

# What are the challenges?

## Challenges when doing business with Singapore

The size of Singapore and its population are the main cause of challenges when doing business with Singapore.

There are a number of other specific challenges, including:

- the UK has an eight hour time difference with Singapore
- it can be expensive to do business with Singapore
- there is an increase in anti-foreigner sentiment due to the widening of income inequality
- there are tighter foreign worker restrictions such as quotas
- it is vulnerable to economic downturns due to the very open market
- there are restrictions on expansion for the legal sector in retail banking and licences

*[Source – DIT: Doing business in Singapore: Singapore trade and export guide]*

## Intellectual Property (IP)

Make sure you register your rights as soon as possible when exporting to Singapore in order to defend and enforce them. IP rights are territorial, therefore registrations made in the UK may not be enforceable in other countries. You may have to register again in the country you are exporting to.

Singapore's IP legal framework is robust and very comprehensive. Its IP rights legislative and administrative regime is compliant with the World Trade Organization's Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). IP can be protected in a variety of ways including patents, trademarks, registered designs, copyright, and layout-designs of integrated circuits, geographical indications, trade secrets, confidential information and plant variety.

Singapore's IP framework is considered to be one of the best in Asia.

Singapore is a member of the following organisations and conventions that regulate IP matters:

- Paris Convention

- Madrid Agreement
- Patent Cooperation Treaty
- World Intellectual Property Office (WIPO) Copyright Treaty
- NOCE Agreement
- Berne Convention

The Intellectual Property Office of Singapore is operating under the Global Patent Prosecution Highway (GPPH) initiative, partly due to the encouragement of the UK. Patent applications that are filed in Singapore can be approved quickly and much more efficiently.

International surveys have consistently recognised Singapore's IP regime as being one of the best in the world. According to the 2019 World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, Singapore is ranked 2nd in the world, and 1st in Asia, for having the best IP protection. Singapore has also been ranked top in Asia in the Property Rights Alliance's International Property Rights Index and Taylor Wessing's Global IP Index, for their efforts concerning IP protection.

The Global Innovation Index 2019 has ranked Singapore as the most innovative country in Asia and 8th globally. In recent years, Singapore has begun to undertake a comprehensive plan to become Asia's IP hub. The country has varied and expansive initiatives and programmes related to developing its IP infrastructure and ecosystem.

Singapore has a "first-to-file" system, therefore the first person to file an IP right in Singapore's jurisdiction, when granted, will own that right.

The company and employee are held accountable for copyright infringement. Penalties can include fines and/or a prison sentence.

The information regarding over 2 million trademarks from six ASEAN countries can be viewed on the ASEAN TMview online database: <http://www.asean-tmview.org/tmview/welcome>. This online portal is free to use and aims to make ASEAN trademark data easily accessible to all interested parties.

Singapore is part of the regional patent work-sharing programme, ASEAN Patent Examination Co-operation (ASPEC), among nine participating ASEAN countries. The programme is used by participating offices to share search and examination results. This allows applicants to obtain patents faster and much more efficiently.

There is no customs recording system in Singapore.

Make sure you learn more about IP issues that are relevant to your business's specific industry sector. When planning to enter the Singaporean market, consider defensive measures early.

The UK Intellectual Property Office has an IP attaché based in Singapore with specific focus on providing support and advice to UK companies in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Further information can be found at:

- the UK Government's Intellectual Property Office, providing free and impartial advice on how to protect and register your IP both in the UK and abroad: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/intellectual-property-office>
- ASEAN IPR SME Helpdesk provides free information and training for European SMEs in the ASEAN region
- Intellectual Property Office of Singapore: <https://www.ipos.gov.sg/>

*[Source – DIT Overseas Business Risk: Singapore]*

## **Bribery and corruption**

Bribery is illegal and it is an offence for UK nationals and bodies incorporated under UK law to bribe anywhere in the world.

Singapore has zero tolerance for bribery. Arrests will be made if there is any attempt to bribe or otherwise prevent an official from carrying out their duties.

The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) is the Singapore Government's agency that investigates corruption and prosecutes in the public and private sectors. The agency also investigates criminal cases where corruption is suspected.

The CPIB is independent of other government agencies as well as the Singapore Police Force, in order to stop any interference during its investigations. The Bureau is headed by a director that reports directly to the Prime Minister of Singapore. The CPIB has the power to detain those suspected of corrupt practices without a trial.

Singapore was ranked 4th out of 180 in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in 2021: <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/singapore>.

Read the information provided on the UK Government's bribery and corruption page: <https://www.gov.uk/anti-bribery-policy> for more information.

*[Source – DIT Overseas Business Risk: Singapore]*

## Organised crime

Organised crime is taken very seriously by the Singaporean Government, and severe measures have been put into place to counteract it, including the death penalty against drugs and firearms traffickers, as well as jail sentences and fines for those caught human and goods trafficking. Strict rules and expensive entry fees are put in place to deter Singaporeans from entering casinos at its two integrated resorts. Red light districts are also closely monitored.

UK visitors are advised to stay away from drugs, even the possession of a small amount can lead to imprisonment or the death penalty.

Read the information provided on the UK Government's organised crime page: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/crime-and-fraud-prevention-for-businesses-in-international-trade>.

For advice on serious organised crime, visit the National Crime Agency website: <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/>.

*[Source – DIT Overseas Business Risk: Singapore]*

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