

domestic violence and sexual or physical harassment. A battered wife can obtain court orders barring the spouse from the home until the court is satisfied that he will stop his aggressive behavior. The Penal Code prescribes mandatory caning and a minimum imprisonment of 2 years for conviction on a charge of 'outraging modesty' that causes the victim fear of death or injury." (U.S. Department of State Human Rights Report, 1996--Singapore.)

b. Equality "Women enjoy the same legal rights as men in most areas, including civil liberties, employment, commercial activity, and education. The Women's Charter, enacted in 1961, gives women, among other rights, the right to own property, conduct trade, and receive divorce settlements. Muslim women enjoy most of the rights and protections of the Women's Charter.



Muslim men may practice polygyny; they also may divorce unilaterally, whereas Muslim women may not. Polygyny occurred in 104 of 4,412 marriages registered in 1995.

In 1962 the Government instituted the principle of equal pay for equal work in the civil service and abolished separate salary scales in 1965.

Women make up 39 percent of the labor force and are well represented in many professional fields, but they still hold the preponderance of low-wage jobs such as clerks and secretaries. As a result, their average salary levels are only 74 percent those of men. Women hold few leadership positions in the private sector.

Other areas of discrimination remain. For example, children born overseas to female citizens are not granted citizenship automatically, while those of male citizens are. Female civil service employees who are married do not receive health benefits for their spouses and dependents as do male government employees."

4. Conflicts

Two islands in dispute with Malaysia

5. Holidays/Observances

(The following material, adapted from Holidays, Festivals and Celebrations of the World Dictionary, compiled by Sue Thompson and Barbara Carlson, [Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1994], is instructive.)



a. Panguni Uttiram (pahg-OO-nee oo-TEE-rahm, April; full moon of Phalguna)

- Celebrates the marriage of Hindu goddess Meenakshi, an incarnation of Paravti, and Lord Sundereswarar (also known as Shiva).
- At the Sri Mariamman Temple, there is a fire-walking ceremony.

b. Birthday of the Monkey God (17 February & 12 September)

- Celebration of Tai Seng Yeh, the popular Monkey God, who is thought to cure the sick and absolve the hopeless.
- Taoist mediums go into a trance to let the god's spirit enter their bodies; possessed, they howl and slash themselves with knives and scrawl symbols on scraps of paper that are grabbed by devotees.

c. National Day (9 August)

- Public holiday to commemorate Singapore independence.
 - Singapore was the administrative seat for the Straits Settlements, a British crown colony, from 1867 until it was occupied by Japan in World War II. Restored to Britain in 1945, it became a part of Malaysia in 1963, and independent in 1965.



d. Festival of the Nine Imperial Gods (first nine days of the ninth lunar month)

- Derives from an ancient Chinese cleansing ritual.
- Priests invite the Nine Imperial Gods to descend from the heavens into an urn filled with burning benzene.
- Nine oil lamps representing the gods are hung from a bamboo pole in front of the temple.
 - Ground below the lamps is purified every morning and afternoon with holy water. Worshippers enter the temple by crossing a specially constructed bridge, symbolizing belief that they are leaving evils of the past year behind.

e. Birthday of the Third Prince (8th and 9th days of fourth moon)

- Chinese Taoist festival to honor the Third Prince, a miracle-working child-god who rides on the wheels of wind and fire.
- Chinese mediums in trances dance and slash themselves with spiked maces and swords, and write charms on yellow paper with blood from their tongues.
 - There is a street procession of stilt-walkers, dragon dancers, and Chinese musicians.

f. Vesak Day (veh-SAHK, during fifth lunar month)

- Celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and nirvana of the Buddha.

g. Other Singapore holidays:

- (1) Chinese New Year (varies)
- (2) Christmas (25 December)
- (3) Easter
- (4) Good Friday
- (5) Labor Day (1 May)
- (6) New Year's Day (1 January)

6. Customs



a. Gestures

- **Discussion** Avoid conversation topics on religion and politics
- **Laws** Rules against littering, drugs, weapons, jaywalking, spitting, smoking and pornographic materials abound. Beware and ensure you know the laws prior to going to Singapore.
- **Conversation** In discussions with Singapore's people, you may be asked questions of a personal nature. A smile and quiet explanation may be appropriate. (See Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands, pp. 330, 334.)
- **Pointing** Avoid pointing at anyone with the index finger

b. Freedom of religion

"Freedom of religion is provided for in the Constitution and usually respected in practice. There is no state religion. The Government has determined that all residents of public housing should have access to religious organizations traditionally associated with their ethnic groups. It therefore provides some financial assistance to build and maintain mosques. The Government also facilitates contributions to the construction of Indian and Chinese temples.

