

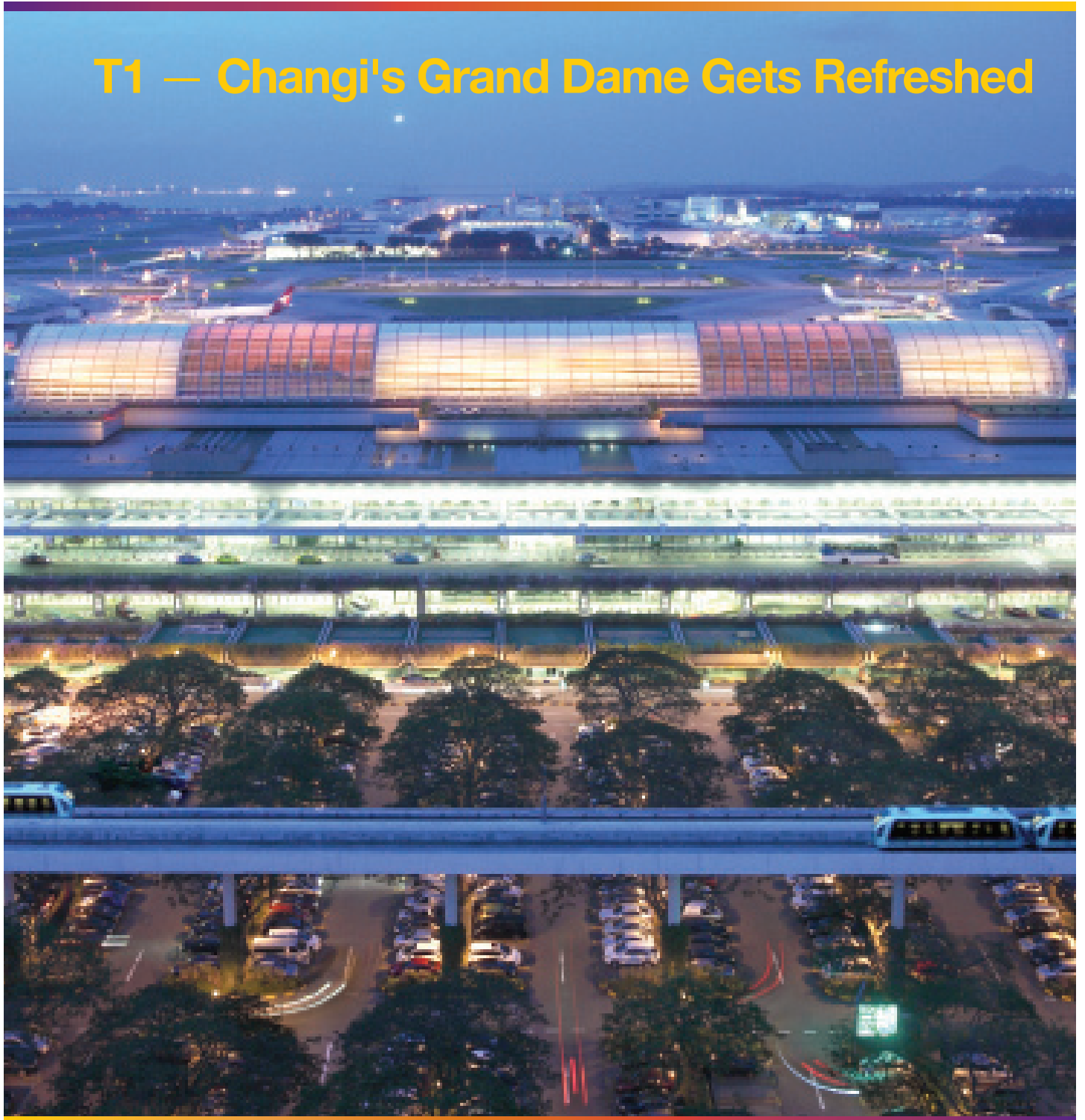
CHANGI CONNECTION

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T1 — Changi's Grand Dame Gets Refreshed



CHANGI SEES 11.6% MORE PASSENGERS IN FIRST HALF OF 2012



Aircraft movements increased for Jan-Jun 2012, with Changi handling 10.2% more landings and take-offs.

Buoyed by an increase in travel demand across the Asia-Pacific region, 11.6% more travellers passed through Changi Airport in the first six months of this year compared to the same period in 2011. For the January-June 2012 period, 25 million passenger movements were recorded at Changi.

