



## Hotel Vagabond Singapore - Worth the Risk

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With a tagline that invites 'trouble', a stay at the newly opened Vagabond in Singapore's heritage zone, is not like your usual hotel stay



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**LF Says:** ★★★★

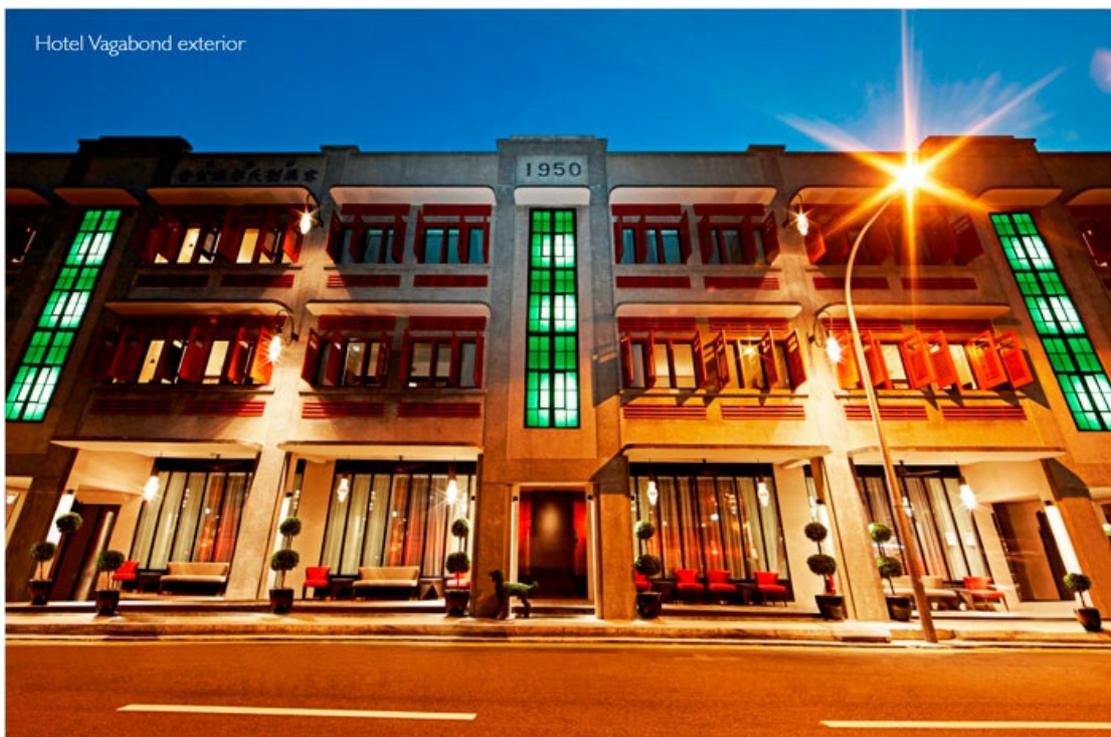


At first glance, you might think you have entered a Parisian salon – a mix of culture, cocktails and cinema – in pure red and gold. And you would not be wrong. The Salon, at the heart of the new Vagabond hotel, is designed as an experiential luxury boutique hotel, complete with a heritage touch befitting an Art Deco heritage building that once was a center of 'entertainment' in the area.



A stay at Vagabond is unlikely to be like anywhere else. And that fits in perfectly with the brand it has just become part of – Tribute. When the deal was signed, Tribute was of course still part of Starwood, which has since been acquired by the Marriott group. The first Tribute hotel in the region, it exemplifies the brand's independent hotel philosophy.

For one, it is headed by 'Lady Boss' aka Harpreet Bedi, the co-owner and GM. And she makes sure the guests to her home away from home are attended to personally. She will point out the highlights of this very individualistic hotel, a personal project for her husband Satinder Garcha and her. Collectors of art, they have ensured the hotel permeates art and music and culture any which way you look. Or feel. Only this isn't quite a museum or a gallery, in either look or feel. And given that the design is done by Jacques Garcia, whose middle name might as well be opulence, the rich palette of colours is no surprise.



The reception, literally a foot from the sidewalk, sets the colour tone with plush red velvet curving sofas leading to

– wait for it – a gold rhino! Well, almost life size, as you catch your breath, you also realise it's the reception cum concierge desk! Look around to see mega elephants, also in gold, lots of wall, photos, period lamps, and gold banyan trees. Yes literally – these trees – with sinewy trunks and hundreds of gold leaves – will make you stare and re-stare. Both the rhino and the trees – which are also present in the adjacent salon and bar are custom made (of course, who would have a gold rhino that is heavier than an actual rhino for sale!) by Rajasthan's Allahbuksh family.

There is a lot more to explore, right through the hotel, but let me leave some things for you to discover. Quick tip, when in the elevator, follow the images! The hotel also has an art residency programme, and you just might catch a famous artist at work!



As it is a converted building, the exterior of this 1950 built structure has been spruced up, but retains its original look. Inside, all the rooms are similar, but slightly different too. Smallish, at about 22 square metres, they are nevertheless plush, with ample touch points to the past again, providing for a cosy feel. Note the old world telephone, or the French screen panels or the dark hardwood floors that compliment the hardwood mahogany writing desk, a Roberts Radio in signature hand sewn Scottish leather (connect your Bluetooth to it for sublime audio quality)...

Not that the contemporary is forgotten in these rooms – there's a 42" wall TV with curated content and some international channels. Even better, there's a mobile phone for your use from which you can make unlimited local calls / local data use, and call to six countries abroad for free! Yes, you can carry it around while exploring Singapore, which proved very useful! Most amenities that you would expect of a luxury hotel are present here, from an excellent king bed to a coffee maker and more. Needless to say, wi-fi is free and very fast.



The suites on the top level are larger of course. If unoccupied, do visit the Vagabond Suite for seeing some of the best art work in the hotel, including original art by some of India's top modern artists. As Ms Bedi points out, however, the real art is in the way people take in the experiences. The Salon also hosts live music gigs thrice a week, and hosts performances and cinema screenings too.

The aptly named restaurant, Hot Buns & Thunder Rolls, offers an innovative menu, including yes, Thunder Balls in different flavours. If you are having breakfast here (not free), then try the kaya toast, which includes freshly made pandan paste. Note the bar too, with its presiding gold Egyptian looking monkey, that serves drinks such as Crazy Farquhar (commonly pronounced f\*\*\*er) or Sentosa Beach Party. Yes, swinging into the right mood should be easy here.

The hotel's location, in the far corner of Syed Alwi Street is a great vantage point to explore a usually overlooked side of Singapore. If you stand at the hotel entrance, you can see the famous 24-hour single store mall Mustafa Centre, just down the road. On one side is Kampong Glam, the original Malay and Arab quarters with its beautiful buildings, trendy food joints and quaint to modern retail.



On the other side is Little India, where short walks take you past prettified townhouses, busy markets you could mistake as Chennai's T-Nagar, temples, churches, mosques, restaurants serving a dizzying array of cuisines, 'Bollywood bars', jewellery stores where you can see Indians, surely haggling, fruit and vegetable vendors, some with phoolmalas (garlands), and everything that could make you forget you are in a glitzy financial capital, whose glass towers with their worker bees are just around the corner. Yes, it's also quite close to this nation-state's major economic and retail hubs.

While Singapore has much for the tourist, discovering this gem of a hotel made for a unique experience, truly making the choice of an independent hotel worth its while. And no trouble at all!

**LF Says:** ★★★★

**Coordinates:** 39 Syed Alwi Rd, Singapore 207630

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