

TRAVEL

VIII..

DECCAN CHRONICLE ■ 25 OCTOBER 2009

Spectacular CAN A COUNTRY LEND ITSELF A SENSE OF CHARACTER? THE NEW SINGAPORE IS SURE HAVING A GO...

■ HIMANSHU BHANDARI

Don't worry about looking around, you just concentrate on buying things," said a worried grandma the day before I was set to leave for Singapore. Worried more about my aversion to shopping ("Doesn't know anything, will get fleeced I tell you — he has that look") than anything else. It would appear the image of Singapore as a shopping destination is more extreme than I'd previously imagined. But there had to be more. Now was the time to tell yourself if you believe something strongly, it turns true.

I can't explicitly vouch for infantile logic but it may have done the trick — a shopper's paradise it may be, but Singapore offers so much more to see, hear, feel and above all, think about. Particularly for the lone traveller. First up, the obvious attractions. For the adventurous types, or those with kids, Sentosa island seemed worth the hype. Back on the mainland, the Flyer is quite an addition to the skyline, offering a bird's eye view of the no doubt impressive landscape. Much happier at ground level, I decided to wander through Orchard Street — the signature upscale boulevard that seems a prerequisite for any tourist city worth its salt these days. Suitable for visits of wonderment, but no place to settle down.

Which is hardly applicable to the rest of Singapore. Armed with a map (free, available at every other corner), I found myself using all forms of the island's public transport — cabs, buses and the tube — within days.

So far, so good. Singapore had met most expectations, and exceeded some. But what about a less savoury aspect, a flipside, an underbelly? Not



(Clockwise) Clarke Quay on the banks of the Singapore River — HIMANSHU BHANDARI

all of Singapore is the spotless, 10,000-watt-worth-of-lighting, shiny, happy paradise of all things good and duty-free. Like far-flung pockets to the north and west ("far" being a very relative term on the small island). Life here seems far removed from the main civic district; in fact it's closer to state of affairs in neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia.

Yet even at the heart of South-West civic district, little pockets in Chinatown and Little India have a grimmer, more rooted feel. As I walked from the latter toward similarly "suburban" Ferrer Park up the road, a multitude of bylanes and backalleys threw a spanner in the works. This wasn't the Singapore of the brochure, but that's what made it exciting. Few other places have South Indian, Pakistani, Malay, mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese and Vietnamese street food (and DVDs!) — often all within the space of a few blocks. Multi-culturalism is a byword for

most travel marketing these days, but now on, I'd only be convinced by something akin to a Japanese massage parlour atop Ghanesh Textiles.

Having said that, these aren't areas for a I am stroll, so I decided to head out, eventually. But not before the "other" Singapore had revealed itself. Underbelly? As close as it comes here. Unsavoury? No way. It pays not to stick to the menu.

Special mention for Clarke Quay — now a small, tightly-packed stretch of watering holes, food joints and the odd designer ice-cream parlour — all on the banks of the Singapore River. The aromas are great, the drinks on the expensive side and the waitresses friendly. Maybe a bit too friendly... must be good for business.

In a short visit, I was satisfied in the knowledge that I'd experienced an alternative Singapore. Overwhelmingly likeable, but profound? I wasn't yet ready for that realisation.



GETTING THERE

By Air: Singapore is one of Southeast Asia's largest aviation hubs. The easiest way to enter Singapore is by air. In addition to flagship carrier Singapore Airlines and its regional subsidiary SilkAir, Singapore is also home to Tiger Airways, and Jetstar Asia.

By Road: The Causeway is a very popular and thus terminally congested entry point connecting Woodlands in the north of Singapore directly into the heart of Johor Bahru. There are buses to/from Kuala Lumpur and many other destinations in Malaysia through the Woodlands Checkpoint and the Second Link at Tuas.

By Sea: Ferries link Singapore with the neighbouring Indonesian province of Riau Islands, and the Malaysian state of Johor.

By Train: Singapore is the southern terminus of Malaysia's Keretapi Tanah Melayu network. It runs two day trains and a sleeper service daily from Kuala Lumpur.

