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Southeast-Asia: revisiting a booming, yet traditional region



first evening in Thailand: No 4 Restaurant, Nai Yang Beach

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Southeast-Asia: revisiting a booming, yet traditional region

After 20 months of travelling overseas, we were on our way back to Europe and soon in need of another break. However, as the logical way from Australia to the Old Continent leads across Southeast-Asia, we couldn't resist to take with us at least another whiff of Asia's uniqueness; ultramodern, bustling cities where traditions are still alive, ultra clean, well-organized business districts next to quarters, where life appears so chaotic that its nice again, and of course, the varied, culinary delights. We were looking forward to finding out how much the region had changed since our last visit in 2007, and even more so, to enjoy the odours, flavours and tastes of Asia.

Already our flight from Australia to Thailand turned out to be an experience, we haven't had before. Not that we fly only little and neither because we're not used to budget airlines. Our flight from Melbourne to Phuket with JetStar (Qantas' budget airline) was just so much automated, we could almost not believe it! Buying a ticket online is nothing special anymore, we're already used to online check-in, or automated check-in counters at airports. But with JetStar, even the baggage drop was fully automated, as was face recognition (comparison with the passport picture) at the security check. Visas are now virtual too, and naturally, the computer finds out quicker than any customs officer, how long you're allowed to stay in the country. At least that way, we didn't have to explain ourselves, why we enter Thailand without an outward ticket.



Thailand: stuck between royal-, military- and civil governance

Our first destination in Asia was Thailand. It's one of only few third world countries that have never been colonized. Thailand's population accounts for almost 69 Million, of which 22% live in metropolitan area of the capital Bangkok. Thai people are ~95% Buddhists, <5% Muslims and <1% Christians. The Thai landmass spreads over an area of 513.115 km².

Thailand has a long history of military coups that started in 1932, when a small group of military officers, known as the "Four Musketeers", overthrew King Prajadhipok. They gave the dead knell to almost seven centuries of absolute monarchy and established a constitutional monarchy. Then, the predominantly European educated military officers thought it's about time to introduce the democratic, European model into the kingdom of Siam.

Meanwhile, the military isn't as fond of democracy anymore, and 12 other military coups were staged in the aftermath, the last one in 2014. Seeing how easy it is all over the world to manipulate immature voters with skilful, populist wordings at the expense of unguilty foreign scapegoats, a military government isn't probably the worst-case scenario. The Thai military probably thinks the same. Thus, elections were held again on March 24th, 2019, the new constitution that was approved in a more or less democratic referendum, cements the role of the military in the new government. Thailand's economy continues to heavily depend on the tourist trade. Though, the country boasts also car manufacturing and high-tech products, like hard drives.



Phuket island: where traditional (chaotic) life coexists with mass tourism

Phuket is not really reputed as Thailand's prime destination for culture- and eco-tourism, rather as a place flooded with ill-mannered, sex-hungry holiday makers and equally uncivilised money-hungry locals, who sell (almost) everything to get ever more of the much-beloved tourist dollars! However, as we found a very cheap and convenient direct flight from Australia to Phuket, we were curious to find out, whether some traditional native Thai life still can be found. We're aware already, Phuket is a tourist hotspot, where the beauty of the Andaman Sea is shadowed by sex-workers, who display themselves almost in the raw in some streets, predominantly in Patong, but also in Kata and Karon!



Connected to the mainland via a bridge, Phuket is with 543 km² (including some appertaining islands), Thailand's largest island. We started our discovery with two days at Nai Yang Beach that turned out to be such a pleasant surprise, we returned later for another week.

Getting around Phuket is easy, but only for those willing to pay the exaggerated taxi-prices that are several fold higher than in the rest of Thailand. There is also some limited public transport though locals seem reluctant to inform tourists about it as almost everybody has a friend who is taxi driver. It's anyway often hard to communicate with Thai people, as surprisingly few speak English well, despite Thailand being a major tourist-destination for decades. Those with a good command of English are often guest workers from Myanmar (Burma).



The 1½ hour journey from Nai Yang to Raweng in the south of the island, would be complicated by bus and so we agreed with a taxi driver to include a sightseeing stop along the way. Surprised about the dense traffic and the number of large modern shopping malls we passed, we reached the impressive Buddhist Temple Wat Chalong. In fact, it's not only one temple but a big assembly of gilded temples and shrines. Thai people come here to pray and to donate. Likewise the tourists, also the locals take plenty of pictures. We were surprised that probably half of them didn't abide by the request for conservative clothing; strapless is fashioned after all, also among Asian women.

