

# Punching above its weight

## The Singapore passport story

by Marvin Sim

The Singapore passport story is a tale of continuous journey of improvement, always seeking to do better. It is one of the most sought after passports in the world. The Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) of Singapore, the agency responsible for the Singapore passport seeks to offer greater value to citizens through ingenious ideas and bold use of technology. Gone are the days where Singaporeans had to queue at the passport office in order to apply and/or collect their passport. Gone too, are the days when passport officers processed voluminous paper applications manually and performed endless data-entry. ICA has revolutionised the passport application and collection processes from a manual-based model into a seamless, secured and pleasurable one for all.

### Biometric passport

Launched in 2006, Singapore's biometric passport securely stores the holder's particulars and biometric identifiers (including their fingerprint data and facial image) on a contactless chip embedded within a polycarbonate data page. At a time when global standards and technologies for biometric-enabled passports were in its infancy, the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) actively collaborated with the United States, Australia and New Zealand in a three-month International Live Test (ILT) that ran from 15 January to 15 April 2006, to assess the interoperability of the new Singapore biometric passport with the passport reader systems of these immigration authorities. The trial involved some 2,000 Singapore Airlines crew members (Singapore citizens) who were issued trial passports for test use at overseas airports in San Francisco (USA) and Sydney (Australia) (see Figures 1 and 2). The results from the ILT confirmed that the Singapore biometric passport was interoperable with the trial countries, thus setting the stage for its public launch on 15 August 2006 (see Figure 3).



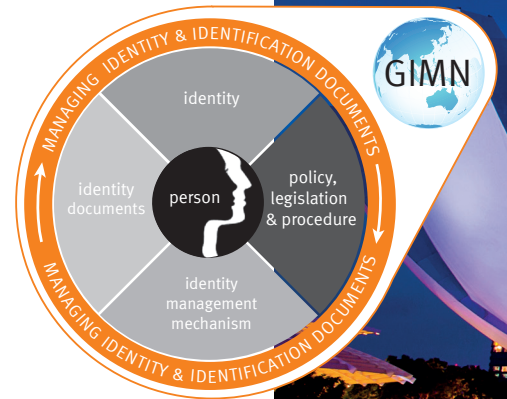
**Figure 1:**  
Singapore Airlines crew participating in the biometric passport trial.



**Figure 2:**  
Lanes for the Singapore biometric passport trial at a foreign airport.



**Figure 3:**  
Former Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, Minister for Home Affairs Mr Wong Kan Seng, officially launching the Singapore biometric passport on 15 August 2006.

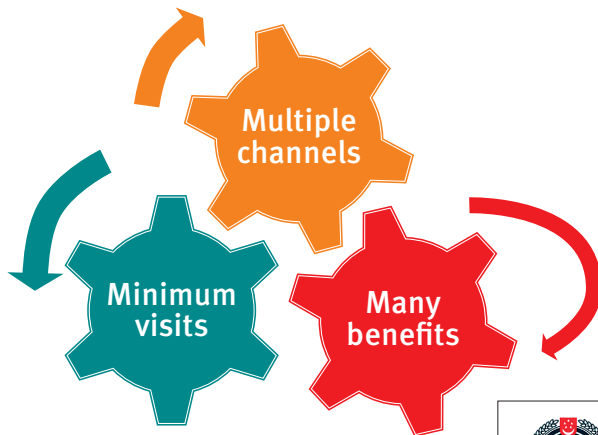


*Marvin Sim is the Commissioner of the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) of Singapore. ICA is responsible for securing Singapore's border, ensure that the movement of people, goods and conveyances through the land, air and sea checkpoints is legitimate and lawful. ICA also administers immigration and registration services. In 2017, ICA cleared 207 million travellers and processed 5.5 million of service applications.*



**Multiple Channels, Minimum Visits, Many Benefits**

Guided by the Social Capital Framework, the service delivery was anchored on the ‘3M’ service principles: ‘Multiple Channels, Minimum Visits, Many Benefits.’



**Making passport application easy**

In 1994, ICA moved from the traditional over-the-counter passport application to time-saving methods, such as an application by post or dropped into deposit boxes located at the ICA Building. Recognising the growing segment of internet-savvy Singaporeans, ICA became one of the early government adopters of internet transactions with the development and launch of its electronic service in 2002, which allowed applicants to submit their passport applications online. The system can be used for electronic passport application, uploading a photograph, and subsequent payment.

Available round-the-clock, the online system offers Singapore citizens the convenience of flexibility and choice when applying for their passports. The system also allows applicants to enquire about the status of their passport applications online. To further incentivise

**Immigration & Checkpoints Authority**  
A member of the Home Team

Singapore Government  
Integrity · Service · Excellence  
Sitemap Feedback Contact Us

SEARCH MyICA

### Apply for Passport

This facility allows you to apply for a Singapore Passport.

If you have **damaged** or **lost** your passport, you should report it immediately in person to Passport Unit at Level 2 of ICA Building.

