

A nighttime photograph of the Singapore skyline. The Merlion statue is in the foreground, spouting water. Behind it, the city is filled with brightly lit skyscrapers, including the Maybank Tower and the Fullerton Hotel. The water in the foreground reflects the city lights.

grand getaways

48 HOURS IN SINGAPORE

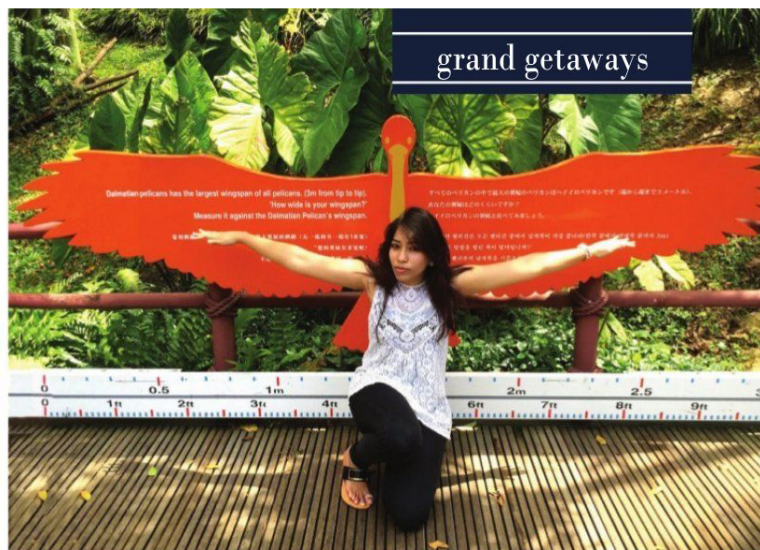
Travel junkie Neeharika Satyavada was thrilled to play tour guide for her own parents when they visited Singapore. Though it was a short trip, she made the most of every minute, taking them to all the popular hotspots and iconic places in this fascinating city-state.

When I learned that my parents and I would be together in Singapore for three days and that I had to show them around the city, where I had briefly lived, I was in a frenzy trying to come up with every experience that I knew they would enjoy. I wrote down all the must-sees on every tourist's list. From running between getting vegetarian food of their choice and familiarising them with my favourite haunts, I had just 48 hours in which I could give them their first 'touristy' experience of this city-state which, for all good reasons, is touted to be one of the greatest cities in the world – to live and work in.

We began our day with a visit to Merlion Park, and went to all the other popular spots in the vicinity. The Merlion was originally commissioned and unveiled in 1972 by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to welcome all visitors to the city, at the mouth of the Singapore River. Today the statue stands overlooking the Marina Bay, right opposite the Fullerton Hotel. This half-fish and half-lion structure that represents Singapore is quite iconic. Anyone who has visited Singapore will definitely not miss an opportunity to pose for a picture in front of it! From here we went on to the Singapore River Cruise, and I must say it was a pleasant trip on a breezy afternoon down the cobblestoned pathways of history. We learned about the history of the Raffles' Landing Site, where the founder of modern Singapore first stepped foot on the island in 1819, and Boat Quay, the heart of the trading port town that was then called 'Singapura'. You can choose to get off at Clarke Quay, an area that is now home to the trendiest nightclubs and restaurants in town. Irrespective of time, this side of the river



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is all hustle and bustle, and this is the place to be for club-hopping or dancing the night away. We, of course, chose to complete our tour by riding on the Singapore Flyer.

The next two stops on this route were the Marina Bay Sands and Gardens by the Bay. Be it the Super Tree Grove, the Flower Dome or the Cloud Forest conservatories, they are every photographer's favourite spots. The 22-metre walk above the ground, along the Skyway is mesmerising. Gardens by the Bay is said to be one experience that should not be missed; unfortunately, we couldn't take the walk, so we chose to use the Helix Bridge to walk to the Marina Bay Sands. This sprawling specimen of modern-day architecture is home to one of Singapore's most luxurious hotels, a famous casino, and numerous fashion boutiques.

We ended the first day by binge shopping on Orchard Road. This 2.2-kilometre stretch is heaven for shoppers – retail therapy at its finest! If you are looking to pick up some smart street fashion and quirky accessories, then Bugis Junction is where you should go, while for some fun souvenirs, China

Town is the answer. The TinTin Store in Chinatown is a personal favourite; you can't help but fall in love with it if you grew up reading and loving TinTin comics.

Day two was more about leisurely strolls in the lap of nature, for how can you miss out on that when you are in the Garden City of Singapore. We went to the Jurong Bird Park and the Night Safari, but I would say that a visit to the Singapore Zoo and a detour on the River Safari are also well worth the trip. One just needs to pick and choose, depending on how much time is available.

Also, to soak in the culture of this vibrant city, at least one meal at any of the Hawker centres is a must; this is where one gets to experiment with all varieties of authentic Southeast Asian food.

Overall, I would say that Singapore has a lot to offer to every kind of traveller. Clearly, it's much more than just a city you transit through before you head off to more exciting destinations. - Neeharika