Traffic to and from the Middle East (+22%), South Asia (+15%) and Northeast Asia (+14%) recorded the largest increases. Aircraft movements grew in tandem to 159,500 for the six months with Changi handling 10.2% more landings and take-offs compared to a year ago.

Among flight sectors with at least a quarter of a million passengers, Beijing, Frankfurt, Guangzhou, New Delhi and Taipei registered the strongest percentage growths. Reflecting Changi's increasing connectivity to China and India, traffic to the two countries grew strongest among markets with at least a million passengers.



Changi shipped 898,400 tonnes of airfreight in the first half of 2012.

On the cargo front, shipment volume at Changi held steady for the half-year, with 898,400 tonnes of airfreight shipped, a slight drop of 1.0% compared to the same period in 2011. The top five cargo markets for Changi were Australia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia and the United States of America.

With consumer confidence declining in several major economies, Changi Airport Group (CAG) introduced a S\$15 million cargo support package in March 2012 to support its partners in the current downturn and to sustain the long-term growth of the air cargo sector. The support package includes a 20% landing fee rebate at Changi Airport for all freighter flights, funding support for new cargo development initiatives, as well as up to 20% rental rebates for cargo tenants leasing CAG's facilities at the Changi Airfreight Centre.

TOP CITIES BY PASSENGER MOVEMENT (Jan-Jun 2012)

1	Jakarta
2	Bangkok
3	Hong Kong
4	Kuala Lumpur
5	Manila
6	Tokyo
7	London
8	Ho Chi Minh City
9	Denpasar
10	Sydney

TOP CITIES BY CARGO MOVEMENT (Jan-Jun 2012)

1	Hong Kong
2	Shanghai
3	Jakarta
4	Bangkok
5	Tokyo
6	Taipei
7	Seoul
8	Sydney
9	Melbourne
10	Frankfurt

25million
PASSENGER MOVEMENTS

159,500
AIRCRAFT MOVEMENTS

ONE MAN'S VISION TO TOUCH HUNDREDS OF LIVES



Instrumental in the development of Singapore Changi Airport, Mr Howe Yoon Chong (left), unveils the plaque at the official opening of Terminal 1 in 1981.

Minister of State for Finance and Transport Mrs Josephine Teo joins CAG Chairman Mr Liew Mun Leong and CAG CEO Mr Lee Seow Hiang in presenting a \$200,000 cheque to the four beneficiaries of the Changi Foundation.

Changi Airport Group (CAG) launched the Changi Airport Group-Howe Yoon Chong (CAG-HYC) Book Prize, in honour of the late Mr Howe Yoon Chong, at the ceremony to mark the completion of the Changi Airport Terminal 1 Upgrading project on 18 July. Then Minister for Defence, Mr Howe officially opened Changi Airport on 29 December 1981.

Among his many contributions to Singapore, Mr Howe played a leading role in the development of Changi Airport. As Chairman of the Special Committee on Airport Development, he led a team and studied how the future needs of aviation in Singapore could best be met. Despite expert recommendation of expansion plans for a second runway in Paya Lebar, Mr Howe advocated instead the reclaiming of land to build a new international airport at Changi.

In celebration of Mr Howe's spirit of determination and courage, CAG will be awarding bond-free book prizes to less privileged youths who display the same character as he did, overcoming disadvantaged backgrounds and circumstances to succeed and triumph in life. CAG believes in a holistic approach to help these youths address the needs and challenges that they face, which may include poor academic performance, lack of family support and often, financial difficulties. The book prizes will support recipients as they pursue formal education and seek opportunities to upgrade.

The funds for the book prizes come from the Changi Foundation that had been set up to make CAG's corporate

social responsibility framework more systematic and sustainable. Three key thrusts – Education, Skills Development and Community Service – were identified to guide the Foundation's initiatives. The launch of the CAG-HYC Book Prize supports the fundamentals of learning by encouraging youths to remain in school to finish their basic education.

On the launch of the CAG-HYC Book Prize, Mr Lee Seow Hiang, CEO of CAG, said, "Mr Howe Yoon Chong set the mandate for Changi Airport to surpass benchmarks through pioneering innovations which laid the framework for Changi to become one of the best airports in the world. This continues to be the guiding principle of Changi's operations today.

