

## **Singapore**

### **Facts and Statistics**

**Location:** Southeastern Asia, islands between Malaysia and Indonesia

**Capital:** Singapore

**Population:** 4,353,893 (July 2004 est.)

**Ethnic Make-up:** Chinese 76.7%, Malay 14%, Indian 7.9%, other 1.4%

**Religions:** Buddhist (Chinese), Muslim (Malays), Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Taoist, Confucianist

### **The Language**

Singapore has attempted to promote a national identity in its land of immigrants since its independence in 1965. As part of this effort, Singapore has four national languages: Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and English. For business and politics, English is the language of choice.

### **Singapore Society & Culture**

#### **The Family**

- . The concepts of group, harmony, and mutual security are more important than that of the individual.
- . The family is the centre of the social structure and emphasizes unity, loyalty and respect for the elderly.
- . The term, 'family' generally includes extended family and close friends who are treated as family members.
- . Respect for the elderly and seeing the family as the place one goes to for support, both help retain core values in this island nation.

#### **Face & Respect**

- . Having face indicates personal dignity.
- . Singaporeans are very sensitive to retaining face in all aspects of their lives.
- . Face is a prized commodity that can be given, lost, taken away or earned.
- . It is a mark of personal qualities such as a good name, good character, and being held in esteem by one's peers.
- . It can also be greater than the person and extend to family, school, company, and even the nation itself.
- . Face is what makes Singaporeans strive for harmonious relationships.

#### **Hierarchy**

- . Singaporeans claim they are an egalitarian society, yet they retain strong hierarchical relationships that can be observed in the relationship between parents and children, teachers and students, and employers and employees.
- . This goes back to their important cultural value, group dependence.
- . This reliance on hierarchy is drawn from Confucianism, which emphasizes respecting age and status, even blind obedience to one's elders. . In the workplace this is seen in the increased deference that is paid to employees who are older.
- . The elderly are always treated with the utmost respect and courtesy.
- . Even if you do not personally know the individual, you will be expected to give special consideration.
- . Elders are introduced first, are given preferential seating, are given the choicest food, and in general put on a pedestal.
- . There was a law passed in 1996 that mandated that children must assume financial responsibility for their elderly parents should the need arise.
- . This is indicative of the high status of the elderly and the challenges facing the small country as the next generation becomes more individualistic.

## **Ethnic Diversity**

- . Singapore is a multi-ethnic society where Chinese, Malay and Indian traditions coexist beneath the veneer of a western cosmopolitan metropolis.
- . The three main ethnic groups are religiously and culturally diverse.

## **Non-Verbal Communication**

- . Singaporeans are group dependent and rely on facial expression, tone of voice and posture to tell them what someone feels.
- . They often trust non-verbal messages more than the spoken word.
- . They tend to be subtle, indirect and implicit in their communications.
- . They hint at a point rather than making a direct statement, since that might cause the other person to lose face.
- . Rather than say 'no', they might say, 'I will try', or 'I'll see what I can do'. This allows the person making the request and the person turning it down to save face and maintain harmony in their relationship.
- . Silence is an important element of Singaporean communication.
- . Pausing before responding to a question indicates that they have given the question appropriate thought and considered their response carefully.
- . They do not understand western cultures ability to respond to a question hastily and think this indicates thoughtlessness and rude behavior.