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Village Hotel Katong & Village Hotel Albert Court



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Hotels & Resorts



Village Hotels: Mirrors of Tradition and Pride

Text by SHAHIDA SAKERI
Images by VILLAGE HOTELS

In a world where travel is no longer just about escaping the mundane but rather to further enhance our quality of life and make us more enriched, today's travellers are becoming more demanding than ever. They seek true connection with the destination, be it through the activities they do, the food they eat or even the place they stay. Imagine waking up in a country that gives you a strong sense of place – it adds more meaning to the trip, doesn't it? And that is what the Village Hotels by Far East Hospitality have in spades.

The idea behind the Village Hotels brand is to deliver local and integrated experiences for its guests, by promoting and advocating the cultural essence of the neighbourhoods where its properties are present through its facilities, decor and overall experience. But how far does the brand go to celebrate the neighbourhood's cultural tapestry and local history? I was looking for the answer to that question when I recently stayed at Village Hotel Katong and Village Hotel Albert Court, Singapore.

Village Hotel Katong

Strategically situated in Katong district – a neighbourhood populated by the Peranakans – Village Hotel Katong is arguably one of the finest examples that demonstrates the brand's philosophy. The location itself makes the trip to Singapore worthwhile; the area is rich with intriguing stories, emblazoned with rows of beautiful and colourful pre-war two-storey shophouses, which a century or so ago, would have been surrounded by coconut plantations and weekend mansions for wealthy city dwellers. Today, both locals and travellers come to this neighbourhood for a taste of old traditions and slower pace lifestyle – but more on this later.

Village Hotel Katong embraces the idiosyncratic sense of place by incorporating the core Peranakan elements into the design. The property's 230 rooms, for example, are styled with intricate motifs and ceramic tiles that are commonly seen in Peranakan houses, but not overly used to the extent that guests would find them overwhelming. I find this smart combination of subtlety and heritage creates an incredibly inviting and relaxing environment, albeit feminine and soft.

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My Peranakan Club Room is an instant favourite, chicly designed in calming shades of turquoise, light beige and pure white. The open-plan layout works well for me too, with the bathtub sitting next to the huge and oh so comfy bed while the shower and toilet tucked behind a mirrored screen to ensure privacy. Other amenities include a 46" LED television set with cable channels, plenty of power sockets, unlimited Wi-Fi, iron and ironing board, a hairdryer and tea/coffee making facilities. Staying at the Peranakan Club Room grant guests access to the exclusive Peranakan Lounge that serves up daily breakfast from 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 a.m. and evening cocktails from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.

In respect to having local touches throughout the property, Village Hotel Katong also uses Peranakan-inspired artwork created by children aged five to 12 from the heART Studio – a local private art studio that encourages and nurtures creativity among children though art – to adorn all of the hotel's 55 Club Rooms, while paintings by the studio's teachers take centre stage at the hotel's lift lobbies on levels 5 to 12.

But, what is a hotel stay experience without culinary pleasures? To make the most of the hotel's offerings, guests should dine at the halal-certified all-day dining and buffet restaurant, Katong Kitchen, which prides itself in showcasing traditional Peranakan favourites and delicacies such as *Laksa*, *Satay* and *Ayam Buah Keluak*. On top of those, the restaurant also offers Macanese, Asian, Local Chinese and Western delights to suit the palate of all diners. The Seafood Station was a hit when I was there for dinner, but I'd say the extensive selection of desserts ranging from traditional *kuehs* and pastries also made me ecstatic.

Another route for meaningful travel is to create social experiences whereby guests can meet and interact with local residents. I made way to the Artiste Residency (www.kimchoo.com) not far from the hotel. This place is owned by Edmond Wong's family who have been feeding Singapore with authentic traditional Peranakan *kuehs* (snacks) for generations under the popular brand 'Kim Choo Nyonya'. Edmond's mother, Mrs. Helen Lim, taught me how to make the *nine-layer kueh* and *ondeh-ondeh*, both personal favourites of mine since childhood. It was here that I learned about how to consume the *nine-layer kueh* based on traditional Peranakan belief regarding longevity: you are supposed to eat the *kueh* layer by layer as if you are enjoying life at a steady pace; the longer it takes for you to finish it, the longer your life span. Eating the whole *kueh* all at once, on the other hand, may result in shorter life span – some believe this story to be a little too superstitious, but to me, it is no less intriguing.

For guests who are keen towards history, I suggest they head to the Eurasian Heritage Centre located a mere 10 minutes' walk away from the hotel. Katong has long been considered as Singapore's major Eurasian enclave and at this centre, travellers can learn more about this community through visual displays and guide's commentaries. I found the visit here to be refreshingly educational because I was able

to understand how the Eurasian community endured since the time when the Europeans (Portuguese, Dutch, British, others) first came to Singapore until today, including when they were persecuted during the Japanese Occupation. After World War II, some Eurasians prefer to remain in Singapore, while the rest moved to Australia rather than going back to freezing Europe because besides being warmer, they found Australia more welcoming.

