southern Indian cuisine. Here I indulge in one of my favourite dishes, *masala dosa* – a crêpe of rice and lentils, stuffed with spicy potato and onion and served with a bowl of spicy sambar stew.

It's been a marvellous and illuminating introduction to Singapore's Indian heritage. Tomorrow, I'll take a walk through Chinatown to discover yet another unique facet of this beguiling city. **TW**



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PICTURE: The Original Singapore Walks

TOP: Garland store in Little India
ABOVE: Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple