

Singapore



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1965
Population:	4,737,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	3.9% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 27
Official languages:	English, Chinese (Mandarin), Malay, Tamil
Time:	GMT plus 8hr
Currency:	Singapore dollar (S\$)

Geography

Area:	699 sq km
Coastline:	193km
Capital:	Singapore

The name 'Singapore' derives from the Sanskrit *Singa Pura* ('City of the Lion'). Situated in South-East Asia and lying just north of the equator, the Republic of Singapore is separated from Peninsular Malaysia by the narrow Johor Straits (1km wide), crossed by a causeway. A number of smaller islands are included within its boundaries and a few kilometres to the south are islands belonging to Indonesia.

Area: Land area 699 sq km, including 63 small islands.

Main towns: Singapore City, Jurong, Bukit Panjang, Serangoon, Katong and Changi.

Topography: The land is flat apart from low hills (highest point is Bukit Timah at 163m). In the north-east large areas of swamp have been reclaimed. The island is drained by a number of small streams.

Climate: A hot and humid tropical climate, without defined seasons. Heavy showers November to January.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are industrial pollution and seasonal smoke/haze resulting from forest fires in Indonesia; and the finite land and freshwater resources to support a very high population density.

Vegetation: Outside conservation areas, much of the natural dense forest and swamp flora have been cleared, although there is extensive planting on any spare ground in urban areas, and Singapore aims to be a 'garden city state'. To control the impact of industry and urban development, environmental regulations are strict. Forest covers 3% of the land area and there was no significant loss of forest cover during 1990–2007. Arable land comprises less than 1% of the total land area.

did you know?

Singapore has won the annual Commonwealth Essay Competition nine times since 1983 when it was launched; no other country has won more than three times.

Singapore is by far the most densely populated country in the Commonwealth.

Scholarships and fellowships are awarded by Singapore to citizens of other Commonwealth countries under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

In 2010 Transparency International ranked Singapore and New Zealand the least corrupt countries in the world.

Wildlife: The last tiger was shot in 1932. Most of the animals found in Singapore are confined to the rainforest area of the nature reserves and include the flying lemur, squirrels and the long-tailed macaque. Despite the urbanisation of the country, there are over 300 species of birds.

Transport: There are 3,260km of roads, all paved, with 118 flyovers, the longest of which is the 2.1km Keppel Viaduct. The 42km Pan-Island Expressway is the longest road. Traffic congestion became a major problem and private traffic is rationed. A limited number of permits to put a vehicle on the public roads is auctioned every month, greatly increasing the cost of running a car. Traffic in the central business district is further discouraged by a system of tolls, policed electronically.

The Mass Rapid Transit System (MRT) connects the city with all residential areas and the international airport, serving more than 40 stations. A railway across the Straits of Johor causeway connects the island with the Peninsular Malaysian railway system and beyond to Thailand.

Singapore has an excellent harbour and is one of the world's busiest ports. It comprises six terminals, a container port and several deep-water wharves.

Changi International Airport, 20km east of Singapore City, has three terminals; the third terminal was opened in January 2008.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 6,777
Life expectancy: 81 years

Population: 4,737,000 (2009); 100% lives in urban areas; growth 2.1% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 8 per 1,000 people (23 in 1970); life expectancy 81 years (69 in 1970).

The population is predominantly Chinese (77% in 2000 census), with Malays constituting 14% and Indians 8%, and small minorities of Europeans and Eurasians.

Language: English, Chinese (Mandarin), Malay and Tamil are the four official languages. Several other Chinese dialects are spoken, the most prevalent being Hokkien, Cantonese and Teochew. Singaporeans are mostly bilingual, in a mother tongue and English (the administrative language).

Religion: Buddhists 43%, Muslims 15%, Christians 15%, Taoists 9% and Hindus 4% (2000 census).

