



# The Quintessential Guide to Working in Singapore

*An Innovative City for Professional  
Growth and Connectivity in Asia*



2021 Edition



# *Hi there!*

Working in Singapore will feel strangely familiar and foreign all at once. Like most cosmopolitan cities, it's fast-paced, culturally diverse and filled with vibrant businesses and opportunities.

Many qualities are also entirely unique. As a city-state whose economy transformed from labour-intensive to knowledge-based, to innovation-driven industries in 50 years, Singapore has had to – and continues to – reinvent herself to stay ahead of the game. Our adaptive and resilient spirit is how we consistently retain our spot as one of the most competitive economies in the world.

Part of how this magic is created is by keeping our doors open to global talents like you who strengthen our workforce with the sharing of skills and knowledge. This is why we've put together this guide for you to imagine what it's like to work in Singapore. It covers our key industries, in-demand jobs in Singapore, wider Asia Pacific (APAC) trends and how you may join us, should you choose to do so.

P.S. If there's anything you're looking for that isn't in the guide, we are always [one click away](#).

Love,  
***Singapore Global Network***





# Begin the Next Chapter of Your Career in the Gateway to Asia

Located in the middle of the APAC region, our regional connectivity is ideal for furthering your career ambitions. Coming to Singapore, you'll be joining 400,000 expats (Ministry of Manpower, June 2020) in exploring exciting roles and opportunities across booming industries in the region – including digital services, fintech and pharmaceutical industries.

● *The Interlace, Queenstown*

“

The combination of a fast-paced business environment paired with a lot of greenery and leisure options is excellent. Singapore is very diverse – there are people from so many different countries and cultures, mixing all together. Everyone gets along, there is a lot of mutual respect, and people enjoy living here.”

*Sebastian Muller  
German Citizen living in Singapore  
CEO & Founder of MING Labs*





# A Regional Launchpad for Businesses

Singapore is an important node in the global economy. Known for our openness to business, innovation, trade and talent, we strongly believe in keeping our doors open to connections and opportunities from all around the world. It is this belief that forms the bedrock of our diversified and resilient economy and job landscape.

On top of being a core member of the ASEAN region, we are also a recognised trade partner with 25 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) globally. Singapore was recently ranked as one of the world's top countries for political and operational stability (Global Innovation Index, 2019) and for doing business (World Bank's Doing Business Index for 2019) — this makes us a prime location if you're looking to kickstart your own company.



# Diverse Career Opportunities Await You

Opportunities to explore careers that will allow you to make an impact abound in Singapore. You will find professional opportunities with regional exposure across sectors and global businesses. This includes leading technology companies such as Google and Apple, which have based their regional headquarters here.

As a city-state with limited natural resources, sustainability has always been at the forefront of what we do, and our commitment towards sustainable development and quality living continues to be a focus as we develop our economy. This commitment to sustainability comes through in our rapidly-growing environment and sustainability sector.



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I was looking for an opportunity to transition away from my TV news career into a more entrepreneurial role in the digital economy... Looking to Singapore I saw a mushrooming tech and startup scene, backed both by government and the business community, somewhere I could engage with inspiring people and ideas, somewhere I could take a chance.”

*Teymoor Nabili*  
*Filipino Citizen living in Singapore*  
*CEO & Publisher, Tech For Impact Asia*



# An Abundance of Future-ready Growth Industries

Singapore is often regarded as one of the top financial hubs in the world, and our strengths in technology, professional services, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and advanced manufacturing industries diversify and future-proof our economy.



Central Business District



*The tech start-up scene is very vibrant here in Singapore. I believe that it is the best country to start a tech start-up in Southeast Asia considering the ease of doing business, the easy-to-understand government policies and the availability of start-up talent.*

**Rudi Ramin**  
*Filipino Citizen living in Singapore*  
*CEO at Infinit Care and IO Labs*

P.S. [Read](#) all about Rudi's experience as an expatriate and start-up founder in Singapore!



# A Robust Tech Ecosystem with Strong Government Support



The support of government initiatives has created an ideal environment for tech firms to thrive.

Across industries, incumbent firms are accelerating their digitisation efforts, while new tech start-ups, as well as established tech giants, inject fresh innovations into the ecosystem. All this translates to thousands of career opportunities in Singapore's growing tech sector.

