Singapour’s man in city sees bright future

Whether it’s due to investment and trade, or cultural and linguistic links, Singapore’s Consul-General Ong Siew Gay sees strong Singapore-Shanghai relations, and the prospect of creating further opportunities for both cities based on these ties. Yao Minji reports.

Ong Siew Gay, Singapore’s consul-general in Shanghai, arrived in the city at the end of January, shortly after the Chinese New Year. He has since been making several trips a month to neighboring cities covered by the Consulate-General in Anhui, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces.

“We continue to place emphasis on Shanghai, and Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. These are longstanding markets for Singapore investments in eastern China. Jiangsu brings in more than one-third of our total investment in China,” Ong tells Shanghai Daily.

“At the same time, we are also looking into new areas to expand our commercial presence, one of which is Anhui. Anhui has a relatively sophisticated labor force and we encourage Singapore companies to visit and take a look.”

One of Ong’s most recent trips included the province’s Chuzhou city, a relatively new area for foreign investment, where the Sino-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park is making its first foray beyond Jiangsu.

Ong has also quickly become involved in the local culture and Singaporean community in this area.

Last Saturday at the National Day dinner organized by the Shanghai Singapore Business Association-Singapore Club Shanghai ISSBA-SCS with support from the Consulate-General, Ong launched the “Singapore Restaurant Month.” The monthlong event in August which will offer all food lovers special discounts and promotions at some 20 Singaporean-owned and operated restaurants in Shanghai aims to promote Singaporean food and culture to the local and foreign communities in Shanghai, and will culminate in a Consulate-General Open House on September 1.

Official figures show approximately some 7,000 Singaporeans in Shanghai, and more than 10,000 in the whole jurisdiction, forming one of the largest concentrations of Singaporeans outside of Singapore.

“We have three groups of people: professionals, families and students. We’re definitely seeing an increase in young Singaporean talent who come to Shanghai to study and work,” Ong says.

“One of our duties is to provide consular assistance and help them remain engaged to Singapore.”

He sees great advantages for Singapore expatriates in comparison with other international communities.

“We are usually conversant in two languages, if not more. More than a common language, Singaporeans understand Chinese culture. We definitely have an advantage there,” he says.

Ong and his office also take care of Singapore companies in the area.

In Shanghai alone, there are more than 2,000 Singapore companies and more than 3,000 investment projects from the country. Trade between Shanghai and Singapore in 2011 reached US$17.5 billion — up by 17 percent on 2010. The figure for January to May has already increased 34 percent year-on-year.

Anhui, Jiangsu and Zhejiang are also important strategic markets and partners for Singapore companies. The area has two of seven business councils Singapore has in all of China — the Singapore-Jiangsu Cooperation Council and the Singapore-Zhejiang Economic and Trade Council. These councils, led by high-profile officials from both countries, meet regularly to assist and encourage cross-border cooperation and projects.

Collectively, the area covered by the Consulate is the recipient of nearly 50 percent of Singapore’s investment in China.

It also contributes a great portion of the country’s trade with China, which increased 6.4 percent in 2011 to US$81.4 billion, accounting for 10.4 percent of Singapore’s total trade. Singapore is China’s fifth largest foreign investor, remarkable considering the small geographical size of the nation.

Ong is happy to be back in China, after his first posting in the Singapore Embassy in Beijing in 10 years. In the past 10 years, the bilateral relationship has progressed greatly.

“When I left China, the biggest project was the China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park which we hoped would add value to China’s economic modernization efforts, and where the experience can be replicated in other parts of China,” Ong recalls.

“China and Singapore have embarked on more projects together since then. In 2007, we started a new project in Tianjin, the Tianjin Eco-City. These projects bear testimony to Singapore’s efforts to contribute to China’s evolving developmental needs.”

Singapore companies have a presence in a variety of fields including real estate, food, healthcare and urban planning.

“We also have great potential in the further development of service sectors, especially in areas like urban solutions,” Ong adds.

“We understand the importance of having a high quality of life. We don’t have much space in Singapore, so we have to be very careful with what we do have. Singapore has also developed experience in the early education market, which could be an area for further Singapore-Singapore cooperation. These developments could help the next generation of Chinese citizens benefit even more from today’s economic growth.”

Ong remains optimistic in the prospects for bilateral economic cooperation despite the slowing Chinese economy.

“While the whole world is going through a slow-down, China is still the biggest growth story.”

Ong is particularly positive about the recent agreement to set up two qualifying full banks from China in Singapore, one of which will be the official RMB clearing bank, making Singapore the first offshore RMB center outside China.

“This will make it far easier for businesses and individuals who need RMB to have a direct line of credit. It is also a great step towards the internationalization of the RMB, and especially positive for those interested in RMB products,” he concludes.
Singapore — Lion City at a glance

**63 islands**

Singapore consists of 63 islands, including the main island, widely known as Singapore Island but also as Pulau Ujong.

There are two man-made connections to Johor, Malaysia: the Johor–Singapore Causeway in the north, and the Tuas Second Link in the west.

Pulau Island, Pulau Tekong, Pulau Ubin and Sentosa are the largest of Singapore’s smaller islands.

**710 sq km**

Singapore is one of the smallest countries in the world with a total area of about 710 square kilometers.

**Demographics**

Singapore is one of the most prosperous nations with over 5 million people living in the islands. The population is highly diverse: the majority are Chinese, with Malays and Indians forming significant minorities.

**74%**

of the population is ethnically Chinese

- 100% of the total population lives in an urban area
- The life expectancy of males is 79.6 years, while the life expectancy for females is 84.3 years (2011).