Media: There are several daily newspapers, among which *The Straits Times* (founded in 1845), *Business Times*, *The New Paper* and *Today* are in English. Other dailies are in Chinese, Tamil or Malay.

MediaCorp, owned by a state investment agency, operates TV and radio stations.

Some 98% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 760 personal computers (2007) and 683 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

Education: Public spending on education was 3.0% of GDP in 2009. By the 1990s, primary education was virtually universal. There are six years of primary education starting at age six. The

school year starts in January. Secondary education is streamed at three levels, according to measured ability, leading to junior college or vocational institutions.

The principal universities are National University of Singapore (founded in 1905), Nanyang Technological University (1981, as Nanyang Technological Institute), Singapore Management University (2000, the first private university) and SIM University (2005, also private). National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University each had more than 30,000 students in 2009. Singapore Management University, with some 6,000 students, offers accountancy, business management, economics, information systems, law, and social sciences. SIM University's academic programmes are aimed at working professionals. A new public university, located at Changi, is due to open in 2011.

Other tertiary institutions include Singapore Polytechnic (founded 1954), Ngee Ann Polytechnic (1963), Temasek Polytechnic (1990), Nanyang Polytechnic (1992), National Institute of Education and Institute of Technical Education (1992). Co-operation between industry and technological education is well developed and retraining and education for older adults is an important goal. There is virtually no illiteracy among people aged 15–24.

Health: Private health care predominates in the primary sector; 80% of hospital care is through public provision. There are more than 20 hospitals, ten of which are government-run. Employees pay into a health insurance fund known as Medisave (which is part of the wider social welfare provision of the Central Provident Fund). The entire population uses an improved drinking water source and adequate sanitation facilities. Infant mortality was 2 per 1,000 live births in 2009, the lowest rate in the Commonwealth and among the lowest in the world (31 in 1960).

Communications: Country code 65; internet domain '.sg'. Mobile phone coverage is excellent. Internet cafes and post offices are located throughout the country.

There are 391 main telephone lines and 1,404 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Labour Day (1 May), National Day (9 August) and Christmas Day.

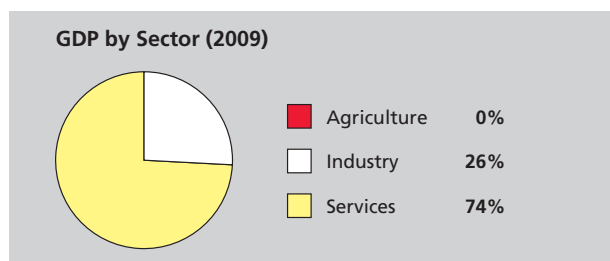
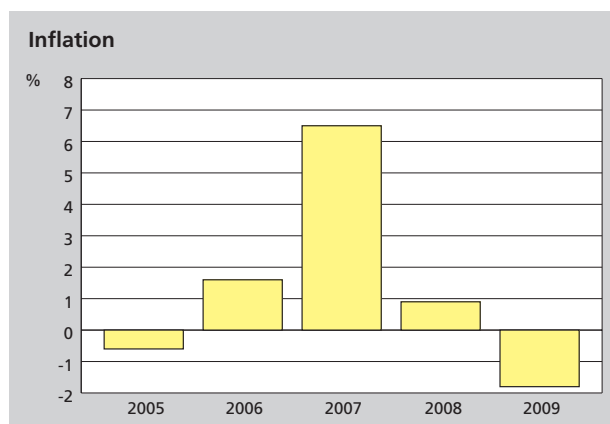
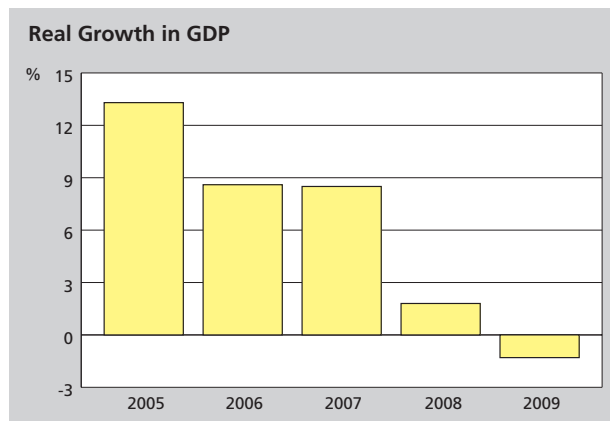
Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Chinese New Year (three days), Good Friday, Wesak (Buddha Purnima, April/May), Hari Raya Puasa (End of Ramadan), Deepavali (Diwali, October/November) and Hari Raya Haji (Feast of the Sacrifice).

