

Singapore: Sensory perceptions

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Brave new world: Art Seasons gallery.

The island city is giving Hong Kong a shake as Asia's arts hub, writes Nina Karnikowski.

Think of Singapore and behemoth shopping malls, the Merlion, Singapore Slings and a distinct lack of chewing gum will probably all come to mind. But art galleries? Maybe not so much.

That's all changing, however, thanks to a state-led effort to promote the "Lion City" as one of Asia's largest cultural and artistic hubs, with the Singaporean government pumping hundreds of thousands of dollars a year into the city's arts scene.



The Rendezvous Hotel.

Singapore already boasts more than 50 contemporary art galleries, including the newly opened Centre for Contemporary Art and the Singapore Art Museum, and hosts world-class art events including the recent Singapore Biennale and Art Stage Singapore, south-east Asia's largest art fair. And with both the Singapore Pinacothèque de Paris (the first Asian outpost of Paris' largest private art museum) and the National Art Gallery (which will exhibit the world's biggest public collection of modern Southeast Asian and Singaporean art) scheduled to open in 2015, the city is giving Hong Kong a run for its money in the race to become Asia's arts hub.

Here, we've hand-picked a selection of the city's hottest art destinations from the rapidly growing pool, so that next time you visit the Lion City you'll know just where to take your beret.

CHAPEL GALLERY, SCULPTURE SQUARE



An exhibition at Art Plural Gallery.

It's small, but you can't miss this silver spray-painted church. The building is an 1870 Methodist church that became a gallery in 1999. It focuses on 3D art, with the artistic director aiming to expand the concept of sculpture in the minds of Singaporeans. The gallery runs art classes on weekends, with rubber-stamp carving and printmaking currently on offer. 155 Middle Road; sculpturesq.com.sg.

What's on *Sensorium - The Unfurling*, kinetic sculpture and paintings by Australian artist Jo Darvall. July 8 to 11.

Where to eat Artichoke, 161 Middle Road, Sculpture Square, artichoke.com.sg. Tucked away behind the gallery, Artichoke is especially renowned for its brunches, but the Mediterranean-focused food (think smoky baba ghanoush and braised short ribs) is good all day, nibbled indoors or out.



The Arts Seasons Gallery.

ART SEASONS GALLERY

Tucked away on level two of the POMO shopping centre, next door to the Danz People dance studio, Art Seasons focuses on cutting-edge Chinese and south-east Asian art. The gallery also has branches in Jakarta and Beijing. Their collection of art books and catalogues in the back room is rather fabulous, should you have time to peruse. 1 Selegie Road, artseasonsgallery.com.

What's on Indonesian artist Gatot Indrajati's solo exhibition, *The Puppet State*. To May 10.



Singapore Tyler Print Institute's exhibition. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist and Singapore Tyler Print Institute

Where to eat Cups N Canvas, 139 Selegie Road, [facebook.com/cupsncanvas](https://www.facebook.com/cupsncanvas). Just a few minutes walk away, this hole-in-the-wall cafe holds weekly "art jamming" sessions, where patrons learn to draw and paint while sipping sweet potato lattes and eating home-style cooking.

ART PLURAL GALLERY

Occupying an art deco refurbished former Catholic school opposite the Peranakan Museum, this four-floor gallery is Singapore's largest, and one of Southeast Asia's most pre-eminent. The coolest floor is the third, dedicated to emerging artists from around the world. 38 Armenian Street, artpluralgallery.com.



STPI Paper Pusher. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist and Singapore Tyler Print Institute

What's on *Spurious Stories from the Land and Water*, a solo exhibition of Singaporean artist Sherman Ong, will feature two photography series and a short film. Runs to May 31.

Where to eat Bacchanalia, 23A Coleman Street, bacchanalia.asia. Two minutes down the road you'll be gorging yourself on the creations of chefs trained at Heston Blumenthal's The Fat Duck. Bacchanalia is all low lighting, fabulous cocktails, great music and reinvented French classics including French onion soup, steak tartare and pineapple tatin.