"As we mark the completion of the upgrading for T1, we fondly remember Mr Howe, a pioneer of Changi, for his spirit of true grit in surmounting difficult and challenging circumstances. Despite the views of experts, Mr Howe determined that Changi Airport was doable within the timeframe set. As it turned out, his assessment proved to be an astute and accurate one.

"Through the CAG-Howe Yoon Chong Book Prize, we honour Mr Howe's legacy, which we hope will serve as inspiration and motivation to our youths today, and at the same time encourage them to remain steadfast and resilient when faced with challenges."

IN SEARCH OF TALENT, CAG FINDS ITS OWN IDENTITY

In a competitive job market like Singapore, the war for talent is constantly being fought. This is no less true for Changi Airport Group (CAG). As a relatively new corporate entity, CAG faces its fair share of challenges getting the right people on board. There was a need for the company to differentiate itself from other strong, established organisations if it was to stand out as an employer of choice.

This attempt to define the value that CAG offers to its prospective and current employees led to the launch of its Employee Value Proposition (EVP) in July this year. This EVP is reflected in recruitment advertising and on the refreshed careers page of the CAG website (www.changiairportgroup.com), which showcases the people and job opportunities in the company.



CAG's recruitment advertisements highlight the unique experience that employees can expect.

The Employee Value Proposition

The EVP crystallises the key attributes that CAG possesses or hopes to acquire over time. Firstly, it highlights that the company stands for service. The friendliness of airport staff, the many customer-centric facilities and services, and the efficiency of the airport have made Changi the most awarded airport globally, with more than 400 accolades, defining world-class in the process.

In this unique airport community, CAG performs the role of a conductor in an orchestra – synchronising the efforts of its partners to produce a positively surprising experience for each passenger. This role was clearly evident during the 2010 volcanic eruption in Finland that disrupted European flights and left thousands of travellers stranded in Singapore. CAG's team of passionate employees went about identifying holding areas and deploying customer service personnel, while liaising closely with ground handling agents and airlines to keep the stranded travellers up to date on the latest developments. In line with its culture of excellence, CAG also sought to enhance the experience of stranded passengers through the distribution of amenities such as refreshments, sleeping bags, and even computers.

CAG's set-up with multiple business streams means that employees can experience diverse job opportunities in the course of their career. It is possible for employees to move



CAG's Employee Value Proposition greets visitors of the new Careers page on the CAG website.

between business clusters with markedly different areas of focus requiring very different skills, such as transferring from Airport Emergency Service to the Commercial division. Even within a cluster, there are many platforms for employees to be directly involved in challenging projects.

CAG Scholarship and Internship Programmes

CAG's Human Resources Division has also stepped up its promotion of the CAG Scholarship and Internship Programmes. The CAG Scholarship has been popular because it has minimal restrictions on the course of study that applicants wish to pursue, while offering a shorter bond period than many other scholarships. The CAG Internship Programme offers interns a chance to develop a project, guided by experienced mentors and supervisors who provide valuable experience and learning opportunities.

Despite the focus of these programmes on tertiary students, CAG does not close its doors to mid-career recruitment. This is evidenced by the installation of the Employee Referral Scheme, which incentivises CAG employees to refer suitable candidates for CAG job openings.

With the EVP defining the CAG brand as an employer and other recruitment initiatives described above, no stone is left unturned in the company's quest for talent, to lead and manage Changi Airport so that it continues to be world-class in every way.

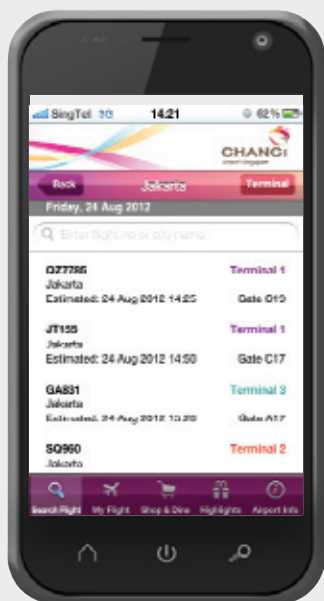
STAYING DIGITALLY CONNECTED WITH CUSTOMERS

Increasing use of the Internet and the proliferation of the smartphone have not only brought technology into people's lives, but also ushered in a new era where everyone is digitally connected 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

As a service-oriented organisation, Changi Airport Group (CAG) recognises the importance of staying digitally engaged with its customers. The *iChangi* mobile application provides the latest status of flights and a host of other airport information, while the revamped Changi Rewards website makes shopping and dining at Changi even more interesting for card members.

