

## 24 Hours in Sindapore

By RUBY BOUKABOU

fter getting to know
Singapore airport way too
well during transits, on my
last trip from Australia to Paris I
decided it was time to make a date
with the Lion City. I discovered a
smooth, cosmopolitan city. The
24-hour stopover rewarded me with
tasty poodles, calming temples,
beachside coconuts, an unlikely
local tour guide and a tap dance.

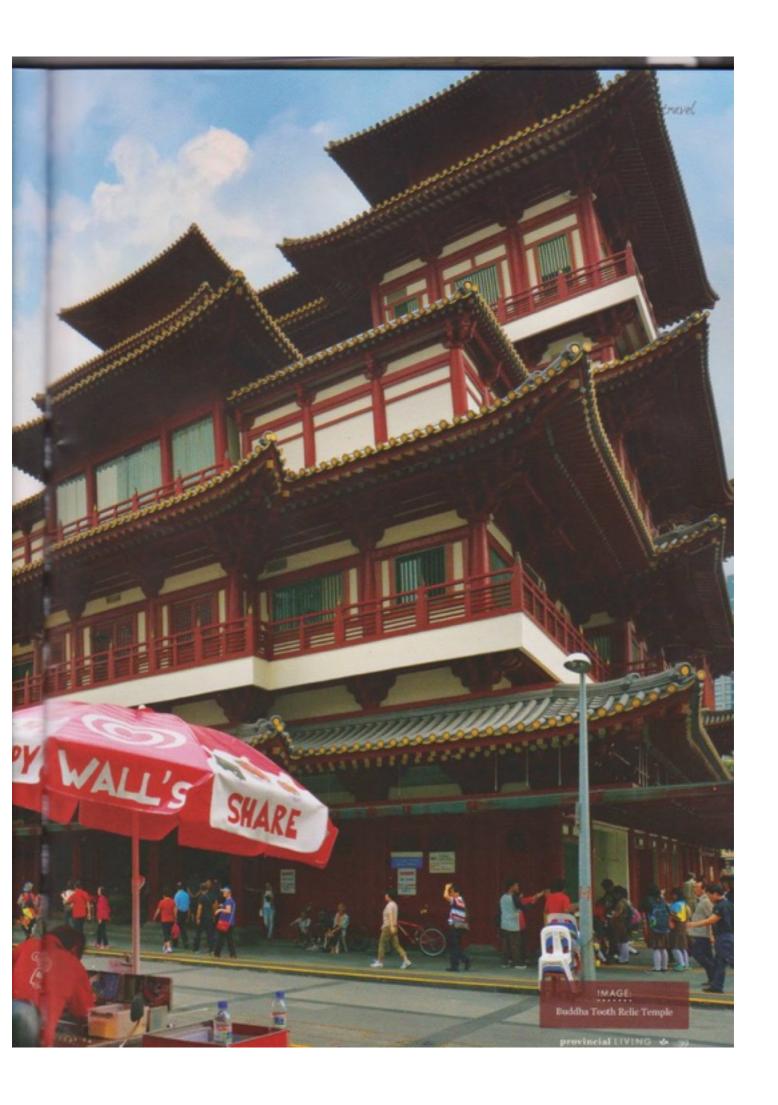
I touch down in Singapore a midnight, after an eight hour flight from Sydney. Hit with the tropical island's humidity, I'm glad I have taken a friend's advice and prebooked a boutique hotel. A small part of me was tempted by the idea of spending 24 hours out and about, plunging into Singapore life; I even conjured a fantastical image of being wooed back in time, solving an exotic mystery in an opium den But I have things to do when I get to France, and no time to recover from midnight adventures in the underworld, imagined or not. This trip is about getting a taste of the city at a leisurely pace, and easing my jet lag at the other end. No missions or bucket lists, just a small pit stop to

discover Singapore at my own pace.

When I check into The Scarlet Hotel, a renovated 1920s Art Deco delight in the heart of Chinatown, it's too late to try the pool, bar or beauty spa. I'm tired from the flight anyway, so happy to head to my comfortable, cosy-chic room, take a shower and get some sleep.

