

Travel Outlook

Shop around

You'll find more variety in Singapore



Vince Egan
Travel

Thomson News Service

All of us, of course, travel to broaden our understanding, to expand our horizons, to know our fellow man. Of course.

But - honestly, now - don't we all love to shop a bit in foreign lands, to find rare treasures or hot bargains?

Some of the best shopping in the world is undoubtedly to be found in three booming, bustling cities of Southeast Asia - the city-state of Singapore, the British crown colony of Hong Kong, and Bangkok, capital of Thailand.

Of these, Singapore makes a strong claim for top rank. Its diverse population gives a special meaning to "multiculturalism," and assures shoppers of an unmatched variety of products - opera masks from China, gems from Sri Lanka, electronics from Japan.

Prices seem to have risen less in Singapore in the past few years than elsewhere in the region, and they still reflect the city's status as a duty-free port.

Shopping is by no means Singapore's only attraction. For a small island with a population about the same as Toronto's (2.6

million), it holds a wealth of places abounding in cultural and historic interest. But visitors are almost inevitably drawn to the countless shopping centres, big and small.

ONE STOP

Singapore's main shopping area is Orchard Road, with numerous one-stop shopping centres either directly on the 2-km thoroughfare or steps away on side streets.

In typical oriental fashion, the individual and independent shops in these centres tend to be tiny. Bargaining, or haggling, is the accepted practice. (Department stores, such as the branch of the giant Daimaru chain at the Hotel New Otani, have Canadian-style fixed prices.)

The difficulty is not in finding an outlet that meets your needs, but rather in choosing one out of the dozens that are available. The retail market is dominated by Singapore's two major groups - Chinese and Indian - and some local people suggest that the former are more tenacious and less accommodating bargainers than the latter.

Some of the shopping centres are several stories high, and a rule of thumb seems to be that the higher the rise, the higher the prices will be - relatively speaking.

ASIAN ANTIQUES

For antiques, and for items that

just look antique, the best choice is likely to be found at the three-level Tanglin shopping centre, just off Orchard Road on Tanglin Road.

There, and at the nearby Singapore Handicraft Centre, shoppers can find an endless array of oriental antiques, from Balinese carvings to handmade maps.

A few of the Tanglin shops also offer local antiques in the form of handcrafted silver ornaments designated as "Noya," a term referring to Straits Chinese women born of mixed marriages between Chinese traders and Malay women in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In the same general area, more contemporary items can be found in the dozens of shops at Orchard Towers, 400 Orchard Rd. One camera shop that comes well recommended is Dax Parmanand's Save 'n' Safe Electronics, on the second floor.

Yet another Singapore specialty is timepieces - a constantly intriguing variety ranging from Switzerland's finest to perfectly acceptable Japanese watches costing less than \$10 Canadian. There's also a thriving, if illegal, trade in \$20 imitations of expensive watches; street touts usually try to entice prospective buyers into backroom outlets.

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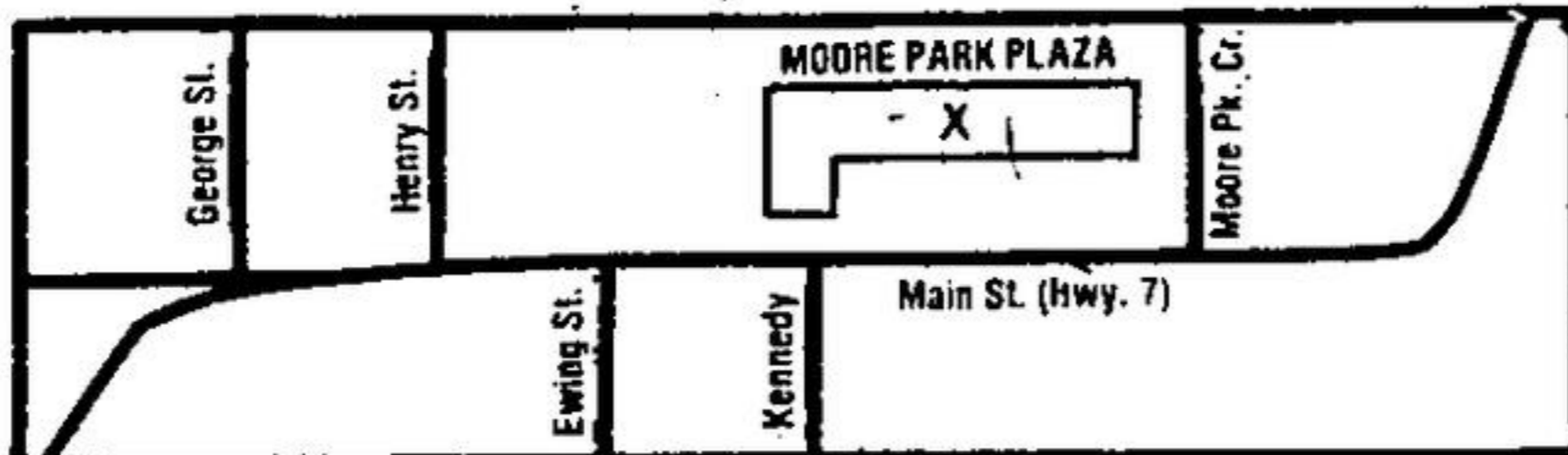
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