Economy

KEY FACTS 2009

GNI:	US\$185.7bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$37,220
GDP growth:	6.1% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation:	1.3% p.a. 2005–09

Overview: Singapore originally built its prosperity as an entrepot and as an importer of its neighbours' raw materials for processing. At independence in 1965, there was a basic electrical assembly industry and some oil refining. During the 1960s these two sectors took off rapidly. There was a huge expansion of oil refining, and in 1967, attracted by tax incentives, Texas Instruments set up a



semiconductor plant. Other electronics companies soon followed, and Singapore swiftly became a world player in the electronics industry. Pharmaceuticals subsequently developed, then financial services and tourism stimulated the economy generally.

Singapore has a high level of government intervention, a strong currency, relatively low inflation, and a long track record of prudent macroeconomic management and outstanding growth. GDP grew by 6.7% p.a. 1980–90. Substantial inward investment has stimulated rapid economic development and in the 1990s outward investment increased. Since the latter 1990s policy has aimed to increase the innovative, research and development aspects of electronics, biotechnology and other high-tech sectors, so that Singapore would become a centre where new ideas are born rather than one for executing them through skilled and efficient manufacturing.

In the wake of the Asian economic crisis investment and exports (but also imports) were depressed and growth fell sharply from 8.6% in 1997 to -0.9% in 1998, but recovered sharply in 1999–2000, when there was continued heavy investment in new infrastructure. The

stock market was liberalised and banking restrictions were eased to allow more competition from foreign institutions.

But the economy plunged into recession in 2001 – shrinking by 2.3% – as a result of the international downturn in information technology. It recovered quickly and returned to vigorous growth during 2004–07, averaging 8% p.a., before it again stalled in the world economic downturn of 2008–09, showing growth of only 1.8% in 2008 and a contraction of 1.3% in 2009. But the economy bounced back in 2010, when a surge of growth in the last quarter brought the annual growth rate to about 15%, among the highest in the world for that year.

Trade: Exports of goods and services (including re-exports) account for 234% of GDP (2008). Main exports are machinery and equipment, electronic components, oil and refined products, pharmaceuticals and chemicals.

Constitution

Status:	Republic
Legislature:	Parliament
Independence:	9 August 1965

Singapore is a republic and a parliamentary democracy, with an elective, non-executive presidency. The constitution came into force on 2 June 1959. It provides for a head of state, a prime minister and a cabinet, and a unicameral parliament. Elections, under universal adult suffrage and compulsory voting, must be held at least every five years.

The prime minister is the leader of the majority party in parliament, who chooses a cabinet from among the members of parliament.

The parliament is made up of three types of members: 84 elected members (75 elected in teams of between three and six to represent 14 group representation constituencies and nine in single-member constituencies); up to nine nominated members (NMPs); and up to three non-constituency members (NCMPs) from the opposition political parties. In early 2011 the Eleventh Parliament had 94 members, comprising 84 elected members, nine NMPs and one NCMP.

The president is directly elected by universal adult suffrage for a six-year term. In practice the president no longer has powers of veto over legislation or appointments. The position is largely ceremonial. The first presidential election was held in 1993 but, in 1999 and in 2005, when the election committee, under the very restrictive eligibility rules, found only one candidate to be eligible, there was no election.