Missionaries are permitted to work and to publish religious texts. However, all religious groups are subject to government scrutiny and must be legally registered. The Government restricts some religious groups by application of the Societies Act and has banned others, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. The Government banned the former in 1972 on the grounds that it opposes military service, and its roughly 2,000 members refuse to perform military service, salute the flag, or swear oaths of allegiance to the State."

c. Religion and ethnicity

"In the 1980s, members of all ethnic groups lived and worked together, dressed similarly, and shared equal access to all public institutions and services. Religion, therefore, provided one of the major markers of ethnic boundaries.



Malays, for instance, would not eat at Chinese restaurants or food stalls for fear of contamination by pork, and a Chinese, in this case, could not invite a Malay colleague to a festive banquet. Funerals of a traditional and ethnically distinctive style were usually held even by families that were not otherwise very religiously observant.

The Community Associations and the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board encouraged the public celebration of such ethnically distinctive and appropriately colorful and noncontroversial festivals as the Chinese lantern festival and the dragon boat races.

The marriages, divorces, and inheritances of members of religious communities and the management of properties and endowments dedicated to religious purposes were of concern to the government, which interacted with some religious bodies through advisory boards dating back to the colonial period.

The Hindu Advisory Board, established in 1917, advised the government on Hindu religion and customs and on any matters concerning the general welfare of the Hindu community. It assisted the Hindu Endowments Board, which administered the four major Hindu temples and their property, in organizing the annual festivals at the temples. The Sikh Advisory Board acted in the same way for the Sikhs."

d. Religious Change



"Modernization and improved education levels brought changes in religious practice. The inflexible work schedules of industrialism, which tended to restrict communal ritual to evenings and Sundays, and the lack of opportunity or inclination to devote years to mastering ceremonial and esoteric knowledge, both contributed to a general tendency toward ritual simplification and abbreviation.

At the same time, prosperous citizens contributed large sums to building funds, and in the 1980s a wave of rebuilding and refurbishing renewed the city's mosques, churches, Chinese temples, Buddhist monasteries, and Hindu temples. Ethnic affiliation was demonstrated by public participation in such annual rituals as processions, which did not require elaborate training or study.

Immigrants tended to drop or modify religious and ritual practices characteristic of and peculiar to the villages they had come from. Hindu temples founded in the nineteenth century to serve migrants of specific castes and to house deities worshipped only in small regions of southeastern India became the temples patronized by all Hindu residents of nearby apartment complexes. They offered a generic South Indian Hinduism focused on major deities and festivals.

Many Chinese became more self-consciously Buddhist or joined syncretic cults that promoted ethics and were far removed from the exorcism and sacrificial rituals of the villages of Fujian and Guangdong.

The movement away from village practices was most clearly seen and most articulated among the Malays, where Islamic reformers acted to replace the customary practices (adat) of the various Malay-speaking societies of Java, Sumatra, and Malaya with the precepts of classical Islamic law--sharia.

By the late 1980s, some Buddhist organizations were winning converts by following the Protestant churches in offering services, hymnbooks, and counseling in English and Mandarin. A Buddhist Society at the National University of Singapore offered lectures and social activities similar to those of the popular Christian Fellowship.

Some Chinese secondary students chose Buddhism as their compulsory religious studies subject, regarding Confucianism as too distant and abstract and Bible study as too Western and too difficult. They then were likely to join Buddhist organizations, which offered congenial groups, use of English, and a link with Asian cultural traditions.



In the late 1980s, other Chinese whitecollar and skilled workers were joining the Japan-based Soka Gakkai (Value Creation Society, an organization based on Nichiren Buddhism), which provided a simple, direct style of worship featuring chanting of a few texts and formulas and a wide range of social activities. The more successful religious groups, Christian and Buddhist, offered directly accessible religious practice with no elaborate ritual or difficult doctrine and a supportive social group.



