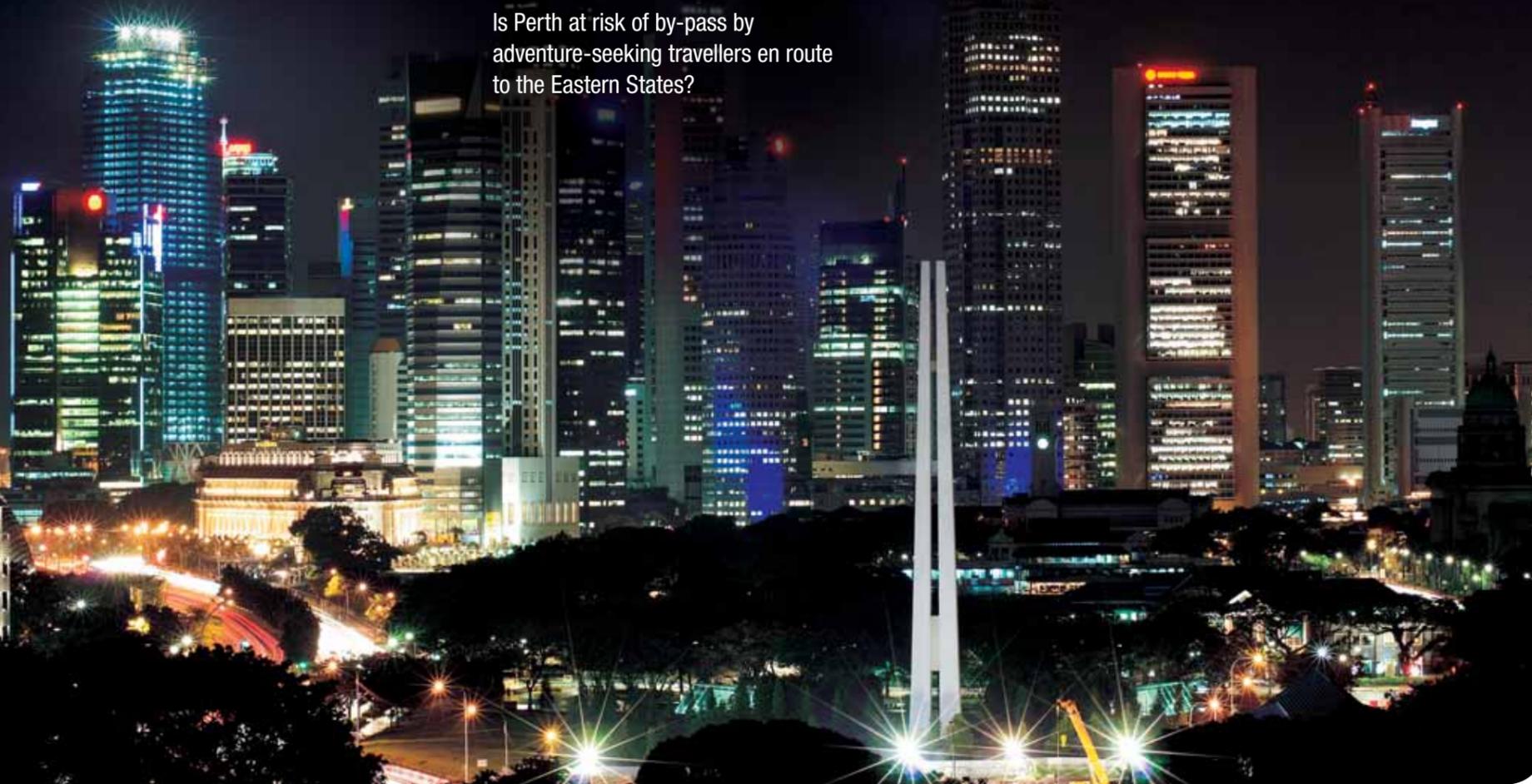


Singapore or Perth?

Stop-over or Shop-over?

Is Perth at risk of by-pass by
adventure-seeking travellers en route
to the Eastern States?



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Singapore is a popular tourist destination in its own right, but it's also a competitor of ours in the quest to secure lucrative stop-over traffic from Europe. Like Perth, it's a gateway city to Australasia and offers travellers seven-day trading, a selection of vibrant cultural districts and more hotels, shops and restaurants in one block than Perth offers in Northbridge, Subi and the CBD combined.

