



Deaths involving British Nationals in Singapore

The death of a relative or a friend can be a very traumatic experience. When a death occurs overseas, family and friends can feel additional distress if they are unfamiliar with foreign procedures and are unable to communicate in the language of the country where the death occurred. Consular Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our British High Commission in Singapore are ready to help as far as they can. You may be uncertain about what to do next or who to contact for advice. These notes are designed to help you through the practical arrangements you will need to make.

The information contained in this document is not meant to be a definitive statement of the law, nor is it to be taken as a substitute for independent legal advice.

Autopsies (Post Mortems)

An autopsy is mandatory for any foreign national visitor whose death occurs whilst they are in Singapore. If the death occurs in a hospital following an illness, an autopsy is only necessary if the doctor is unable to determine the cause of death, or a death has been the result of or has been contributed by an unnatural event.

In such cases, the body will be sent to the Centre for Forensic Medicine (CFM) Mortuary (located at Block 9 Singapore General Hospital, Outram Road). The Police investigator will arrange for the family to view and identify the deceased's body in the presence of the Coroner. This is usually the following morning after the death has occurred. The Coroner will review the case and determine if an autopsy is required. The family will be informed of the Coroners decision and the time to claim the body for the funeral/repatriation. If the autopsy reveals that the death is unnatural, the Police will need to conduct further investigations into the cause of death and the family may need to assist. Once the investigation is complete, the family will be told by the Police to attend a Coroner Inquiry at the Subordinate Courts.

Organs may be removed for examination and then replaced. There are no circumstances in which the organs will be removed and retained.

An autopsy report will not be automatically sent to the family. This has to be applied for (via a lawyer) and costs S\$105.00 at the mortuary.

Mortuary Facilities

The mortuary is located at the Centre for Forensic Medicine Mortuary located at Block 9 Singapore General Hospital. The Centre for Forensic Medicine (CFM) of the Health Sciences Authority is the national provider of forensic medical consultancy services in the examination of Coroner's cases. The standards provided and applied are on a par with that provided in the United Kingdom.

Funeral options

Following the death of a British national in Singapore, the next of kin (NoK), or their formally appointed representative, must decide whether to

- (a) repatriate the deceased to the UK or
- (b) have a local cremation and repatriate the ashes back to the UK or
- (c) have a local burial or cremation.

If the deceased was covered by travel insurance, it is important that the NoK contact the insurance company without delay. If the insurance company grants cover, you should discuss with them what funeral arrangements they will cover, including possible repatriation of the deceased to the UK. If there is no insurance cover, the cost of repatriation, burial or cremation will need to be met by the family. The service of an international undertaker are normally necessary to help with these arrangements as neither the Foreign and Commonwealth Office nor our High Commission in Singapore has budgets to meet these costs.

It is important to remember that if the deceased was travelling with a tour operator, they can be an important source of assistance and advice.

There are a number of Funeral Directors in Singapore who are able to offer a full funeral service including burial and cremation and repatriations to most countries in the world. If a local burial or cremation takes place, there will be no Coroner's inquest carried out in the UK. Local Funeral Directors include the:

Singapore Casket Company (Tel 6293-4380) or

Casket Company (Tel 6454-8167).

Local Burial

The Choa Chu Kang Cemetery Complex is the only cemetery in Singapore still open for burial. The Complex includes Christian; Muslim; Ahmaddiya Jama'at; Jewish; Parsi; Bahai; Chinese and Hindu Cemeteries. The burial period for all graves is limited to 15 years. At the end of the 15 years, the graves will be exhumed. For those whose religion allows cremation, the exhumed remains will be cremated and stored in columbaria niches. Where compulsory burial is required due to religious reasons, the remains will be re-buried in smaller individual plots.

Local Cremation

There are three crematoria in Singapore – one government-managed crematorium and two private crematoria. The government-managed crematorium is located at Mandai Crematorium and Columbarium Complex and the two private crematoria are located at Kong Meng San, Phor Kark See Monastery and Tse Toh Aum Temple.

Cremated ashes may be stored in columbaria niches. Foreigners cremated in Singapore are not entitled to purchase niches in government - operated columbaria. They may however purchase niches at private columbaria.