Village Hotel Katong also provides hourly complimentary shuttle service to its surrounding attractions, including Big Splash at East Coast Park and Parkway Parade. And if those are not enough to fill the itinerary, guests should embark on a food trail journey around Katong, for instance breakfast at Heaven Wang and lunch at 328 Katong Laksa.

Village Hotel Albert Court

Made up of restored pre-war shophouses, Village Hotel Albert Court still holds all of its original charm. Guests would feel like stars in period dramas when they find themselves surrounded by the hotel's beautiful courtyard, marble floors, traditional Indian and Straits Chinese facade, and opulent ambience filled with history. To me, every inch of this property's lobby oozes romance and nostalgia. In fact, the hotel even has its own signature scent made from several blended herbs to intentionally create a soothing and welcoming environment.

Village Hotel Albert Court has been inviting guests for over 20 years now, with multiple refurbishment exercises done over the years to remain as a top-notch accommodation. Despite being located in one of Singapore's prime districts – Rochor – I love how the hotel hides itself from the main streets, so guests would feel as if they are staying in an intimate, romantic refuge from the bustle outside. There are 220 rooms altogether, each designed with a dab of Indian and Chinese Straits mix with richly coloured walls and dark wood furniture.

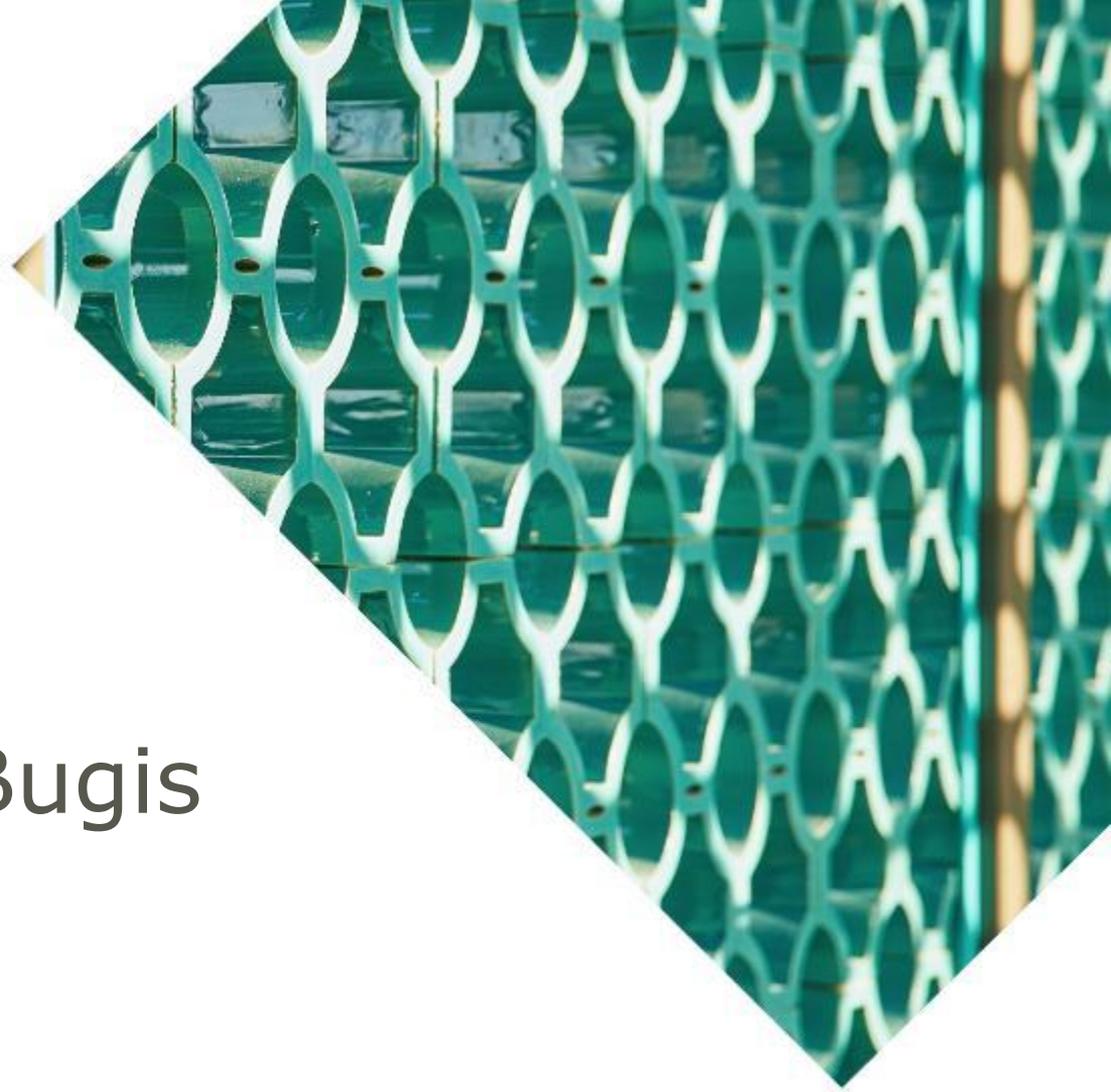
The Albert Cafe serves a huge array of local and international delights, while the cosy Shish Mahal on level one offers a good range of Indian fare. The hotel's gymnasium and two four-seater Jacuzzi set on the hotel's fourth floor offer respite for travel-weary guests.

