

PROUD TO BE A SINGAPORE PR BUT DON'T ASK ME TO PUT MY BRAIN TO SLEEP©

I'm British and have lived in Singapore for 23 years and I think Singapore is one of the best places on earth to live. Yet when in conversation with Singaporean friends about what can be improved in Singapore I am often told "well if you don't like it you can leave!" My retort - "I love Singapore - I have lived longer here than I have lived anywhere in my 63 years - but that doesn't mean I have to forget my critical faculty." This is similar to the comments from Singaporeans to the recent praise from Canadian Eric Brooks telling him "well if you like it so much why don't you become a citizen". What is it about Singaporeans that causes such black and white thinking. For me the sign of a great nation - and a great citizen - is the ability to have pride in your birthplace coupled with the ability to recognise what it needs to improve. I am proud to be a British citizen but that does not blind me to its many faults. Both go hand in hand - its never "either/or". Too often the debate on Singapore forces people into "hate it" or "love it" camps - which gets us nowhere. In fact I would argue that my love of Singapore (or England) requires that I be critical about aspects of the country that I find difficult.

Having spent the last 23 years here teaching cross-cultural understanding to Singaporeans as they strive to work with other cultures I feel I have a certain license to speak both as a PR and a friend of Singapore. My key message is this - look at what you love about Singapore and more often than not you will find that there is a shadow side to each of its the strength - below is my list of Singapore's pros and cons here's my list - what's yours?

Singapore Score Card

Pros	Cons
Real courtesy of its people	Not getting a "no" answer when that is what is needed
Respect shown to the elderly - we Brits have so much to learn from Singapore	Blind agreement with seniors, bosses or people in authority
A desire for Consensus minded attitude of groups is highly commendable and promotes a "working together "one team" mentality	Lack of questioning "group think" robs Singapore of some of its greatest ideas
Green environment - trees everywhere	There is no wilderness - and sorry but Bukit Timah does not compare with the Matterhorn as one Singaporean tried to convince me
Absolutely the best food in the world	No cons
Convenient 24 hour society - I can get up at 3am and get great food at Jalan Kayu	No time to smell the roses
A democracy that governs with the best brains and with consensus	At times too strong reaction to criticism
Multi-racial and multi-religious harmony and great laws to maintain both punish offenders	a tendency to sweep under the carpet of important differences
Secure and safe	No cons
Great place to set up a business	No cons
Great shopping malls	Little time to spend in nature
Striving to make things as good as they can be - constant improvement	Obsession with being perfect with no time for the simple, happy pleasures of life
Best airport, best airline, best workforce in the world	No cons

Is Singapore is a wonderful place to live? Yes no doubt. Has it one of the best physical, social and cultural environments in the world to live and work? Certainly no doubt. But please Singaporeans for the sake of the future of this great nation - don't lose the critical factor - its never "either-or".