

## SINGAPORE & KUALA LUMPUR TRIP - Part 3

The third and last full day in Singapore was spent mostly at the Botanical Gardens. We slept in till mid morning, since in addition to having had a hard day yesterday, we also stayed up late doing more preparations for our bus ride to KL: buying on-line our tickets. The hotel clerks had advised us to just take a cab to Golden Mile Center and choose from any number of dozen or so bus lines that ply the route, at rates anywhere from S\$20 to S\$50. But googling the site indicated it was safer to reserve in advance.

Internet speed was good, and even if I had to use Lisa's laptop, which I was not that familiar with, we could do all the surfing we needed. We booked on-line and it came to S\$32 each.

The other room attraction, TV, was surprisingly very limited. The most number of stations seemed to be less than a dozen, and programming was mainly Chinese. I really expected English to be much better understood and spoken, but that wasn't the case.

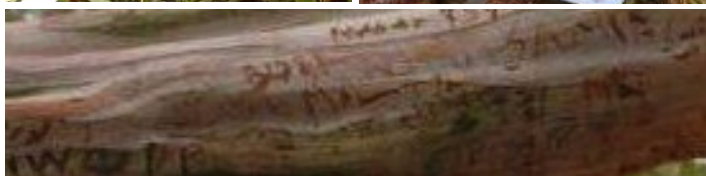
Although this Value Hotel Thompson was well rated, it had no restaurant or dining facilities. I'd buy breakfast at a Chinese restaurant across the street and bring it up to the room. After a late breakfast, we got a cab for the Botanical Gardens. This was the best way to go.

Then we walked, and walked and walked, from garden to garden: Healing garden, Ginger garden, Orchid garden, Evolution garden. The brochures said total area was 74 hectares with 150 years of history. In between, we took lunch. It rained a bit and fortunately, we had our umbrella.



And each garden was subdivided. Here, the Healing garden has sections for trees/shrubs/plants reputedly good for various ailments. No wonder Chinese folk medicine have so many herbs.

I took lots of photos at the Orchid garden, especially since Lisa wanted to compare them with our orchids at home. Below is a sample. Other two photos show that not all visitors follow the rules. I had a pocketknife and was tempted, but didn't.



At mid afternoon, after about 5 hours, we quit, got a cab, and went back to the hotel. We realized that if we had availed of the 4 hour package tour for S\$32 for each of us that included the Botanical gardens, and walking tours of downtown which included Chinatown and Little India, we couldn't have covered this much. And we already had covered Little India and part of Chinatown on our own. We had done better.

This was our last night, and there was a celebration going on in Chinatown so we decided to take the bus, and join the crowds.



And crowds indeed there were. This time, we meandered amid most of Chinatown, shopped a bit, had dinner at a finer restaurant. Going back by bus at almost 10 was no problem.

We checked out the next morning, took a cab to Golden Mile Center, found the "Starmart" Bus company kiosk our internet-booked printout had advised, but alas, they didn't have our names or ticket. There was a glitch. We had paid to an intermediary bus agent by internet, but they hadn't yet remitted to the bus company. Best solution was to pay cash for the tickets, and go after the internet bus agent. Cash was much cheaper at S\$20. We left at about 10:30 in the morning.



Later we were refunded on-line.

The bus was luxurious, (left) and I couldn't figure out how it made money with just the 12 passengers I counted.

For about half an hour, the bus drove to the other side of Singapore, where just before a long bridge, we were told to alight and go through customs. Then on the Malaysia side, we had to get off again and bring our baggage for x-ray. At another stop, the Indian driver got off and was replaced by a Chinese driver. He drove like a madman, weaving in and out of the excellent 6 lane highway. I noted the posted speed limit at 100 kph and estimated we were going much faster, but so what, many cars were also overtaking us.



Mile after mile of terrain showed palm oil plantations. Reminded me of the huge farms in California on Interstate 5, but greener.

We had bought "baon" for the trip, so the next rest stop at about 2 pm wasn't really needed for a late lunch, but the signs shown at this stop were most welcome. Left side were the toilets, right were the prayer rooms. I don't think anybody went to the right.



I asked the driver how many more hours to KL and he said we were at the outskirts, and sure enough in less than half an hour we were at the bus terminal which was quite close to our Hotel. We hailed a cab nonetheless.