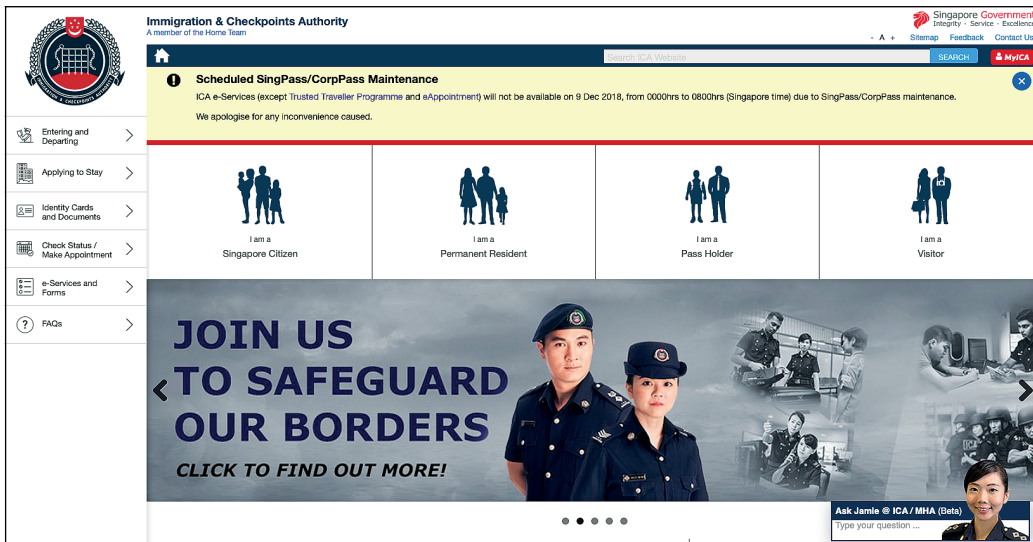
**Information Required**

Please have the following information ready when submitting the passport application:

- Applicant's Identity Card Number/Birth Certificate Number/Citizenship Certificate Number
- Applicant's Identity Card Issue Date
- Applicant's Passport Expiry Date
- Applicant's recent passport-sized colour photograph (taken within the last three months)
- VISA or Master Credit/Debit Card, American Express Card or Internet Banking Details.

Ask Jamie @ ICA / MHA (Beta)  
Type your question ...

<https://www.ica.gov.sg>



**Figure 4:**  
Passport application made easy with e-services.

applicants not to submit their applications over the counters, ICA introduced a rebate of SGD 10 off the passport fee for those applying by post, deposit box or via online application service. By freeing up the manpower at the counters, ICA has been able to optimise its resources more effectively to support other higher value-added tasks. These multiple channels made available to the citizens were so successful that less than 5% of the applications are now submitted over the counters. The rest of the applications are submitted via passport online application service, deposit box or post (see Figure 4).

Another customer-centric initiative is the Passport Expiry Notice. Since end 2009, Singapore citizens whose passport has less than nine months' validity will receive a renewal notice from ICA. The notice includes a preprinted, personalised passport application form that can be mailed back to ICA.

#### **Passport collection**

In addition to the introduction of multiple channels for passport application, ICA continuously looks into offering the public more options and greater flexibility at collection, through the concept of Alternate Site Collection. ICA has decentralised passport collection to the post offices as a trusted service partner, moving passport collection away from ICA counters.

ICA leverages biometric verification to ensure passports collected at the off-site locations are issued to the rightful holder. ICA equipped 20 designated post offices with biometric-matching devices to verify the identity of the applicant prior to issuance. This approach is unique among passport authorities that outsource passport collection to service providers. A three-month trial was carried out to test the robustness of the security processes before full implementation.

Today, the number of participating post offices handling collection service has grown to 30. The same platform is extended to cover the collection of other documents, such as identity cards and Long Term Pass cards.



Immigration & Checkpoints Authority  
A member of the Home Team

Singapore Government  
Integrity · Service · Excellence

ICA Website

Search ICA Website

SEARCH MyICA

### e-Appointment for Collection of Passport

e-Appointment allows you to book, change or cancel your appointment for the following services with ICA.

Please click [here](#) for SingPost service fee information and details on participating SingPost branches.

Alternate Site Collection of Passport is only available for eligible applicants.  
Click [here](#) to know more about Alternate Site Collection.

Identity Card/Birth Certificate No.      File Reference No.      For

Please specify here      Please specify here      Self

Go to MyICA Home      Next

**Figure 5:**  
ICA's e-Appointment  
home page.

### e-Appointment

More novel ideas were introduced to enhance customer service experience. For example, e-Appointment was introduced on 1 May 2008 for applicants to book an appointment online to collect their passports (see Figure 5). This allows ICA to schedule and manage



**Figure 6:**  
The iCollect – speedy and secure self-collection of documents.

demand more effectively, resulting in a significant reduction in waiting time for the passport collection, from about two hours to a mere 15 minutes. ICA customers can better plan their time instead of waiting unnecessarily.

### iCollect

In 2013, ICA pushed the boundaries further by introducing a fully automated self-service machine for customers to securely collect their passports. Known as iCollect, this innovation combines biometrics security with robotic arm and RFID technologies to enable citizens to self-collect their passports through fingerprint and facial biometrics verification (see Figure 6).

### Punching above its weight

Beyond Singapore, ICA plays an active role in strengthening global passport security through spearheading the Public Key Directory (PKD) under the auspices of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Singapore was one of the six founding members of ICAO's Public Key Directory in 2006, together with the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. After the PKD system was commissioned in March 2007, the ICAO Council appointed Singapore into the PKD Board, along with seven other members. Since then, Singapore has partnered the international community through the PKD forum to strengthen international passport standards, and making transnational travel safer for everyone.



#### Small nation – big player

For a young nation, the Singapore passport is an extraordinary document. Although Singapore is one of the smallest countries in the world, its passport is ranked amongst the best in the world as it offers its citizens visa-free entry into most countries. Such privileges are earned through uncompromising and sustained efforts in maintaining strong passport security, from application to issuance and collection, as well as staying ahead of international passport developments.

