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# Diary Of An Expat In Singapore



## Synopsis

This hilarious new book records the tongue-in-cheek journey of an expat in Singapore, told through vignettes, snapshots and Top 10 lists: "10 sure signs you're in a Singapore taxi"; "Things first-time visitors to Singapore say"; "10 signs you've overstayed"; "Politically-incorrect expat profiling by nationality"; and many more. Based on the author Jennifer Gargiulo's popular blog of the same name, *Diary of an Expat in Singapore* packs in a wealth of quirky observations, witty one-liners, and laugh-out-loud misunderstandings as the author tries to adjust to life in a strange new land and raise two kids while at it. Marvel as Jennifer enlists the help of her young son, Alexander (who learns Chinese at school), to find out what her hairdressers are saying about her at the salon! Expats will share many of the experiences of the author told in this book, but few will have heard them told with more humor and flair. And Singaporeans will also find much to enjoy and laugh over, when local customs and foibles are seen anew through the author's eyes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Jennifer Gargiulo is an author, university lecturer and blogger. Her blog "Diary of an Expat in Singapore" has been featured in magazines such as *Expat Living*. Born in Verona, Italy, she studied philosophy at Vassar College, New York, and went on to obtain her PhD from Sydney University. Dr Gargiulo has lived in Singapore for the past six years.

I'll be going to Singapore for the first time in January for a period of 10 days, and have been reading

books and finding information about the place in preparation for my trip. I've always found books written by expats to provide interesting, informative, and personal insights on a country, and tend to try to read at least one such book before going to a country for the first time. Especially in the case of Singapore, which other than a few general "word associations" in my mind (e.g. "safe", "clean", "hot", "business friendly", "caning") is pretty much a blank slate, I looked forward to reading an insider's perspective. For the most part, "Diary of an Expat in Singapore" delivered. Having lived as an expat in Japan for 2 years, I also found it interesting to compare the author's expat experiences with my own ... despite Japan and Singapore both being "Asian countries", the differences greatly outnumbered the similarities, which was interesting. This is a light and easy read, with short vignettes and insights. It is humorous throughout, and a page turner ... I think I finished it in a matter of 2 or 3 days, reading an hour or two here or there. I enjoyed the book, overall, but there were probably three main things that held back my enjoyment a bit. First, the first half or so of the book flies by, but then the middle third or so just starts to get repetitive. It seems like some of the same stories or motifs are simply rehashed, maybe from a different perspective, but a lot of this book feels like the same half-dozen or so stories: It's hot (the heat is usually mentioned in concurrence with taxis or swimming pools). Expats have an obsession with learning Mandarin (even though it doesn't seem that necessary of a skill for living in Singapore). The shopping is nice but everything's expensive. The food is good. The airport and airline are nice (which is good, as about half the stories seem to be about escapes from Singapore for business and pleasure). Education is intense. About 95% of the stories revolve around these motifs ... the first couple swimming pool stories are funny, but the mind starts to wander by the 10th one. The book is a bit impersonal and detached. In a lot of cases, books written by expats are interesting because either 1) the expat learns something about him or herself in some kind of personal discovery (sometimes these can be a little bit cliché, but it helps the reader bond with the author a bit and understand where they're coming from), or 2) they provide interesting insight into the country due to their experiences there and perspective as "embedded outsider". While the author of this book is funny, she also keeps the reader at arm's length ... we see what she sees and thinks to some degree, but we don't really feel what she feels. Being an expat is an emotional experience, with many highs and lows ... this doesn't come across in this book all that strongly (despite the occasional "my kid's Italian, but likes jasmine rice more than risotto!" kind of story). The "lightly humorous" tone is nice, but a little bit of variation in that tone would be nice. Moreover, I'm not sure we really gain any unique insights onto Singapore, and certainly not on Singaporeans (the author's interactions with the locals seems limited to taxi drivers and Chinese tutors). Perhaps because of the above two points, Singapore itself as an actor in this

