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## A unique Singapore experience

by Alice Wee. Posted on August 21, 2011, Sunday



I HAVE been to Singapore many times – thanks to the island state being so close to Malaysia and the many concerts there that featured my favourite musicians.



WONDERFUL: Killing time is so easy at Marina Bay Sands with plenty of leisure activities and entertainment lined up.

So when I was offered a trip to the see latest attraction in Singapore, I felt indifferent.

Marina Bay Sands opened in April last year, was new to me and I failed to connect the name to a picture in my mind until I was told “this is where the casino is.”

Aone-stop destination for business, leisure and entertainment, Marina Bay Sands offers a luxury hotel with three 55-storey towers capped by the Sands SkyPark; two state-of-the-art theatres; convention and exhibition facilities; a museum, a world-class casino and the best shopping and dining in the region.

From the airport, Marina Bay Sands hotel guests can use the shuttle bus for free while all others visitors need to pay S\$25, nearly the same as a taxi. By car, it takes about 20 minutes but by bus and MRT, it takes some walking and inter-changes, and definitely longer.

### Arts and cultures

Having explored Marina Bay Sands on a three-day-two-night trip, I would say it's another prestigious project that Singapore can brag about. But what really made me fall in love with Lion City – apart from the little surprises here and there – is its inclination towards the arts.

I am particularly fascinated by the “existence” of a museum near a casino. These two don't seem to blend but there it is, the ArtScience Museum, known as the largest private museum in Singapore.

Taking a form reminiscent of the lotus flower, the building, called “The Welcoming Hand of Singapore” has a body that is already an art to begin with.

Presently hosting three international travelling exhibitions – Van Gogh Alive; Dali: Mind of a Genius, and Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds – there's also a permanent exhibition that starts at the “floating stairs” on Level 3 and spans the entire Level 4 galleries.

I had the most unforgettable experience at the ArtScience Museum and I can assure you there's absolutely no need to do background reading or be an art enthusiast to “properly appreciate the arts.” Your natural sense of beauty will lead the way.

If you don't trust yourself enough, then trust the exhibitions to work their wonders. You can be completely hypnotised as you watched the ever-changing projections of Van Gogh's masterpieces on the walls, roofs and floor, accompanied by beautiful music.

It was such a colourful world, almost unreal as if I was living inside a kaleidoscope and it felt bad to wake up too soon.

Rain Oculus

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The Rain Oculus is one of the many things at Marina Bay Sands that you'll find interesting although some passers-by may mistake it for a wishing well or simply pass it by without knowing how adorable this giant bowl-like sculpture is.

Located at the intersection of the retail mall and the waterfront promenade, the Rain Oculus, one of US artist and sculptor Ned Kahn's contributions to Marina Bay Sands, is a 22-metre wide whirlpool that can circulate 6,000 gallons of water per minute.

The acrylic and stainless steel art installation functions as a kinetic sculpture, a skylight and waterfall for the retail mall below, and it's also part of the building's rain-collecting system.

Two storeys below is a canal where water that falls down the atrium is collected when it rains. Unexpectedly, it also collects coins that visitors tossed into the Rain Oculus. Once in a while, the mall staff will come to pick up the coins, and it was reported earlier that the Rain Oculus had collected a handsome S\$22,000 since it opened late last year. That canal is also where shoppers can enjoy an indoor Sampan Ride along the man-made canal that runs through the shopping area.

Throughout the trip, I saw mostly families with children and young couples enjoying the boat ride, and I was told many newly-weds also came to have their wedding photos taken here.

An interesting fact many do not know is the Rain Oculus' amazing ability to "flawlessly transmit sound across the other side."

My travel mates and I couldn't fully comprehend the meaning of the statement until after a 15-minute display of "the wonder of the Rain Oculus in action."

Due to the Rain Oculus' shape and structure, sound can travel across it, enabling one to hear conversations of others standing by the giant sculpture. It was the more amusing when we learned that the sound transmitting would cease when the water stopped flowing.