Politics

Last elections:	May 2011
Next elections:	2016
Head of state:	President Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam (2011–)
Head of government:	Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong
Ruling party:	People's Action Party

In 1990 Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of the People's Action Party (PAP) was succeeded by his former deputy Goh Chok Tong, who called elections in August 1991 and was returned to power, though with a reduced majority. In 1991 the presidency was made

elective. Ong Teng Cheong won the first presidential election, held in 1993, and S R Nathan was the only candidate in the second presidential poll in August 1999.

The opposition parties are the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), the Workers' Party (WP), the National Solidarity Party (NS), the Singapore Justice Party (SJP), the Singapore Malay National Organisation (SMNO) and the Singapore People's Party (SPP).

The PAP won the general election of January 1997 taking 65% of the total vote, winning 81 seats (including all nine single-member constituencies). The prime minister, the two deputy prime ministers, the senior minister (former PM Lee) and many other ministers were returned unopposed. The SDP took no seats, while the SPP held its one seat with a decreased majority. The WP held its one seat with an increased majority, and its leader J B Jeyaretnam was offered a non-constituency seat.

In an early general election in November 2001, the electorate gave the PAP a decisive endorsement, when it took 82 of the 84 elected seats with 75.3% of the votes. The WP and the four-party Singapore Democratic Alliance each won one seat.

In August 2004 Goh Chok Tong was succeeded by Lee Hsien Loong, son of Lee Kuan Yew and deputy prime minister since 1990.

In August 2005, when the election committee again found there to be only one eligible presidential candidate, S R Nathan was declared re-elected.

The PAP was again returned with 82 seats in the May 2006 election and received 66.6% of the votes. Opposition parties contested 47 seats, and it was the first time more than half the seats were contested.

In the May 2011 general election the PAP won 81 seats and received 60.1% of the votes. Opposition parties contested 82 seats. The WP (six seats and 12.8%) was the only other party to win seats, though the NS received a comparable number of the votes (12.0%).

In a hard fought presidential contest, in August 2011, former deputy prime minister Tony Tan – with 35.2% of the votes cast – defeated his three rivals; Tan Cheng Bock secured 34.9% of the votes, Tan Jee Say 25.0% and Tan Kin Lian 4.9%. Dr Tan succeeded retiring President S R Nathan on 1 September 2011.

International relations

Singapore is a member of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Indian Ocean Rim

History

Singapore was known to the Javanese as *Temasek* ('Sea Town') in the late 1300s, when Siam (Thailand) and the Majapahit Empire of Java were contending for control of the Malay Peninsula. In 1390 Prince Parameswara, in flight from Majapahit, briefly set himself up as prince of Temasek, but was driven out and fled to Malacca. In the early 1400s Temasek was ruled by Siam, but the Malacca sultanate soon took control of the island. The Portuguese took Malacca in 1511, and the Malaccan admiral established himself in Temasek, or Singapura, building a capital which he called Johor Lama.

In 1587 the Portuguese took and destroyed Johor Lama. They made another punitive expedition to Singapore in 1613, destroying a town at the river-mouth. The island, henceforth sparsely populated, remained partly the property of the Sultan of Johor, partly that of the Temenggong (the Malay ruler of the island). In 1819 these two rulers, for a financial inducement, permitted Sir Stamford Raffles, Lieutenant Governor of Bencoolen, to establish a British trading post on the island. Raffles was impressed by the magnificent harbour, and the island's suitable position for both Far East and local trade.

By 1824 Raffles's move was paying off so well that Britain bought the island from its two rulers. In 1826 it was united with Malacca and Penang as the Straits Settlements, which were made a Crown colony in 1867. In 1869 the Suez Canal was opened, increasing the amount of shipping calling at Singapore. Its prosperity increased further after the 1870s, when Malaysian rubber became one of its important exports.