play seems a bit sterile. If someone were to ask me what I learned about Singapore from reading this book, I'd say the following: it's hot, safe, expensive, business/consumption-oriented, and strict when it comes to law and order. In other words, pretty much the "word association" I'd had before. That lack of "Oh! I thought things were like THIS, but they're really like THAT!" or "I never would've thought of that!" moments was disappointing and suggests that either Singapore just isn't that interesting when it comes down to it (possible, but doubtful), or the author has only really scratched the surface of Singaporean culture. Living in Japan, those "ah ha!" moments came at least once a day, but then again I was at a Japanese school for a year (living with a Japanese host family), and working for a Japanese company (as the only "gaijin" in headquarters) for another year. I don't know if the author is self-censoring or what, but I scratched my head at the lack of stories from her work (I gather that she taught classes at a Singaporean university) ... I knew many people who taught English in Japanese schools that had many more interesting, and personal, experiences. The husband's experiences are almost non-existent as well. Instead, the author seems content to only reveal life inside the expat "bubble" and, whether true or just the impression she gives, it feels like life is a constant cycle between the condo, her kids' school, and the mall ... a life that could just as well be lived in San Diego as Singapore. In spite of these complaints, I really did enjoy reading the book. It was humorous, but I just felt that it wasn't quite as deep or personal a read as I was hoping for, based on other expat-written books I've read (and my own experiences as an expat, and other expats I've known). The book has me looking forward to my trip to Singapore, and I am curious to see how my experiences line up with some of the stories and advice that the author gives in this book. Overall, a worthwhile read, however ... and one that could be easily read on the LONG flight to Singapore!

1/15/15 UPDATE - I write this as I am about to finish my third trip to Singapore, and I have to say that my exposure to the country and the people leaves me more underwhelmed by "Diary of an Expat" than when I first read it. It just doesn't do a great job of capturing this complex country and the fundamental issues that roil just beneath the surface, or even expat life. Still a largely entertaining read, but there's a lot more to Singapore than this book captures, both good and bad ... I have not edited my original review, but if I were to do so, I'd knock this book down to 3 stars.

1 part travel, 1 part parenting, 2 parts humor! Jennifer Gargiulo shares her adventures as an expat in this delightful book. Many mothers will relate to relocating their families for work even if it's not around the world. (though it is fun to read about relocating around the world!) I'm raising my family far from home and she nailed the experience. I especially loved her tone which was neither whiney

nor braggish. Just a regular (and very international) (and very funny!) mother, coping well out of her element. It made me want to visit Singapore, Dublin, Dubai, Bali and Verona, where she is from. It also made me realize how in the end we are all doing the best we can with our situations. Super fun read!

No revelations, not terribly entertaining nor funny. Not very useful in preparing you for a Singapore assignment, nor expatriation in general.

Funny, but not as informative as I would have liked. A lot of information and reference to raising and educating a child in Singapore, much less on being single.

Brought back memories of Singapore but A LOT of repetition and not well written. Stick to the blogging.

I am always interested in another person's expat experiences. Like Gargiulo, I am an expat wife and mother. Like Gargiulo I have two children. Like Gargiulo, my husband's work is what brought us to Singapore. Like Gargiulo, I expected to stay a year...and am now approaching my 4th anniversary as opposed to her 7th. However, I just can't relate to this. A--Instead of cracking jokes about maids (naming them slo-mo, their handphones) I want to discuss the power imbalance and all the ways the relationship is set up to fail. Instead of thinking about how the construction noise is bothering me, I want to talk about how construction companies seize the foreign worker's passports and abuse them. B--Instead of talking about Singaporeans like they're a fascinating alien species, I actually have made friends with them and am willing to sit and let them explain things to me. It took effort, especially as a stay at home mom to a child too young for school, but it was worthwhile. It also means I have a better understanding of why a family would move to a condo within 1 km of a school and how tuition culture works and why instead of cracking jokes about it or dismissing the fact that my kid has no local friends because they're always studying. C--Instead of saying "hey my husband works ALL THE TIME but it's cool because I get the remote," I'd rather have an honest discussion about how isolating it can be to be the trailing spouse and the effect that can have on a relationship. D-I just can't find the humor in racial stereotypes. Especially in a book where in the next breath she's praising SG for racial harmony (and not in an ironic, aware of all the roiling racism and tension just under the surface way). It's amusing, apparently, to her to say how Indians don't talk longingly about India and want PR and they sit around talking about how to store saris and buy gold

(hint-calling it politically incorrect doesn't then allow you to write a chapter of microaggressions.) Just don't mention about how Indians are actively discriminated against in the rental market. (Something we know about first hand, as my husband is Indian American). The default shorthand of expat as White, Wealthy, and Western is also lazy and blind. She mentions the Japanese and the Korean neighbors, but then defaults right back to "curly hair--western hair" and "expat=white". In short, I just don't have much use for humor devoid of any serious content. I laughed at some of the expat kid points--mine too also have their minds blown that you can get to places with fewer than 3 planes or in a single digit number of hours. But there's also value in balancing that joke with the ambivalence expat parents often feel about having their kids grow up so divorced from their home culture. The chapter where she implies they've been in SG too long because their kids are too Asian, or where she mentions that they speak more Mandarin than Italian start to approach the topic, but then she deflects with humor rather than talk about it. Without that balance, it's just not something I'd recommend, or reread.

great fun for former singapore expat

At times this books was laugh out loud (even on a plane) funny and at times I was wondering if somehow I had lost my place in my kindle and was rereading sections.

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