Tourist information: For more information log on to Singapore Tourism Board's site at www.visitsingapore.com

Accommodation: Hotels come in various categories from one to four stars. Rates vary according to accommodation, location and sometimes high or low season or special events.

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Beauty TRIP

>> Continued from PG 1

COSMEDICAL TOURISM

According to a recent report in *Bloomberg Markets* magazine, medical tourism could spell the next big boost for the Indian economy. Another Internet-based research has revealed that India could earn Rs 100 billion (US\$2.3 billion) through medical tourism alone by the year 2012. And it's no surprise that several organisations have been mushrooming, offering complete healthcare and tourism services. These companies cater to the complete 360 degree needs

of a medical tourist — right from suggesting the best hospitals for treatments, providing a round-the-clock case manager, transportation, accommodation and even a visit to some of the most famous tourist spots are thrown in.

Says Vishal K. Laroia, business head, medical tourism at Sahara Medical, a division of the Sahara Group, "India is accessible from any part of the world these days. This is why packages often include the cost of treatment, airport transfers, medical concierge service and hotel arrangements." He adds, "Since cosmetic surgery is not life-threatening and needs a longer recuperation

period, combining it with a holiday makes it a very attractive deal for medical tourists."

But it's not just surgical procedures that are luring tourists; even ayurvedic treatments are finding a lot of takers. Says a spokesperson from Ananda Spa, one of India's premier spas located in the Himalyas, "Over 70 per cent of our guests are from the US, UK, Germany, France and so forth. Guests come here for different reasons — some to relax, some to lose weight, some for a detox programme — but one common thread is that everyone seeks wellness."

However, despite the demand and advantages to this trend, there is a downside to it too. According to experts, India faces stiff competition from other South East Asian countries like Thailand and China, which also offer world-class facilities at an economical rate.

Another thing that tarnishes India's image among medical tourists is the hygiene and sanitation

factor. "The lack of hygiene is the main concern among our international patients. This is also one reason why they prefer checking into premier hospitals in the metros rather than going to a specialised, private clinic — because they know that at these hospitals a lot of attention is paid to cleanliness and other details and they can be assured that the care that they receive will be on par with any other facility across the world," explains Dr Kamat.

Which is possibly why Dr Thomas chooses to put things in perspective with — "Our challenges are more from within the country than from other foreign influences. For one, we need to make the entry and exit procedures very smooth."

He cautions, "On their part visitors should be alert and careful not to fall prey to the numerous touts in the country. A little bit of research on their part will go a long way towards making their experience a very satisfactory one."

HOTLIST OF COSMETIC SURGERY PROCEDURES

FOR THE FACE

BAGGY EYELIDS (Upper & Lower)
Rs 1,03,644

Blepharoplasty or Eyelid Surgery for those who want to remove excess fat from the upper eyelids and in the area around the eyes. These accumulations of fat will make you look tired and older than you actually are. This fat can be reduced by cosmetic surgeries.

FULL FACELIFT

Rs 1,27,242

Rhytidectomy or face-lift is done to remove signs of ageing or wrinkles from the face. It also improves the texture of the skin and facial muscles leading to a more youthful look. There are variations of these procedures — a mid-facelift or a lower facelift targets only specific parts. Neck-lift targets the skin around the neck, and costs around Rs 64,315.

DIMPLE CORRECTION

Rs 30,075 (per dimple)

Ever wanted dimples like Preity Zinta? No, you don't have to be born with them. A two-week procedure (including post-operative care) will do the trick.

LIPOSUCTION OF CHIN

Rs 39,329

This procedure is usually done to eliminate what we more commonly know as a double chin.

LIP AUGMENTATION

Rs 43,956

This surgery is used to correct droopy lips that are curved into a permanent sad smile.

FOR THE HAIR

HAIR TRANSPLANT

Rs 92 (per hair graft)

Usually done by those who are losing hair due to various reasons, this is performed under the supervision of a trichologist.

FOR THE NOSE

COSMETIC RHINOPLASTY

Rs 1,22,615

Yes, this is how Shilpa Shetty got her perfect nose! This operation involves resetting the nasal bones to give it a perfect structure and finish.

