

THE FUN CITY OF SINGAPORE

I like to stick to a few simple rules when traveling.

EXPLORE. EXERCISE. EXPERIENCE. The Triple EX rules. They work best for me especially when I arrive at some place new. Like here, in the Fun City of Singapore.

Rule number one is to EXPLORE around and learn about the culture – both past and progressive.

I took the main road that leads to a host of museums and galleries, such as the Changi Museum, the Asian Civilizations Museum, and my personal favorite - the Chinatown Heritage Center. Here, the earliest Chinese settlers of the city bare their stories of survival as I walked through a multi-storey shophouse cramped with pictures, artifacts, miniature structures and rooms full of memories past.

Just as impressive is the gallery of modern Singapore culture – the Suntec City. Come to think of it, today's giant shopping malls are bound to be tomorrow's museums of living art and culture. Last I heard, Suntec City has been included in the Guinness Book of World Records for housing the biggest water fountain in the world. Circle it three times while touching the water, and good luck is on its way to your door.

A full day of exploration always puts a strain to my stamina. That's why I never overlook the second of the Triple Ex rules.

EXERCISE... Keeps my body fit, my palate pleased, and my wallet trim.

Shopping in Singapore's malls is the ultimate exercise that targets my weary eyes and legs. The range of choices leaves me breathless. But at the end of the day, one crucial exercise gives me the adrenalin rush I need to stay awake - bargain hunting.

From sun up to sun down, these cramped yet complete bazaars and bargain stores can be found in the ethnic quarters of Little India, Chinatown, and the Peranakan district. Take your pick from house ware items, electronic appliances, the latest in clothing and fashion accessories, and souvenir tokens to bring back home.

Soon, it's time to exercise the palate. So, off I go to a gastronomic work out that promises to be both a delight and an adventure. First stop is at Ya Yun Kaya restaurant for the city's famous breakfast fare - Kaya Toast. Served best with brewed coffee and poached eggs, kaya toast is the best way to start my day.

Strolling along the hawkers' food district in Chinatown, I chanced upon a local dish called rojak. This nutritious vegetarian salad mixes lamb meat with pineapple, cucumber and mangoes blended with soya and hot sauce for that well-balanced sweet and sour taste. Still another Singaporean delicacy is pohpia – veggies and tofu wrapped and dipped in peanut powder.

While visiting the Katong area, I dared to order a steaming bowl of Katong Laksa – the spicy Peranakan dish that's sure to excite one's senses. But for a first-hand sampling of world class gastronomic delights, a visit to Senso and My Humble House is definitely a must.

On a clear morning, the best alternative to spending a day in the city, is just a boat ride away. I took the chance to breathe some fresh air and took a short trip to this island retreat. An hour away from the city's concrete jungle, is Pulau Ubin - a haven for weekend warriors and nature lovers. Biking and camping enthusiasts will enjoy its rugged and winding terrain made perfect by a lush, green forest cover. Facilities for aqua

sports are also available. For first-time visitors to Singapore, Pulau Ubin is a viable respite from all the hustle and bustle of the fun city.

The last of the Triple Ex rules is indeed the most important. EXPERIENCE.

Different cultures interpret fun and excitement in multifarious ways. In Singapore, I discovered how the passing of darkness creates diverse opportunities for discovery and pleasure. Tourists flock to the Night Safari for an experience of the wild, up close and personal.

But for those with a different kind of experience in mind, the prospect of a wild evening leads them to a host of night spots, like Zouk. More than just a village party - which is what it means - Zouk is the fun place for music lovers of all types – R&B, hip-hop, trance you name it. Its three outlets cater to a wide range of party animals of all ages, color and language.

Out on the tamer, more quiet side of the city, rows of bars and café joints by the river attract the weary urbanite. Here, the end of another grueling day at the city is savored over bottles of beer and relaxing music. It is a rejuvenating experience.

So go ahead. After all these tips, I guess your appetite for fun and adventure is rarin' to be filled. It is now your turn to explore, exercise, and experience the excitement at the Fun City of Singapore.

It's time to create your own rules.