

Singapore – 2018

This year the annual conference I usually go to, ISMD (International Symposium on Multiparticle Dynamics), was in Singapore. After some grumbling about the high travel cost, but being assured that I was invited to give a talk, the head of our group agreed that I could go. After some searching for flights and places for a vacation, I found that flying from Amsterdam to Singapore and returning from Tokyo was slightly cheaper than returning from Singapore. I would have to pay for the flight from Singapore to Japan myself. But that was not so expensive on Scoot, a budget airline based in Singapore. I booked a non-stop flight (6 hours) to Kansai International Airport (KIX) near Osaka for SGD 413, which translates to €268, including a bag in the hold and a meal.

Then started intensive planning of sightseeing in Japan. I mainly used the *Michelin Green Guide* for Japan, supplemented by Lonely Planet.

Thursday, 30 August. I was quite early at at Schiphol in case of any unexpected problems. But there were none. Security and passport control went quickly, perhaps due to the lateness of the flight, which was scheduled to depart, and in fact did depart, at 21:00. So I had a long wait. Fortunately, the flight was not full, and the seat next to me was vacant. The 12-hour flight went quite well.

Friday, 31 August. We landed about 15 minutes late, nearly 16.00, having to circle Singapore for a time because of heavy traffic. There was a half-hour wait at passport control, not too bad, and another 15 minutes before I had my suitcase. The metro got me to the vicinity of my hotel in Chinatown in a bit more than an hour, and I found my hotel without too much of a problem with the help of Google Maps. It is a minuscule room, but for two nights I can stand it. And at SGD 100 a night, it is not too expensive. (A Singapore dollar is about $\frac{2}{3}$ of a euro.)

I went out to eat in a near-by street full of food stands and areas with tables where you could eat, as well as small restaurants. I had a simple meal from one of the stands for SGD 9 and a large beer from another stand for SGD 8.50.

Saturday, 1 September. Today's photos are at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/ySiRas3qr54F8tLK8>

I was up at 9 and went out to find breakfast. At a near-by shopping centre (Singapore, so English spelling) I found the Bread Shop. I got a croissant (SGD 1.60, a bit expensive) and a cup of coffee (American, which here means black, *i.e.*, without milk or sugar), and consumed them on a bench on the bank of the Singapore river. Being part of the reservoir system, there were signs along the river warning you not to throw trash into it. Along the banks are old buildings just a couple of stories high, dwarfed by all the skyscrapers behind them.

I then went to the Singapore National Gallery, a “visual arts institution which oversees the largest public collection of modern art in Singapore and Southeast Asia”, as their brochure puts it. It is only a few years old and the interior is very modern. But that is misleading, since it is housed in what was two building: the old Supreme Court and the old City Hall, both from British times, and deemed historic buildings which should be kept. But that too is misleading, since the two buildings, located next to each other, have a new, modern building built over them, *i.e.*, they are both

entirely within the new structure and are connected by bridges at all levels. Thus from the top level you can look down on the dome of the former Supreme Court. At the top level above the former City Hall there is a terrace with nice views, and a bar and a restaurant. Other restaurants are located on the ground floor. The museum is thus a mixture of museum and private enterprise. Much of the museum has corporate sponsors. The museum is free for Singapore citizens and residents; SGD 20 for others, but as a senior I got a SGD 5 discount.

Most rooms of the Supreme Court are now galleries containing Southeast Asia paintings and sculpture from around 1800 to the present, several unfortunately closed. However, the Chief Justice's chambers and office are about the history of Singapore and contain many historic documents. Interesting. The four courtrooms each contain one remaining feature, the dock. As in England, prisoners were kept in cells below, a few of which are maintained. When a prisoner's trial was called the prisoner was lead up the stairs and, via a trap door in the dock, arose into the court. One of the guards, of which there were many diligently keeping you from getting too close to the paintings, explained how they worked and pointed out that the stairs in one of the courtrooms were still there and that the trap door still worked. But even though it happened to be the working one, she didn't volunteer to demonstrate.

The former City Hall contains art from Singapore. I was impressed by the number of Chinese artists who had left China for Europe and/or the U.S. in the 20's or 30's and ended up in Singapore. There are also galleries for exhibitions, of which there were two. One was of Wu Guanzhong (1919–2010), billed as one of the most significant artists of 20th century China. He visited Paris, studying at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in 1947, returning in 1988 when he was invited to make a series of landscape paintings for a Paris-themed exposition in Tokyo. He travelled all around China getting inspiration from the villages, rivers, and mountains. There were paintings in ink, watercolour, and oil. There were a number of them that I really liked.

The other exhibition was of a Singapore artist, Lim Cheng Hoe, who painted almost exclusively in watercolour, and almost exclusively of scenes in Singapore from the 1930's to the 1970's. He was largely self-taught but caught the attention of the then-art inspector of schools Richard Walker at Raffles Institution and could study under him. He also learned by reading art publications and talking and painting with other artists. For most of his career he had a full-time job in the civil service. Painting was a spare-time activity. Nevertheless, he produced quite a lot, often coming back to the same scene thus providing a document of changing Singapore. All in all quite interesting.

I went up to the roof terrace to take some pictures of the surrounding area. It overlooked a remnant of British rule, a club with tennis courts and lawn bowling. Unfortunately it started to rain, which ended the bowling matches that were on. The area was busy with setting up fences and bleachers in preparation for the Grand Prix a week or two hence.

