

Understanding Singaporeans

WHY DO INDIANS DOT THEIR FOREHEADS?

and Other Questions



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Why Do Indians Dot Their Foreheads?

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INTRODUCTION

The Indians are one of the four main races in Singapore. The others are the Chinese, Malays and Eurasians.

Among the Indians, there are Tamils, Malayalees, Punjabis, Gujaratis, Telugus, Bengalis and others. The Indians are quite diverse, but they do have some common practices.

This book answers twenty questions a young Singaporean might ask about Indian traditions, beliefs and festivals.



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WHAT LANGUAGES
DO INDIANS SPEAK?

More than half of the Indians in Singapore are Tamils. Most of them can speak Tamil.

You can also hear other Indian languages in Singapore, including Malayalam, Telugu, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi and Marathi.

DID YOU KNOW?

This says "Tamil" in Tamil:

தமிழ்

And this is part of the Hindi alphabet in Hindi:

अ आ इ ई उ ऊ

ARE
ALL
INDIANS
HINDUS?



No. Many Indians are Hindus, but some are Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Muslims or Christians.

Hinduism is an ancient religion from India. It is believed to have more than 300 million gods and goddesses! But Hindus can choose to worship many gods or one god.



WHY DO SOME INDIANS PIERCE THEIR BODIES DURING THAIPUSAM?



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Men hook their bodies to a metal arch called a kavadi to give thanks to a Hindu god. Kavadi means “sacrifice at every step”. The men then walk in a colourful parade.

At the parade, you might also see people carrying pots of milk on their heads. The milk is poured over a statue of the god, Lord Muruga, to show devotion.

DID YOU KNOW?

The parade starts at Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple in Little India and ends at Sri Thendayuthapani Temple near Fort Canning Park. That is a walk of nearly three MRT stations, from Farrer Park to Clarke Quay!



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WHY DO
INDIAN
BRIDES
GET THEIR
HANDS
AND FEET
DECORATED?



The decorations, called mehndi, were traditionally used to help keep brides calm during a stressful time—their wedding!

The brown paste used for the mehndi has a cooling effect on the bride. The paste is from a plant called henna. Over time, mehndi became a wedding tradition in some Indian cultures. Families believe that the darker the colour, the more the groom loves his bride!

Mehndi is also used for other important celebrations, such as Deepavali.





WHAT DO THE INDIAN FLOWER GARLANDS MEAN?

Those colourful strings of flowers are a sign of happiness, respect and good luck. You might see them at weddings around the necks of the bride and groom. You might also see them at Hindu temples around the statues of gods.

Many garlands are made of jasmine flowers because they smell nice and look beautiful.

WHY DO SOME INDIANS HANG MANGO LEAVES IN THEIR DOORWAYS?

Hindus believe mango leaves soak up bad thoughts. They help keep homes happy and peaceful. Evil spirits go away!

You might see fresh green leaves on festival days and dry leaves at other times.



HOW DO YOU SAY...?

(In Tamil)

Hello!	Vanakkam!
Friend	Nanban
Have you eaten?	Saaptacha?
Thank you	Nandri
See you again	Meendoom sandhipom

WHAT DOES ... MEAN?

Ayurveda	traditional Indian healing system
Bindi	dot on a forehead (Hindi)
Deepavali	festival of lights
Dhoti	garment worn by a man
Diya	small oil lamp for Deepavali
Kavadi	arch carried as sacrifice during Thaipusam
Kurta	top worn by a man
Kurti	top worn by a woman
Mama	uncle
Mehndi	henna designs on a body
Namaste	greeting in Hindi
Pottu	dot on a forehead (Tamil)
Rangoli	flower patterns on the ground outside homes
Roti prata	flatbread
Salwar kameez	top and trousers worn by a woman
Saree	garment worn by a woman
Sari	garment worn by a woman
Sherwani	suit worn by a man
Thaipusam	festival about sacrifice and giving thanks
Vanakkam	greeting in Tamil

Why do Indians hang mango leaves in the doorway?

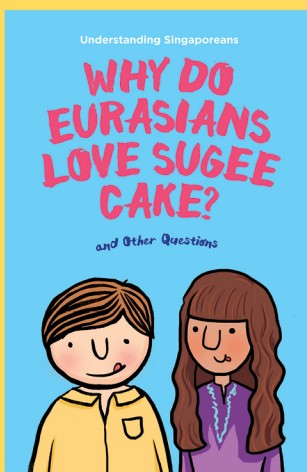
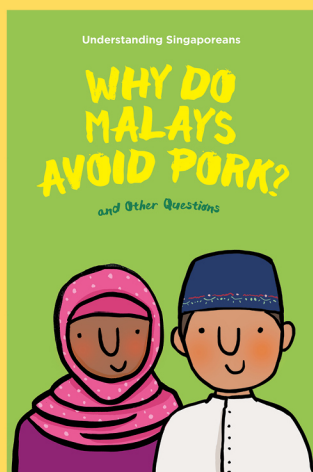
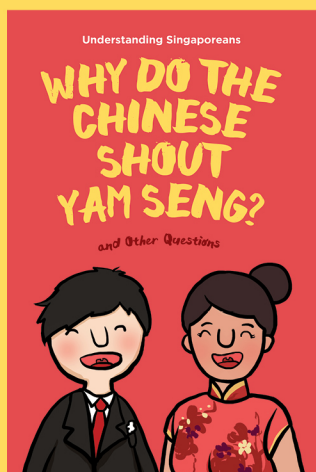
Why is it called a mama shop?

Where does roti prata come from?

We provide the answers—and useful tips—to some of the most-asked questions young Singaporeans might have about the Indians.

This book is part of a fun series about the Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians. Each handbook uses twenty questions to highlight diversity and promote understanding of the different races in Singapore.

Understanding Singaporeans Series



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