

SINGAPORE & KUALA LUMPUR TRIP - Part 2

To me, the subway is the easiest way to travel: the rail lines and stations are fixed, and there always are subway maps available. Each station has a map, and each railway car indicates where you are and where you're going. The downside is that if you are a tourist, you don't see much of the outside.

In about 15 minutes and 5 stations later, we got to Chinatown. But the place didn't seem like a real Chinatown. We realized later that the subway station was at edge of the area. But never mind, there was a bustling covered market with lots of food stalls, and we were hungry.



The "must-eat" dishes we were advised about were chili crab and fish head. Well, three of the stalls we went to had run out of crab, so we settled for fish head (photo above) and a platter of shrimp. The servings were larger than we expected, and we ended up bringing the shrimp back to the hotel. But it wasn't cheap. Total bill was about US\$30, and had there been chili crab, it would have set us back US\$28 more. Yes, we found food expensive. Near our hotel, there was a bakery where we'd order hopia. It was US\$1 apiece and canned sodas were US\$1.50, and at a bar right beside the hotel, beer was US\$9.



From Chinatown (left), and with the map as guide, we got on the subway and rode to Little India. It was dusk by then. We meandered around as Lisa had hoped there'd be some interesting things to purchase, but there

weren't any. We had set our target to shop more at KL, which was reputedly less expensive.

Singapore's population mix is 74% Chinese, 13% Malay, and 9% Indian. When in both "towns", we felt

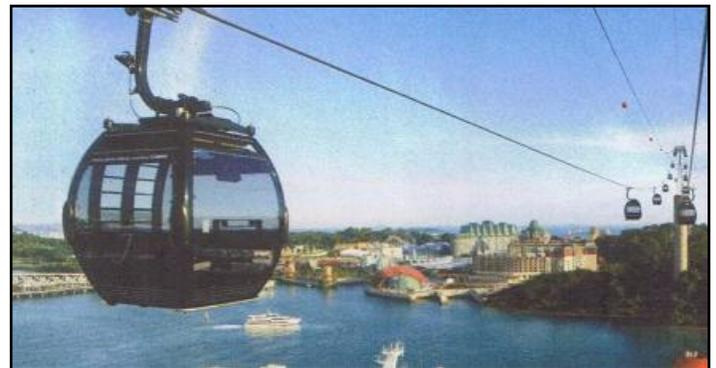


immersed in China and India. I don't suppose there was a Malay-town. One thing I noticed in Little India was there always were sidewalk flower shops, with vendors stringing garlands and floral arrangements together. And also, the ubiquitous bazaars with saris and jewelry. See photos above.

We took a cab back to the hotel; must have been 8 in the evening. Since Singapore is close to the equator, the sun rises and sets almost at the same time throughout the year, and dusk comes early at 6 pm. And, it was hot and humid.

We originally had intended to join one or two packaged tours. One of the "must-sees" was Sentosa, an island accessed by an aerial cable way, wherein a number of theme parks and mostly younger-set attractions were offered. One tour that caught our fancy was a 4 hour guided stroll through Chinatown, Little India, then the Botanical Gardens. But we were too late to book for that morning's schedule.

If we joined the Sentosa tour in the afternoon, it would extend to late at night, and since the attractions weren't our type, then why waste time and money. We could very well just get a ticket to ride the cable car round trip. Thirty years ago, I rode that cable car, and later heard about a number of accidents. To Lisa, it was a no-no, since it was high up over



The Sentosa Cable cars are strung on a single cable loop system. Other cable systems (multiple) have a thicker, stationary cable as a "railway" on which the wheels of the individual cable cars ride on. Cars are pulled by a thinner cable loop. Picture scanned from brochure. Should have been interesting, if we had ridden, and the winds were high.

the sea. At least the cable car we rode in Hakone, Japan a few years back was over land, strung low, and was a multiple cable system. So the Sentosa tour was scrubbed.

Instead, we decided to do what the hotel tour desk guide had suggested: ride the bus system and see more. Take Bus #147 a few blocks from the hotel, go to the City Hall terminal, buy S\$27 whole-day tickets, and go around. We had done this thing in London some time ago, and it was great.

We had set our sights on Orchard Road (the equivalent of NYC's 5th ave), the Esplanade by the sea, the Bugis commercial area, and of course the Botanical Gardens.

Mid morning that second day, we walked to the nearby bus stop, and surprise, the bus stop had maps, routes, schedules, distance, bus numbers, etc. It was so easy to understand and use. With a street map, we couldn't get lost. It even had a real-time indicator when the next bus was due.



Left, bus schedules and maps. Above, interior of bus. Clean, air-con, and sometimes double decker. Never jam-packed.

After swiping our cards at the bus entrance, I figured out perhaps another dollar or so was deducted; not bad at all. In no time, we found the bus gliding by the length of Orchard Road, with all the high end stores that we had planned to window-shop at and gawk. The City Hall station, where we were to buy our whole day bus passes, must have been some distance away yet. Then, BANG, something gave way. The bus had a tire blowout. The driver told all of us to transfer to the next bus.

Lisa and I instantly had the same thought in mind: why bother about the whole day bus pass? We just use our cards, add load if need be, and work the bus lines to where we want to go. If tired, or lost, take a cab back to the hotel

We walked a couple of blocks, entered some high end stores, used their rest rooms, and surprisingly, Lisa found a hole-in-the-whole kiosk where she got trinkets and other pasalubong for pretty good prices.

Then we took the bus to Bugis, the large, well known shopping area. We ate lunch at Burger King, then started exploring a few of the many malls in the area. At one of the malls, we met a Filipina who at first glance, gave us the impression that she was one those domestics who reputedly are common in Singapore. But no, she was a tourist, too, from a few towns north of Tanjay, doing her shopping with her small kid.

The sign pointing to a sex shop surprised me. Something one wouldn't see in Manila, or perhaps even in prudish Singapore. Yet I truly couldn't find where it was.

While Lisa spent time in one mall, I went a few blocks to the reputed largest electronics/camera center. Only much later did I realize I had been close to the famous Thieves Market I had visited 30 years before, but which by now was describd as a used swap meet center, with no contraband.

We were really just killing time that afternoon, because we wanted to catch the open air concert by the sea at the Esplanade.



We took a bus from Bugis to the Esplanade. I thought the bus route was a loop around the Marina Bay area before doubling back to the route's indicated destination.

It was a double decker bus and we took the upper deck. The views (above) were great. Note the greenery.

Views of the skyline in the Marina Bay were even greater. (below and above right). But I must have misread the bus



route because after half an hour, the bus driver announced to us, the last passengers, that this was the end of the line. And somehow, we couldn't ride back on the same bus.



We were stuck. But to make a long story short, by walking, subway, and more walking, we finally got to the Esplanade. We had tried to hail cabs but at rush hour the taxi-stand lines were long.

We explored, enjoyed the views, saw the exhibits, had dinner, and watched the short Chinese show.



We were really dog-tired by then, and fortunately had no problem getting a cab for home at the hotel, half an hour and about ten bucks away.

to be continued
29 Sep 2012