

The background image shows a vibrant red building facade with intricate white architectural details, including arched windows and decorative columns. A series of red and yellow lanterns with Chinese characters are strung across the front of the building. The text 'Singapore: From Swamp to Superpower' is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Singapore: From Swamp to Superpower

Complete History in 30 Minutes!

1134 AD



2026



Singapore · Questions 1–5

1. What is the modern name of Bukit Larangan, the “Forbidden Hill”?
2. Which European colonial power opposed Raffles’ move in 1819?
3. Which canal’s opening in 1869 boosted Singapore’s trade?
4. Which famous Singapore hotel opened in 1887?
5. Singapore was Britain’s “Gibraltar of the” what?

Singapore · Questions 6–10

6. What Japanese name did Singapore receive during the occupation?
7. What does PAP stand for in Singaporean politics?
8. In which year did Singapore separate from Malaysia?
9. Which western area became a major industrial estate?
10. Which Changi complex opened in 2019 with an indoor waterfall?

Singapore · Answers 1–5

1. What is the modern name of Bukit Larangan, the “Forbidden Hill”?

Fort Canning Hill

2. Which European colonial power opposed Raffles’ move in 1819?

The Netherlands (the Dutch)

3. Which canal’s opening in 1869 boosted Singapore’s trade?

The Suez Canal

4. Which famous Singapore hotel opened in 1887?

Raffles Hotel

5. Singapore was Britain’s “Gibraltar of the” what?

The East

Singapore · Answers 6–10

6. What Japanese name did Singapore receive during the occupation?

Syonan-to (also accept Shōnan-tō or Syonan)

7. What does PAP stand for in Singaporean politics?

People's Action Party

8. In which year did Singapore separate from Malaysia?

1965

9. Which western area became a major industrial estate?

Jurong

10. Which Changi complex opened in 2019 with an indoor waterfall?

Jewel Changi Airport

SINGAPORE

Success, Rules, and the "Nanny State" Label

A follow-on look at the policies behind the polish



A Powerhouse, Not a "Superpower"



Singapore is tiny — smaller than New York City, with about 6 million people. It has no natural resources to speak of.

Yet by GDP per capita, financial clout, and port/air connectivity, it punches at a level countries 50x its size envy.

#1

Ease of doing
business (Asia)

5.9M

Population

Top 5

Global financial
centres

1965

Independence —
from swamp to hub

The engine behind that success is a dense web of rules — the same rules that earn it the "nanny state" tag.

Keeping It Clean



Anti-Littering Laws

- Fines up to S\$2,000 for a first offence
- Repeat offenders face Corrective Work Orders — cleaning in public, sometimes on camera
- "Singapore is a fine city" — the pun locals actually live by



Mandatory Tray Return

- Law since 2021 at hawker centres and food courts
- Diners must clear their own trays and tableware after eating
- Fines from S\$300 (first offence) — enforced by roving officers



Small Habits, Big Rules



Chewing Gum Ban



- Sale of chewing gum banned since 1992 — vandalised trains were the tipping point
- Therapeutic/dental gum allowed only via a pharmacist
- Importing gum for resale can mean a fine or jail



Smoking Controls



- Banned in almost all indoor public places, and a growing list of outdoor spots
- Designated smoking corners marked with yellow boxes
- Heavy "sin taxes" keep cigarette prices among the highest in the world

Alcohol and Drugs: A Hard Line



Alcohol Controls

- Public drinking banned 10:30pm–7am nationwide
- Designated "Liquor Control Zones" (e.g. Little India) add tighter weekend limits
- High excise duty makes beer and spirits notably expensive



Strict Drug Laws

- Among the toughest regimes anywhere — mandatory death penalty for trafficking above set thresholds
- Zero tolerance extends to consumption abroad by citizens/residents
- Government credits this with famously low addiction and drug-crime rates

Owning a Car: The World's Priciest Hobby



Certificate of Entitlement (COE)

- A 10-year licence just to own a car — bid for at auction, on top of the car's price
- COE prices have exceeded S\$100,000 (฿2.6m) in recent years, for the certificate alone
- Quota system deliberately caps the number of vehicles on the road



The Payoff: World-Class Transit

- MRT and bus network is cheap, extensive, and famously punctual
- Fewer cars per capita than almost any wealthy nation — by design, not accident

Housing Everyone — On the State's Terms



HDB Public Housing

- About 80% of Singaporeans live in Housing & Development Board flats
- Flats are 99-year leaseholds bought largely with compulsory CPF savings, not cash



Ethnic Integration Policy

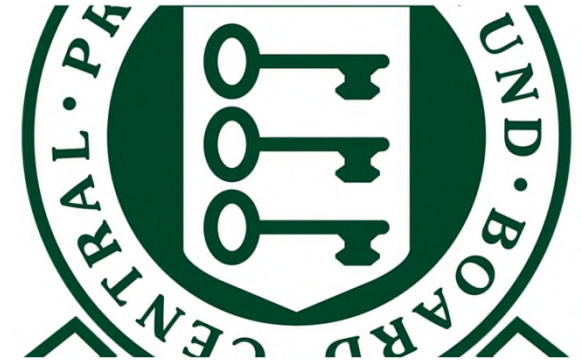
- Each HDB block and neighbourhood has ethnic quotas (Chinese, Malay, Indian/Other)
- A flat sale can be blocked if it would push a block's racial mix over quota
- Aim: prevent ethnic enclaves and keep communities genuinely mixed



Compulsory Saving: The CPF System



The state decides how much you save, and largely how you spend it — for housing, healthcare and retirement.



