

## Singaporean Cultural Profile

**PLEASE NOTE:** This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of Singaporeans who live in the Eastern Region of Melbourne. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients.

### Introduction:

The island of Singapore is located off the southernmost tip of the Malaysian peninsula and linked to it by a causeway. Singapore is largely comprised of migrants from China, India and Europe with a small population of Indigenous Malay. Other ethnic groups include Eurasians and *Baba's* or *Nyonyas* (a result of marriage between Malays and Chinese). Most Singaporeans in Australia are ethnic Chinese, followed by Malay and Indian. Singaporeans living in Australia are predominately young, affluent and highly educated.

### Migration:

- At the 2016 Census, there were 16,063 Singapore-born persons in Victoria. This was an increase of 2,367 people from the 2011 Census (ABS 2016).
- The community is distributed throughout metropolitan Melbourne, with distinct concentrations in Melbourne City (12.2%); Monash (11%), Wyndham (6.7%) and Boroondara (6%). Out of the top 10 local government areas for people from Singaporean background, 5 of these are based in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne (Boroondara, Knox, Manningham, Monash and Whitehorse). These represent 5,510 people or 34% of the total Singapore-born population in Victoria (ABS 2016).
- Based on the 2016 Census Data, the Singapore-born community showed a relatively young age profile with the median age of 33 years compared to the median age of the Victorian population which is 27 years.
- Migration from Singapore remained minimal until the late 1980s. Only 20.6% of the Singapore-born residents in Victoria had arrived in Australia prior to 1986. Most of the arrivals from Singapore are professionals, skilled migrants and students.

### Local Demographics: Singapore-born residents in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total Singapore-born Population	50-59 years	60-69 years	70-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Singapore-born people aged 65 and over	People aged 65+ as a % of the Singapore-born population
City of Boroondara	966	126	131	49	11	125	13%
City of Knox	919	154	125	26	16	98	11%
City of Manningham	899	138	125	57	8	128	14%
City of Maroondah	236	48	31	13	9	18	8%
City of Monash	1,763	178	147	47	15	137	8%
City of Whitehorse	959	119	102	43	16	109	11%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	123	22	16	0	0	5	4%
Eastern Region	5,865	785	677	235	75	620	11%

(ABS Census 2016)

## Language:

- According to the 2016 Census data, the main languages spoken in Australia at home by Singaporean people are English (44.1%) and Mandarin (32.8%).
- Other significant languages spoken include Malay (7.5%), Cantonese (4.9%) and Tamil (3.7%) (ABS 2016).
- 46.1% of the Singapore-born population in Victoria assessed themselves as speaking English 'very well' and 8.1% as 'well' (ABS 2016).

## Religion:

- Ethnic Chinese are mainly Buddhists.
- Indigenous Malays are mainly Muslim.
- The Indian Singaporeans practice Hinduism.
- The Singapore-born population in Victoria identified as the following religions at the 2016 Census:
  - Catholic – 15.6% (2,502)
  - Buddhism – 9% (1,448)
  - Islam – 8.8% (1,212)
  - Christian – 6.3% (1,014)
  - Hinduism – 5% (809)
  - No religion – 25.5% (4,102)

## Attitudes and Issues with Ageing:

- Seniors in Singapore are valued and respected by the population in general, according to the findings of the 2008 Study on Public Perception and Attitudes towards Ageing and Seniors. The study also revealed that despite changing times, 79% of Singapore residents believe the family should be the primary care-giving units for elderly members. (Council for Third Age, 2009).
- Many Singaporeans tend to avoid direct address, such as "I" and "You", especially with the elderly. They prefer to use "aunty" or "uncle" (terms which are intended to designate respect, not family relationship), or "Sir" or "Madam" etc. (Section II: Core Culture Values and Beliefs of Singapore, Liu Qiang).

## Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- There is a strong cultural stigma associated with physical disabilities and mental illness in Singapore.
- Recent research found that only 31.7% of those with mental disorders had sought help with 15.7% from mental health providers, 8.4% from general practitioners, and 7.6% from religious/spiritual advisors or other healers (Annals Academy of Medicine 2012).
- In Singapore, families are seen as the first line of support for people with disabilities and the approach towards their integration into society is seen as relying on 'many helping hands' from the community, private and public sectors. (Community Business, Towards Disability Confidence, April 2011)

## Customs / Values:

- 'Saving face' or not being publicly embarrassed or causing shame to the family is very important to Singaporeans.
- The family is the core social unit. Singaporean family structure is traditionally hierarchal and patriarchal, with the eldest adult male the primary decision-maker in health and other matters. Older children have precedence over younger children and male children over female children.
- Families tend to be very private and reluctant to discuss family issues or conflict with non-family members.
- Emotional self-control is highly valued and arguments or disagreements are kept to a minimum.

## Communication Styles:

- There may be a preference for little emotional display by Singaporeans. Passivity is often the response to conflict.
- Singaporeans may sometimes interpret assertiveness as aggressiveness.
- Most people choose a more indirect route in expressing themselves. They tend to be as subtle as possible.
- Singaporeans tend to favour direct eye contact over indirect. However, they may view overtly direct eye contact as suspicious and threatening.
- Touching is usually allowed between close friends (pat on shoulders), family members and couples.
- Women tend to prefer more indirect eye contact when dealing with men.

## Naming Conventions:

- The Chinese place family names first, followed by personal names. Muslims do not have family names, but have personal names followed by 'bin' (son of) or 'binti' (daughter of) before their fathers' personal names. Indians follow a similar convention, but use the terms 's/o' (son of) and 'd/o' (daughter of). (CNN International, Singapore Visitor's Guide)
- Women traditionally retain their own names or add their husbands surname to theirs on marriage.
- Using appropriate titles is important to Singaporean people, i.e. Mr, Mrs. and Dr.

## Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Singaporean people may use a combination of traditional and biomedical practices.
- Chinese Singaporeans may tend to assume a passive sick role relying heavily on other family members.
- Chinese Singaporeans may practice traditional health practices that include acupuncture, acupressure, dietary restrictions and Chinese herbs.
- Some Chinese Singaporeans may use a traditional remedy called cupping or coining. Cupping is a remedy used for a range of ailments. It is usually performed on the forehead, the abdomen, and the base of the nose, between the eyes and on the neck, chest or back. This practice can result in bruises or marks, it is important not to mistake the resulting marks as a sign of abuse.

## Taboos

- Avoid sticking your chopsticks upright in a bowl of rice. This is reserved for praying to the dead.
- Public displays of affection where couples kiss or are involved in any form of petting is considered offensive.
- Yelling or swearing at elders is frowned upon.

## Greetings:

English Greeting	Malay (Closest English Pronunciation)	Mandarin (Closest English Pronunciation)	Tamil (Closest English Pronunciation)
Hello	APA KABAR	NEE HAO	VANAKAM
Goodbye	SELAMAT TINGGAL/JALAN	ZAI JEN	POITE VAREH
Yes	YA	SHI	AMA
No	TIDAK	BU SHI	ILLE
Thankyou	TEREEMA KASEH	SHEA SHEA	NANRI

## Key Singapore Festivals / Significant Dates:

- Chinese (Lunar) New Year *1st day of the 1st Lunar Month (Jan/Feb)*
- *Hari Raya Puasa* (Muslim) *1st day of the 10th month of the Muslim calendar.*
- *Hari Raya Haji* (Muslim) *10th day of the 12th month of the Muslim calendar.*
- Vesak Day (Buddhist) *May*
- National Day *9th August*
- *Deepavali* (Hindu) *Seventh month of the Hindu lunar calendar (Oct/Nov)*

\* For other significant dates related to religious observances, refer to the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim religious profiles.

## Local services useful for Singapore-born residents in the Eastern Region

### Settlement Services

Provide information, referral and casework for refugees and family migrants who arrived in the last five years.