From the mid-19th century, there was considerable immigration from all over the region. In the early 1920s Britain began

constructing a great naval base, suitable for the biggest ships, in the Johor Straits. The base was finished in 1938. From February 1942 until August 1945 Singapore was occupied by the Japanese army. In 1946, separated from the Straits Settlements, Singapore became a colony with a provisional advisory council.

In 1955 Singapore became partially internally self-governing, with a legislative assembly with 25 elected members out of a total membership of 32, and a council of ministers. A speaker presided in the assembly. In 1959 it became a state with its own citizenship and complete internal self-government. The first prime minister was Lee Kuan Yew.

In September 1963 Singapore was incorporated into the Federation of Malaysia. But in August 1965 Singapore left the Federation, by mutual agreement, after months of dispute between it and the federal government, over a variety of issues, including ethnic affairs. On 9 August 1965, Singapore became a separate independent state and joined the Commonwealth. In December 1965, it became a republic with a non-executive president.

The People's Action Party (PAP) was first elected in 1959 and was continuously in power for the rest of the century, in many elections winning every seat. In 1981 the Workers' Party won one seat in a by-election. Two opposition members were returned in the 1984 elections, one in 1988, and four in 1991.

During this period, Singapore developed a highly sophisticated economy with extensive social services and one of the world's highest rates of GNI per capita.

Association for Regional Cooperation, Non-Aligned Movement, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Singapore hosts the headquarters of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: Possession of even small quantities of drugs can lead to imprisonment, and drug trafficking may result in the death penalty.

It is against the law to smoke in any public place or indoor restaurant or to drop a cigarette end in the street, and those caught will face an immediate fine. It is also prohibited to chew gum on the MRT system and failure to comply will attract an immediate fine.

Handshaking is the usual form of greeting. Visitors should remove their shoes if entering a private home or when visiting a temple or mosque. Dress is generally informal.

Business travellers should dress smartly for meetings and English is spoken in business circles. Appointments should be made and punctuality is important. Business cards are essential, although it is policy for government officials not to use them. Singapore is a popular destination for business conventions and has conference venues with state-of-the-art facilities. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0900–1300 and 1400–1700, Sat 0900–1300.

Immigration and customs: All visitors must have passports valid for six months from the date of arrival in Singapore. Visas are only required by some nationals. The length of stay permitted to foreign nationals also varies, depending on the country of origin, and must be checked well in advance of travel.

There are restrictions on entering Singapore with replica guns, radio communications equipment, weapons and ammunition, as well as fruit, vegetables and fish. Chewing gum and tobacco products must be declared on arrival, and all liquor or tobacco products with 'Singapore Duty Not Paid' on the packaging are prohibited.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate will be required from those arriving from infected areas.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left hand side and visitors can use a national driving licence for stays of up to one month. For longer visits, an international driving permit is required. On entering Singapore, drivers are required to pay ERP (Electronic Road Pricing) – a system based on the principle of 'pay as you use'. Driving under the influence of alcohol can lead to imprisonment.

The MRT, one of the most advanced metro systems in the world, operates daily in and around Singapore offering inexpensive, fast and comfortable travel.

Taxis are widely available; they can be picked up from outside hotels and official ranks, or flagged down in the street. Fares are metered. Trishaws are also found in Singapore.

Travel health: Comprehensive medical insurance is recommended for all travellers, as health care is exceptionally good but can be very expensive. Visitors should also pack enough medication to last their stay, as some prescribed drugs are unavailable in Singapore. Dengue fever occurs in Singapore, so visitors should take insect repellent and suitable clothing to protect themselves from mosquito bites.

Money: Credit cards are widely accepted, and US dollars, Australian dollars, yen and sterling can be used at most major retail outlets. Travellers cheques can be cashed in most banks on presentation of a passport. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 1000–1500, Sat 0930–1300.

There were 7,488,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

Further information

Singapore Government Online: www.gov.sg

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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