The *iChangi* mobile app

The number of mobile users with smartphones worldwide has increased significantly in recent years, with an estimate that as many as 90% of smartphones are used throughout the day. For many in Singapore, which has the world's highest smartphone penetration rate of 54%, the smartphone is very much part of their daily lives.



Flight info is easily accessible through *iChangi*.

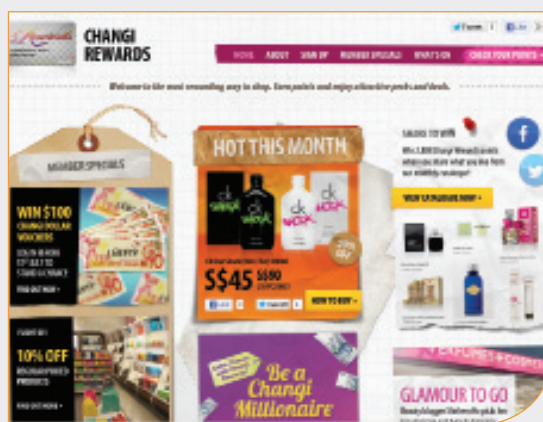
To cater to the needs of smartphone users, the *iChangi* mobile application was launched in 2011. Available on the four most popular mobile platforms – Android, Blackberry, iOS and Windows Phone 7, the *iChangi* app gives users on-demand access to the most commonly accessed airport information:

- flight information and alerts,
- retail and dining information,
- events and promotions at Changi Airport and
- travel advisories.

There is no longer a need for passengers to call or turn on their computers to get updates on their flights. With the *iChangi* app, users can also request to receive push notifications on the status of their flights.

The *iChangi* app has proven hugely popular and garnered favourable reviews. Since its launch, it has been downloaded more than 880,000 times.

In the coming months, an *iChangi* application for the iPad will be launched. With a larger screen, the high-definition version of the *iChangi* application boasts more detailed flight information, airport maps as well as recommendations on things to do at Changi Airport. It is definitely an app to look out for!



Find the latest deals at Changi through the Changi Rewards website.

A more rewarding Changi Rewards website

Shopping and dining at Changi Airport has never been more exciting! On top of GST savings whether they are flying or not, members of Changi Rewards, Changi Airport's shopping rewards programme, can earn points to redeem Changi Dollar Vouchers. For shoppers, this translates to rebates of as much as 6.25% – certainly one of the most attractive returns offered by comparable loyalty programmes in the market.

To bring its shopping experience closer to Changi Rewards members, CAG has revamped the members' portal. On the new website, there are deals galore for members – including a new hot deal every month and exclusive perks for members, ranging from discounts at retail stores like Esprit, Planet Traveller and Flight 001, dining and food deals at Saboten and Butter Studio, and even travel deals. Members also enjoy special benefits during their birthday months and privileges for activities like cartoon character meet-and-greet sessions.

For a closer look at what's good to buy and eat at Changi Airport, a new content section, 'Experience Changi', features articles contributed by bloggers and Changi Rewards members who share their experiences shopping, dining and enjoying activities at Changi. In addition, members can check out the latest good buys at Changi Airport under the 'Good Buys' section, which comprises a product catalogue featuring interesting products of different themes every month. Members who share their favourite product via social media channels Facebook or Twitter stand to win 2,888 points (which is equivalent to a spend of \$2,888)!

For more information, check out the new website at www.changirewards.com.



The magnificent Kinetic Rain welcomes travellers at the upgraded Terminal 1 Departure Hall.

A NEW LOOK FOR TERMINAL 1

Changi's Grand Dame receives a facelift after 31 long years of service

Thirty-eight months, 1.5 million man hours, S\$500 million – these are some of the figures associated with the biggest upgrading project undertaken at Changi Airport in recent years. In May 2008, upgrading works at Changi Airport's Terminal 1 (T1) started with the aim of improving the airport experience for the tens of millions of passengers passing through the terminal each year.

With the upgrading, about 22,000 square metres of floor space has been added in the terminal. There is now more spatial comfort with wider thoroughfares, resulting in better passenger flow throughout the terminal. With the increase in floor area, the number of concessions has also increased by 12%, and there are now approximately 110 outlets in the terminal, offering passengers a wider choice of retail and F&B offerings.