Repatriation

It is necessary to appoint a Funeral Director to organise the repatriation of a body from Singapore.

If the deceased was covered by travel insurance, the insurance company will normally have a standing agreement with an International funeral director in the UK to arrange repatriation on your behalf. If the deceased is not covered by insurance, the next of kin (NoK) will need to appoint an international undertaker in the UK. A list of companies is attached at the end of this document (appendix A).

There are also a number of Funeral Directors in Singapore who also specialise in repatriation and will provide special caskets required for the international carriage of human remains. The following Funeral Directors specialise in local funeral arrangements and repatriation:

Singapore Casket Company (Tel 6293-4380) or

Casket Company (Tel 6454-8167).

Registration of the death

In Singapore a body will be released for local burial/repatriation once the medical practitioner has issued a Certifying Cause of Death (CCOD) document. After the CCOD has been issued it will be necessary to register the death at the Police Divisional Headquarters, Neighbourhood Police Centre, Neighbourhood Police Post or the Registry of Births & Deaths located on the 3rd Floor of the ICA Building (Tel: 6391 6100). The informant will need to present the Certificate of Cause of Death and the identification papers of the deceased and the informant. It takes approximately 45 minutes at Neighbourhood Police Centres/Posts to issue the Death Certificate and approximately 30 minutes at Citizen Services Centre, ICA Building.

In the case where an autopsy has been conducted, the CCOD and Death Certificate will be issued by CFM Mortuary.

Deaths of British Nationals overseas are not automatically recorded in the UK, nor is there any obligation for the death to be registered with the British High Commission. However, NoK may find that there are advantages in doing so: a British death certificate will be available and record of death will be held at the General Register Office in the UK. To register the death from the UK, you should contact the Nationality and Passports Section of Consular Directorate, Old Admiralty Building, London, SW1A 2AF, Tel: 020 7008 0186 between 10am and 12pm Monday to Friday. To register the death at the British High Commission in Singapore, you will need to contact the British High Commission, Tel: (65) 6424 4200 and will have to pay a statutory fee to register the death and a fee for a certified copy of the death certificate.

Return of Personal Effects

Personal effects are normally returned to the next of kin, or their authorised representative. If the personal effects need to be returned to the UK and the next of kin are not present in Singapore, the Funeral Director will be able to help make arrangements.

Police/Judicial Inquiries

The Singapore police will lead on any case of suspicious death or a death resulting from a road traffic accident. Interviews with witnesses and investigations may also take place before a decision is made as to the cause of death and may cause a delay in the repatriation or burial of the deceased.

Legal Aid

Legal Aid in Singapore is only available to those who do not admit to a charge and are unable to afford to pay for a lawyer to defend them and is available through the Criminal and Legal Aid Scheme (CLAS). To apply for legal aid the applicant would need to present documentary evidence of their income, savings and assets.

Under certain circumstances, such as a suspicious death, you may want to appoint a lawyer to represent your interests should this be necessary. A list of lawyers can be found on the British High Commission website.

UK Coroners

If a person who has died in violent, suspicious or unusual circumstances overseas is repatriated to England or Wales, a Coroner must investigate. Coroners are not legally obliged to hold inquests in other cases, even if the next of kin insist on one. However, the Coroner has discretion to hold an inquest in other cases. A Coroner's decision not to hold an inquest in cases where a family has insisted can be taken by the family to a judicial review.

In Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) deals with the investigation of all sudden, suspicious, accidental, unexpected and unexplained deaths which occur in Scotland. However, the COPFS does not have the jurisdiction to investigate deaths that occur outside Scotland apart from a few limited circumstances. Broadly, those circumstances include terrorism, cases where the death may have been caused in Scotland but the person died outside Scotland and cases where the death was as a result of murder or culpable homicide caused by another British citizen or subject.

Coroners in Northern Ireland have no jurisdiction for investigating the deaths of persons being returned from abroad. However, next of kin can apply for a judicial review if no inquest is held.