As Phuket has a Muslim minority, there was once a while a mosque along the way. However, the sheer number of gilded Buddhist temples and the number of rather new cars on the road gave the impression of Phuket being wealthier than it is, if you look behind the façades.



Rawai Beach: not a bathing -, but a working-beach packed with long-tail boats

Our week in Rawai Beach started on February 24, 2019. The name of this peaceful village is somehow misleading; there is actually no bathing beach in Rawai Beach. Instead, there is a charming island-dotted bay



with colourful long-tail boats along its shore. Many are still used for fishing but nowadays most are used to shuttle tourists to the outer islands. As most visitors bring more money than time, there is an ever-growing fleet of high-speed boats. The times when locals were wondering how much money young Backpackers from Europe must have, are gone. Today, locals and Europeans are wondering, how much money Chinese Tourists spend. Meanwhile, at Rawai Beach

most tourists come from China, followed by Russians and then there is a big gap until Europeans appear in the statistic.

Though it's a bit disturbing that the main road hugs the waterfront, the owners of the uncountable restaurants that line that road still found space to squeeze in proper dining terraces between the other roadside and the water. Along here, you find a multitude of freshly prepared tasty Thai- to Western-food – though it's all a bit overpriced. Probably it's the hazard bonus for the personnel, who has to carry the food across the busy main road. Surely, part of the price is also because Thailand's seasonal businesses often employ their staff year around, even though most would only be needed for a few months.



The eastern end of the waterfront of Rawai Beach caters for Chinese seafood lovers. The seaside of the alley is lined with market stalls specialised in selling sea creatures; dead and alive. On the other roadside, the same businesspeople run restaurants where the expensive seafood will be cooked to order for another fortune. If you know how to handle the beasts, you just hand them over to the chef. If not, you might lose a finger before the crab or lobster loses its life.



If you wander away from the coast, the (Thai-) restaurants get cheaper, unless they are run by expats offering Italian, French, Swiss, Scandinavian, or whatever type of food. Additionally, in Rawai you still see traditional life too, including uncountable really cheap food-stalls where the locals eat. They are open to everyone, but most foreigners only eat there once, because their food is really very spicy!

A bit hidden in a residential quarter, there is pretty Wat Sawang Arom temple. Apart from several smallish temple buildings and a large main complex, we found also a tall, shiny white statue of a sitting Buddha. To us, the town of Rawai Beach was a perfect compromise between traditional Thai life, and a low-key tourist destination with a good choice of Thai restaurants.

Phuket Town: a disregarded beauty

Apart from the over-touristy Sunday night-market, Phuket Town does not appear high as a tourist destination. According to the travel books, only die-hard adventurers and backpackers visit this town of ~ 90.000 inhabitants. Maybe because we didn't expect that much, Phuket turned out to be a very pleasant surprise. First of all, we were impressed by the sheer number of places of worship, be they for Buddhists, Chinese, Muslims or Christians. Wherever we went, it was never far to the next temple, mosque or church. The number of Chinese temples is striking.



The centre of Phuket is very nicely restored. It consists of many rows of brightly painted townhouses in Sino-Portuguese architecture. Every now and then, we also came across various stately mansions that are still in use, be it as museum or government office.

As we like to ramble around, we soon discovered some quarters where life appeared still very traditional, sometimes even a bit chaotic. Often, we noticed Thai people that were obviously blended with Portuguese, of whom many settled here as merchants centuries ago.

In a big town like Phuket, there are obviously many restaurants and food stalls. We were delighted that the choice was much bigger and the prices substantially lower than on the touristy places along the beaches. Logically, everything is priced the way that locals can afford to eat out three times a day. During our stage, a big food-fair was held. We were already impressed by the selection in Thai restaurants, but seeing the variety and choice at this food fair, dwarfed any menu we had seen before! This was Exotica at its best: from the sweetest treats to the most suspicious deep-fried insects!

Another highlight was our 4km walk to Phuket's fishing harbour. The piers at the river mouth were chocked with colourful, mostly wooden fishing trawlers. It was all very bustling and there were constantly some vessels sailing in and out. It was nice to watch the fishermen and while the time away. To us, Phuket Town was an unexpected highlight and therefore, we extended our initial two days to four.