Name	Address	Contact
Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)	Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill 3128 <u>and</u> 18 Bond Street, Ringwood 3134	Ph: 9285 4888 (Box Hill) 9870 1351 (Ringwood)
New Hope Foundation	Grattan Gardens Community Centre 40 Grattan Street, Prahran 3181	Ph: 9510 5877

## **Aged Care & Disability Support Services**

### **Migrant Information Centre Aged & Disability Services**

Address: Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill 3128  
Ph: 9275 6901

Email: [wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au](mailto:wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au)

Website: <http://miceastmelb.com.au/our-services/elderly-people-younger-people-disabilities-carers/>

The Access & Support Program provides short term support to help people access aged care and other services so they can continue living at home independently. The Program provides information, referral, support and monitoring. The aged and disability team generally aims to increase access to aged care and disability services for CALD communities in the EMR through working with CALD communities to promote those services, provide information and referral and supporting organisations to provide culturally appropriate care.

## **Other Support Services and useful websites**

### **Singapore Kongsı (Australia)**

Email: [singaporeclubau@gmail.com](mailto:singaporeclubau@gmail.com)

Website: <http://singaporeclubau.blogspot.com.au/2012/03/melbourne-contact.html>

This social group aims to provide and enhance community spirit among Singaporeans and their families and reduce social isolation by providing a platform for networking and socialising.

### **Australian Malaysian Singaporean Association Inc.**

Website: <http://www.amsa.com.au>

### **Peranakan Association Australia, Inc.**

Email: [j.then@bigpond.com](mailto:j.then@bigpond.com)

The "The *Peranakan* Association Australia Inc." (PAA) in Melbourne established in March 2008. Its primary aim is to ensure the continuation of the heritage of the *Peranakan* culture.

### **Merlion Club**

Website: [www.merlion.org.au](http://www.merlion.org.au)

Merlion Club was formed to foster fellowship and business networking amongst Singaporeans/former Singaporeans and their families in Australia.

## **Media**

<b>Media</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Details</b>
Radio	ABC Radio Australia SBS Radio one 12.24am (Mandarin) – daily Saturday 10:00-11:00pm (Malay language)	Address: GPO Box 428, Melbourne 3001 Ph: 9626 1500 Website: <a href="http://www.radioaustralia.net.au">www.radioaustralia.net.au</a>
Newspaper/Journal/ Articles	Merlion Club Melbourne E-Newsletter	Ph: 0412 836 180 Email: <a href="mailto:info@merlion.org.au">info@merlion.org.au</a> <a href="http://www.merlion.org.au">www.merlion.org.au</a>

**References:**

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016, *Census of Population and Housing*, viewed 30 March 2022, <<https://auth.censusdata.abs.gov.au/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Census of Population and Housing*, viewed 1 March 2010, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/home/census>>.

Kua, E. H., 1999, *The Physically Disabled in Singapore*, Singapore Medical Journal, Vol 40 (02), viewed 20 April 2010, <<http://www.sma.org.sg/smj/4002/articles/4002e1.html>>

Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), 2008, *Seniors from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds*, Demography on the 50 years plus Victorian population from the 2006 census, Victoria, Australia.

Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2008, *The Cambodia-Born Community in Victoria*, Fact Sheet No. A-7, viewed 20 April 2010, <<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/stories/pdf/cambodiafs-24apr08.pdf>>.

Council for Third Age, 2009, Report on 2008 Study on Public Perception and Attitudes towards Ageing and Seniors, viewed 22 August 2012, <<http://cdn.c3a.com.sg/surveys/c3a-survey-08-perception.pdf>>.

Annals Academy of Medicine, April 2012, Siow Ann Chong, *Help-Seeking Pattern of the Mentally Ill*, Vol 41 No. 4, viewed 22 August 2012, <<http://www.annals.edu.sg/pdf/41VolNo4Apr2012/V41N4p154.pdf>>

CNN Go, *Singapore Visitor's Guide*, viewed 22 August 2012, <<http://www.cnn.go.com/singapore/basics>>.