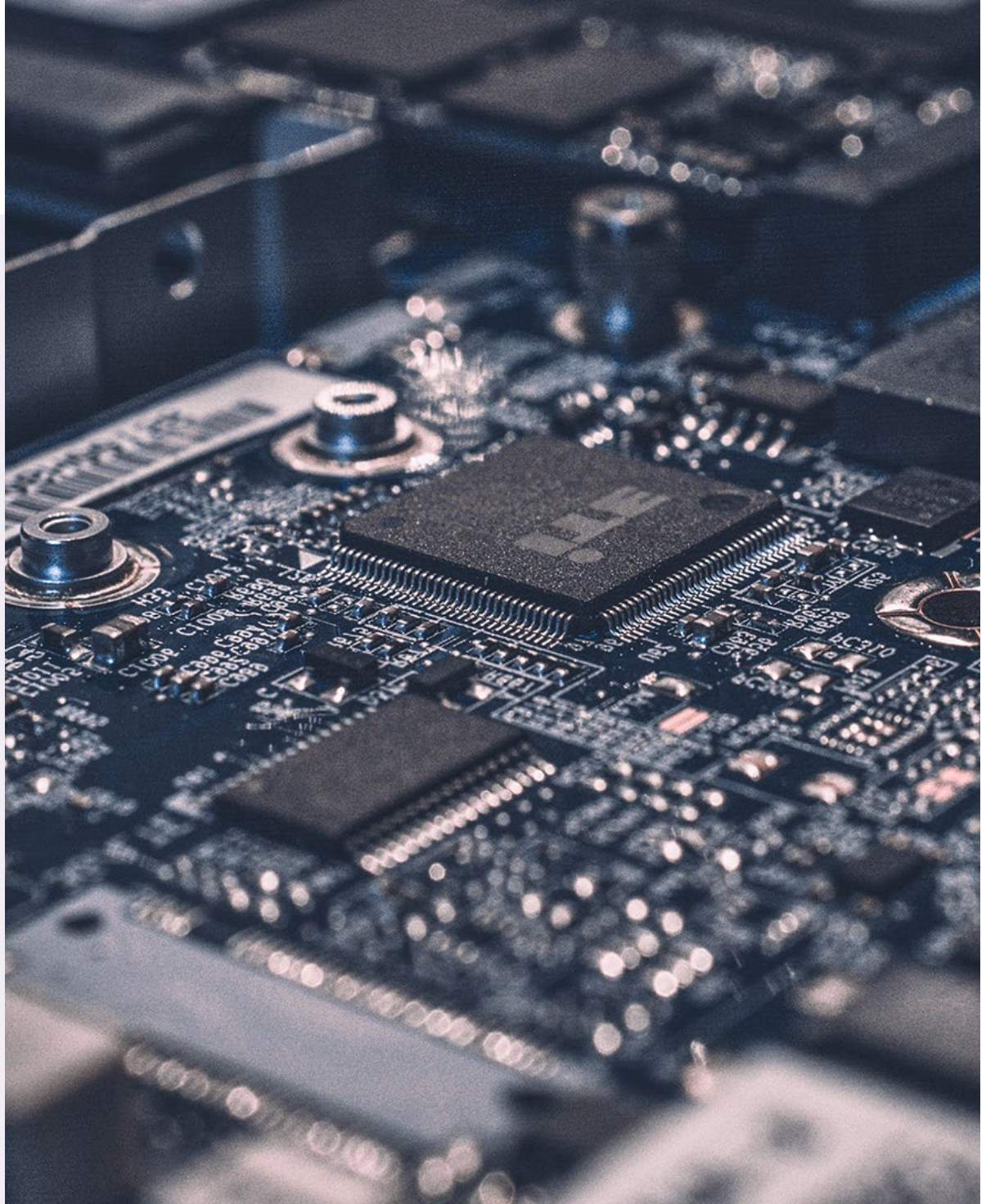
*As of September 2020, the Government has invested over S\$52 million in more than 80 start-ups and have rolled out programmes including upskilling young professionals to fill high-demand tech roles and apprenticeship at deep tech companies where participants can work in the industry.*

*Read more on how our friend of SGN, [Annabelle Kwok](#), is spearheading AI and tech in Singapore.*



Today, 80 of the top 100 technology firms in the world have a presence in Singapore. Technology giants value Singapore's rigorous intellectual property (IP) protection, advanced digital infrastructure, innovative culture and highly skilled talent pool. These factors make us an ideal incubator for technology companies looking to establish or expand their foothold in Asia.

A career in tech in Singapore affords regional exposure to booming industries in the ASEAN region. With the internet economy in Southeast Asia expected to reach US\$300 billion by 2025, you can stand to latch on growing opportunities in the region's tech sector across cybersecurity, software development and engineering, data science and analysis, and fintech.