NASAL TIP CORRECTION

Rs 83,285

A shorter version of the previous ones, this is for those who want a perfect, pointed nose.

FOR THE BODY

ABDOMINOPLASTY

Rs 1,82,766

This is the other word for tummy tuck, that's one of the most common surgeries that people from abroad come to India for. This is a major surgical procedure and involves removal of excess fat and skin from the lower abdomen region to tighten the abdominal muscles.

LIPOSUCTION

Rs 76,114 (per region)

Liposuction is done on the body

to remove excess fat from body parts, this also helps in making the skin around that part firmer thereby giving it a more toned appearance.

TOTAL LOWER BODY LIFT

Rs 3,35,457

This procedure offers one of the most dramatic transformations by tightening the areas around the buttocks, hips, stomach, and thighs. It's also known as Belt Lipectomy and is often performed on those patients for whom weight loss techniques haven't worked. It's not necessary to go for a total body lift; instead one can opt for procedures targeted at only certain parts of the body.

FOR THE BREASTS

MAMMOPLASTY

Rs 1,34,414

In simple terms, this is nothing but a breast enhancement surgery; it's a surgical procedure that involves the insertion of implants to make the breasts look fuller. These can be done using smooth saline implants or cohesive gel implants. The opposite of these procedures is also possible and is in fact quite common. Mastopexy that involves changing the shape of the breast is another popular variant.

GYNECOMASTIA

(Male Breast Reduction)

Rs 1,30,481

One of the most embarrassing things for men is to have enlarged breasts, this surgery is used to reduced, tighten breasts in males.

Lets take a Chota Break

Before we could even realize, the year's on the verge of ending and we could not plan any outstation tour. Forget a big holiday, we couldn't even think of a long weekend and now only 2 months are remaining to seek a break from the monotonous lifestyle. To address this specific need of yours, Kesari came out with the concept of a 'Chota Break' and received a mammoth response from you all for its Dubai, Thailand, Malaysia, Shrilanka, Singapore tours and now Kesari has brought 'Chota Breaks' of 4 days 3 nights for variety of destinations to add splendour to your Christmas vacations.

What's 'Unique' about this novel concept is that not only you will be accompanied by a 'Personal Escort' but 'Chota Break' also includes your flight ticket, airport and government taxes, visa expenses, excellent boarding at star hotels, city tour, visits to destinations and breakfast with rich dinner to satiate your appetite. What's unique to travel with Kesari's that unlike others Kesari doesn't have any hidden expenses. Often airport tax's excluded from the tour price to lure the customers but an enthusiastic tourist starts finding such attractions elusive after he's made to pay for these expenses upon reaching the destination. A wise tourist therefore must understand that a certain overseas tour will have its own expenses and that's why Kesari has included even the airport tax in its aggregate tour price.

For several years our valued customers were seeking a tour



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option that allows them to use the tour days the way they want i.e. some wanted only to rest, while others wanted to do abundant

shopping and many others were keen to refresh themselves in Spas. Kesari prioritized all these suggestions and introduced the concept of 'Chota Break' that proved to be an instant success.

'Chota Break' tour introduces the respective city and then the afternoons are kept completely free to relish the way you want. Even lunches are included. You can even enjoy any type of food in places like Dubai, Singapore, Hong Kong or Malaysia — they are the overflowing hubs of local, continental, American, Italian, Mexican, and Lebanese, Thai or Chinese delicacies. Besides a professionally trained 'Personal Escort' of Kesari guides you 'Where to get What' i.e. which pearls, diamonds and emeralds you should pick up from the treasure these destinations offer irrespective of whether it's night time discos, Spas, shopping or food.

Additionally, what should excite you most is that you can preplan your 'site visits' because before starting the tour if your destinations are chosen, we can offer concessional rates but while being on tour, you are required to pay the full rate. We suggest, using this 'Small Break' either for complete rest or for ravishing fun will be a better deal but ecstatic site visits too can be included on these tours.

So friends, take a 'Chota Break' at least at the year end and just don't forget that if you don't like an 'Escorted Tour', our division 'Strawberi Holidays' can design a 'Chota Break' at any — I repeat — 'ANY' destination across the world.

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