Since it was raining quite hard, I remained there, getting caught up on the news and my mail. Thank goodness for the free wifi. When the rain stopped I walked a bit along the river. But it soon got dark and I headed for my hotel. I ate again at the food street, but got my food from a different stall. Also good, and cheap.

Sunday, 2 September. There was a thunderstorm when I woke up. I waited until the worst was over and then headed to Bread Talk for a croissant and coffee. Since it was still raining, I ate it in a covered open area next to the shopping centre where there were chairs and some older men (but younger than me) sitting and talking (in Chinese). When the rain stopped I walked to the Asian Civilisations Museum, which was on the river near the museum of yesterday. It is (since 2003) in a couple of connecting older buildings, but I didn't catch what the history of the buildings is. It was only opened in 1997, but traces its history to the Raffles Museum founded in the mid 19th century, and is devoted to the artistic heritage of Asia, particularly those part with historical cultural links to Singapore. Consequently, there is a bit of Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist art; performing arts, *e.g.*, shadow puppets; Chinese ceramics and furniture. But the section I found most interesting was on maritime trade, in particular all the stuff from the Tang shipwreck. The wreck was discovered in 1998. It was an Arab merchant ship with goods from Canton which sank off the Sumatra coast about 1100 years ago. The cargo was mostly ceramics (more than 60000 pieces), very well preserved, but also included an outstanding gold octagonal cup from Yangzhou dated to around 850. The ship demonstrated that there was important sea trade between China and Arabia as well as the well-known Silk Road. Then, as now, Singapore was an important link in the trade route. The museum was well worth the SGD 4 (for seniors) entrance fee.

In the afternoon I picked up my suitcase from the hotel and took the metro and a bus to the National Technical University where the conference takes place. It took a bit more than an hour. So it is not so interesting to sneak out of the conference for a short time.

I ate with a couple of other physicists at a food court on campus. It had about eight different stalls, each with food of a different region. I had some dumplings (Shanghai) and pork with vegetables (Szechuan). No alcohol available though. Alcohol seems to be discouraged in Singapore, despite the presence of lots of bars with happy hours in the city.

We stay at rooms in the University Executive Centre, which are reasonably nice (and much roomier than my hotel in town). Breakfasts (buffet) are in an adjoining restaurant. The lectures are in a lecture hall in the same building as the rooms, and lunches (buffet) are served in a common area. Dinners also a couple of the evenings.

Monday, 3 September. Breakfast was pretty good with a choice of rice, curry, and such things, fruit, scrambled eggs, toast, orange juice, tea and coffee. Lunch was terrible: very bland. When asked by one of the organizers I know how I liked the conference, I said that it was fine except for the food. How could the food be so bland when all the S.E. Asian countries use a fair amount of spices? Whether that had anything to do with it I don't know, but the food improved. And I didn't hear anyone complaining about the spiciness.

Tuesday, 4 September. The conference continues.

Wednesday, 5 September. Today an e-mail from Scoot that my flight to KIX on Saturday is cancelled. It seems that a typhoon has inflicted damage to the airport, which is located on an artificial island. A tanker was blown into the causeway con-

necting the airport to the mainland, and it is expected to take several days to get things running again.

Fortunately, I could rebook to a flight to Tokyo. But unfortunately, it is a night flight leaving a bit after midnight with a stop at Taipei. I will then be able to get a *shinkansen* to Nagoya, and match up to my original trip plan the next day. So it only meant changing my Saturday night hotel from Wakayama to Nagoya.

In the evening was the conference dinner at the Chinese restaurant of the Raffles Marina Club on the Eastern side of the island with Malaysia visible across the channel. Luxurious building and grounds, and a lot of yachts in the harbor. The meal was pretty good except that they tried to limit us to 1 bottle of wine per table of 10 people!

Thursday, 6 September. This afternoon is the conference excursion, to Gardens by the Bay, a park including two giant climate controlled “green houses”. One replicated a dry climate and the other a cool mountain cloud forest climate, both (needless to say) a far cry from Singapore’s climate. They contained lots of various plants and lots of Alice in Wonderland statues to make it interesting for the kids (and I suspect some adults). It is hot, 32°C, and about 80% humidity, but nice in the green houses. Photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/veTowWamWTVDiRUHA>

In the evening was the Board of Elders (organizers of previous conferences in this series) dinner meeting, where we have a nice meal, discuss how well the conference went and drawing any lessons for future conferences, and decide who gets to organize the next two conferences. Next year will be Santa Fe, and the following year in Scotland.

Friday, 7 September. End of the conference about 4. Good-bye to everyone—“See you next year in Santa Fe.” A friend who was taking a taxi gave me a lift into town. Fortunately, the thunderstorm ended just after we got to his hotel.

I walked a few blocks to Chinatown, stopping at Bread Talk to buy two croissants for breakfast. Then to Liao Fan Hawker Chen, a bib gourmand in *Michelin*, located at the end of the food street where I had eaten before. It is a bit like a fast food joint: order and pay, and then pick it up at the counter when called. I had barbecued chicken and pork with rice and a beer. It was pretty good, and pretty cheap. Then I went to one of the drinks stalls in the food street for another beer (cheaper than at Hawker Chen).

While drinking my beer I noticed a couple who had ordered crab. They got plastic gloves to eat it with. I’ve never seen that before. Good idea!

I took the metro to the airport, checked in, walked past all the shops, exchanged my remaining Singapore dollars for yen. Check-in went reasonably smoothly, and security was fast—much less thorough than in Europe. Then a 3½ hour wait.