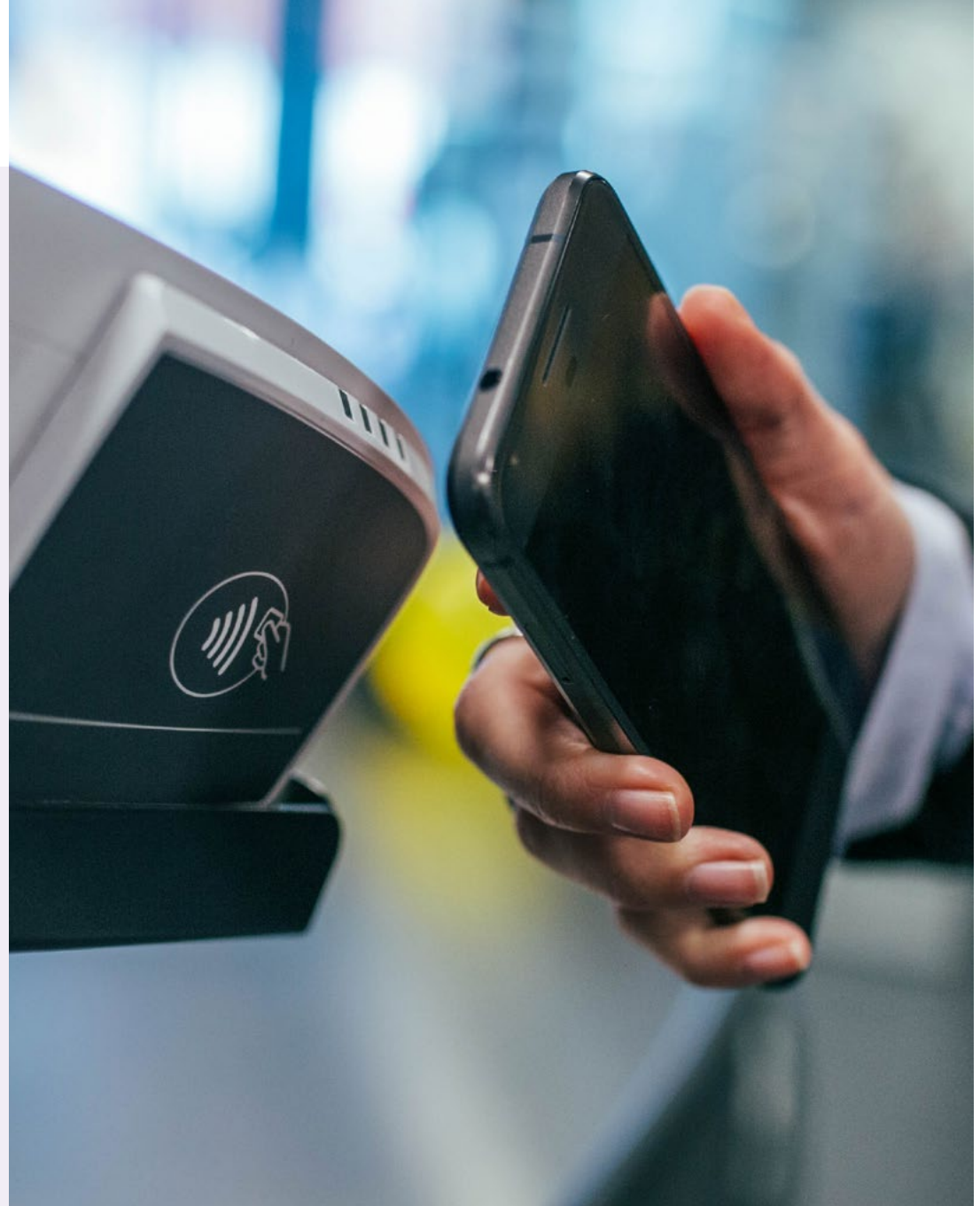
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The Singapore government has numerous initiatives designed to encourage live testing, talent development, and cross-industry research, giving us access to a live testbed and capabilities to bring the ideation, co-innovation and commercialisation phases into a single location, which allows us to innovate faster.”

*David MH Tan  
Managing Director  
Hewlett Packard Enterprise*

# An Emerging Fintech Hub in APAC

Large international players, including Visa, MasterCard and PayPal, have long leveraged on our ideal business environment, talent pool and location to establish their regional headquarters here. In fact, 40% of all fintech companies in Southeast Asia are estimated to be based in Singapore, which roughly translates to 750 entities from global leaders to innovative start-ups where you may kickstart your fintech career with.