**Economy**

Per capita GDP: US$50,324
Average salary: US$30,940

Taking in Singapore in just two full days

Chehui Peh

Once a small fishing village, the island nation of Singapore has much to celebrate this year on its 47th birthday commemorating independence from Malaysia in 1965. Singapore has developed rapidly since then, and today it is one of the business hubs in Asia as well as a unique combination of races, history and development.

Though it’s a favorite transit city, there is much to see in this Southeast Asian country even for a traveler with only 48 hours in the Garden City. Here are some the best bets for seeing Singapore like a local.

Day 1: Exploring modern Singapore

- **Landmarks**
  
  Start off the day at Singapore’s marina bay, which has evolved in recent years to house both the old and new landmarks of Singapore. Begin at the Fullerton Hotel, once the General Post Office when Singapore was a British colony. Cross the busy street to the Merlion, Singapore’s mythical creature with a lion head and a fish’s tail before heading to the Esplanade, Singapore’s performing arts center resembling the king of fruits, the durian. With lots of photo opportunities, it is the best way to see the busy skyline and the bustling business district.

- **Marina Bay Sands**
  
  With natural light flooding in from above and a canal flowing along the lower ground floor, Marina Bay Sands is one of the most popular and trendy shopping destinations. From well-known luxury brands to celebrity chefs, it is a place for window-shopping for those on a budget, and a shopping heaven for those with deep pockets. Visitors can ride a gondola on the canal. For US$20 a visitor can go up to the SkyPark observation deck to view the Singapore skyline. The famous infinity pool open only to guests of Marina Bay Sands Hotel is on the same floor.

  Address: 10 Bayfront Ave

  Hours: 10am-11pm (Monday-Thursday), 10am-12am (Friday-Sunday)

  Marina Bay Sands Hotel is on the same floor.

- **Helix Bridge**
  
  Cross the Helix Bridge, an architectural feat of engineering and design, to the ArtScience Museum, Singapore’s newest museum that showcases some of the most major touring exhibitions from around the world. The current shows are the Harry Potter Exhibition running through September 30 and the Andy Warhol Exhibition from pandan leaves. Coffee shop serving Kaya toast, a spread made from pandan leaves.

  Address: 39 Armenian St

  Hours: daily, 10am-10pm

- **Marine Life Park**
  
  The Marine Life Park, which houses exotic animals, is open to the public at 9am. For US$20 a visitor can go up to the SkyPark observation deck to view the Singapore skyline. The famous infinity pool open only to guests of Marina Bay Sands Hotel is on the same floor.

  Address: 10 Bayfront Ave

- **Gardens by the Bay**
  
  A newly opened waterfront garden features conservatories growing some of the most exotic spices on Earth. It’s a showcase of Singapore as the Garden City. The landscape features structures known as the Supertrees, which house exotic ferns, vines and orchids, mimicking the ecological function of trees. There’s a nightly light show at 7:45pm and 8:45pm in which the Supertrees reenact life from the Stone Age. Admission to the outdoor gardens is free but an admission fee is charged to the Skyway and conservatories. The venue is perfect for a jog or slow walk after dinner. It’s calm, beautiful and a spot for nature lovers.

  Address: 18 Marina Gardens Drive (access from Marina Bay Sands’ Lion’s Bridge or Bayfront MRT Station)

Day 2: Peranakan Singapore

The Peranakan Chinese were among the earliest settlers in Singapore, establishing a large enclave of rich culture that has been retained to this day. Defined as old established Chinese immigrant of West Java, they have had major impact on the old neighborhoods of Joochiat and Katong.

- **GeylangSerai Market and Food Center**
  
  The GeylangSerai area became predominantly Malay starting in the 1920s and to this day it’s a must-visit area for understanding Malay culture. Visit the market and sample popular Malay foods such as nasi lemak (coconut rice), nasi padang (rice topped with meat and vegetables), Bandung (milk with rose syrup) and goreng pisang (fried banana). Dried foods and spices can be purchased at reasonable prices. Children like the Keropok, a fish or prawn cracker that crackles in with the first bite. Follow the crowd queueing at stalls for authentic food, since Singaporeans are serious food-lovers.

  It’s better to go in the mornings or late afternoons because that’s when it typically bustles and the temperature is more comfortable.

- **JooChiat Place and JooChiat Road**
  
  Taking a long walk in the old neighborhood of JooChiat, one can enjoy both tranquility and traditional foods at open-air restaurants along the streets. Eateries specialize in one particular dish, ranging from fish head curry to wanton noodles to dumplings. Shops have colorful tile facades and interesting architecture not seen in modern buildings. There are Chinese herbal clinics and specialty stores, such as those selling durian puffs known as puteri mas durian puffs (475 JooChiat Rd).

- **East Coast Road**
  
  At the end of JooChiat Road is East Coast Road, a quiet unassuming neighborhood that contains Peranakan shophouses. Laksa, a famous, spicy Peranakan noodle soup, is available here.

  Sample Katong Laksa, at No. 49 for a taste of one of Singapore’s classic spicy dishes. Stroll along for a slice of traditional life. In case of hunger or temptation, walk to 204 East Coast Road to Chin Mee Chin Confectionery, a favorite old-school coffee shop serving Kaya toast, a spread made from pandan leaves.

- **Peranakan Museum**
  
  House in an old building on Armenian Street, the Peranakan Museum explores Peranakan cultures in Southeast Asia, and is part of the larger Asian Civilizations Museum. Exhibits describe origins and customs such as the 12-day wedding, traditional costumes, and arts and crafts are displayed. Armenian Street is also home to landmarks such as the Substation, Singapore’s first independent contemporary arts center. The best upscale Peranakan restaurant, True Blue (49 Armenian St), is a short walk from the museum.

  Hours: 1pm-7pm (Monday), 9am-7pm (Tuesday-Sunday)

  Address: 39 Armenian St