The city seemed to be more hilly than Singapore, and the views from the bus gave the impression of a more diverse cultural and ethnic mix. Above are Moslem and Hindu buildings respectively. One on right leads to Nirvana.

The Sky View hotel was a new, multi-story structure that was reasonably priced at an equivalent of about US\$50, with spacious rooms. Included was breakfast in their excellent restaurant. And though it advertised internet in every room, that wasn't so. The signal was only available at the lobby and at the dining area in the mezzanine.

The lobby had a full time tourist kiosk, manned by an Indian. After discussion with the tour guide, studying the street maps and brochures, and some internet surfing, we decided to: a) go on our own for the rest of the day and the following day; b) take the 5 hour 11-destination guided tour on our last day, then use same car/driver to bring us to the airport quite some distance away. Breakdown was 160 Ringgit for the tour and 90 to the airport, or about US\$83 total. Seemed lopsided to me, but why complain. Our flight out of KL was 6:30 in the evening.

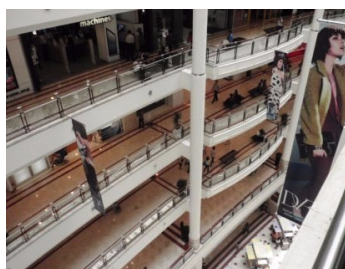
This time, we didn't even attempt to get on a bus, or a train. Seemed too confusing. Since we were near the downtown area, we walked and took cabs, when we could. The city's highlights would be on the guided car tour the last day.

We went to the famous Central Market (all air-conditioned), China and India town, a few malls, etc.

This was a city of superlatives: largest aviary, shown



above, which we didn't explore due to lack of time, the tallest building, Petronas Towers, above, which we entered briefly for what turned out to be an expensive lunch. Just like the Empire State, and Twin Towers in NYC, one needs reservations to line up for the top floors. One of the towers had a mall on the first 5 floors (right). There we took a quick fish lunch (below) which was shown on the menu to be 23 ringgit, but total bill was 93. Seems as if the tea, wet towelette and perhaps even the napkin was extra. That's a US\$16 morsel.



However, food generally was quite reasonable, unlike Singapore. We had sampled KFC, a Malay corner food-store, and the hotel restaurant. Generally, I found it too spicy and really different.



It probably was also superlative in terms of temperature. On left is an outdoor but covered sidewalk at the Central market, with electric fans on the posts. There also were "mistlers", those cooling devices one sees only in dry desert areas like Palm Springs. In this humidity, it probably would make it worse.



At a sidewalk near the hotel, I saw something that reminded me of Avenida Rizal. It was a water pump sucking water from the mains. Obviously a solution to low pressure, but is it legal? Our tour guide, a young Indian, working his

way through college, kept bitching about the racist policies of the government where the minority Chinese and Indians were discriminated against in terms of jobs, taxes, housing, and if one believed him, almost everything. Had he seen this pump, he'd surely aver the owner is Malay.

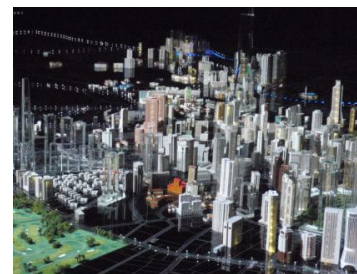
He vented this frustration on the gas pedal because on the way to the airport, he drove at 130 kph in an 80 zone. Once finished schooling, he'd join his uncle in England. We did give him a good tip anyway, not normally encouraged.



We both had a 30 minute foot massage, though Lisa turned down a hand "massage" done by fish. They nibble on your dead skin. It was a bit

unnerving, I must admit, but there's always a first time for everything. An adjacent tank had bigger fish for the feet.

We posed before the King's Grand palace, went to a few



museums, where I got excellent shots of the models of the city skyline. But we passed up entering one mosque by first removing our shoes and donning some flowing violet garb.

When the Indian guide/driver dropped us off at the KL International airport at 4 in the afternoon, we were early. But it turned out to be the wrong airport. Cebu Pacific flies out of the more popular LCAT (low cost air terminal) about 12 km away, so we took another cab for ten US bucks to get there. Better late than never. Finally, we could relax. The 3-1/2 hour flight back to Manila was thankfully uneventful. Only then could I start reading the pocket book I had brought along.

Our 5 day Singapore-KL trip was over.

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