*Data is the new digital currency.  
What makes Singapore unique  
is being close to China and India.*

Those markets have very different payment and commerce requirements than the Western world. These large economies are hungry for innovation and disrupting the payments and commerce as we know it.

*Imran Bidiwala Hajimusa  
General Manager & Head of Payments  
Platform Silicon Valley Bank*



# Ever-growing Demand for Professional Services

We lean on a deep pool of talent to further our economic growth, making our professional services sector one of the fastest-growing, diverse industries. Key positions can be found in sectors across finance, legal, strategy, business development, sales and product management, and design.

As more regional and global enterprises build their bases in Singapore, our professional services sector is poised to grow. Businesses will continue to accelerate capability building, partnerships, and innovation, increasing demand for skilled talents to fill the shoes of pivotal roles in infrastructure development and professional solutions.



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**The Professional Services sector is a growing industry with tremendous potential for job creation. Singapore has the right conditions for companies to innovate world-class business solutions and forge cross-disciplinary partnerships.”**

***Indranee Rajah  
Minister, Prime Minister’s Office,  
Second Minister for Finance &  
Second Minister for National Development***

*If you’re considering building a career in fintech, product sales, relationship management and regional experience are some of the most sought after in-demand skills that are increasingly valued by prospective employers.*





#### Patent Activity

Annual patent filings, patent grants and patent-in-force



#### R&D Intensity

Research and development expenditure



#### Productivity

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Income (GNI) per employed personage



#### Tertiary Efficiency

Total enrolment in tertiary education



#### Researcher Concentration

Professionals, including postgraduate PhD students, engaged in R&D per population



#### Manufacturing Value-added

Manufacturing value-added, as % GDP and per capita



#### High-tech Density

Number of domestically domiciled high-tech public companies - such as aerospace and defense, biotechnology, hardware, software, semiconductors. Internet software and services, and renewable energy companies

## Singapore Ranks Among the World's Top 3 Most Innovative Cities

The annual Bloomberg Innovation Index analyses dozens of criteria using seven metrics on the ability of economies to innovate.

# Robust Pharmaceuticals & Biotechnology Industries

Singapore's pharmaceuticals and biotechnology industries have also experienced robust growth in recent years. Job opportunities in the sector are growing with industry leaders Pfizer, Novartis, Sanofi, AbbVie and Amgen basing their global manufacturing hubs in Singapore.

*Singapore's home-grown medical robotics start-up, Roceso Technologies, is a world pioneer in soft robotic exoskeleton technologies. Its product, the EsoGLOVE, is one of the world's lightest hand rehabilitation and exoskeleton devices for people with motor issues in the hand and arm. [Watch](#) the rehabilitative tool in action as demonstrated by CEO Jane Wang.*







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I believe Singapore is a great place to test ideas and new innovative solutions. It is also a controlled environment in the sense that getting regulatory approval in Singapore will make it easier to work with the rest of the region. It is a great place to build a business, and then look to see how you will scale out.”

