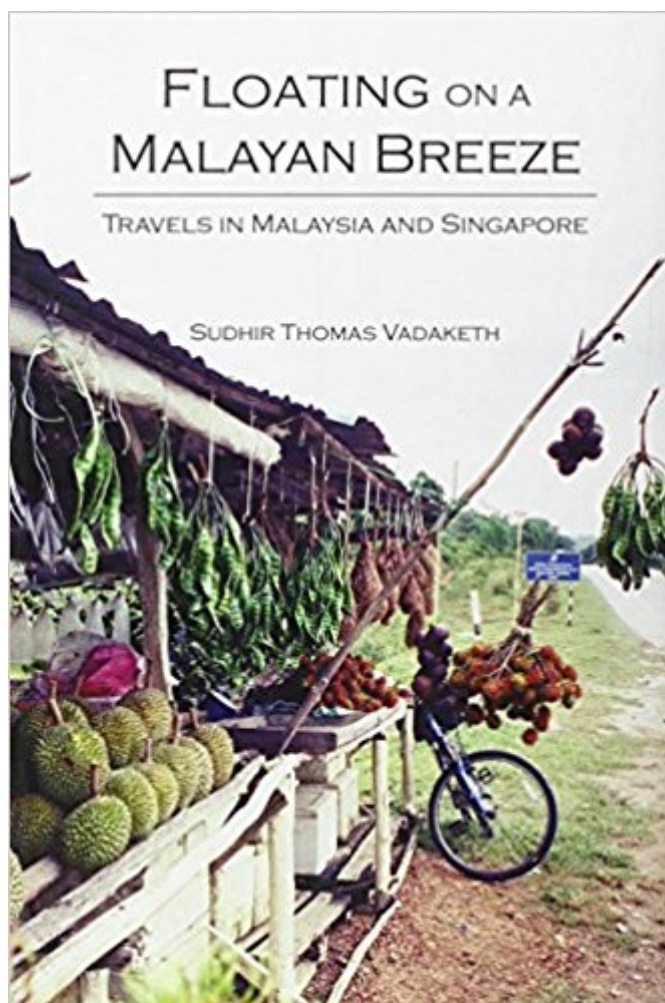


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# Floating On A Malayan Breeze: Travels In Malaysia And Singapore



## Synopsis

What happens after a country splits apart? Forty-seven years ago Singapore separated from Malaysia. Since then, the two countries have developed along their own paths. Malaysia has given preference to the majority Malay Muslims -- the bumiputera, or sons of the soil. Singapore, meanwhile, has tried to build a meritocracy -- ostensibly colour-blind, yet more encouraging perhaps to some Singaporeans than to others. How have these policies affected ordinary people? How do these two divergent nations now see each other and the world around them? Seeking answers to these questions, two Singaporeans set off to cycle around Peninsular Malaysia, armed with a tent, two pairs of clothes and a daily budget of three US dollars each. They spent 30 days on the road, cycling through every Malaysian state, and chatting with hundreds of Malaysians. Not satisfied, they then went on to interview many more people in Malaysia and Singapore. What they found are two countries that have developed economically but are still struggling to find their souls.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"One of the best, and certainly one of the most enjoyable, single-volume introductions to both countries' politics, economies and societies, and to their delicate sibling relationship-part envy, part rivalry, part affection." - Simon Long, "Banyan", Asia columnist, The Economist" For Sudhir, a young Singaporean, to describe himself as Malayan piqued my curiosity because I also consider myself one. This lively book is more than just an enjoyable travelogue: it is a series of thoughtful--sometimes provocative--observations on the history, culture, politics, religion and other aspects of our diverse lives in Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore. In an increasingly globalised

future, it seems more and more likely that our destinies will remain intertwined. It is the same Malayan breeze on which we float."- George Yeo, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Singapore

"Malayan Breeze is a young man's perspective on how 50 years of the nation state experience has transformed ancient ties, giving rise to two distinct groups of people living in an age of political transformation.....this is a book that spares no one and, refreshingly for a work of its kind, takes no prisoners no matter what the sensitive issue may be. Race, religion, the sacred and the profane are all dissected and discussed with little self-censorship.....a must-read; generational classic" - The Star (Malaysia)

File under 'great books you've never heard about.' Honest and frank throughout. (Marginal Revolution)

