

# Savouring Singapore

Tamara Hinson finds out why you'll never go hungry in Singapore



**I**n June, Singapore hosted the World's 50 Best Restaurants Awards – the first time the event has been held in Asia – and the government is attempting to secure Unesco status for its hawker food culture.

It's a reminder of Singapore's culinary diversity. It's got dozens of Michelin-starred restaurants, alongside some of the world's best street food, so there are plenty of places to chow down, whatever your budget.

#### SAVE: HAWKER HIGHLIGHTS

The mercury's pushing 28C, and the fans clattering above my head aren't doing much to help me forget that Singapore's sweat-inducing humidity makes it feel much hotter.

Luckily, my restaurant is an open-air one but it's not – unlike the dining rooms of many of the five-star hotels – on a marble terrace overlooking Singapore's water-spouting Merlion. It's the Tekka Centre – one of Singapore's best hawker centres.

This is a favourite haunt I discovered years ago in the heart of Little India and just a short walk from Orchard Road. I fell in love

with the wide range of cuisines from all over the world, although about half of the stalls specialise in Indian food from all regions of the country – some of which I've never heard of.

Take your time to choose your dish, wander from stall to stall and watch the dextrous chefs hand-spinning naan breads before baking them in tiny ovens and sprinkling them with coriander.

There's more wallet-friendly grub at nearby Haji Lane. A mural-daubed, narrow street popular with backpackers and hipsters, it runs parallel with Arab Street (which refers to Bussorah Street and its offshoot alleyways), and both are crammed with some of Singapore's coolest independent bars and restaurants.

There are also several fantastic cafes here, including Konditori for delicious pastries and Haji Lane's Juice Clinic, where you can munch on a rainbow-hued slice of cake before offsetting any guilt with a nutrient-packed smoothie.

And speaking of cake, it's a common misconception that hawker centres specialise only in savoury dishes. Sweet items often include *pulut hitam*, a porridge ➤

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:  
Landing Point's afternoon tea;  
StraitsKitchen at Grand Hyatt  
Singapore; gin parlour at The  
Clifford Pier; Tekka Centre  
OPPOSITE: Alma by Juan Amador  
PICTURES: HeryHuang; Danny Santos



BOOK IT

**Gold Medal** offers a week's bed and breakfast in a Grand Deluxe Room at the five-star Orchard Hotel Singapore, from £989, flying from Gatwick with Emirates on September 2. The package includes transfers, a Good Morning Ni Hao walking tour that visits the local wet market, breakfast at the Chinatown Complex, and a stop at a traditional herbal shop. [goldmedal.co.uk](http://goldmedal.co.uk)

**Kuoni** offers four nights in a Club Room at the Oasia Hotel Downtown – within walking distance of some of Singapore's most famous hawker centres and bars – plus three nights in a Deluxe Room at the newly opened Village Hotel At Sentosa. The package includes breakfast, Singapore Airlines flights from Heathrow and transfers, with prices from £1,649, based on two sharing, for selected departures in October. [kuoni.co.uk](http://kuoni.co.uk)

made with black rice and served with coconut milk – and the Tekka Centre's Hajjah Fatimah serves some of the best in town. I've also got a soft spot for ice kacang – shaved ice topped with red beans and brightly coloured syrup. Find it at Jin Jin Hot/Cold Desserts or at Jalan Bukit Merah's ABC Brickworks Market & Food Centre, one of Singapore's first hawker centres and home to several recipients of Michelin's Bib Gourmand awards, created to recognise cuisine that is delicious and great value.

And don't forget to visit Liao Fan Hong Kong Soya Sauce Chicken Rice and Noodle at the Chinatown Complex Food Centre. It's the world's cheapest Michelin-starred restaurant – about £1.20 for a plate of chef-owner Chan Hong Meng's legendary chicken rice.

Finally, squeeze in a visit to the Newton Food Centre, to the north of Orchard Road. Built in 1971, it's got a huge number of barbecue seafood stalls, but be prepared to battle the crowds – this historic hawker centre has become especially popular following its starring role in the film *Crazy Rich Asians*.

