

Singapore's prettiest heritage sites? The Merlion and Botanic Gardens, survey finds

The Merlion, Changi Airport's control tower, and the Botanic Gardens – a UNESCO World Heritage site – were ranked by survey respondents as the three most physically appealing heritage sites in the country.

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Want to visit an Insta-worthy attraction in Singapore that's also chock-full of historic meaning?

Then head to the Merlion, the Changi Airport control tower, or the Botanic Gardens.

These were ranked as the country's top three most appealing heritage sites in a 2018 survey of 1,515 Singaporeans aged 18 to 70.

The survey, which polled respondents on 53 heritage sites in Singapore, was conducted by three researchers from NUS' Institute of Policy Studies, and its findings published in a [working paper](#) in August this year.

The survey asked respondents to rank the sites based on factors such as physical appeal, their memories of the site, how much they knew of its history, and its historic importance to Singapore.

Only sites that were 30 years or older were included in the survey – such as Sultan Mosque, People's Park Complex, and the Singapore Art Museum.

The researchers then separated respondents' answers by age group to study how the responses of various generations differed.

In general, the original Merlion statue and Changi Airport's control tower were rated by respondents as Singapore's most important heritage sites.

The survey noted that despite having "little functional utility to the average Singaporean", the Merlion in particular enjoyed a surge in popularity as a heritage site over the past 20 years, thanks to it being [prominently featured](#) in tourism campaigns.

It added that the Toa Payoh Lorong 6 Dragon Playground saw a similar phenomenon, and had become a symbol of childhood nostalgia after being featured on "mass-produced heritage memorabilia".

In third place for the most-important site was the Science Centre (for respondents aged 18 to 48), and the Botanic Gardens (for respondents aged 49 and above).

The Merlion, Changi Airport control tower and Botanic Gardens also came in tops among respondents as the three most physically appealing heritage sites.

Respondents aged 18 to 28 also selected Fullerton Hotel and Chijmes for their top five prettiest heritage sites.

Meanwhile, those aged 29 to 48 chose the Raffles and Fullerton hotels, while those aged 49 and above chose Haw Par Villa and Fullerton Hotel.

The researchers said older respondents tended to favour colonial buildings due to their memories of Singapore being a British colony.

Conversely, the least appealing sites for respondents in general were Changi Prison, Bukit Brown Cemetery, and the Van Kleeef Aquarium. These were also the sites that respondents generally had the fewest memories of.

Alongside the the Bukit Timah Railway Station, the cemetery and aquarium were also voted the least important of all the sites on the list, and the three sites that respondents had the least knowledge about.

In general, the researchers found that these and other less popular sites tended to be closed or not easily accessible to the public.

In contrast, widely accessible sites generally had more favourable ratings. Those aged 18 to 28 knew most about the Science Centre, while those aged 29 to 48 knew most about the Merlion, and those aged 49 and above knew most about Haw Par Villa.

The Science Centre was also ranked by those aged 18 to 28 as Singapore's most memorable site – which the researchers said could be tied to the number of school field trips organised there.

Meanwhile, those aged 29 to 48 had the most memories of the Kallang National Stadium, and those aged 49 and above remembered Haw Par Villa the most.

The researchers said that their survey was the first large-scale study of public perception towards old buildings and landmarks in Singapore.

Based on the survey findings, they suggested that in the future, authorities could take public opinion into account when making decisions about which sites to preserve, instead of relying solely on expert opinions.