

## SINGAPORE & KUALA LUMPUR TRIP - Part 1

The best preparations oftentimes come to naught. When we started to plan this Singapore and KL trip over a month ago, we first went across the street to our nephew's travel agency and asked for a quote. At the same time, Lisa surfed the net to see good prices and hotels. Our target was 3 days in Singapore, then 2 days in KL. We would take a bus from Singapore to KL.

On my part, I prepped my good old laptop by extending the power cord and positioning a rubber band to keep the loose power plug in place. I knew this again would be a trip where every night, I'd be at the computer processing pictures and most likely sending out writeups, as had been oftentimes the case before.

Well, the travel agency gave us a figure which was a wee bit too high for our budget, even if the plane fares were very reasonable as we were to fly Cebu Pacific all the way. For one, our nephew's daughter (running the show at the agency), had honeymooned very briefly last year in Singapore, and obviously stayed overnight at a 5-star hotel. Who needs that for old fogeys like us, especially since we were to be hotel-housed for 5 days? So she came back again with a much more reasonable price, about US\$80, in a 3-star, which to us would be just fine, except that after googling it, we found it was in the downtown red-light district. That would have been OK with me, but Lisa would have nothing to do with it, especially since the ads said something about short-time rates! Lisa decided to book the hotel ourselves, and settled for a hotel at \$94, a bit farther out from downtown. It could have been \$84 but for ten bucks more, we get a window, which surely is worth it. Can't imagine being in a windowless room.



It was much better than those European Etap Hotels. More amenities, but was a bit tight at the queen-sized bed's foot end.

We had a 10:30 flight out of Manila, and at 4 I was all up and about, even firing up the computer. Well, I didn't realize the power transformer had come unplugged, and so when the poor thing tried to boot up on its weak battery, it gave up its ghost thus "corrupted system file, insert original Windows disk and hit R to repair." Well, I did not have a Windows disk. Fortunately, Lisa had her laptop which she didn't intend to bring on the trip, so I deputized it instead. But it had no word processor, spreadsheet program, desktop publisher, or decent picture manager, etc. I hastily downloaded and installed the freebie Open Office Suite.

We had done lots of homework, with tourist maps and brochures (from our nephew), internet data, and so when we arrived at Changi Int'l airport at about 2 that afternoon, we knew what rides to take. Best was a taxi to the hotel for about of S\$18, that's about US\$15 or P640. Bus or subway was cheaper but their terminals were far from the hotel. Not too bad, especially if one thinks in US\$. By comparison, a cab ride from NAIA to Makati is a fixed P600. However, going the other way with flagged meter, it would be just about P250 or so, though the distance in Manila is probably half or a third only.

We knew it wouldn't come out like the Tokyo-Narita episodes of at least 2 people we knew. They paid US\$300. When we took that trip 3 years ago, we went by train for US\$19. Our hotels happened to be near the stations.

At the airport, we took a late lunch (no meals served on Cebu Pacific, you can buy, but what type), changed some money, then took the cab. The cab driver was Chinese, as all the subsequent rides we took seemed to indicate so.

The transportation system in Singapore is terrific: good roads, good subway system, good bus services. What struck us right away was the greenery of the surroundings, with well



Trees were everywhere. And lower branches apparently were pruned early on so the trees developed large canopies.

pruned trees, gardens, sidewalk hedges, etc. Not like the "concrete jungle" such as in NYC.

At the hotel, there was a tourist desk wherein the guide gave us lots of brochures of various package tours, and some advice. Most of these tours were either whole or half day affairs that start early. After a nap at the hotel, we ventured out on foot: to the closest subway almost a kilometer away so to go Chinatown, always a must in most of our travels. Interestingly, it was called the Novena station as there was a Catholic church right there. To us, it was a long walk, but just like any tourist, you have to start off somewhere. The sidewalks were clean and well maintained. I noted right away the absence of all those blackened spots in almost all sidewalks we know, which are hardened residue of chewing gum. After all, Singapore bans the sale of chewing gum.

Our nephew had given us 2 credit-card sized cards that one can use on all subways, buses. Just swipe the card at the electronic reader and your fare is paid, provided of course the cards still has some "load". At the station, we put in S\$10 into each. Later, we found that each ride averaged less than S\$2.

The subway stations were clean, and all had escalators, and one cannot be pushed accidentally unto the railway track, as there were walled partitions with sliding doors. See photo below. And most had restrooms, clean too.



Once, when we got a train that was full, a man offered his seat to Lisa. On the wall there were icons that clearly indicated seating priority for the aged, those with canes, those with babies, and the pregnant. I still can't figure what category that man must have had in mind about Lisa.

To be continued .....  
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