*Harjit Gill*  
*CEO*  
*APACMed*

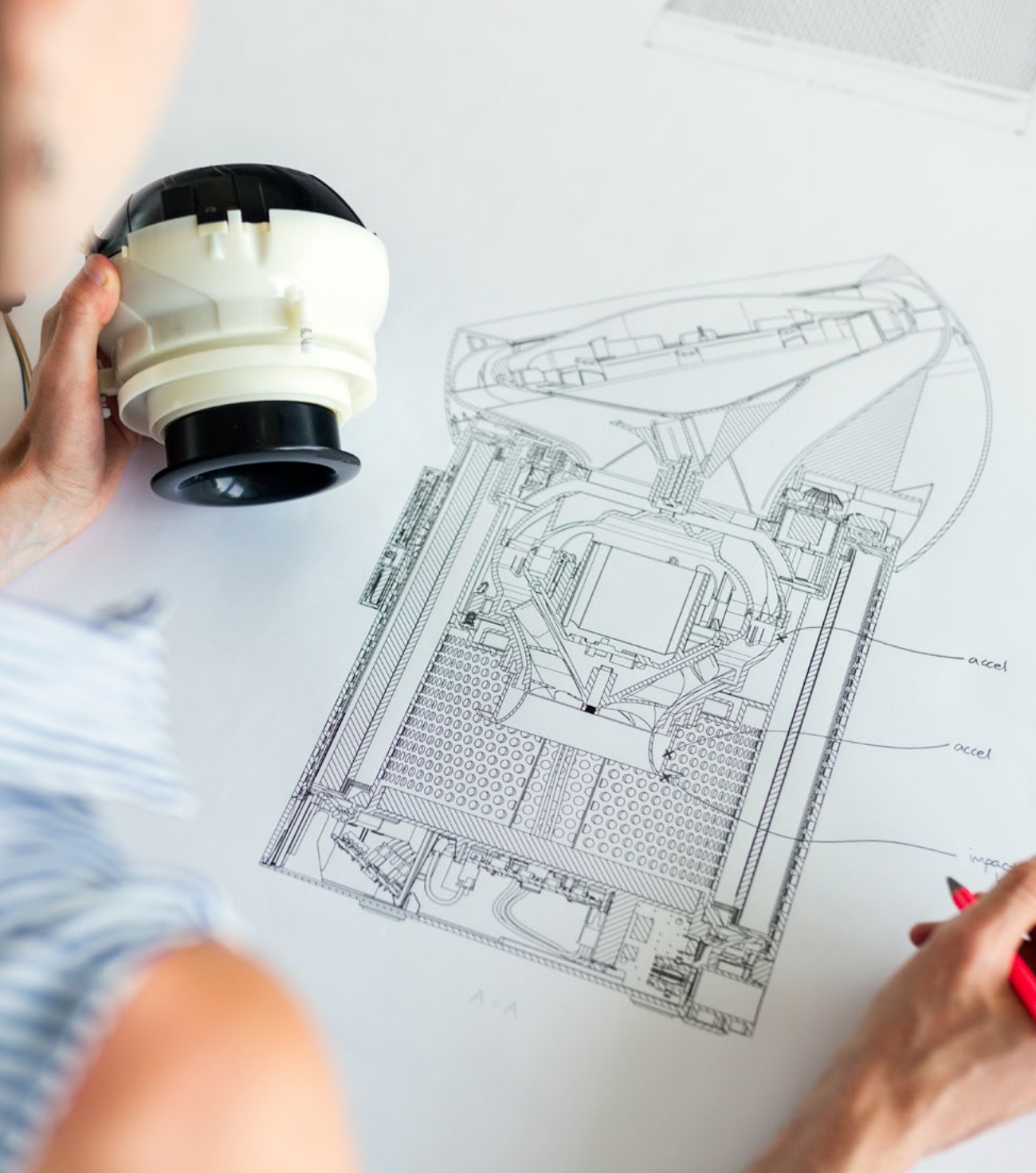
Underscoring the government's commitment to growing the sector, a further S\$4 billion of public sector research funding has been committed to developing Singapore's Health and Biomedical Sciences Domain, which will create greater career opportunities for those in the sector. Plus, some of the in-demand skills that employers look out for in the Manufacturing or Industry 4.0 sector include specialised skills in data analytics, machine learning and AI.

This will see many opportunities in knowledge-driven roles such as research and development and innovation, on top of key positions in high-tech manufacturing, engineering, commercial and supply chain.

*Singapore-based start-up NDR Medical Technology broke new grounds in the medtech world by developing the world's first robotic system with AI and image processing for automated anatomical targeting, making high-risk invasive surgeries such as lung biopsies safer and faster.*







# An Overview of Singapore's Most In-demand Jobs

Technology has changed how we live, and our city is always transformation to adopt new technology to improve our quality of living. Since the Smart Nation Initiative was launched in 2017, Singapore has been studying how to integrate technology into public and private spaces to improve residents' lives.

The Smart Nation Sensor Platform (SNSP), which uses data and insights to form solutions to improve lives and increase connectivity in the country, is one of many projects led by the Government Technology Agency (GovTech).

*Under the Smart Nation initiative, the government has further committed to transforming the economy, society and government structures to build an inclusive, digital-first economy. In 2020, it was announced that an estimated S\$3.5 billion will be spent to develop Singapore's information and communications technology (ICT) industry.*

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**For Singapore, our approach to building a Smart Nation has always been extremely citizen and business-focused to help make Singapore a better place to work, live, and play.”**

***Ng Chee Khern***  
***Permanent Secretary***  
***Smart Nation & Digital Government***

According to LinkedIn's 2020 Emerging Jobs Report Singapore, the tech sector here is expanding at unprecedented rates, creating huge demand for tech professionals seeking impactful and rewarding work. As of end November 2020, more than 12,000 infocomm (ICT) jobs are available under the SGUnited initiative to help expand our digital economy, and this figure is set to increase to 60,000 within the sector over the next three years.

Opportunities in the tech sector span across functions in areas including software development, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, cybersecurity, e-commerce, product management, data science and engineering, and digital communications.