Nai Yang Beach: quiet beach between Russians, Retirees and the Runway



As Phuket Town is the main hub of the namesake island, it is well connected by public transport. Therefore, we thought it must be easy to take a bus back to Nai Yang, where our Phuket trip had started. So we boarded a Songthaeo or Songthaew respectively, a mix between a halfway-open-air truck and a bus, where passengers sit alongside on wooden benches on both sides of the load bed. From what we were told, we thought we'd disembark on the main road, some

500m from Nai Yang's Beach. The extra money asked for bringing us down to the beach, seemed exaggerated, so we decided to walk that bit. Following the truck's course on Google Maps, we realized that we came along another main road, some 5km away from the waterfront. A bit baffled, we dismounted the truck and started walking with our backpacks in the tropical heat. We couldn't believe our luck, when a car stopped by after only 200m. Without being asked for, two young Thai ladies offered us a ride down to the beach which we gladly accepted.

So, on March 7th, 2019, we made it back to Nai Yang Beach, a place we loved that much, we decided to return to, after our initial airport-stopover. Again, we could observe the

planes descending and ascending from Thailand's second busiest airport, only a few kilometres away.

Thanks to the wind, we didn't notice any disturbing noise. Nai Yang is a low-key

beach, popular with Thais and foreigners alike, especially families from Russia and Eastern Europe, as well as retirees from German speaking Europe. There are basically no bars but a good number of food-stalls and beach-restaurants. The sandy beach invites for kilometres of walking. In fact, you can walk into the adjacent Sirinat national park.



To our big surprise, the bathing-beach was guarded in several sections. Well, it was all very laid back. Often, we were under the impression that the watch tower was rather an airy, shady sleeping spot for the lifeguards.

To us, Nai Yang Beach was a perfect introduction and farewell to Thailand. It offered all the Thai delicacies we like, often served on prime spots along the beach: freshly squeezed fruit juices and shakes, breakfasts with tropical fruit, thick pancakes and lunches with fried-rice served in pineapple-halves accompanied by a drinking coconut, and delicious dinners with all kinds of Thai-curries eaten in the cool breeze of a beachside bistro.



Asia's budget airlines: only staying home is cheaper!



We have still many fond memories of travelling around Asia in local buses. This was certainly not the most comfortable way, though, with crowded buses and pecking chicken on the floor, a cultural

experience. Times have changed. Nowadays, even locals resort to the unstoppably popping up budget airiness. Prices for inner Asian flights became so cheap, the airport transfer is often the most expensive part of the journey. Surely, it pays to book well in advance, but even short-notice bookings outside school holidays periods won't make your piggy bank putting its trotters up! Even while booking only a few days ahead, we found bargains like the international flight from Penang to Singapore for below € 7.-! Sure enough, if you're unwilling to leave most of your luggage behind, you have to pay a small premium. Even then, we normally got away with around € 25 a flight, be it domestic or international, and this was already including taxes and luggage. Only once, we had to pay almost € 40.- for an international inner Asian connection, but this was a full-service airline and included a meal. So nowadays, even penny pinchers can discover big parts of Asia by plane, without the need of having a bad conscience – at least not because of the cost.

Malaysia: a modern, traditional and very multicultural country



Our next destination, Malaysia is a federal, constitutional monarchy with a booming newly industrialized market economy. Just behind Singapore and Brunei, Malaysia is nowadays Southeast Asia's third largest economy and the world's 23rd competitive country. The ~32 Million inhabitants spread over a landmass of 330,290 km². The vast majority lives on the Malaysian Peninsula and some 6 Million on Borneo Island in the Malaysian States of Sabah and Sarawak, which amount to ~60% of Malaysia's landmass. About 61% of Malaysians are Muslims, 20% Buddhists, 9% Christians and a bit over 6% Hindus.

After a period with Portuguese and Dutch influence, Malaysia was colonized by the Brits. The country got only full independence from the UK in 1963, then in association with Singapore that seceded in 1965. During pre-colonial times, Malaysia's population consisted almost of Bumiputera people only (predominantly Malay plus other smaller ingenuous tribes like Dayak and Orang Asli). The British brought in lots of Chinese and some Indians. In 2017, 68,8% of the population were still Bumiputera, 23,2% Chinese and 7% Indians. Malaysians (Bumiputera) control the government, Chinese, and to a lesser extent Indians, the economy.



Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia's fascinating capital

After a 1½ h flight from Phuket, we reached the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur on March 14th, 2019. Our hotel was bang in the centre of this city with surprisingly many big parks and 1,8 million inhabitants. On the

map however, KL (as it's often called) spreads into several far-flung down-town city-centres, all with different characters. We didn't stay in the financial district, but in a traditional quarter popular with visitors from India and the Arabic countries.

Coming from Thailand, one of our first impressions in Malaysia was how wealthy the country is and how cheap life can be, despite the wealth. Taxi rides within the city can cost less than ONE Euro. Of course, we noticed that food and freshly squeezed fruit-juices cost only a fraction of what we'd paid in Phuket. The vast majority of Malaysians eat out three times a day and prices are

accordingly low. Meanwhile, average salaries rose to approx. 700 Euros/month and this seems to be sufficient that almost every family can afford a car. About 56% of households have in fact two or more cars, on top of some moto-scooters for faster movement in the jammed city traffic.

As the rainy season hadn't started yet, it was quite pleasant to walk, but if we got too tired, we hopped into a taxi or on a GOKL. This stands for "go KL", a free network of city buses, complementing those you must pay for. This should motivate people to leave their cars at the station, or at home altogether.

For English speakers, Malaysia is a very easy country to get around. Almost everybody speaks some English, and many master it very well. Quite a few told us that they had been to Switzerland. Despite the only official language being Malay, every sign, every menu, virtually everything is written in English, rather than Malay or another local language. Because of the complex ethnic mix, about 140 languages and dialects are spoken in Malaysia. Apart from Malay, about 7 Chinese, and 3 Indian lingues are widespread. English is the common language in business and commerce and, ironically, also at the upper court.



Quarters full of contrasts: traditional or ultra-modern



Almost every corner of Kuala Lumpur has a different appeal. Almost all quarters are bustling, some are very traditional and laid back, others ultra-modern and resemble any western city, except that KL's shopping centres are even bigger. Just next to the same upmarket shops you find all over the world, there are local department stores and markets with an unbelievably wide selection on an unbelievably small area. There, it's almost impossible to get an overview and hard to pass by without bumping into other shoppers or the displays. Somehow, it's an exotic mix between order and chaos.

The outskirts are packed with modern, but sterile apartment blocks, often skyscrapers. Those who have the cash and also the time to commute, live further out in huge quarters with terrace houses.

We loved strolling about the different ethnic quarters, where the scents and flavours of Asia are omnipresent.

Particularly charmingly designed was the Brickfield area, in a way a Little India. It's modern, also very colourful, yet still old-style with many women wearing Indian Saris. Traditional Indian products are being produced and sold. Also the Muslim quarters and Chinatown have very pleasant, but totally different appeals.



During set hours, also tourists are invited to visit the impressive contemporary National Mosque (Masjid Negara). Sure enough, modest clothing is required, but realistically it's not expected that people show up like that. Therefore, the tourist office has some long Muslim frocks on disposal. They were anything but light and comfortable, but available for free. The National Mosque is a mix of modern and traditional Islamic architecture. The dome has a 16-pointed star shaped roof that actually looks like "a half-folded umbrella". The large prayer hall below is surrounded by colonnades. The windows and ceiling of the round prayer hall were richly, yet modestly ornamented. What a difference to the pompous gilded Buddhist temples.

Probably everyone is impressed about the large, green parks in this huge city. One of the largest commences only a few hundred metres from the National Mosque. This park pleases visitors with a botanical garden, orchard- and hibiscus gardens, as well as a large butterfly- and an even bigger bird-park, both with walk-in aviaries. However, in KL you can already see exotic animals without going into manmade habitats. Birds and little monkeys live literally in every tree just behind the skyscrapers. We have seen uncountable cheeky Macaques during our time in the city.

It goes without saying that we also visited Kuala Lumpur's modern Central Business District (CBD), with its landmark buildings like the KL Tower and the famous Petronas twin towers, which were for a while the tallest buildings in the world. We marvelled also at uncountable other modern buildings in this vicinity, where new skyscrapers are still mushrooming. The wealth of Kuala Lumpur is even more obvious in the CBD!



This does not mean that everything is overpriced. We found a small restaurant next to, and with unhindered view of the twin towers, and were pleasantly surprised to find the prices as low as anywhere, where locals eat. Not far and slightly more expensive were the offerings at Tapak food park.



This nightly assembly of food trucks advertises itself as “urban street dining” and aims at the city folks who like to taste food from all over the world. However, uncountable food stalls with local food are being set up nightly in all areas across the city. They are part of the pleasant atmosphere and even to us who had been to Kuala Lumpur several times before, twelve days were barely enough to do this fascinating town justice.