Based on a 'Tropical City' theme, the upgrading works have delivered a T1 that portrays Singapore's reputation as a garden city. The extensive use of material such as timber and warm colours reflect a feeling of warmth, synonymous with the theme of the upgraded terminal. Even the carpets used in the terminal are in the warm shades of the tropics!

One of the key highlights of the upgraded terminal is the extensive use of greenery to provide passengers with some respite from their busy travels. The Central Piazza, a new focal point of the Departure Transit Mall, has luscious landscaping to create a sense of the tropics. The area provides passengers with unobstructed views of the airside, including ample open spaces for relaxation. This was made possible by a 35-metre extension of the terminal into the airside. In addition, T1 now sports a new outdoor thematic garden -- the Lily Pad Outdoor Deck, where passengers can enjoy refreshing air and a view of aircraft flying flags from all over the world.

Stuart Ralls, CAG's Senior Manager, Projects, said, "The upgrading of T1 has been a very unique experience for me personally. We met many challenges as the building was still an operating terminal throughout the upgrading phase. Works had to be done in multiple phases with minimal inconvenience caused to our passengers, airline partners and retail tenants. In addition, to minimise the impact of noise, hoardings were insulated and all noisy works took place during off-peak hours and at night. Noise levels were constantly measured during the day to ensure passengers experienced as little disturbance as possible."

Mr Ralls added, "To many of us in the airport community, T1 holds a special place in our hearts. Many Singaporeans have very fond memories of T1 too and we wanted to preserve these past experiences to ensure continuity with the past. T1's intimate scale and short walking distances to facilities are features that we have retained in the upgraded terminal.



Left: Enjoy refreshing airside views at the new Lily Pad Outdoor Deck.
Centre: New facade of the Arrival Immigration Hall.
Right: New Lantern Feature Wall overlooking the Departure Check-in Hall.

Since the completion of the upgrading works, many passengers have complimented CAG on the new look and feel of the terminal. We have also seen an improvement in the scores given to T1 in our monthly passenger surveys.”

Raindrops keep falling!

Terminal 1’s Departure Check-in Hall has gotten more popular in recent weeks. Passengers and airport visitors have gathered around at a certain spot in the upgraded terminal, busy snapping photographs and filming its newest attraction.

Comprising 1,216 metal droplets, *Kinetic Rain* takes pride of place in the upgraded Departure Check-in Hall. This specially commissioned moving sculpture, a first in an airport globally, comes as a pair, installed several metres apart from each other and visible from many areas of the Departure Check-in Hall.

Weighing a mere 180 grams, each metal droplet has a polished copper coating to prevent the surface from rusting. Centred around an aviation theme, *Kinetic Rain* morphs into 16 different shapes and patterns through graceful movements in a 15-minute programmed segment. Some of the shapes formed include a hot-air balloon, an aeroplane and even a dragon!

Kinetic Rain replaces the old T1 icon – the Mylar Cords, a circular curtain of water that cascaded down three stories of the building. Many Singaporeans have fond memories of the Mylar Cords, a firm favourite for photo shoots. The challenge for the T1 Upgrading team was to choose a feature that would also be visually arresting and invoke excitement

among passengers to befit the status of T1 as the grand dame of Changi.

Chua Ching Hock, CAG’s Manager, Airport Operations, said, “We have seen a spike in the number of compliments from passengers and airport visitors ever since *Kinetic Rain* was introduced. It is very heartening to see so many visitors crowd around the sculpture, and be enthralled by the graceful movements of the raindrops. This is what makes the entire Changi Experience so fascinating ... and indeed positively surprising.”

“This is such a marvelous installation. One that can really make you stop in your tracks and stare... it truly looks different from every angle!”

— Peggy Koh, airport visitor

“I was due to fly out of Terminal 1 and I made sure I had enough time at the airport because I had heard so much about *Kinetic Rain*. It is really such an amazing experience and the movements are so beautiful, you can’t help but be mesmerized by the entire performance.”

— Natalie Wang, airport passenger

Check it out

Scan this QR code to view the official *Kinetic Rain* video.



SOME OF THE NEW FEATURES AT T1

Extended Departure Kerbside Canopy provides better shelter from the weather elements.

Illuminated Roof Top Lantern serves as a prominent feature and focal point for passengers as they travel towards T1 in the evening.