# A Commitment to Lifelong Learning

There is an Asian saying that “one is never too old to learn” – and this is deeply rooted in our approach to lifelong learning. Today, industries are transforming at an accelerated rate, with increasing skills and job demands. To encourage professional development, [SkillsFuture](#) and [Professional Conversion Programmes \(PCP\)](#) were established by the government to allow professionals to enrol into courses to upskill and reskill.

At present, there are over 800 professional courses available spanning across subjects in emerging and critical areas such as data analytics and cybersecurity. Courses are mostly led by Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) in Singapore – including [universities](#) and polytechnics – and dedicated [Continuing Education and Training campuses](#) that offer specialised courses across industries.

*There are plenty of valuable and interesting courses catered for any career route under the SkillsFuture initiative such as:*

- **Design courses**
- **Language courses**
- **Self- and Pet-grooming courses**
- **Culinary courses**

*Design thinking, UX design, UI design and visual design will give you a competitive edge when it comes to growing a career in the professional services industry, especially in the fields of marketing, customer experience and design.*

Psyching yourself up for a new job in Singapore, but not sure what to expect? Are cars the preferred mode for getting around and commuting to work? How is working here really like?

# An Insider's Guide to Working in Singapore







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**Culture eats strategy  
for breakfast.”**

***Peter Drucker  
Management Consultant and Educator***

As management consultant guru Peter Drucker once famously said, culture is everything. Regardless of how effective our strategy may be in growing our economy, it is a healthy working culture that determines success.

So what is the work culture in Singapore really like? Get all the answers from our insider tips on all you need to know about working here in Singapore.

# A Multicultural & Diverse Workplace Environment

Singapore is a secular state that respects the religions and traditions of different cultures.

We are home to many cultures, ethnicities and religions, and our strength lies in harnessing our diversity to build an inclusive and vibrant society. Our multi-cultural influences come through in our language, cuisine, attitudes towards harmonious living, and even in national policies.





# An East-meets-West Workplace Culture

In a city where the 'East meets the West', Singapore has a unique workplace culture where elements from both regions meld together.

Working cultures vary from company to company, but as a whole, local firms tend to have a more hierarchical relationship, while MNCs and younger start-ups tend to adopt a more flat-team, non-hierarchical structure.

A majority of Singaporeans also practise group-centredness and lean towards valuing the group's interest over their individual expectations. While this means that there is a big focus on teamwork and working together towards a common goal, individual performance is also prized and rewarded.

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**The Southeast Asia ecosystem is at an inflection point with many interesting problems as well as deep technical talent to solve these problems. As the ecosystem continues to strengthen, we are likely to see some models take off and more companies coming out of Southeast Asia that have truly global impact.”**

*Silvanus Lee  
Returned Singaporean from the U.S.  
Director, Apac Engineering Centre at Twitter*



Photo Credit: Twitter Singapore



# ‘Saving Face’ – An Unspoken Etiquette

In Asian culture, ‘saving face’ refers to avoiding humiliation or embarrassment to maintain and preserve an individual’s dignity or reputation. This is important in Singapore, where there exists an unspoken expectation for one to be mindful over how an individual’s actions may influence another’s reputation and vice versa.

Publicly questioning or correcting the mistakes of your employer or engaging in confrontation may cause the other party to feel humiliated. The best approach is to discuss matters of disagreement and confrontation discreetly, delicately, indirectly and in a more private and informal setting.

However, as our workforce becomes more diverse, we see a gradual shift in the culture of local companies who recognise the need to stay open to international mindsets and ways of working to remain competitive among other firms.



