

TOURISM

in our own

BACKYARD

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In the wink of an eye, 2020 has drawn to an end and a fresh year beckons us. With travelling restrictions in place since the start of 2020, my hopes for an overseas vacation with my family were long dashed. The next best choice would then be a staycation over the weekend where we could relax in the comfort of our home and sightsee local tourist attractions.

With that in mind, I scrolled through various websites to shortlist potential places of interest. Luckily, most tourist spots had opened up by the year-end and one could easily visit these places, with masks on of course.

A day as a local tourist

Picture yourself as a tourist that has just touched down in Singapore: after coming off your flight, your first stop would probably be the nearby Jewel Changi Airport to both dine and shop. And that was how I decided to start my day. One certainly wouldn't want to miss the iconic Rain Vortex! At 40 metres high, the Rain Vortex is the world's tallest indoor waterfall right at the heart of Jewel. With golden sun rays shining through the

thundering crystal cascade, amid the lush greenery of the Shiseido Forest Valley, the sight was truly breath-taking and reminiscent of one watching a waterfall while trekking in the rainforests. Given the chance, I would have loved to jump right into the centre of the waterfall and let the cascade cut off the world around me. It is a pity that the Light and Sound show has been temporarily suspended to avoid mass gatherings; otherwise, it would have been an enthralling visual treat to catch at night.

After some shopping and a quick bite, it was already noon. How about setting off to Sentosa Island, another popular tourist spot, for the next stop? Beach lovers would probably have gone to the sandy beaches to bask in the sun or play some volleyball. However, the hot tropical sun was too searing for me and I could hardly open my eyes outdoors. Determined to escape the unforgiving heat, I made a beeline for the fully air-conditioned S.E.A. Aquarium. Boasting more than 100,000 marine animals of over 1,000 species across 50 different habitats, the S.E.A. Aquarium is one of the world's largest aquariums.

Watching these captivating marine creatures swim gracefully in the vibrant depths of the aquatic underworld up close was a mind-blowing experience. It felt as though I was diving right next to the likes of sharks, dolphins, jellyfish and stingrays without getting myself wet, and I was blissfully immersed in the world of blue waters and shimmering colourful corals, away from the hustle and bustle of city life.

When night fell, I returned to the mainland and took a stroll down Marina Bay, taking in the glittering city skyline. The iconic Singapore Flyer, Esplanade and Marina Bay Sands stood out from the rest of the buildings in the spectacular skyline, reminding me of how miniscule we were in our bustling garden city.

Enjoying the comforts of home

The next day, I was in a "laze-at-home" mood and decided to stay in. As the first glimmer of sunlight shone through the window, I took my time to enjoy a breakfast of delicious toasted tuna baguettes and hot cereal. I really cherished that moment



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where I didn't have to worry about my studies or work; it was a much-needed break indeed!

As the old saying goes, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy". Since safe distancing has made physical meetups with friends difficult, I decided to have a personal karaoke session to satisfy my singing desires instead. I simply connected to YouTube for the latest karaoke songs, plugged in my amplifier and microphone, and it was time to belt out my favourite numbers to my heart's content!

After hours of crooning, it came time to prepare some home-cooked dishes for the growling stomach. With my mum's help, I was able to whip up two of my favourite dishes – *belacan* stingray on banana leaves and grilled fish with lemon chilli sauce – but not before struggling through the preparation of the seafood and trying to get the ratio of sauces and condiments just right. Served together with stir fried French green beans, fried bean curd skin rolls and eggplants, I couldn't wait to tuck in to our sumptuous home-cooked meal. A squeeze of lime added

a tangy touch to the seafood and we polished off all the food in no time. Thanks to our regular seafood vendor who was just a call away, I could eat fresh seafood easily without having to step out of the house.

Following lunch, it was time for a movie marathon with the family and some leisure reading. When dinner time came, we were all too tired to cook another meal. What better way to end the day than to order in our favourite local *zi char* dishes? The mouth-watering yam ring, fragrant prawn paste chicken wings, delicious ribs in salted egg yolk sauce and smoothly blended tofu were a true feast for the family.

After a day of eating and mostly sedentary activities, I took to the neighbourhood and had a quiet evening stroll to mark the end of my weekend staycation.

Final thoughts

For those of us who crave for vacations amid the challenges of travelling in current times, a staycation in our sunny island can be the next best choice (especially with

the SingapoRediscovered Vouchers available to all Singaporeans). It also provides the convenience of not having to pack your luggage or plan an itinerary. Simply decide where you want to visit and head out!

Here, I would also like to wish our readers a happy, healthy and fulfilling new year. Happy staycations to all! ♦

Legend

1. Cute dolphins swimming at the S.E.A. Aquarium
2. Me tucking into my lunch
3. The Rain Vortex at Jewel Changi Airport
4. The vibrant corals

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