51 WATERLOO STREET

This 1930s heritage building has become an arts and culture centre, housing several small, independent galleries over three floors including Yavuz Fine Art, Art Trove (specialising in European art from the 19th and 20th centuries) and the Private Museum (showcases private collections and upcoming artists' works).

What's on *Bones After Bones: Echo*, a solo exhibition by Wedhar Riyadi, one of Indonesia's best young artists. May 30 to July 12 at Yavuz Fine Art. See yavuzfineart.com.

Where to eat Salt Tapas and Bar by Luke Mangan, 252 Northbridge Road, salttapas.com. Five minutes' walk away is Luke Mangan's Salt. The set menu of entree, main and side for \$30 makes it perfect for a gallery-trawl refuel, with options including kingfish sashimi, sumac spiced veal and pork meatballs.

GILLMAN BARRACKS

Singapore's contemporary arts hub is a former 1930s army barracks 15 minutes' drive from Singapore's CBD. In 2012 the government spent \$8 million transforming the collection of white colonial buildings into 17 small international galleries including the Centre for Contemporary Art. 9 Lock Road, gillmanbarracks.com.

What's on Take your pick from galleries including Future Perfect, Mizuma Gallery and Ota Fine Arts.

Where to eat Since the barracks is a tad out of the way, it's lucky it houses some fabulous restaurants. Masons, a colonial-vibed French joint with black and white tiles and ceiling fans on the verandah, is particularly good.

SINGAPORE TYLER PRINT INSTITUTE

Housed in a restored colonial building, this institute functions as a workshop and gallery for emerging and established artists from around the world. Visitors can watch the artists at work and take part in printing workshops. 41 Robertson Quay.

See stpi.com.sg.

What's on Wu Shanzhuan from Shanghai and Inga Thorsdottir from Reykjavik are collaborating with the epically named *The Printer/The Paper/The Layer/The Thing's Right(s)/The Little Fat Flesh* exhibition until May 10.

Where to eat Burnt Ends, 20 Teck Lim Road, burntends.com.sg. If you're up for splashing out, a five-minute cab ride will find you at this no-bookings hotspot. The counter is where it's at for unique barbecue dishes from their four-tonne, dual cavity ovens and three elevation grills.

The writer travelled as a guest of Rendezvous Hotel Singapore.

THREE ARTY BARS

KINKI

Pull up a pew at this Japanese-inspired rooftop spot, grab a sushi platter and a Nippon-inspired cocktail and soak up the funky vibe, created thanks to graffiti murals (this was Singapore's first graffiti art bar), hand-painted Japanese signs, red lanterns and the video art that plays on the

wall on Saturday nights. 70 Collyer Quay, kinki.com.sg.

ART BAR

Perched above the Butter Factory nightclub, Art Bar is all about upcycling - car seats used as seating, oil drums as tables, old newspaper as wallpaper - with different artists revamping the space every couple of months. This is where to come for dancing and drinking; their range of "skinny" (aka health-conscious) drinks are especially yummy. One Fullerton, 1 Fullerton Road, thebutterfactory.com/artbar.

ZOUK

A spot for the height of the night, Zouk is essentially five different arty clubs in one. The pop art-influenced works displayed in three of the clubs - Zouk, Phuture and Velvet Underground - is rumoured to be worth more than \$6 million (there's a Roy Lichtenstein numbered print in Zouk). 17 Jiak Kim Street, zoukclub.com.

TRIP NOTES

GETTING THERE

Singapore Airlines, Scoot and Qantas all fly daily from Sydney to Singapore direct.

STAYING THERE

Rendezvous Hotel, in the heart of Singapore's arts and cultural precinct, is surrounded by galleries and art schools, directly opposite the stunning green-walled School of the Arts and right behind the National Museum of Singapore. The Singapore Art Museum is a five-minute walk away. The hotel recently had an art-inspired makeover to include spaces dedicated to showcasing collaborations with local art galleries, as well as permanent sculptures and art installations throughout.

Rooms from \$287 a night, see rendezvoushotels.com/singapore.

MORE INFORMATION

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