This is a story about Malaysia and Singapore--or Malaya, if you will. I use "Malaya" because I grew up thinking of the two countries as one. As a little boy, I remember travelling from Singapore to Malaysia, sitting in the backseat of my dad's car, swerving through Malaysia's old single-lane highways, evading smog-emitting trucks piled high with oil palm fruit. We would visit relatives, sometimes five or six homes in a day, popping our heads in to sip tea, nibble cakes and watch the oldies play Cupid--"Is there a nice boy for her in Singapore?" We would stop at roadside vendors, slurping up tropical fruits for a song, and yet still wonder, all the way home, whether we had just been fleeced. We would, in short, soak in Malaysia, her people, her nature, everything about this vast country. Our country, we sometimes thought. Well, if not exactly our countrymen, then our cousins, our brothers from another mother. Malaysia is a 20-minute ride away. Malaysians speak the same languages and eat the same food. We had a separate passport that allowed us entry to (peninsular) Malaysia and nowhere else, as if to signify that we were special, less different than the rest. It was as if God had created another Singapore, right next to us, and blessed it with more land and lower prices. Political divisions and developmental ideologies didn't bother me back then. I was young and eager and just wanted to go on a road trip, to leave Singapore's urban madness for some country adventure and kampung durians. As I grew older, my youthful naivet  slowly gave way to curiosity. Malaya, as I slowly realised, is actually made up of two quite different countries. How can that be? Malaysia and Singapore are, after all, physically divided by only a narrow strait. They were connected politically for centuries. So how come the countries are so different now? Why is Singapore so much more economically developed today than Malaysia? How is it that the ideologies, cultural narratives and ways of thinking vary so much across the narrow border? Is it all because of the invisible political line that divides us?

Good read. Gives you a good insight into how Singapore and Malaysia have changed socially and politically in such a short period of time. I read this book because I was about to holiday in Singapore and I'm very glad I read it before I went because it gave me such a good insight into the political history of Singapore and how it has become the great city it is today.

Not as much travelogue as I would have hoped but a well organized comparison and contrast between Malaysia and Singapore. The author has a slight liberal slant which provides an alternative view in addition to the comparisons.

I bought this book to learn a lot more about both countries. I wouldn't say this book fulfilled that aspiration that much - but it was a good read and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a good starter if you are interested in learning more about Singapore and the culture.

Don't be deceived by the framing of this book as a travelogue, it is far more sophisticated than that. I felt that I was reading an expos  on my Malaysian and Singaporean prejudices. If you're Singaporean, you will come out of reading this book with a new found respect for Malaysia, and I think it works the other way around too. As a "young" Singaporean who didn't experience Malaya before the separation and grew up hearing how different Malaysia was to us, I enjoyed reading how much in common I have with my neighbours, and have a new found hope for Malaysia's democratic process, which in some ways feels like they're moving ahead of Singapore. If you're not Malayan (Malaysian or Singaporean) this is a great book to understand the political, social and cultural narratives of our two countries. The author makes some pretty bold criticisms of both countries, and he manages not to offend either too badly. All in all, great writing and an easy book to get through!

Congratulations to Sudhir for his candid assessment of developments in Malaysia and Singapore prior to 2012 (the year when the book was published). This assessment is unusual in that it is done by somebody (Sudhir) on the ground. Among many topics discussed, politics and economics were discussed extensively. A good read for those who are interested in the developments of these two countries.

This is a remarkable book, and in many ways. It is also extremely well written. It is not, as the sub-title suggests, a travel dialogue, a book about a cycle trip around south-east Asia. It is not a travel book at all. Nor is it entirely about the relationship between two small countries, barely on

most people's radars. Singapore and peninsular Malaysia only contain 25m people after all, the same as some very big cities. And it is not purely about what happens when two parts of one country, as they once were, divide. It is about many of the challenges facing modern democratic and not-so-democratic governments around the world. Should they support the less well-off in their societies, or should "the market" choose the winners and losers? Should neighbours be viewed as potential partners or possible rivals? What does democracy actually mean today? How can multi-cultural and multi-religious communities be made to work? And, most critically, what is social well-being exactly, and how should it be measured? Remarkably, Sudhir tackles these complex issues from his vantage point in Singapore, where almost any sort of debate like this is deeply unwelcome. Mr Lee, the country's founding father, and his family have already told everyone the answers, you see. And yet Sudhir does tackle them, and with great power, aiming his lance with startling precision and little compromise. He dances carefully across the fully laden table and doesn't break a thing. The book is not without a few small niggles. It is sometimes hard to remember which chapter is which. There are rather too many distracting untranslated Malay words. Readers will find it useful to know a bit about these two countries, and their sometimes obscure world-view. But those are minor quibbles. *Floating on a Malayan Breeze* is a delight of a book, providing pleasure for the soul and sustenance for the mind in equal measure.

As a Malaysian, I agree with most of the points that the writer has made. Two years ago I was studying Malaysian history and we learnt briefly about Singapore's split from Malaysia. This got me thinking about Singapore and how it must've been like for them since independence and their rocket-speed rise to development. This book has been a good read and I can say that it has helped me understand better the view of my Singaporean neighbors. I find it a pity that Malaya (although it was way before my time) did not work out; it would've been an interesting place to live in (maybe somewhat like Hong Kong and China?). Every time I visit Singapore, I feel proud of her. To be living next to a country that is 'smart, efficient and clean', I admire these virtues and I admire Singapore. She is one that Malaysia should emulate and strive to be like but of course, in her very own... Malaysian way. :)

This is a travelogue cum political/social discourse. An interesting perspective of the striking similarities and stark differences between Malaysia and Singapore, as well as an understanding of how ideologies and policies of the past have helped shaped the present. It's well-written and told in an intriguing manner, with a healthy dose of humour - expect an honest take on what are often

taboo subjects. As a Singaporean, I had a somewhat myopic view of Malaysia, and it was fascinating to see just how much I had glazed over.

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