We were fortunate to witness several college students experimenting with the truth of this charming knowledge.

Next we picked up a bit of juicy tales as some foreign visitors gossiped about a friend of theirs. We did realise it was unethical to eavesdrop and had considered telling them that their conversations were overheard – well, unintentionally.

After all, there's no need to scream at the top of our voice to get their attention – it would do to just softly remind them they've become drama actors of the night, like they were right beside us although they were at least 22 metres away. Then again, wouldn't that be admitting to them that we had been listening?

#### **Lots to do**

Killing time is so easy at Marina Bay Sands with the amount of leisure activities and entertainment lined up – you can choose to watch a show at the theatre, inspire yourself with works contributed to the Art Path by six internationally renowned artists, try your luck at the luxurious casino (or have fun watching others trying) or get the most value for your dollars at The Shoppe.

With close to 800,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space fully committed, The Shoppes has over 250 restaurants in business while the remaining boutiques and restaurants will be operational in the coming months.

If food is what you are craving for, then you will be thrilled to know there are over 50 dining choices, including celebrity-chef restaurants, helmed by Mario Batali, Daniel Boulud, Wolfgang Puck, Santi Santamaria, Guy Savoy, Tetsuya Wakuda and Justin Quek.

And let's not forget about Rasapura Masters, the 21,000 square foot food marketplace by the ice skating rink, and also an array of restaurants at the Marina Bay Sands Hotel.

My favourite is TWG Tea on the Bridge, not simply for the fascinating fact that it's REALLY on a bridge above the canal where sampans glide, but also its tea-infused recipe that is so pleasing to the taste buds. And if there's a need to burn the extra calories, shopping will be one of the good ways to do so.

I don't normally shop when I don't plan to buy but it's odd to be doing the exact thing I do at home when I'm travelling. Hence, I got rid of my old shopping habit and visited many of the shops.

#### **Batik label**

Alleira, an Indonesian contemporary batik label, is one I spent considerable time at – the next being Charles & Keith, an international brand for women's shoes and fashion accessories.

There is more to see at The Shoppes, especially with an array of luxury retailers such as Bally, Cartier, CHANEL, Salvatore Ferragamo, Gucci, Hermes, Prada, Tiffany & Co and more. Yet, time doesn't stop to wait and there's plenty more at Marina Bay Sands to see.

It's not very often I can part with my laptop and do some memorable activities after work, but I had a lot of fun on both nights at Marina Bay Sands.

On the first after an exquisite three-course dinner at db Bistro Moderne, I watched a show called Wonder Full, a nightly 13-minute performance featuring laser, light, water movements and graphics all set to an original

orchestral sound track. On the second, I got enchanted by The Lion King musical (a must-see) at the theatre.

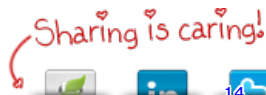
Thinking back on my trip, it's a pity I didn't have much of a "night life" when I could have had the fun of my life at the nightclub or simply chill out at the lounge, and it kills me now to realise I did not visit the Sands SkyPark during the night!

Hence, it was indeed lucky that I must go all the way up the 57th floor for breakfast or I might have left out the Sands SkyPark and the breathtaking panoramic views of the city it offers!

Sitting on top of the three hotel towers at Marina Bay Sands, the SkyPark is said to be big enough to fit three football fields. It has a ticketed public observation deck, a 150-metre infinity swimming pool, a 1.2 hectare tropical oasis as well as lounges and restaurants.

Hotel guests have free access to this rooftop deck as well as the pool, the world's largest outdoor pool, at the height of 200 metres – weird to be swimming when you are actually in the sky.

It has been a fulfilling trip with so much done in so little time. Despite one tiny regret – which was completely my mistake – I'm positive that Marina Bay Sands will offer more fun and values the next time I return.





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