In Jersey the Coroner's role is performed by the Deputy Viscount, in Guernsey by the Attorney General and in the Isle of Man by HM Coroner for Inquests.

Coroners are either medically or legally qualified. Their duties are to enquire into the deaths of those persons whose bodies physically lie in their districts (even if the death did not occur or the injury or cause of death did not arise in their district) in the following circumstances:

- Deaths, which are sudden or unexpected and the cause is not known
- Deaths which are unnatural or violent
- Deaths which occur in prisons.

Coroners are assisted in their enquiries by Coroner's Officers, who are often serving or retired police officers who undertake support and investigative work for the Coroner and provide a link with families. Coroner's Officers can advise the family of a deceased on the Coroner's responsibilities, inquests, post-mortems and death and burial/cremation certificates. Their details can be obtained through the local police.

Coroners – inquests

Coroners may decide to hold a formal hearing, known as an inquest. Inquests are usually held in a court and are open to the public and press. In some public interest cases, such as a death in police custody (even if this occurred abroad), the Coroner may call a jury. In these cases it is the role of the jury to decide on the cause of death. The purpose of the inquest is to confirm the identity of the deceased, the place and date of death and how the cause of death arose, to enable the Coroner to give an official verdict. It is not the Coroner's role to apportion blame for the death.

In most cases the Coroner will "open" the inquest within a few days of the deceased arriving in his/her jurisdiction, and then "adjourn" the proceedings until further information is received from the enquiry abroad. This "opening" is a formality and usually takes only a few minutes. The Coroner only has four questions: that the person has been positively identified; the date; place; and brief circumstances of how they died. This information would normally be provided by the police or the Coroner's Officer; the family would not need to attend unless they wanted to. In normal circumstances the deceased will be released by the Coroner for burial or cremation after this opening.

In many cases there will not be the need for a post-mortem (autopsy) in the UK. This is a decision for the Coroner, but he/she may require one in cases of unnatural/violent death if there has not been one abroad; if he/she is not confident of the expertise of a post-mortem performed abroad; or if there are identification issues.

In the Singapore when the cause of death is not immediately apparent after a coroner's autopsy is conducted, the term "cardiorespiratory failure pending further investigations" is used as a provisional cause of death. This is to facilitate the funeral arrangements or the repatriation of the body. Pending further investigations means that a number of ancillary investigations (tests) will be conducted in order to ascertain the definitive cause of death. The results of the ancillary investigation tests can take up to 3 months and will be made available.

Where the cause of death is not given on the death certificate and if the coroner does not have access to judicial files from other countries then the coroner may order a post-mortem as part of the inquest.

Coroners' enquiries abroad

Sometimes a Coroner may ask for information from the Singapore authorities. This request will be routed through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the British High Commission in Singapore, who will be asked to forward it onto the Singapore authorities. The report, when provided, will then be returned to the Coroner through the same channels.

For further information on inquests please contact your local Coroners Office. Contact details can be found at your local police station.

Compensation

There are no formal Government compensation schemes available, although damages can be claimed through the accused through the courts.

Consular Section
British High Commission Singapore

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APPENDIX A

International Funeral Directors

Funeral Director	Address	Telephone/FAX	e-mail/web address
Co-Operative International	221 Upper Richmond Rd. Putney London SW15 6SQ	Tel +44 20 8788 5303 Fax +44 20 8788 2525	henley.wright@letsco-operate.com www.letsco-operate.com
Kenyon Air Transportation	81 Westbourne Grove London W2 4UL	Tel. +44 20 7258 1130 Fax +44 20 7243 3125	katuk@dial.pipex.com
Phoenix International	13 The Broadway Gunnersbury Lane London W3 8HR	Tel: +44 20 8993 8767	
Rowland Brothers International	301-305 Whitehorse Rd Croydon CR0 2HR	Tel. +44 20 8684 2324 Fax +44 20 8684 8000	info@rowlandbrothersinternational.co.uk www.rowlandbrothersinternational.co.uk
National Association Of Funeral Directors	618 Warwick Road Solihull B91 1AA	Tel. +44 121 711 1343 Fax +44 121 711 1351	info@nafd.org.uk www.nafd.org.uk