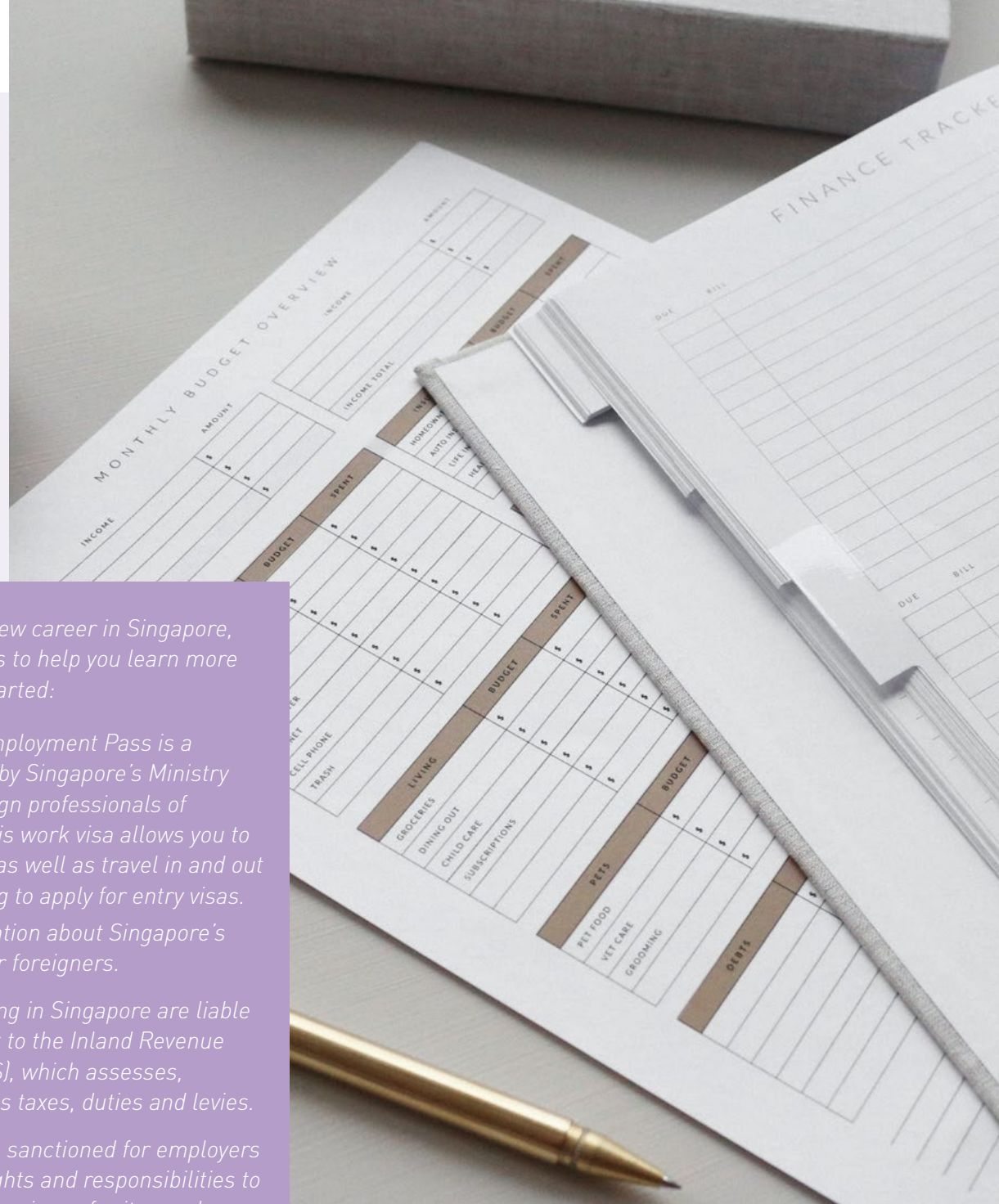
# Low Income Tax & A Competitive Salary Package

Taxes are one of those things that invites universal dread – so you'll be happy to hear that Singapore has one of the lowest income tax in the world. We follow a progressive tax rate starting at 0% and ends at 22% for those with an income of S\$320,000 and above.

According to ECA International, Singapore also had the 19th highest pay packages globally and ranked 9th highest in Asia for mid-level expats last year, due to minimal increases in personal tax and extremely low tax-related costs as compared to most other locations.

*Before you get embark on a new career in Singapore, here are some important links to help you learn more about what you need to get started:*

- **Employment Passes:** An Employment Pass is a Singapore work visa issued by Singapore's Ministry of Manpower (MOM) to foreign professionals of Singaporean companies. This work visa allows you to live and work in Singapore, as well as travel in and out of the country without having to apply for entry visas. [Click here](#) for more information about Singapore's work passes and permits for foreigners.
- **Taxes:** All expatriates working in Singapore are liable to pay Singapore income tax to the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS), which assesses, collects and enforces various taxes, duties and levies.
- **Labour Laws:** The MOM has sanctioned for employers to adhere to employment rights and responsibilities to ensure a fruitful working experience for its employees.





# Work-life Balance as The New Normal

*The weekends are a perfect time to get out and explore the vibrant city! Singapore may be a small country but we are jam-packed with activities whether you're a nature lover, thrill seeker, party goer, sports enthusiast, history buff or an art enthusiast.*

*Check out our 'The Insiders' Guide to Exploring Singapore: Everything From Sights to Bites, For Any Budget' guide on [our website](#) and get started on the adventure!*

Contrary to popular belief, many employers in Singapore take work-life programmes and initiatives seriously. Like most other countries, Singapore has a 5-day work week, and normal working hours typically range from 40 to 45 hours a week. Flexible working arrangements, telecommuting, improved leave benefits and paid company time-offs are also some of the ways employers aim to reduce stress and boost work-life balance among their employees.

