

# THE SUPERTREES OF SINGAPORE

*Mohan Banerji*

**E**arlier this year, my wife and I stopped over in Singapore on our way back from Australia. This was not our first visit to Singapore, but it was undoubtedly the most exciting. We stayed with dear friends, who were not just the perfect hosts but the best guides to everything Singapore has to offer. This is important because the island is constantly evolving, re-inventing and reimagining itself. It's where foodies, explorers, collectors, action seekers, culture shapers and socialisers meet, and new experiences are created every day.

On previous visits, we had enjoyed visiting the National Orchid Gardens, the Botanical Gardens, and the fascinating Chinese and Japanese Garden. On this occasion, however, our friends had a special treat lined up for us: a visit to Marina Bay Gardens and Supertree Grove.

An integral part of Singapore's 'City in a Garden' vision, Gardens by the Bay has won numerous awards, including World Building of



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**Spectacular vertical planting**

the Year in 2012. The park spans a total of 101 hectares of prime land at the heart of Singapore's new downtown - Marina Bay - and consists of three waterfront gardens: Bay South, Bay East and Bay Central. The largest is Bay South Garden, at 54 hectares, which opened in 2012 and is home to the award-winning cooled conservatories and iconic Supertrees.

Measuring between 25 and 50 metres in height, Gardens by the Bay's Supertrees (a man-made mechanical forest) are constructed with large canopies that provide shade in the day and come alive with an exhilarating display of light and sound at night. Of the 18 Supertrees, 12 of them are found at Supertree Grove, with the tallest one measuring 16 storeys in height.

Shaped like inverted umbrellas, the 18 Supertrees are constructed from reinforced concrete wrapped in a steel frame, to which planting panels are attached. The panels support more than 162,900 individual plants, comprising over 200 species and varieties of bromeliads, orchids, ferns and tropical flowering climbers. They are truly the grand-daddies of all vertical gardens!

The Supertrees are clad in plants arranged in a variety of colour schemes, from warm reds, browns, orange and yellows to cooler hues of silver and pink. The plant choice was based on weight, suitability for vertical planting, ease of maintenance, climate tolerance, and their rarity value and visual interest. Species include epiphytes such as pink-flowered bromeliad *Tillandsia stricta* from Brazil, *Tillandsia fasciculata* (known as the giant airplant) from Panama, mauve orchid *Cattleya maxima* from Ecuador, and pendulous cactus *Pseudorhipsalis* from Costa Rica.

The gardens also boast two conservatories in close proximity; the Cloud Forest and Flower Dome, climate-controlled biomes whose layouts were inspired by the shape of an orchid flower. They are the equivalent size of four football fields and house over 220,000 plants from almost every continent.

Eleven of the Supertrees' canopies are embedded with different environmentally sustainable functions, such as photo-voltaic cells to harvest solar energy for lighting, and the collection of rainwater for use in irrigation and fountain displays. The Supertrees also serve as air intake and exhaust mechanisms, contributing to the conservatories' cooling systems.



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**The Cloud Forest and Flower Dome climate-controlled conservatories**



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**The aerial walkway allows a panoramic view of Supertree Grove**

And that's not all; you can get an up-close look at the technical marvels of the gardens' futuristic attraction by strolling along the OCBC Skyway, 22 metres off the ground, which connects two of these towering Super-trees. If you're afraid of heights it can be a little daunting, but it is perfectly safe. This 128-metre long aerial walkway is an experience not to be missed. It would normally take five minutes to walk the length of it but most people take closer to thirty minutes, making the most of the photo opportunities.



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**The evening's thrilling light display**

Admission to Supertree Grove is free, although there is an entry fee for the Cloud Forest and Flower Dome conservatories, and a small charge for the OCBC sky walk. Following our friends' advice, we visited in the evening in time to catch the mesmerising Garden Rhapsody sound and light show.

When the show neared its end, we made our way up to the *Indochine* restaurant, situated at the top of the tallest Supertree (50 metres high). We didn't want to dine, just chill out at the alfresco rooftop bar, awed by the splendid views of nature's best on one side and Singapore's iconic skyline on the other.