In the 1980s, the government regarded religion in general as a positive social force that could serve as a bulwark against the perceived threat of Westernization and the associated trends of excessive individualism and lack of discipline. It made religious education a compulsory subject in all secondary schools in the 1980s. The government, although secular, was concerned, however, with the social consequences of religiously motivated social action and therefore monitored and sometimes prohibited the activities of religious groups.

The authorities feared that religion could sometimes lead to social and implicitly political action or to contention between ethnic groups.

Islamic fundamentalism, for example, was a very sensitive topic that was seldom publicly discussed. Throughout the 1980s, the authorities were reported to have made unpublicized arrests and expulsions of Islamic activists.

The government restricted the activities of some Christian groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses who opposed military service, and in 1987 the government detained a group of Roman Catholic social activists, accusing them of using church organizations as cover for a Marxist plot.

The charismatic and fundamentalist Protestant groups, though generally apolitical and focused on individuals, aroused official anxiety through their drive for more converts. Authorities feared that Christian proselytization directed at the Malays would generate resentment, tensions, and possible communal conflict.



As early as 1974 the government had 'advised' the Bible Society of Singapore to stop publishing materials in Malay. In late 1988 and early 1989, a series of leaders, including Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, condemned 'insensitive evangelization' as a serious threat to racial harmony. Official restatements of the virtue of and necessity for religious tolerance were mixed with threats of detention without trial for religious extremists."

e. People with disabilities *"The Government implemented a comprehensive code on barrier-free accessibility in 1990, which established standards for facilities for the physically disabled in all new buildings and mandated the progressive upgrading of older structures.*



Although there is no legislation that addresses the issue of equal opportunities for the disabled in education or employment, the National Council of Social Services, in conjunction with various voluntary associations, provides an extensive job training and placement program for the disabled. Informal provisions in education have permitted university matriculation for visually impaired, deaf, and physically disabled students. The Government allows the equivalent of a \$2,400 tax deduction for families with a disabled person."

f. National/racial/ethnic minorities *"The Indian and Eurasian communities have achieved economic and educational success rates on a par with the majority Chinese.*

Malay Singaporeans, however, still have a lower standard of living, although the gap has diminished in recent years. Malays remain underrepresented at the uppermost rungs of the corporate ladder, and, some have claimed, in certain sectors of the Government, a reflection of their historically lower education and economic position, but also a result of employment discrimination. Advertisements sometimes specify ethnicity and gender requirements or require fluent Mandarin speakers.

The Constitution acknowledges the 'special position' of Malays as the indigenous people of Singapore and charges the Government to support and promote their 'political, educational, religious, economic, social, and cultural interests.'

A Presidential Council on Minority Rights examines all pending bills to ensure that they are not disadvantageous to a particular group. It also reports to the Government on matters affecting any racial or religious community and investigates complaints."



7. Resources for Further Study

a. Cross-cultural resources

Craig, JoAnn Meriwether. Culture Shock! Singapore. (ISBN 1-55868-108-6), Portland, Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 1993.

Beg, borrow or purchase any book in this series. Highly recommended by the Overseas Briefing Center, U.S. Department of State. Detailed, in-depth treatment of issues.

Eu, Geoffrey and Ng Swee San. Insight Guides--Singapore. Singapore: APA Publications, 1990. AISO--915.957 S617

Aesthetically pleasing presentations of history, peoples, places, foods and travel tips. The beautiful photographs, in National Geographic manner, make this a visually appealing series.

Perera, Audrey. The Simple Guide to Customs and Etiquette in Singapore. (ISBN 1-86034-040-7), Kent, England: Global Books, Ltd., 1996.

Highly recommended by the Overseas Briefing Center of the U.S. Department of State. Less detailed than the Culture Shock! series, but a highly readable treatment.

b. Biography, novels, literature, poetry



Milne, Robert S. Singapore: The Legacy of Lee Kuan Yew. Boulder: Westview Press, 1990.

⇒ Bosun Library: General DS598.S7 M53 1990

Nair, C.V. Devan. Not By Wages Alone/Selected Speeches and Writings of C.V. Devan Nair, 1959-1981. Singapore: Singapore National Trades Union Congress, 1982.

⇒ Bosun Library: General DS598.S7 N32 1982

Written in commemoration of Nair's election to the presidency in 1981. A strong advocate for the workers and labor unions, progress, and education.

c. Military topics

Allen, Louis. Singapore, 1941-1942. Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1979.