Six hours later, I'm up and out, recalling my Singaporesovy friend's tip: "You have to start your day with a kopi-C and a sugarcane juice at a Chinatown hawker's market near your hotel.". I spy temples and markets, feel the excitement of being in a foreign city and, having a bad sense of direction, particularly before coffee, soon get lost.

I arrive at Maxwell Food Centre, a food court that, by the no-frills look about it, seems a good local spot. I can't wait any longer for caffeine, so order my kopi-C (coffee with sweetened condensed milk) and sugarcane juice and sit at a common table. I ask the two guys opposite what I should eat with these exotic drinks.







with prawns and vegetables.Lee goes to see his baby daughter and work. Kenny, who made his millions as a trader then lost them, and is currently enjoying a stint as a selfpronounced burn, leads me to the metro. We go a few stops on the fast, modern train and jump off to visit a temple where he likes to pray occasionally.

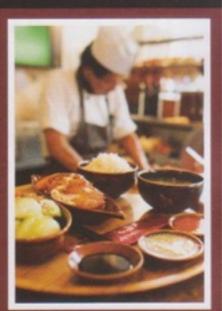
On entering the courtyard of the Palelai Buddhist Temple (watpalelai.org), founded in 1963, a calmness descends and I follow Kenny, lighting and offering incense. We then slip off our shoes and enter the sombre interior of the temple. As Kenny prays, I think how fortunate it is that I've met a local who can be making millions one second, swigging beer and downing noodles as a burn the next, happy as a spontaneous guide.

It's mid-afternoon and the heavy humidity has set in, so I wholeheartedly agree to Kenny's suggestion of heading to the beach, this time via an air-conditioned taxi.

Our destination is behind yet another food court, East Coast Lagoon Food Village. As late lunchers chill at the outdoor tables, Kenny introduces me to some foodstall owners as they prepare for the dinner rush. We peek over their buckets of live crabs, fresh, bright red chillies and duck soups, buy beer (for Kenny) and a coconut (for me) and head to the sand. I pull off my shoes and run to dip my feet in

the water, expecting refreshment. But the water is hot. So instead of a dip, I plonk down on the sand and gaze over at the oil rigs; the scene suddenly looks and feels surreal as the jet lag swoops in. While I know I still have a few hours in front of me and could be hitting the Orehard Road retail hub, visiting the National Gallery to take in the world's largest collection of South-East Asian art (nationalgallery.sg), spotting white tigers at the rainforest zoo (zoo.com.sg), taking pictures at the futuristic super park Gardens by the Bay (gardensbythebay.com.sg), getting a foot massage (Tomi Food Reflexology, Lucky Plaza #B1-114, 304 Orchard Road,) or mani-pedi (thenailmpir.com or thenailsocial.co), trying curries in Little India or even taking a dip in the swish Marina Bay Sands' sublime infinity pool ... I'm quite happy to lie here on the sand and chat to my new friend.

There's one thing I do want to do though, and that's catch up with a Singaporean tap dancer/singer called Alex. She had invited me to a swing-dance event at The Arts House, a multi-disciplinary arts venue in the old Parliament House (theartshouse.sg). Time doesn't quite permit, so Kenny and I meet her at Holland Village for a quick hello and a Shim Sham - a classic tap-dance routine - on the now darkening streets lit by colourful neon from the dozens of busy food establishments. >>





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP TOP LEFT TO BOTTOM RIGHT:

View of CBD skyline at Marina Bay Buddha Tooth Relic Temple, Chicken rice, A chicken rice food stall, View of Marina Bay Sands and ArtScience Museum

Lee arrives for a final meal:
delicious chicken rice and oyster
omelette. He offers to drive me to
the airport so there's just enough
time to pick up my suitcase and stop
with him, Kenny and Alex for a quick
cocktail at Flight Bar of the Marina
Bay Sands SkyPark, overlooking
Singapore's iconic skyline. It's the
perfect way to end the day. ♣

## Hotel tip

The Scarlet Hotel
(thescarlethotels.com/
singapore) was around
S\$204 when I booked, as
was the neighbouring, also
recommended, Hotel 1929
(hotel1929.com). If ready to
splash out for sensational
city views and an exquisite
rooftop infinity pool, book the
glamorous Marina Bay Sands
(marinabaysands.com).