Centralised Departure Immigration allows optimal manning of immigration counters and improves level of service. Up to 18 counters are available for officers to serve passengers at any one time.

Concession space has been expanded by more than 10%, with approximately 110 retail and F&B outlets from the original number of 85.

The Central Piazza welcomes passengers with its luscious landscaping and unobstructed views of the airside.

The Lily Pad Outdoor Deck offers passengers the opportunity to enjoy refreshing air and airside views.

An old favourite of many Singaporeans, the **Viewing Gallery** provides a new level of experience for airport visitors. The gallery has been extended beyond the new building façade providing excellent views of the apron and parked aircraft for plane spotters and photo enthusiasts.

MEGA ELECTRONICS HUB OPENS @ T3



The Electronics Hub @ T3 takes pride of place in Terminal 3.

The Electronics Hub @T3, a one-stop premium electronics retailer, has arrived at Changi Airport! Offering the latest digital gadgets and electronics and located in the public area of the airport, visitors can now earmark Changi Airport as one of their choice destinations for electronics shopping!

Located at Terminal 3's Level 3, the huge outlet spans over 10,000 square feet, offers a comprehensive range of electronic, entertainment and photographic equipment, digital and IT solutions, as well as household appliances. Newly opened in July 2012, the lifestyle electronics store offers over 2,800 products from over 50 brands including established names like Sony, Canon, Nikon, Olympus, Toshiba, Phillips, Samsung, Bose, Apple, Acer, Tefal, Bosch and many more. The store also offers an attractive trade-in programme on selected notebooks and mobile phones.

At Electronics Hub @T3, shoppers can be assured of good deals, as prices are guaranteed to be no higher than at comparable fixed-price stores downtown. As an added bonus, Changi Rewards members enjoy a special discount of 7% to 12% on items such as cameras, household and personal care appliances, home entertainment systems and printer consumables.

Changi Rewards members also earn points on their purchases which translate into rebates of up to 6.25%. In addition, the 100% money-back-guarantee return policy provides customers with the peace of mind that is so important for a great shopping experience.

Electronics Hub @ T3 is located at Changi Airport Terminal 3, Level 3 (near Gurney Drive and Itacho Sushi)

WORLD'S SEXIEST BRAND LANDS @ T1

Coveted by ladies (and admired by men) all over the world for epitomising beauty, glamour and femininity, Victoria's Secret, the leading specialty retailer of lingerie and beauty products, has arrived at Changi Airport!

The Victoria's Secret Beauty & Accessories Store opened its doors at Terminal 1's Departure Transit Mall in May 2012. Operated by Nuance-Watson (Singapore), the 745 square feet shop offers customers an assortment of best-selling Victoria's Secret Beauty products including fun and flirty prestige fragrances, such as the brand's Bombshell scent, and its newest fragrance, Love is Heavenly, as well as the popular scented VS Fantasies body care range.

Victoria's Secret's unique collection of accessories are exclusive to its Beauty & Accessories concept stores and are perfect for those looking for gifts or something for themselves. The glamorous girl-on-the go will be excited by the wide range of Victoria's Secret branded bags, luggage, passport covers, cosmetic bags, bangles and key fobs.

The store's façade takes a modern approach with a dynamic storefront and a dramatic black and hot pink interior, featuring a gallery of photographs of the brand's world famous 'Angels'.

"We strive to be innovative and at the cutting edge of retail concepts to be in line with Changi Airport Group's ideology to be the forerunner of airport retailing. Victoria's Secret is a powerful brand with consistent sales and profit growth, and we believe that the inclusion of this new store will further enrich the shopping experience for passengers in Changi Airport," said Mr Ken Tse, Managing Director of Nuance-Watson (Singapore).



Victoria's Secret lands at Terminal 1, much to the delight of female travellers.

LAKSA – A DISH TO SLURP AND SWEAT OVER



A spicy bowl of noodles on a sweating hot day might not seem very enticing but it is exactly this sweating hot experience that makes this dish one of Singapore's favourite local food. Called "laksa", this fiery dish has Peranakan origins, a merger of Chinese and Malay culture.

The highlight of laksa is its hot and spicy curry soup. It is made from coconut milk, grounded dried prawns and curry soup base which give the soup a thick flavourful taste. Laksa is best enjoyed with a spoon and noodles cut to portion.

