

LION CITY

A little over 24 hours to kill in Lion City? **Charley Larcombe** takes you on a tour of her former backyard.

3PM – CHECK-IN TO THE MARINA BAY SANDS

Singapore boasts many great hotels, but the *MBS* is the icon that dominates the new city skyline. The rooms aren't bad, the dining choice is fantastic and the staff are always charming, but it really is access to the famous infinity pool that encourages you to stay.

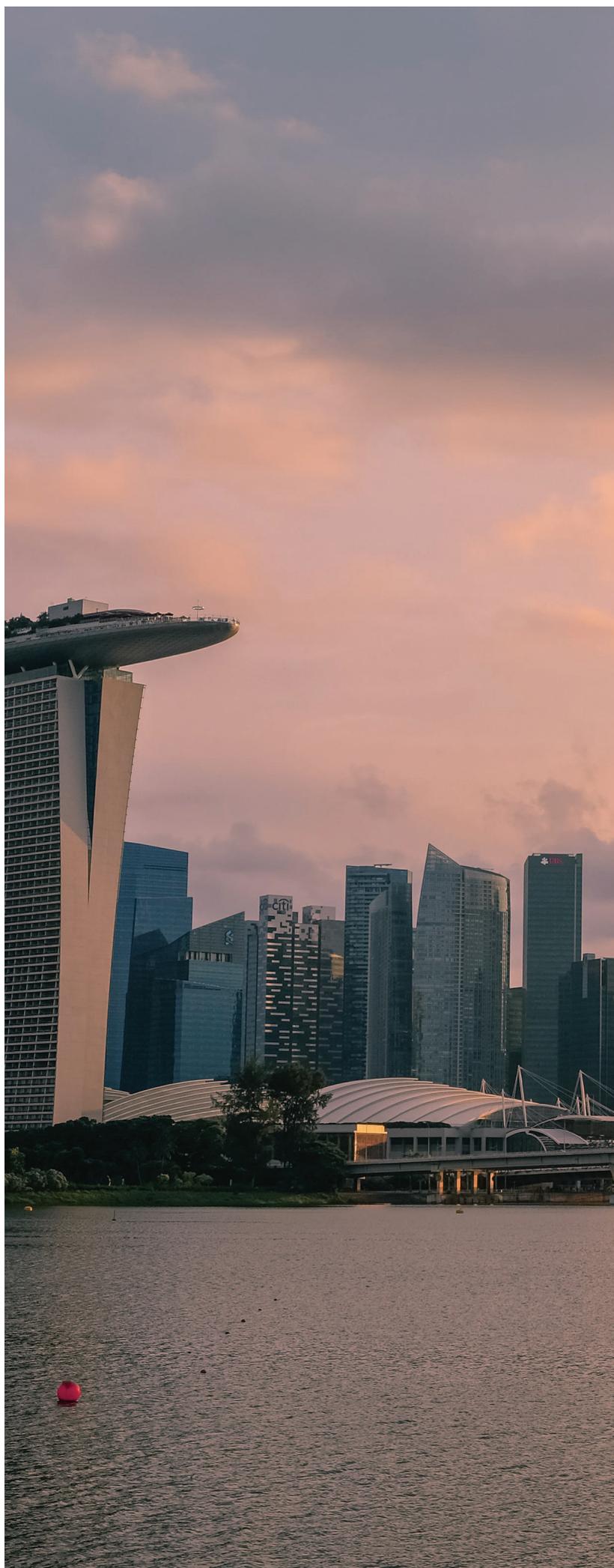
At check-in, you may be tempted to race straight to the roof, but hold back and use the pool first thing in the morning – it's a magical spot to watch the sun rise and see old and new Singapura come to life.

4PM – WORK OFF JET LAG

After 16 plus hours, you'll want to stretch your legs. Fortunately, you're right next to *Gardens by the Bay*, home to *Avatar-esque* trees, a breath-taking waterfall and a great water-front running track to blow away the cobwebs. It is one of the few occasions when a tourist site truly lives up to the hype – and this time in the afternoon should be a little quieter and cooler.