**SPEND: BUFFET, BARBECUE AND BRUNCH**

It's a myth that hawker centres are the only option for travellers on a budget. Proof of this can be found at the Grand Hyatt Singapore's StraitsKitchen restaurant, just off Orchard Road. It's famous for its street food-inspired buffets, from a reasonable £35 a head.

Many of the hand-picked chefs started their careers in hawker centres, and you'll be able to feast on more than 70 dishes, all of which reflect Straits cuisine – Chinese, Indian, Malay and Peranakan.

The open kitchens make this one of Singapore's most spectacular restaurants – must-sees include the barbecue

“At the world's cheapest Michelin-starred restaurant, it's about £1.20 for a plate of the legendary chicken rice

station, where machete-wielding chefs beaver away behind dangling rows of golden ducks, and the dessert station, with its pyramids of fluorescent bean paste cubes. Feeling brave? Opt for a scoop of durian ice cream.

No visit to Singapore would be complete without afternoon tea, and one of the best is at the Fullerton Bay Hotel's Landing Point. It's also great value, as it's one of the few 'endless' afternoon teas in Singapore, with waiters happy to replenish your cake stand (from £30). It's a great way to line your stomach for a visit to the hotel's greenhouse-like Clifford Pier, with its outdoor gin parlour decked out in quirky decor that even includes a tuk-tuk.

The neighbourhood of Dempsey Hill, a former army barracks transformed into an expat-filled retail and dining destination, is also worth checking out. The diversity of the restaurants means there's something for all budgets. It's home to Candlenut, the world's first Michelin-starred Peranakan cuisine restaurant, as well as the Dempsey Cookhouse & Bar, opened by Michelin-starred chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

But Dempsey Hill is most famous for its popularity with the Sunday brunch crowd, who flock to Don Quijote for the tapas buffets (from £23 with free-flowing soft drinks) and the RedDot Brewhouse inside the old Tanglin

Barracks for enormous burgers (from £12) and delicious salads such as RedDot guava (£9).

**SPLURGE: STAR ATTRACTION**

Singapore was the first country in southeast Asia to be rated by the Michelin guide, and you don't have to go far for fine dining. City centre Michelin-starred restaurants include Alma by Juan Amador for Asian-inspired European cuisine; Jiang-Nan Chun for Cantonese cuisine, where the speciality is Peking duck prepared for 14 hours and smoked in a mesquite wood oven; and Béni for French fine dining with a Japanese twist. While that combination sounds odd, it most definitely works, even if coming to Singapore and gorging on French food is akin to visiting Kobe and ordering a Big Mac.

For a culinary experience combining tradition and theatre with a strong sense of place, Labyrinth at Singapore's Esplanade Mall is hard



to beat. Entering this unassuming restaurant feels like stepping into a nightclub. There are dark walls and carpets, with carefully positioned lighting highlighting a handful of tables and the unusual decor, the restaurant's dishes arranged on the walls, alongside images of the people who inspired founder and chef LG Han's dishes.

It's one of the few farm-to-table restaurants in Singapore, and Han

sources 80% of ingredients locally. The Labyrinth Rojak, for example, contains herbs and flowers from a local urban farming project, while the highlight of Grandma's Fish Maw Soup is a beautifully arranged rosette of yellow snapper, bought from a local fish market. It's not cheap, but your £106 will get you 16 dishes that provide a delicious insight into Singapore – and what better way to explore this varied city than through its food? **tw**

SWEET THING

Whatever your budget, there's always scope to swap a nightcap for a sugar fix at Holland Village's 2am:dessertbar, founded by Singaporean pastry chef Janice Wong.

The most popular items on the carefully curated dessert menu include the Melon Winter (£13), a yoghurt disc served with Midori jelly and cassis meringue, and the Chocolate Praline Poprocks Cake (£11).

All the desserts can be paired with drinks, ranging from the gin-based concoction recommended as a perfect partner for the Melon Winter, to the sparkling sake suggested as an accompaniment for the Green Tea Tart (£12).

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