For those who do not like coconut milk or thick curry, they can try "Asam" laksa, which is a sour, fish soup-based noodle dish. Asam laksa is served with finely sliced vegetables including cucumber, onion, red chilli, pineapple and lettuce, giving a more refreshing taste than curry laksa.

In Singapore, the more commonly found laksa is the curry laksa, also known as Katong laksa. It is named after the Katong area, where one can find numerous stalls selling this signature dish. Many stall owners claim their laksa to be the most authentic but this ultimately depends on the taste buds of customers.

Finding the best laksa in Changi Airport

Delicious and appetising Katong and Asam laksa can be found at several places in Changi Airport. These include the Pappamia and Gurney Drive restaurants, which offer authentic Peranakan and Penang cuisine respectively.

Try piping hot and fiery laksa at these Changi Airport F&B outlets:

TERMINAL 1

- Wang Café
(Public Area)
- Pappamia
(Public Area)
- 1983 Taste of Nanyang
(After Immigration)

TERMINAL 2

- Wang Café
(After Immigration)
- Chinta Manis Peranakan Café
(Public Area and After Immigration)
- Heavenly Wang
(Public Area)
- Toast Box
(Public Area)
- Killiney Kopitiam
(After Immigration)

TERMINAL 3

- Wang Café
(Public Area)
- Heavenly Wang
(Public Area)
- Gurney Drive
(Public Area)
- Kim Choo's Nonya Kitchen
(After Immigration)

DIY Curry Laksa

Peranakan food usually involves many ingredients and complicated preparation methods. However, here's a simple recipe you can try:

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons of oil
- 2 cups of coconut milk
- 100g (3 1/2 oz) of prawns, shelled
- 100g (3 1/2 oz) of squid, cleaned, skinned and sliced
- 6 fresh scallops (optional)
- 6 cakes dried deep-fried beancurd (tau foo pok)
- salt and pepper to taste
- 200g (7 oz) of fresh rice-flour noodles (laksa), blanched in boiling water, or dried rice vermicelli (beehoon), soaked to soften
- 1 cup of beansprouts
- 2 sprigs laksa leaf, chopped roughly
- 6 quail's eggs or 1 hen's egg, hard-boiled and peeled
- 2 table spoons of fried shallots

For Spice Paste

- 12 shallots
- 4 cloves garlic
- 6 candlenuts
- 5 cm (2 inches) ginger
- 4 red chillies
- 2 tablespoons of dried prawns, soaked to soften
- 1 teaspoon of dried shrimp paste (belacan)
- 2 lemon grass, bruised.

Preparations:

1. Prepare the spice paste. Chop shallots, garlic, candlenuts, ginger and chillies coarsely and blend or process with dried prawns and a little oil until fine. Then, mix in curry powder and dried shrimp paste, blend for a few seconds longer, then set aside with lemongrass.
2. Heat the remaining oil in a wok or a heavy pan.
3. Add the spice paste and cook over low heat, stirring constantly, for about 5 minutes until the paste is fragrant. After that, add coconut milk and chicken stock and bring to the boil, stirring.
4. Put in all the seafood and beancurd and simmer until it is cooked. Then, season to taste.
5. Lastly, to serve, divide the noodles and beansprouts among 4-6 bowls. Top with coconut milk gravy, eggs and sprinkle with laksa leaf and fried shallots.

(Recipe source: <http://www.laksa.com/>)



The traditional Bhutanese attire, known as Gho (men) and Kira (women).



Bhutanese schoolgirls with their warm smiles.



Paro International Airport

THE BEAUTY OF BHUTAN – NOW JUST SIX HOURS AWAY

Bhutan – a country previously little known until its Gross National Happiness index made the headlines – has been somewhat of an exotic destination for Singaporeans. Before 2011, only about 700 travellers from Singapore had set foot in this small country nestled between China and India.

The commencement of a direct service between Singapore and Bhutan means that Singapore residents can now visit this mystical land in less than six hours. The twice-weekly service by Drukair, Bhutan’s national carrier, removes the need for an overnight stay in Thailand or India.

*The flights leave Changi on Thursdays and Sundays at 0600 hours and reach Paro at 0945 hours, leaving visitors with the entire day ahead to start their exploration of the country. Bhutan is two hours behind Singapore. **Ng Koon Ling** describes a recent visit.*

First impressions

While Paro is the international gateway of Bhutan, the country’s capital is Thimphu, an hour away. Bhutan has no rail system and everyone walks, cycles or drives to get from one place to the next.

