

## NATURE HOLIDAY

CREATURE  
Comforts

Discover the wild and wonderful side of the slick and bustling metropolitan city of Singapore. **BY PALLAVI PASRICHA**

**Y**ELLOW, RED, BLUE, green, orange, I had never seen so many colours on one creature before. The lory birds, with mischievous eyes, native to Australia, looked absolutely stunning. I held out my hand and before I knew it they were all over me, their sharp claws digging into my shoulder and arms as they reached out for a bowl of mixture of nectar and honey that I was holding. Within seconds, at least three of them made themselves comfortable on my arm. Two of them even got into an argument, squeaking

loudly, as they could not manage to get to the food at the same time. I was enjoying, yet worried, that the fight should not get too violent, otherwise I would have to bear the brunt. I waited patiently while my fellow travellers clicked me with these colourful birds at the Jurong Bird Park in Singapore. Yes, this was at Singapore. On this visit, I ignored its nightlife in favour of nature.

The nine-storey-high loft, where I stood, happens to be the world's largest flight aviary for lorries where they can fly freely in an ambience that resembles the lush, tropical

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rainforest in north Australia. It was incredible to see the birds soar toward the sky, with an obvious, and ironic, sense of freedom. But this was so starkly different from my memories of a zoo I visited in my childhood where the animals and birds were in cramped cages.

I began my day on a charming note with 'The Early Bird Breakfast Show' outside Bongo Burgers at the bird park. As all of us were busy gobbling down sausages, hash browns and toast when a Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, a small white bird, started mimicking the trainer, whistling to the girls and even singing a song. The antics were amusing. But little did I know that this was just the beginning—of the show and a great day. What lay ahead was fortune telling, of course, by one of the birds. After I shuffled a pack of cards, a pretty, Yellow-Naped Amazon Parrot, selected one card with its beak. I anxiously waited to see what my fortune had to say. The card read, 'if you think hard you may get to know how to make alternative sources of money.' I wanted the parrot to pull out another card, but alas, my turn was over. We went on further to yet another show—Birds of Prey—where the feathered

1. A family enjoys The Early Bird Breakfast Show at the Jurong Bird Park 2. Feeding the giraffes 3. Orangutans at the zoo 4. Penguins are a major attraction

## AT A GLANCE

## GETTING THERE

Singapore Airlines flies from Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore and Ahmedabad. Fare from Delhi ₹25,000 (approx)

## MUST DO

## STAY

**Hotel Grand Chancellor:** 3 Belilios Road, Little India; tel: +65 6215 9933; [www.ghihotels.com](http://www.ghihotels.com)

A good option for those who want to stay in Little India.

**Cost:** Rooms start at SG\$ 128 (₹4,000, approx) per night.

**Luxury: InterContinental Singapore:** 80 Middle Road;

tel: +65 6338 7600; [www.singapore.intercontinental.com](http://www.singapore.intercontinental.com)

A good hotel for those who want to indulge.

**Cost:** Rooms start at SG\$ 288 (₹10,000, approx) per night.

## GOOD TO KNOW

**Jurong Bird Park and Singapore Zoo:** Cost: SG\$ 18 (₹600, approx) for adults and SG\$ 12 (₹400 approx) for children.

**Night Safari:** Cost: SG\$ 32 (₹1,100 approx) for adults and SG\$ 21 (₹700 approx) for children. Visit [www.wrs.com.sg](http://www.wrs.com.sg) to know more about these parks.

starcast included eagles, falcons, hawks and more.

To cover the entire bird park, the largest in Asia Pacific, with 380 species of birds, you need more than a day. Tired after trudging around, we stepped into the monorail and as the day progressed I kept seeing more stunning birds—White Pelican Coves, Caribbean Flamingoes and penguins, who looked delightful as they walked taking tiny steps.

**S**oon it was lunchtime. We began our meal on a 'lucky' note with *Yu Sheng*, a raw fish salad eaten during the Chinese New Year to bring good luck and prosperity. The colourful salad had heaps of white radish, carrot with ginger, green and red pepper around it. Surrounding the plate were bowls with toasted sesame seeds, peanuts, plum sauce, lemon juice, crackers and fish. After mixing all the ingredients, we tossed the salad high with chopsticks and said "Lo Hei!" (mix it up), for good luck. The higher you toss it, the better the luck for the year, so I raised my hands as far as I could. With all the ingredients well mixed, it was bursting with flavours.

The next day at the Singapore Zoo we had orangutans for company during breakfast. To me, they looked just like chimpanzees as they came swinging down from one branch to another, but the in-charge told me that these animals are native to Indonesia and Malaysia and resemble the great apes. We behaved like children, waiting for our turn to pose with four of them. Rain played spoilsport that day, making us run away from almost every venue we went to in the zoo. Our date with these animals was cancelled but I was not disappointed as I had encountered quite a few at the Night Safari the previous evening.

On my way to the airport, I could not help wondering how different this trip was. It's difficult to skip shopping in this city, but did I miss it? Not at all.