You may also be surprised to know that more companies in Singapore are opting for creative offices with functional facilities and plenty of space to work, collaborate and socialise.

You'll find fully equipped gyms and yoga studios instead of the usual desk setup in local co-working spaces such as Core Collective and many others. Creatively designed shared spaces and unique themed meeting rooms can also be found at Huone Singapore – host your annual general meetings in a majestic rainforest or huddle up and have a cosy meeting in an igloo!



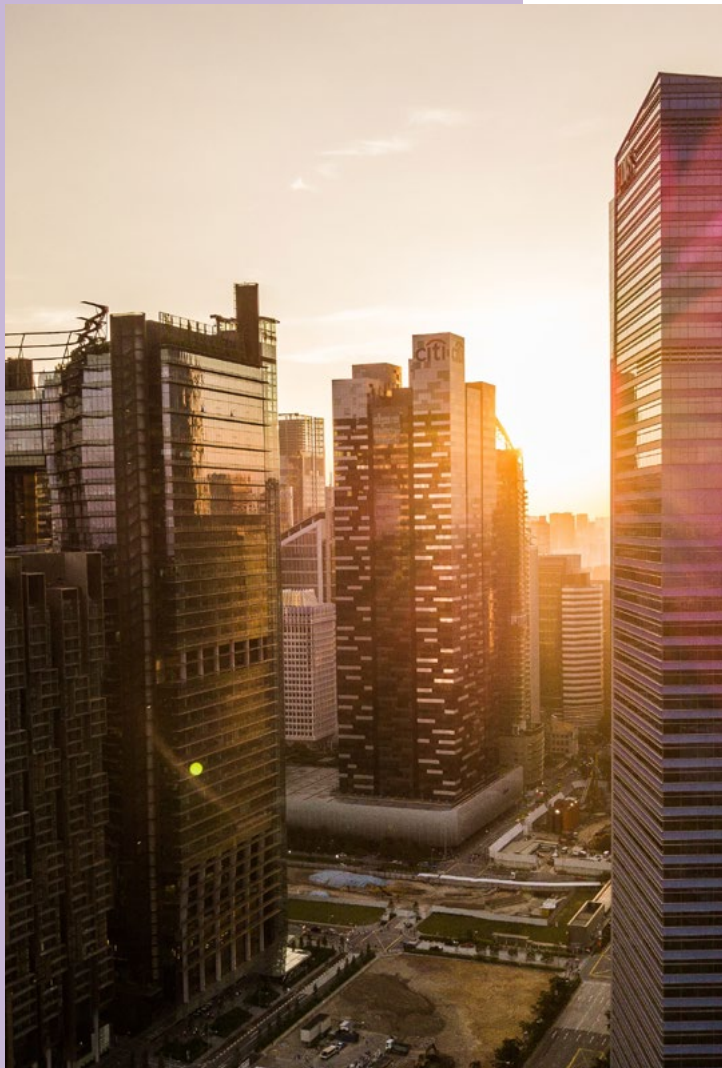
# Getting Around Seamlessly

Owning a car is not a necessity – public transportation is affordable and our transport system is efficient, extensive and well-integrated to cover almost every part of the island. Convenient ride-hailing apps such as Grab and Gojek also makes it easy to flag a ride from wherever you are with just a touch of a button.

And that's not all – as part of Singapore's Smart Nation initiative, autonomous vehicles, contactless fare payment, open data and analytics for urban transportation, have been introduced to continuously optimise transport systems for an efficient and reliable network to meet with our nation's evolving future needs.



# Our Parting Words



Aside from this guide on working in Singapore, we have other guides on [studying in Singapore](#) and Singapore's heritage and culture. If you're intending to relocate, check out our [Settling in Singapore](#) guide on all you need to know before you take off.

With that, we leave you with two more useful links on landing a fulfilling career and we hope to meet you in Singapore very soon!

- [Guide for applying for jobs in Singapore](#)
- [Find out the average salary offered for your job](#)

If you prefer a chat instead, we're always happy to connect at [hello@singaporeglobalnetwork](mailto:hello@singaporeglobalnetwork) and we'll connect you with someone who's made the move from abroad to Singapore to learn about their experience first-hand.

Love,  
***Singapore Global Network***