Recommended by the Combat Studies Institute of Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

d. News articles

Mydans, Seth. "The Smiling Land (if People Obey)." New York Times, 13 Dec 1996, p. A6.

Account of the "Smile Singapore" campaign to attract tourists. "Immigration officers have been provided with small mirrors to check the quality of their smiles."

Vocabulary List--Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore

Abangan (ah-BAHNG-ahn) Indigenous blend of native and Hindu-Buddhist beliefs combined with Islamic practices.

Gestapu Affair (ges-tah-POO) Indonesian military coup occurring on September 1965. Blame was placed on Communists. As a result, Indonesian citizens must align themselves with a religious group.

Kartini Day (KAHR-tee-nee, 21 April) National Indonesian holiday commemorating the 1879 birth of Raden Ajeng Kartini, a national hero and pioneer in the emancipation of women.

NGO: Nongovernmental organization, dedicated primarily to humanitarian causes within a given country.

Pancasila (pahn-cha-SEE-lah) Secularist Indonesian state ideology based on five principles, (1) belief in one God, (2) humanitarianism, (3) national unity, (4) democracy, and (5) social justice.

Pidgin (PIJ-ahn): National language of Papua New Guinea, developed over generations by people of separate tongues.

Santri (sahn-TREE) Persons who are consciously and exclusively Muslim, who may remove themselves from the secular world so great is their Muslim devotion.

Singapore Muslim Religious Council: Organization which oversees Islamic and Malay affairs in Singapore.

Suharto (soo-HAHR-toh, 1921 -) Indonesian general and leader first elected to office in 1968.

Tudong (too-DONG) Traditional head covering worn by many Brunei Muslim women.

Review Quiz: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore



Part 1--Multiple Choice Place the letter of the most correct answer in the blank provided.

1. _____ Pidgin language is used in which country?
 - a. Indonesia
 - b. Papua New Guinea
 - c. Brunei

2. _____ The worlds most populous Muslim country is
 - a. Saudi Arabia.
 - b. Indonesia.
 - c. Pakistan.

3. _____ What ethnic group makes up the highest percentage (76%) of Singapore citizens?
 - a. Indian
 - b. Chinese
 - c. Malays

4. _____ In Indonesia, Hinduism is primarily associated with the island of
 - a. Timor.
 - b. Java.
 - c. Bali.

5. _____ What type of Buddhism is most commonly found in Singapore?
- a. Mahayana
 - b. Zen
 - c. Theravada
6. _____ Due to oil and natural gas wealth, which Indonesian archipelago country has a world influence disproportionate to its size?
- a. Malaysia
 - b. Singapore
 - c. Brunei
7. _____ One of the five principles of Indonesia's Pancasila is
- a. freedom to believe or not believe in god.
 - b. justice and civility among people.
 - c. government based on Islamic Sharia.
8. _____ The terms Kabatinai and abangan describe the _____ nature of Indonesian Muslim practice.
- a. exclusive
 - b. syncretistic
 - c. fundamentalist
9. _____ In highland Papua New Guinea society, women are commonly viewed as
- a. equal with men.
 - b. property.
 - c. superior to men.
10. _____ Roughly, what percentage of the Papua New Guinea population is Christian?
- a. 10%
 - b. 33 %
 - c. 66%

Part 2--True/False Place a T or an F in the blank provided.



1. _____ In Singapore, religion provides one of the major markers of ethnic boundaries.
2. _____ Under President's Sukarno and Suharto of Indonesia, the government stresses strong inclusion of Islam within political activity.
3. _____ In Papua New Guinea society, violence against women is not a prevalent problem.
4. _____ Chinese religion, as practiced in Singapore, incorporates Buddhist, Taoist and folk belief.
5. _____ In Singapore, the Muslim Religious Council has little influence upon the Muslim population.
6. _____ In practice, the government of Brunei routinely restricts practice of non-Muslim religions.
7. _____ Singapore's Hindu population practices strict adherence to a caste system.
8. _____ The Malaysian government closely monitors what it considers as extremist or deviant interpretations of Islam.
9. _____ The aborted 1965 coup in Indonesia led to all citizens being required to register with a specific religious denomination/faith group or be suspected of Communist sympathies.
10. _____ Ethnic Malay peoples of Malaysia are primarily Muslim.



"Today, the real risk lies in hesitating, and the real
payoff will go to the bold, the innovative and the
inventive."

Admiral William Owens