Stepping out, guests could walk along one of Singapore's oldest thoroughfares, Serangoon Road, to find cultural gems before arriving at the buzzing Little India area. Bugis Street market, Singapore Art Museum and major shopping centres like Bugis Junction and Bugis+ are also nearby. I suggest that guests make use of the handy smartphone (available at both Village Hotel Katong and Village Hotel Albert Court) provided in the guestrooms while roaming the streets because it allows guests to make free local calls, access the comprehensive Singapore city guide, obtain unlimited mobile internet connectivity and exclusive discounts. Free international calls to selected countries are also possible; however, it is best that guests first check with the hotel staff.



Indeed, Village Hotel Katong and Village Hotel Albert Court have embraced the artistic heritage of the neighbourhoods they occupy, while not forsaking modern conveniences. All travellers should consider staying at both properties whenever they are in Singapore to learn how to eat like a local, explore like a local and definitely play like a local, while learning about Singapore's colourful history and communities at the same time.

**Club room and suite guests who book directly through stayfareast.com will enjoy privileges under the Far More Perks deal, which include a complimentary two-hour airport lounge access, Club Lounge access, early check-in or late check-out time and two pieces of laundry. For more information about the offers by Far East Hospitality, visit www.stayfareast.com/en.*



Village Hotel Bugis

Village Hotel Bugis: Children-friendly Hotel at the Crossroads of Culture

TEXT by EMILA YUSOF | IMAGES by VILLAGE HOTEL BUGIS



Are you heading to Singapore with your family for the upcoming holiday? Looking for something different for the trip? Try Village Hotel Bugis' newly launched kids-themed rooms at special rates!

The rooms at Village Hotel Bugis can accommodate two adults and one child comfortably and offer themes such as Cars, Sophia and Super-heroes. These rooms are children-friendly with children-dedicated amenities. One of the walls is covered by blue wallpaper with the theme's recurring motifs. Your children will love exploring every part of the room and discovering little surprises such as adorable and fluffy cushions, carpet with flying rabbit, children-sized bath soap and shampoo, powder, toothbrush, toothpaste, cotton buds and body oil, toys and more toys. On top of that, the rooms also readily come with free Wi-Fi connectivity, in-room safe deposit box, 32-inch LCD TV, coffee/tea making facilities, iron and ironing board.

Other facilities at the hotel include Mooi Chin Place (non-halal restaurant), The Landmark (Halal restaurant), gymnasium, laundry room, swimming pool, 24-hour guest services, 24-hour security, concierge and business services (faxing / photocopying), including a shopping mall that is directly connected to the hotel.

Surrounded by four roads: Victoria Street, Arab Street, North Bridge Road and Ophir Road – or shall we say crossroads of culture – the hotel is very near to everything you want and need. At the North Bridge Road, you can find the famous Singapore Zam-Zam Restaurant, the Sultan Mosque and Haji Lane where small boutique outlets stocked with fashion labels, cafés and stationery shops are located. Bugis Junction and Bugis+ shopping centres are a five-minute walk away

along the street and if you walk for another five minutes, you will reach the Singapore National Library. On Arab Street, which lies opposite to the hotel's main entrance, is 7-Eleven where travellers can buy for snacks or essentials after midnight. Just across the Ophir Road behind the hotel is the Raffles Hospital, in case of emergency. And if you and your family members are up for some street art, you can discover them at Baghdad Street that connects Arab Street and Haji Lane.

Village Hotel Bugis is an excellent choice for families looking for an affordable option in Singapore because it is strategically located and offers the necessary things that you need when travelling with children.

If you book your stay from now until 31 December 2016, you can enjoy the special rate from SGD\$160++ (rates excludes 10% Service Charge plus 7% GST). The stay includes one-night stay at Kids-themed Superior Room (Room assignment will be random and subject to availability), breakfast for 2 adults and 1 child, unlimited Wi-Fi access and free hop-on, hop-off City Tour for two adults and one child.

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