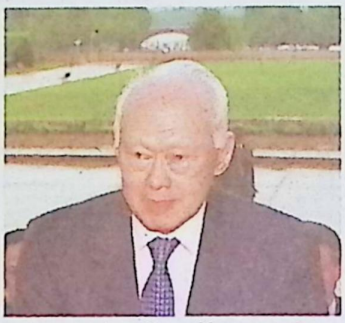


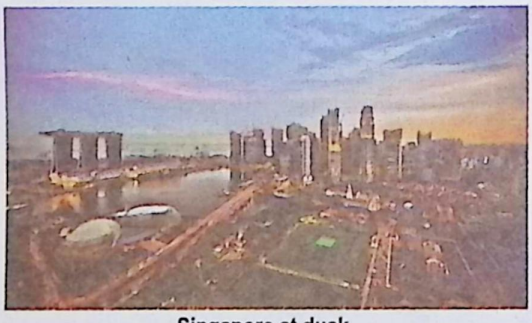
Lee Kuan Yew

Onward Singapore

AHMEDE HUSSAIN

I have a secret to share today. I have fallen in love. Those of you who are smacking their lips with a twinkle in the eyes, hoping to read something saucy in this otherwise drab column, are going to be sorely disappointed. Unlike its more illustrious counterparts, it didn't happen at first sight. To make matters a little more than platonic there have been no candle light dinner, no holding hands on a soft, starry night or kissing at the bend of a dark yet blissful dead end that we at times call life.

It is even difficult for me to tell when and how I fell for Singapore. Was it while going out of Suntec City and forgetting to go straight and taking the Middle Road to get to Bras Basah Road, where I was staying? I turned right on Nicoll Highway and was near Merdeka Bridge. Getting lost is always a little uncomfortable when you are a 20 something, bursting with youthful energy, and the time is one in the morning–you would want to get lost in Clarke Quay, not in a street that refuses to show its tail. You do what I did–find the nearest Singaporean you come across and ask for direction. Singaporeans are the friendliest peoples I have come across in my stay in countries across the globe– after a few gentle taps on the latest iPhone, h/she will tell you with a smile your way home or to Chijmes, a dining and shopping centre in Victoria Street that remains open at this ungodly hour.



Singapore at dusk.

Besides the ever charming Singaporeans– always on the run– you have the MTR and rapid bus transit that snake through the city state. In case you do not like standing in the queue–it is usually never long– you can buy an ezlink card from the nearest 7-Eleven. Public transport is the easiest and fastest way to travel in the country, but you might want to get to the nearest Subway quicker than the bus or the tube, you need to hail a taxi. I love the way the cabbies in S'pore repeat the name of the place you tell them to go–'Simpang Bedok. Ok, you want to go to Si-m-p-a-n-g Be-do-k!' I found it a little weird at first only to realise it later that they do not want to get the names wrong and drop you at the other end of the city.

Simpang Bedok and Pasir Panjang have some of the finest restaurants serving Chilly Crabs, Singapore's unofficial national food. The kopi tiam in front of Woodland station has some of the best arthropods that I have had. In fact, if you are into seafood, there are several other cheap but delicious options at hand: The Banana Leaf Apolo (thebananaleafapolo.com), Razacak's Seafood Kitchen (sbestfood.com/razacksseafoodkitchen), Hj Maimunah (hjmaimunah.com), Qiji (qiji.com.sg) and Old Chang Kee (oldchangkee.com).

Orchard, Singapore's shopping district, is famous across the world for the designer brands, the country also has some of the finest theme parks in the world. Its hospitals are considered second to none in this part of the globe. A cursory glance at the kiosk for tourists at Changi will lead you to a new world of wonder.

The way to a man's heart might lie through his stomach, but at the end of the day what matters to you the most if you want to live in a country is the aura that it gives you. In Singapore you will feel safe all the time. If any country in the Northern Hemisphere can boast of enforcing the principles of equality and rule of law with an iron fist, Singapore it has to be. Lee Kuan Yew, the island state's founding father, and the pioneers have made a lot of sacrifice to build the Singapore we so love and admire today. It is indeed a lesson to the world, a lesson in hard work and perseverance. Singapore remains to us a beckon of hope, a shining example of peace, prosperity and happiness.

On a less serious note, not falling in love with Singapore is impossible. And unlike other love stories that you have read, I don't mind sharing my love with you. It's worth ending with a few lines from 'Ulysses by the Merlion' by Edwin Thumboo that aptly describes the spirit of love and togetherness that we call Singapore:

Peoples settled here,
Brought to this island
The bounty of these seas,
Built towers topless as Ilium's.
They make, they serve,
They buy, they sell.

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