

The First 3 Months of Relocating to Singapore: Essential Insights

By Melanie Fonseka, Group Sales Director, Huttons Asia Pte Ltd

Welcome

- Moving to a new country can be both thrilling and overwhelming. This guide is designed to help you navigate your first three months in Singapore with confidence and ease.
- From savouring world-famous dishes to exploring vibrant neighbourhoods and connecting with local culture — this is your practical roadmap for the first 90 days.
- — Melanie Fonseka

1. Getting Acquainted with Singapore

Singapore is a compact yet dynamic city with distinct districts, each offering a unique character and pace of life:

Central Business District (CBD): The financial heart of Singapore — skyscrapers, work culture, and world-class connectivity.

Orchard Road: Singapore's iconic shopping belt — malls, high-end boutiques, international dining, and hotels.

Tiong Bahru: Heritage-rich with indie cafes, bookstores, and charming Art Deco architecture. A favourite for creatives.

Holland Village: A long-established expatriate favourite — laid-back atmosphere, eclectic dining, and a strong community feel.

East Coast / Katong: Family-friendly with Peranakan heritage, great eateries, and proximity to East Coast Park.

Sentosa: A resort island perfect for weekend escapes — beaches, theme parks, and luxury resorts.

Tips for Your First Few Weeks

- Download essential apps immediately: Grab (ride-hailing), CityMapper (navigation), SG Weather, Singpass.
- Explore your nearest hawker centre in the first week — it will become a daily ritual.
- Take a walking tour of Chinatown, Little India, or Kampong Glam for instant cultural immersion.
- Visit the Singapore Visitor Centre at Orchard for maps and practical newcomer advice.

2. Hawker Culture — Your Daily Essential

Singapore's hawker centres are the lifeblood of its culinary scene — affordable, authentic, and unmissable. A proper meal costs as little as SGD 3–5.

Must-Visit Hawker Centres

Maxwell Food Centre: Famous for Tian Tian Hainanese Chicken Rice.

Old Airport Road Food Centre: A haven for Char Kway Teow and Laksa.

Tiong Bahru Market: Great for Carrot Cake (Chai Tow Kway) and Chwee Kueh.

Lau Pa Sat: Iconic for satay and lively evening dining.

Newton Food Centre: Popularised by films — a classic Singapore evening experience.

Dishes to Try in Your First Month

- Hainanese Chicken Rice — Singapore's national dish.
- Chili Crab — messy, delicious, iconic.
- Laksa — spicy noodle soup with a rich coconut base.
- Satay — grilled meat skewers with peanut sauce.
- Kaya Toast with soft-boiled eggs — the quintessential Singapore breakfast.
- Bak Kut Teh — peppery pork rib soup, perfect for a rainy morning.

Hawker Tips

- Always return your tray to the designated return areas — it's the law and the culture.
- Long queues are a reliable sign of a must-try stall. Join them.
- Carry cash — many hawker stalls still do not accept cards.
- Dine during off-peak hours (before 12pm or after 2pm for lunch) to avoid the crowds.

3. Choosing Your Neighbourhood

Tiong Bahru: Perfect for singles or couples who enjoy a hip, artsy, heritage-rich vibe.

Holland Village: Ideal for expatriates seeking community, convenience, and a relaxed atmosphere.

East Coast / Katong: Great for families — access to parks, good schools, and the beach.

Bukit Timah: Greenery, nature reserves, and proximity to top international schools.

Woodlands: Spacious homes, family-friendly, and close to the Causeway for Malaysia access.

Choosing a Neighbourhood

- Proximity to work and school is the single most important quality-of-life factor.
- Consider the community vibe — many expats thrive in areas with a strong international presence.
- Budget matters: condos vs. HDB flats vs. landed property represent very different price points.

4. Museums and Cultural Sites

National Museum of Singapore: A journey through Singapore's complete history.

Asian Civilisations Museum: The diverse heritage of Asia, beautifully presented.

ArtScience Museum: A futuristic space blending art and technology at Marina Bay.

Peranakan Museum: Showcasing the unique Peranakan (Straits Chinese) culture.

Changi Chapel and Museum: Honouring Singapore's WWII history with dignity.

Museum Tips

- Plan weekday visits to avoid weekend crowds.
- Many museums offer free admission on selected days — check in advance.
- The Singapore Museum Pass offers unlimited access across multiple institutions.

5. Parks and Outdoor Life

Gardens by the Bay: Supertree Grove, Cloud Forest, and Flower Dome — a world-class attraction.

East Coast Park: Cycling, jogging, BBQ pits, and a long stretch of beach.

MacRitchie Reservoir: The TreeTop Walk and jungle trails — nature within the city.

Pulau Ubin: A rustic island for cycling, kayaking, and nature trails.

Southern Ridges: A trail connecting Telok Blangah Hill, Mount Faber, and Henderson Waves.

Outdoor Tips

- Always wear sunscreen and carry water — Singapore's heat and humidity are relentless.
- Visit early morning (before 9am) or after 5pm to avoid the midday heat.
- Check for free guided nature walks — they're often excellent and genuinely free.

6. Rooftop Bars and City Views

Marina Bay Sands SkyPark: The iconic infinity pool view — unmatched in Singapore.

Smoke & Mirrors (National Gallery): Creative cocktails, great art-inspired décor, and skyline views.

CE LA VI (Marina Bay Sands): Music, dining, and a spectacular terrace.

1-Altitude: Singapore's highest rooftop bar — sweeping 360-degree views.

LAVO (Marina Bay Sands): Italian dining with floor-to-ceiling city views.

Rooftop Tips

- Always check the dress code — most rooftop venues enforce smart casual or above.
- Make reservations for sunset slots — they fill up days in advance.
- Visit during happy hours (typically 5–8pm) for significantly discounted drinks.

7. Connecting with Local Culture

Chinese New Year (Jan/Feb): Lion dances, festive markets, and Chinatown light-ups.

Hari Raya Puasa (varies): Geylang Serai's spectacular light displays and Ramadan bazaars.

Mid-Autumn Festival (Sep/Oct): Mooncakes, lanterns, and the lit-up Gardens by the Bay.

Deepavali (Oct/Nov): Little India transforms entirely with lights, decorations, and festivities.

National Day (9 August): Parades, fireworks, and strong national pride — worth experiencing.

8. Practical First 3 Months Checklist

- Set up utilities through SP Group (electricity and water).
- Open a local bank account: DBS, OCBC, or UOB are the main options.
- Choose a mobile plan: Singtel, StarHub, or M1 based on data needs.
- Register with a GP clinic near your home.
- Download: Grab, Deliveroo, SingPass, OneMap, SG Weather.
- Join an expat Facebook group or Meetup community for your neighbourhood.
- Enrol children in school or join the waiting list for international schools.
- Attend an expatriate orientation session if your employer offers one.

Final Advice

- Take it slow in the first month. Let the city reveal itself to you.
- Keep an open mind — Singapore rewards curiosity and genuine engagement.
- Join expat communities early — the networks here are remarkably helpful and welcoming.
- Ask locals for recommendations on everything from food to doctors. They love sharing.

Ready to find your home in Singapore?

Contact Melanie Fonseca · +65 9658 8410 · melanie@melaniefonseka.com

WhatsApp: wa.me/6596588410 · www.melaniefonseka.com · CEA Licence R046575I