Driving through the streets of Bhutan, one sees how the country has kept much of its culture. As many as nine out of 10 people on the streets wear the traditional attire – the *gho* for men, and *kira* for ladies. This is despite the impact of modern influences such as television and the Internet.

Once we left Paro, the scenic post-card Bhutan presented itself. With lush green mountains looming in the distance everywhere I looked, coupled with the fresh cool mountain air, I was almost tempted to break into song that the “hills were alive with the sound of music”. At the foot of the mountains lay green valleys, dotted with quaint colourful houses in characteristic Bhutanese architecture that made me stop our driver every 10 minutes so that I could capture these

beautiful images forever. Freely grazing cows and horses dotted the landscape.

Over the course of a few days, our group got a taste of the main sights of Western Bhutan as we traversed the cities of Paro, Thimphu and Punakha. Each city exuded its own charm – Paro is a small city that is a quiet introduction to what is to come. As the current political centre and seat of administration, Thimphu is imposing, while Punakha evokes awe as the olden capital of Bhutan. Each city has its own *dzong*, built originally as a fortress, but which now houses the local government and a monastery. More than 1,500 temples scatter the entire country, bearing testimony to the importance that religion plays in the lives of the Bhutanese.



Taksang Monastery, or Tiger's Nest - the holiest ground in Bhutan.



Punakha Dzong - the most important dzong in Bhutan and where all royal weddings took place.



An entire shopping street in the city centre of Thimphu.



A quaint hole-in-the-wall general store in Paro.

The must-visit

The highlight of the trip was the trek up Taksang Monastery, or Tiger's Nest. Perched on the cliffs 900 metres above the Paro valley floor, Taksang got its name when Guru Rinpoche, the lotus-born sage guru who was believed to have introduced Buddhism to Bhutan, flew from Tibet to Taksang on a tigress, and meditated there. The trek takes about four to six hours both ways. While it was possible to hire either horses or donkeys, we were encouraged to go the entire way on our own feet – which we did. While the view from atop is once-in-a-lifetime, what struck me more deeply was how faith moves – on our way down, we met a bent old lady inching her way up the mountain alone. The 80-year-old told our guide she goes to the Taksang every week to offer her prayers.

The commencement of a direct service between Singapore and Bhutan means that Singapore residents can now visit this mystical land in less than six hours.

The must-experience

Walking on the shopping streets of Thimphu, the busiest in the whole of Bhutan, was an experience on its own. In their hole-in-the-wall stores, business owners keep one eye on the evening crowd, and the other on small television sets positioned at a strategic corner. Men gather along the streets, exchanging their stories for the day.

A single-storey cinema stands alone amid the rows of shops, and at its entrance, a table serves as a counter for the sale of movie tickets, which are almost exactly like what Singapore had in the 1980s – ticket stubs on which the staff writes your seat number after crossing it out from a seating plan containing the layout of the cinema.

The must-eat

Locals delight in what they call *ema datsi*. Made of green chilli fried with local cheese, it thrilled the chilli fans in our group. Seemingly harmless at first, the spiciness builds up with a vengeance starting from the second mouthful, making chilli fans going for many more helpings subsequently. Chilli is a staple ingredient in Bhutanese food, which follows the Chinese style of cooking.

A happy place indeed

With drop-dead scenery all around, clean and fresh air to oxidise our lungs (and complexion), Bhutan is certainly a must-visit place for jaded travellers who have been there, done that. The country's tranquil environment and serene charm make it easy to understand why the Bhutanese are said to be the happiest people on earth. Certainly, my travelling companions and I were one happy bunch during our five-day visit.



Kids enjoying themselves at the Canopy playground as parents look on.

FUN IN A FOREST CANOPY

Changi Airport prides itself as a great family destination for visitors. To keep the airport experience refreshing and fun, new elements that appeal to visitors of all ages are constantly introduced. For children, there are numerous play areas in the airport to keep them entertained, such as the new Canopy playground.

Canopy is the first forest-themed indoor playground in Changi Airport. The playground comes with play structures that are designed to be safe and fun. Children aged 18 months to 12 years old can choose to bounce on the trampoline or slide down one of the tunnel slides while parents take a break and do some plane spotting.

Venue: Viewing Mall, Level 3, Terminal 1

Business Hours: 10.30am to 10.30pm daily

Fees: \$6 for every 30 minutes play time

Terms and conditions apply.

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