

**The Worshipful Company of Arbitrators' Travelling Scholarship**  
**in Private Dispute Resolution – Singapore (April 2022)**

In April 2020, I was awarded the Travelling Scholarship in Private Dispute Resolution by The Worshipful Company of Arbitrators to spend one month in Singapore. Due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, I did not take up the scholarship until two years later in April 2022.

This was my first visit to Singapore and indeed, my first international travel outside of the UK since the start of the pandemic. From the moment I landed, I was struck by the diversity and innovation of the 'Garden City', and the importance of law and order in this city-state.

Singapore has 4 official languages, namely English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. These different languages can be seen on signs and heard on broadcasts on the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) which is Singapore's equivalent of the London Tube. The co-existence of different cultures can be seen in the wide variety of cuisines available at the Food Courts and Hawker Centres, of which a visit to Lau Pa Sat is a must. Simple hearty meals can be had for as little as £3 to £4. For those seeking a gastronomic experience, a 15-course tasting menu featuring Peranakan cuisine at Candlenut, Como Dempsey is highly recommended. I was very fortunate to be treated to this phenomenal experience by a partner at one of the local law firms.

The sheer diversity of this geographically small nation is also reflected in its architecture and its multitude of flora and fauna. From shophouses in the historic district of Chinatown, to the sprawling blocks of public housing (Housing Development Board), to the tallest indoor waterfall and terraced forest setting that is Jewel Changi Airport, Singapore is a masterpiece in urban planning and development. The efficiency of public transport makes for very easy navigation. One can get from the splendours of floating down a gondola in the glitzy shopping mall at Marina Bay Sands, to the glistening white sands lined with palm trees on Sentosa Island in the blink of an eye. For avid bird watchers and nature enthusiasts, Gardens by the Bay and Changi Cove are home to kingfishers, hornbills and many other two-legged flying friends. Outlying islands such as Pulau Ubin are home to monkeys, wild boars and monitor lizards.

The law-abiding nature of the people in Singapore is not surprising in light of the many rules and signs put up in the country, serving as a constant reminder that certain behaviour and actions are prohibited. For example, bringing durians into a hotel or not clearing a table may lead to the imposition of a fine, and certain offences may even be punished by caning. Cardboard cut outs of a policeman are placed outside certain shops reminding passersby of the number of shoplifters that have already been arrested and that they would not wish to be another

statistic in this tally. Positive acts are strongly encouraged, with other signs and broadcasts on the MRT reminding commuters to offer their seats to those in need and even a Singapore Kindness Movement set up to encourage Singaporeans to make a real commitment to gracious living through simple acts of kindness in their daily activities. I felt this kindness and generosity of spirit strongly as the bus driver offered to help me with my suitcase and did not start driving until I had sat down, office workers went out of their way to walk me to my destination, and other day trippers to Lazarus Island very generously shared their mangoes with me.

Against the backdrop of this ecoecosystem, it is not surprising to learn that Singapore has quickly risen up the ranks to share the number one spot with London as the top arbitration seat globally<sup>1</sup>. With the choice of arbitration at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC); mediation at the Singapore International Mediation Centre (SIMC); or litigation at the Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC) amongst other possibilities for dispute resolution, parties are provided with an entire suite of options for the resolution of their commercial disputes. Within the last decade, International Commercial Courts have sprung up in various jurisdictions across the globe and the SICC appears to be a successful example. In addition to local judges, those on the Bench hail from both civil and common law jurisdictions including England and Wales, Hong Kong, Canada, USA, India, Australia, Japan and France. Parties may be represented by counsel of their choice, including foreign counsel in certain cases, and the use of technology has quickly gathered pace especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, with many hearings now taking place by Zoom.

The diversity and generous spirit observed in Singapore society is filtered through to the legal community. In addition to observing various SICC hearings and an SIAC arbitration hearing which was held in hybrid format at Maxwell Chambers, I was kindly hosted by Allen & Gledhill and met with legal practitioners from other law firms and chambers in the country including WongPartnership, Rajah & Tann, Three Crowns, PDLegal, Aquinas and many others. I also met with Kevin Nash (Registrar at the SIAC), Professor Steve Ngo (President of the Beihai Asia International Arbitration Centre), and George Lim SC (Chairman of the SIMC).

The easing of Covid-19 restrictions during my time there also meant that in-person events could again be held. I attended the SIAC Annual Appreciation Event; an event organised by the International Law Association featuring Lucy Reed in the Hot Seat; a book launch organised by the Singapore Academy of Law featuring a book on the Law and Theory of International

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<sup>1</sup> 2021 study conducted by Queen Mary and White & Case.

Commercial Arbitration in Singapore; and an event hosted by CIArb with a keynote address by the Honourable Minister Indranee Rajah SC. I was pleasantly surprised to see many familiar faces at the various events that I attended, with the Singapore legal community eager to ensure that I was made to feel welcome and in the company of friends.

I also visited the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Singapore Management University (SMU). The NUS Law School is situated within the beautiful Botanic Gardens which features a huge array of different fragrant flowers, shrubs and plants. Simon Chesterman who is the Dean of the Law Faculty had kindly put me in touch with Professor Jean Ho and Professor Gary Bell and I was invited to attend an informative seminar on International Investment Law and Arbitration.

Although this was my first trip to Singapore, I felt strangely at home the moment I arrived. The sheer diversity in terms of languages, food and landscape meant that there was something for everyone and something that reminded us all of home. It is also extremely safe and the country is making strident efforts to become ever more green, embracing new technologies and new ways to ensure sustainable living. This was my first trip to Singapore but will surely not be my last and I very much look forward to being back in the Garden City again very soon.

Grace Cheng  
23 May 2022