So amid the debate surrounding the future of Perth, particularly the push for waterfront development, deregulated trading hours, the Northbridge link and a more vibrant city centre, I set off on a six-day family trip to Singapore. It's a pleasant five hour flight from here to there, but the differences between the two cities are quite literally a world apart.

I arrived in Singapore around 12 noon on a typically busy Saturday and after making my way past the gun-toting airport guards, boarded an air conditioned shuttle to my finely appointed hotel.

This was my fifth trip to Singapore, and in keeping with my earlier sojourns, I was struck by the lush green vegetation that smothers this action-packed little island and the litter-free streets and parkways. In the 80s Singapore adopted a mantra for the city of "clean and green" and it seems to have worked. Littering of any variety attracts a hefty fine as does chewing gum and spitting. At only 704 sq kms, Singapore is the smallest country in Southeast Asia, but

also the richest with a foreign national reserve of around \$200 billion.

From humble beginnings as a sparsely populated fishing village, Singapore evolved into a prized destination on the British East India Company's spice route and a highly strategic port and supply channel during World War II.

In the last century Singapore has faced British colonisation, Japanese invasion and occupation, a merger to form Malaysia and subsequent expulsion from the 14-state federation due to ideological differences. With independence has come great economic success, and it was ranked by The Economist in 2005 as offering the highest standard of living in Asia, and 11th in the world.

Foreign investment and government-led industrialisation has created a thriving economy which now sees Singapore ranked among the top 20 wealthiest nations in the world.

But aside from Singapore's impressive economic clout, it is also a popular tourist destination, and one that competes very successfully with Perth for

stop-over tourist traffic from Europe.

In recent times the Singaporean government has made a concerted effort to promote the country as a centre for arts and culture and to transform the island into a cosmopolitan gateway between Australasia and Europe.

Singapore is a city that caters to tourists, and the population benefits because of it.

The world-famous Orchard Road shopping precinct offers designer label haute couture, upmarket restaurants, five-star hotels and a bustling labyrinth of coffee houses, sidewalk stalls and fast-food eateries. Consumers - both local and transient - can choose from hundreds of shops specialising in everything from high tech digital devices to tailor-made suits, footwear and luggage. Everything opens every day and stays open till late. Movie cinemas, pubs and clubs are interspersed among the shopping centres and restaurants, and if you decide you've seen enough of Orchard Road, the city and its surrounding suburbs are connected by a highly efficient subway and taxi service.

although some would say this has come at the cost of one of the highest execution rates for convicted criminals across the globe. That aside, I can't remember the last time I walked alone at night in a foreign country without feeling unsettled, in fact, I don't think I ever have, except in Singapore, and I felt perfectly safe doing so.

In addition to the deregulated shopping hours and cultural precincts, Singapore boasts some amazing sight-seeing attractions, including the breath-taking cable car ride to Sentosa Island from Mt Faber which affords unparalleled views of the island, its port facilities and city scape. I imagined something similar between King's Park and the Barrack Street jetty coupled with a dynamic waterfront development along Riverside Drive that would undoubtedly infuse the city with more atmosphere and interest for tourists and locals alike.

The Singapore River is not impressive. After years of pollution from outlying farms and untreated sewage, the government set itself the ambitious task of rejuvenating the waterway, and has been successful in doing so - but it's still not a patch on our magnificent Swan. That aside, the new development around the river, particularly in Clarke Quay, leaves our scattered collection of jetties and cafes for dead.

One way the Government has been able to resurrect the river's vitality is by demonstrating its value as a tourist attraction, and to that end, Clarke Quay is a shining example of what a vibrant waterfront development can be. Both sides of the river are lined with restaurants, pubs and cafes catering to every epicurean penchant imaginable. The paved boardwalks and laneways are interspersed with water features and fountains and the trees provide an enchanting fairy-lit canopy of soft pink and purple light. Music and laughter spills from each doorway and the sidewalks are lined with tables of voracious diners, soaking up the ambient alfresco surroundings and the delightful intermingling of divergent cultures.

Securing a taxi for the return trip to the hotel was as easy as raising my hand to oncoming traffic - nothing like the nightmarish two and a half hour wait I recently endured after a concert at Subiaco Oval.

I wouldn't trade Perth's sparkling beaches, generous suburban block sizes or temperate climate for anything, but when it comes to competing with the likes of Singapore for tourist traffic on what is known as the "kangaroo route" from East to West, we stand the risk of being left behind if we don't do something to energise our city and offer visitors more to do when the sun sets on our famous Sunshine Coast.



Clarke Quay



Chinatown