6PM – COCKTAIL HOUR

There are some exceptional choices for an aperitif at or around your hotel – such as *Spago* for an order of off-the-menu Rough Love cocktails – but a couple of favourites for me are *Smoke and Mirrors*, and *Atlas*. The former is housed at the top of the National Gallery with a cool balcony overlooking the historic Singapore Cricket Club and the glass skyscrapers of the CBD. *Atlas* is like walking into a Fitzgerald novel; a stunning Art Deco lobby of low-lighting and high ceilings. With a 1,000-bottle gin bar, you could have a classic Tanqueray or ask the barman for something particularly special.







8PM – FIRST COURSE

Food is a HUGE thing in Singapore; the locals are true epicureans and essentially anywhere you see a queue, is well worth a join.

I used to like doing a ‘food safari’; a different course at different restaurants gave The Beard and I plenty of options and was a way to walk off the gluttony.

It’s a bit touristy, but head to the corner of the CBD to *Lau Pa Sat Hawker Centre*. Grab one of the plastic tables and chairs on the street, order a pitcher of Tiger beer and a round of chicken satay skewers, and just appreciate the noise of multiple nationalities, the lights of the city, and the smoke drifting off the grill.



9PM – THE MAIN EVENT

Grab a cab up to the Keong Saik Road. The former red-light district is now home to a plethora of seriously good restaurants, full of life and ambience. If you don’t mind a bit of a wait, check out the unassuming *Man Man* for unagi; or enjoy an easy burger on the roof at *Potato Head*; or salivate over melt-in-your-mouth meat at *Burnt Ends*. There are salty, briny, just-have-one-more oysters at *Humpback* only a street away, and imaginative cocktails at *Neon Pigeon*. Dining sorted.

P.S. There is also a brilliant poke bar and coffee place called Loloku on Keong Saik, which is an ideal work, eat and play spot during the day.

MIDNIGHT – THE WITCHING HOUR

After hours, head to 28 Hong Kong Street – ask a taxi driver to take you there. Hidden in plain sight, this is one of the best bars in Asia. It is fantastic! Amidst the run down shophouses, keep an eye out for the door to be revealed, push back the velvet curtains and pray that there is a stool at the bar. My friends and I are of the classic cocktail persuasion so I can tell you that co-bar captains Lukas Kaufmann and Charmaine Thio make mean martinis and negronis, but their menu is always full of wonderful things just waiting to be sipped.





9AM – HOW D'YA LIKE YOUR EGGS IN THE MORNIN'?

Post your sunrise swim – told you it was worth it – you could indulge in the delicious buffet breakfast again at Spago. But you're here for such a short time, rise and shine early and get out into town. One of my favourite areas in Singapore is *Haji Lane*; a jumbled warren of streets and alleys, where shophouses are home to cool coffee shops and independent labels. Opt for Aussi-Asian joint, *The Hangar* for eggs over wood-fire baked toast and strong coffee, get the camera out for the exceptional urban art, and have the wallet ready for local trinkets.

NOON

It's time for your next destination, but not before you've tried the infamous Singapore chilli crab. Fortunately, most of the joints to try this local dish are in East Coast Park, en route to the airport or ferry terminal. Grab a table outside at *Long Beach* and order one traditional order plus a plate of their own black pepper crab – just make sure to ask for extra *mantous* to mop up all the delicious sauce. Say yes to wearing a bib and be prepared to get messy.

This is the mere tip of the iceberg to discovering Singapore. The *Botanical Gardens* with their extraordinary orchid grove is spectacular. Former army barracks, *Dempsey Hill* is a treasure trove of great restaurants, a concept store takeover by Dover Street Market, contemporary art galleries, and homeware stores. *Sentosa* is a family friendly paradise of beautiful hotel brunches, *Universal Studios*, and beach clubs that fill weekends with great tunes and great service. There's dim sum in *Chinatown*, the food markets in *Tiong Bahru*, and excellent hiking around *MacRitchie*.

In short, you really need more than 24 hours in Singapore, but hopefully this little guide will give you just a taste – and encourage you to go back for more. ■