~37%

Combined employer +
employee contribution
(under-55s)

3

Ring-fenced accounts:
Ordinary, Special,
Medisave

1955

CPF founded — one of
the world's oldest
social security schemes

Result: high home ownership and a funded retirement system — with little say for the individual over their own money.

Enforcing Racial and Religious Harmony



Singapore treats social harmony as a matter of law and policy, not just goodwill.

- Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act — restraining orders against those who stir religious/racial tension
- Sedition and public-order laws used against remarks deemed to inflame racial or religious lines
- Strict rules on public assembly (e.g. Speakers' Corner as one of very few licence-free spaces)
- Multiracialism is written into the constitution and reinforced through housing, schools and national events



Nanny State vs. Pay-off

What Critics See

- Heavy fines and surveillance for everyday behaviour
- Limited free speech and public assembly
- The state directs housing, savings and even neighbourhood mix
- Little tolerance for dissent or disorder

What the Results Show

- ✓ Among the world's lowest crime, corruption and littering rates
- ✓ Near-universal home ownership; well-funded retirement savings
- ✓ Racial and religious peace sustained for six decades
- ✓ Consistently top-ranked liveability, safety and business environment

From the Stick ... to the Carrot

Singapore's newest phase goes beyond fining bad behaviour — it now pays citizens to do the things it wants to see.



THEN — Regulate Behaviour

- Don't litter — or pay a fine
- Don't smoke here
- Don't drink here after 10:30pm
- Don't chew gum
- Return your tray — or pay a fine



NOW — Reward Behaviour

- Read more — earn cash-back coins
- Exercise more — get sports credit
- Go for a health check-in — earn Healthpoints
- Buy efficient appliances — get a voucher
- Have children — receive substantial state support

The government doesn't just govern the country — it actively tries to shape how citizens live.

Pay Days for Good Behaviour (2025–26)



Read

ReadSG: earn cash-back coins for 15 mins' reading a day



Exercise

S\$100 ActiveSG credit for gyms, pools & sport



Health check-in

1,500 Healthpoints (≈S\$10) for a Healthier SG check-in



Go green

Up to S\$400 Climate Vouchers for efficient appliances



Culture

S\$100 Culture Pass for arts, heritage & local literature



Have children

≈S\$70,000 per child, birth to 17, + more parental leave

All schemes confirmed as of the government's National Day Rally and agency announcements, 2025–26.

?

For Discussion

*“Singapore: Nanny State —
or simply a country where the nanny turned out to be rather good at her job?”*



Singapore's Prime Ministers

Lee Kuan Yew

1959–1990

- Founding Prime Minister (31 years)
- Independence in 1965
- Industrialisation, housing & infrastructure
- Foundations of modern Singapore

1959–2004

Goh Chok Tong

1990–2004

- Second Prime Minister (14 years)
- Continued economic growth
- Asian Financial Crisis & SARS
- More open, consultative style

A New Generation

Lee Hsien Loong

2004–2024

- 20 years as PM
- Smart Nation & Skills Future
- Economic and social modernisation

Lawrence Wong

2024–present

- Fourth Prime Minister
- Took office 15 May 2024
- Current PM



Only four Prime Ministers since 1959 — remarkable leadership continuity.



My Feed

Edition: Asia ▼

Latest News

Singapore

Asia

East Asia

Commentary

Insider

TODAY

Lifestyle

Watch

Listen

All ▾



Thailand considering oil tax cut, finance minister says

7 minutes ago



Xi rolls into Trump summit with China's trade engine roaring

20 minutes ago



Kit Chan's Singapore concert draws Stefanie Sun, JJ Lin and other local stars

1 hour ago



Bus passengers face fines of up to S\$500 for playing loud audio, putting feet on seats from Sep 23



Crisis looming for Marseille after five successive losses

21 minutes ago



AC Milan boss Amorim determined to learn from mistakes at Man Utd

1 hour ago



Australia's Firmus to launch \$5 billion IPO on October 6, term sheet shows

1 hour ago



Singapore retrenchments rise sharply in Q2 amid falling vacancies and fewer laid-off workers finding jobs



PATTAYA

expats

CLUB

Expats Helping Expats

NEXT SOCIAL EVENING

18:30 on Wednesday 30th September 2026



Nong Smile Café

57 Soi Bong Koch 3, off 3rd Road 



Buy Your Own Drinks, Tasty Lasagna & Thai Dishes
Shared food cost should be <150thb

WGCP-GR Pattaya City



PATTAYA

expats

CLUB

Expats Helping Expats