

Welcome to my blog posts from partlycloudy.co.uk, the travel journal I wrote when living in Singapore from 2012-2017. Not wanting to do away with website content, I've made PDFs of some of the posts and uploaded them here, to keep the adventures alive.

## Pot luck

November 21 2013



There's a pair of big baskets at the [Peranakan Museum](#), where I am training to work in a part time capacity as a volunteer tour guide. These bamboo containers are known as '[bakul siah](#)', or 'auspicious baskets'. They were part of the 12-day Peranakan wedding ceremony, used to transport gifts between the houses of the bride and groom. They have several units or shelves, are cylindrical in shape and shiny with lacquer, and are held at the top by a big single handle. I love the idea of them, the ceremonial aspect, and the way they look.

This morning, a few of us from the museum's guiding class went on a tour of the [Baba House](#). This is a great example of a Peranakan home in Singapore that visitors can walk through. There in the master bedroom was a basket, and not just one but several (lucky couple).

After the tour someone said they'd seen an antique shop nearby. Even better it was actually open (shops open late in Sing). We decided to pay a visit. Like most antique shops, it was jammed to the rafters with stuff. Stacks of shoes, retro phones, an old Cola sign under an altar that was dotted with more things, tinkling bells, crystal vases, odd wooden objects, crazy neon candles. It reminded me of my childhood apartment back in London, furnished with stuff from the junk shops my parents loved to visit.

Having pushed to the back, I spotted something covered in a blanket, a peek of dusty red, a box in three parts with a big handle. It was smaller than the ones in the museum, but unmistakable. I wiped off some dust and the colours shone through.

I asked the owner how old? He said hmmm, maybe 70 years, lor. I went to look for my friend again and asked her what she might pay, because she's been an expat in Singapore for a lot longer than me. After much muttering we reached a figure, and I returned to the front of the store where the owner stood, and we started the bidding.

My bakul siah now sits on top of our bookshelves. It has had a proper wipe-down and the colours are shining out. It looks completely at home besides our dark wood furniture and red artefacts, of which we seem to have many. I don't know how genuine or how old it is, or how much of a good deal I got. I'm not sure whether I should have brought it home at all. But I just don't care, it's lovely.

*[Eleven years later in 2024, after editing this piece, I go and look at my bakul siah in the lounge, give it a dust, and reassure it that it is still beautiful, and much loved]*