Penang: a charming yet chaotic place

On March 26th, 2019, Malindo Air whistled us from KL to the island of Penang (1,5 Mio. inhabitants). We stayed at a pleasant guesthouse in George Town, which is, with a population of ~ 700.000, Penang Island’s largest town, and Malaysia’s second largest city.

With its colonial shophouses and residences, George Town appears rather small-scale. However, the amount of traffic or the size of the shopping malls, tells a different story. From our guesthouse, we could reach almost everything afoot, including the area meanwhile world heritage listed for its colonial buildings. Penang’s only unpleasant thing is the seemingly unlimited stream of cars and motorcycles and the lack of foot paths and pedestrian crossings.





Actually, there would be nice arcades along the shophouses. In reality however, the passage is often blocked, either by parked scooters (if not cars), or workshop extensions, or maybe by dining tables, or by residents sitting down to read a paper, tap on the mobile phone, or even lay down and have a nap. So, pedestrians end up on the road, squeezing past rather reckless driven cars and bikes.

One of George Town's eating out. We always locals eat, be it a simple restaurant. Also the latter cheaper than touristy clients with booze and alcoholic drinks cost simple meal, as booze is countries. Local food is and includes dishes from cultures. We love the food with its Roti, Nan and baked or fried flat breads, curries. Furthermore, of vegetarian snacks and skewers) you go to a the Chinese provide stir-fried dishes with meat, vegetables or tofu, also pork, duck and nice-looking dumplings. Malaysian food is very varied, comes in a multitude of great tastes and is rarely too spicy for western palates. Also Arabic, Vietnamese, Thai, Japanese and whatever cuisines have made their way into the towns, as have steaks, burgers and Pizzas.



biggest delights was chose places where the food stall, or a posh can be substantially eateries which lure their sports-TV. Normally, several times more than a heavily taxed in Islamic always freshly prepared Malaysia's different Malay influenced Indian Murtabak, all freshly always served with there's a surprising variety curries. For Saté (meat-Malaysian restaurant and

The locals became fond of coffee and cake, even bread is on the rise. If it comes to drinks, our Malaysian favourites are the freshly brewed ice coffees and ice teas, and of course the big selection of fruit and vegetable you choose for your juice. You name it, they squeeze it!

Noteworthy, if a bit touristy, is the street art that got quite fashioned around Penang. Here, it's not mainly the size of the art-work that impresses, but the fact that the environment and some objects are integrated. Tourists can sit on some incorporated real items, like a moto cycle or a chair and sometimes, a building's door or window is also an integrated part of a mural.



Easier to find than the murals, are the uncountable beautiful mosques, temples and churches around town. Furthermore, some extraordinary temples are situated on the outskirts, like the Thai Buddhist temples Wat Buppharam and Wat Chaiyamangalam, and Dhammikarama, a Burmese Buddhist temple, or Kek-Lok, a Chinese Buddhist temple.

If it wasn't raining, it was also very pleasant to stroll around the different ethnic quarters again and again. Unlike other Malaysian towns, Penang is dominated by Chinese for a long time. They have built the rows of colonial influenced, two- and three-storey merchant- and shop-houses that line many streets in Penang. Around Saturday lunchtime, Little India came alive and looked with the many traditionally clad people, like real India.

Less traditional, on the other hand, is Penang's landmark; Komtar Tower. It houses one of the big shopping centres of the island. As it's often frequented by tourists too, the shop keepers are sometimes pushy, which is otherwise not common in Malaysia. However, rambling the local shops in the old town was much more interesting to us.



But then again, all of Penang was interesting to us! Despite having been here already several times, there was still something unknown to be discovered, like the Clan villages with their stilt houses along some piers on the waterfront. We liked Penang very much and could have easily spent more than our 10 days. Including our time in the capital KL, we had 3 very pleasant weeks in Malaysia. It was just great to dive into this multicultural country again. Despite knowing already many corners of Malaysia, we're always tempted to come back.

Singapore: steppingstone and farewell to exotica

The city of Singapore is an independent island state, connected to the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsula with a bridge. The 722,5 km² large former English crown colony lies only one-degree of latitude (137 km) north of the equator.

Singapore's 5,6 million inhabitants are ethnically prevalent of Chinese ~74%, Malay ~13% and Indian ~9% origin. Some 33% are Buddhist, 19% Christians, 14% Muslims, 10% Taoists, 5% Hindus and 19% irreligious. After a short period of Japanese occupation during the second world war, Singapore became independent from the UK in 1963, then together with Malaysia.

