How does Singapore Interact with its Hinterland? How big is a hinterland?

Determining the size of the hinterland is not easy. It depends on what you use to measure it. For example, a daily newspaper may be sold over a wide area, but children attending schools in the settlement may come from a smaller area. Patients attending a specialised medical facility, for example for heart surgery, may come from a very much wider area again. Studies of different goods and services for one urban area produce variously-sized hinterlands.

Larger settlements have larger hinterlands. With improvements in transport and communications, a global hierarchy of settlements has developed. In many studies three cities - London, New York and Tokyo - are considered to be world cities. That is, for some services the world is the hinterland of these cities. They are the three main centres in the worldwide flow of information and capital; they have a major influence on the global economy. World cities are not necessarily the largest cities, but they have good air, telecommunications and computer links to other centres.

Singapore is a city of continental importance.

Singapore’s hinterland

The size of Singapore’s hinterland varies depending on what product or service is being considered. Because the island is largely covered by the city state, its hinterland is offshore.

Immediate hinterland

Malaysia and Indonesia are Singapore’s immediate hinterland. Despite having 15 reservoirs and good drainage networks to capture the ample rainfall, the city cannot meet its water needs. It relies on Malaysia for fresh water, transported through a pipe beside the causeway linking the two nations. Singapore is building a dam in the Malaysian state of Johore to provide more water, and ships also transport water from the Indonesian island of Bintan to Singapore. Malaysia owns the railway line in Singapore.

Singapore imports raw materials, for example food (poultry, pigs, eggs and vegetables are imported from Malaysia and Indonesia) and oil, from its hinterland. It provides services such as port facilities, finance and tourism, and exports finished products such as refined oil and microwaves to its hinterland.

An economic partnership exists between Singapore, adjacent Malaysian states and Indonesia. This growth triangle links Indonesian factories to Singapore’s port, and Singaporeans to Malaysian tourist resorts.

Singapore gains access to land, people and resources; and an increasing number of Singaporean entrepreneurs are contracting-out or investing in food production in Malaysia or Indonesia. The food is for consumption in Singapore.

Wider hinterland

Singapore is expanding its influence in the wider South-East Asian region. The Economic Development Board (EDB) helps Singaporean companies invest overseas by providing tax incentives and loans. In 1995 Singapore was the second largest foreign investor in Thailand and Myanmar (Burma), fifth largest investor in China, and eighth largest investor in India.

Jurong Town Corporation International (a Singapore company) is developing industrial townships in Wuxi and Suzhou in China and the Bangalore Information and Technology Park in southern India. Singaporean companies also invest in New Zealand, particularly in properties in Auckland.

The Regional Language Centre undertakes research offers courses language teaching, and each year organises a regional seminar for schools for language education. It is an educational project of the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation.
Global links
Singapore is a continental and regional hub. 5000 multinational companies have regional headquarters in the city. Billions of dollars of business are transacted without goods going anywhere near the city. The city has global links. More than 400 shipping lines do business in the port, and link it to 600 ports worldwide (including New Zealand ports). Changi International Airport handles flights from 53 countries, and is one of the busiest airports in the region.