

## **Changi Airport control tower, Merlion ranked most important heritage sites: IPS survey**

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The Changi Airport control tower and Merlion were ranked first and second among 53 local heritage sites in terms of importance by Singaporeans across all ages.

Findings from an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey released on Wednesday (14 August) also showed that the mythical creature rated high in three other categories: respondents' memories and knowledge of the site as well as its physical appeal.

While the Merlion "has little functional utility to the average Singaporean" and is unlikely to be visited regularly by most people, the respondents evaluated it as "one of the most memorable, well-known, aesthetically appealing and important sites", said the IPS.

"This is probably because of its prominence in branding Singapore as a tourist destination, and in the conscious promotion of a unique Singaporean identity," it added.

"It also seems to mark a shift in perceptions in the last 20 years - previous studies have found that only a minority of Singaporeans considered the Merlion an embodiment of Singapore heritage or liked it as a monument."

[Other sites](#) that were ranked highly across the board were the Botanic Gardens, Singapore Science Centre, and Haw Par Villa.

The two-year inaugural study, supported by a grant from the National Heritage Board, polled 1,515 Singaporeans aged 18 to 70 in July to August last year.

The respondents were asked to score the sites - 50 that existed as of April last year and three that were demolished - on the scale of 1 to 7 across the four categories.

IPS senior research fellow Natalie Pang said that the study's objective was to address a gap where public opinions and everyday experiences of heritage sites is lacking in Singapore.

"Discourse and discussions about heritage have very much been addressed by policymakers, academics and activists as well, but the focus has been on expert opinions," she added.

Pang stressed that the findings showed that there was no singular framework on public perceptions of such sites.

"Going into the research, we were hoping to find a nice, universal framework to see how people appraise heritage. We found that there is no such thing...every site has a very different set of dynamics and stakeholders," she added.

For instance, IPS research analyst Wong Kwang Lin noted that those aged 49 and above who found colonial buildings - such as Chijmes or Raffles Hotel - more important and symbols of national development - such as the Benjamin Sheares Bridge, MacRitchie Reservoir and Padang - more physically appealing were likely to report a stronger "sense of national identity".

But such links to national identity are not as strong and prevalent in those aged 18 to 28.

The younger respondents were more likely to be influenced by civil activism surrounding landmarks affected by demolition and development, such as the Bukit Brown Cemetery, Toa Payoh dragon playground and Pearl Bank Apartments.

Some sites also stood out for respondents aged 48 and below because they were featured in school trips and curriculum.

Authorities can consider educating different groups to appreciate heritage in more varied ways, not just based on historical events or site designs, said Wong.

Researchers can study landmarks not listed in the study as well as on how certain demographics, such as younger respondents, think about heritage, she added.