However, Singapore separated two years later because of ideological differences (not only because the Malaysian constitution warrants the Bumiputera (Malays) control of the government) and became a sovereign state in 1965. Under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore transformed in one single generation from a developing, to a developed country.

Singapore is among our favourite destinations. We used this fascinating city 12 years ago for about a year as base to travel around Asia. When we returned in 2017, it was our steppingstone too, and now in 2019, we visited again, this time as farewell from exotica.



After 1 ½ hours flight with Scoot (Singapore Airline's budget carrier), we reached the island-state on April 5th, 2019. This time, we stayed for another 9 days in this fascinating bustling metropolis.

Singapore is well organized and treats tourists the way they feel welcome. Already at the airport subway station, somebody from the tourist office helps new-arrivals to buy the right ticket.

To us, Singapore is an excellent example, how well different cultures can live and work together and make their pluralism an asset. We loved to dive into Little India, Chinatown and the Malay quarters Kampong Glam. As in most parts of Asia, also the people of Singapore eat out three times every day; normally in the countless food courts, which used to be outdoors, but are nowadays mostly housed in air-con shopping malls. Singapore's cuisine is even more diverse than the population and dishes from around the world can be found. There is a vast choice of simple, or sometimes very posh restaurants. Renting an apartment with kitchen, on the other hand, costs a fortune. Eating out is simply cheaper.



Luckily, nothing has changed the appeal of the city. Singapore is still as bustling, multicultural and safe, as we remember it from our last visit 10 years ago.

What did change, is the skyline. Many new buildings have been erected in the meantime; mostly high rise of course! There is now a new landmark, built on land that wasn't even there 10 years ago: The Marina Bay Sands complex. It consists of three 191metres tall, 55-storey skyscrapers, connected to each other with a giant

planted roof-garden, with a 146m long swimming pool. The impressive complex houses 2,561 hotel rooms, a shopping centre (of course) with food-court, then a casino with 600 tables and 2,500 slot machines and furthermore, some museums and exhibition halls. Sure enough, such a small complex doesn't occupy the entire reclaimed land. Among other sights, there are the "Gardens by the Bay", a beautiful landscaped park packed with attractions for children and adults alike.



A perfect fusion between traditional and modern life



Singapore is a city of contrasts. There is more than the skyline of office towers hosting international companies and banks. There is Orchard Road, lined for kilometres with huge upmarket designer shopping centres. Just next to it, there are quarters where traditional life still prevails, like in Chinatown or Little India. Those quarters are bustling with traditionally clad people, old-fashioned markets and shops, fixing and selling anything at good prices. Haggling is not common anymore. At the many gold-shops, it might be different, but there it might get pretty expensive anyway – practically, a pawnshop is often next door. It's all very colourful and exotic smells are omnipresent. Somehow, Singapore is both: very modern and organized yet, very traditional and very chaotic at the same time.



Thanks to our lodging, the budget Hotel 81 Dickson, we had the privilege to stay in the middle of Singapore's multi-ethnic melting pot. Little India was right on our doorstep, Bugis 10 minutes' walk away, and Orchard Road, Chinatown or Singapore's Malay quarter, Kampong Glam, were all only short metro rides, or half an hour afoot away.

Unfortunately, this time, none of Singapore's many diverse festivities were on schedule, where foreign visitors are few, but always very welcome. During previous visits, we had been lucky to see the impressively illuminated and decorated roads in the different ethnic quarters, the Malays "Hari Raya Puasa", the Indians' "Deepavali Festival" or the Chinese's equally impressive "Moon festival". Also stunning, were the Xmas decorations around Orchard road.

The most impressive festival we've experienced in Singapore, respectively all over our planet indeed, was the "Hindu Thaipusam Festival" of the Tamils. It was more than just eye striking to see, how much self-mutilation humans can endure painlessly, just by controlling the body by strict self-mastery and meditation.



Singapore is an extraordinary, ultra-modern metropolis where the rat-race peacefully coexists with old way customs. This city state delights us with its multicultural life again and again. Singapore is a bustling, highly interesting, not to be missed city, a perfect steppingstone to, and farewell from exotica.

Revisiting South-East Asia along our way from Down Under back to Europe was a perfect decision. We love to dive into Asia's unique melting pot, time and again, it tempts to go back!





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