Vatican

Vatican News



From left, Pope Francis is welcomed by Singapore's Minister of Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong and his wife (name not given) and Ambassador of Singapore to the Holy See Ang Janet Guat Har as he arrives at Singapore Changi International Airport, Wednesday, Sept. 11. Pope Francis is heading to Singapore for the final leg of his 11-day trip to Asia and Oceania. (AP photo/Gregorio Borgia)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

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Singapore — September 11, 2024
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Pope Francis on Sept. 11 landed in Singapore, the world's most religiously diverse country, where he is expected to encourage its small but growing Catholic community and to continue his push for pluralism on the Asian continent.

The pope arrived here in Asia's wealthiest nation following a three-day visit to one of the region's poorest nations, East Timor, on the final stop of a nearly two-week swing through Asia and Oceania on what is the longest trip of his papacy.

The city's soaring and shimmering skyscrapers mark a stark contrast from the dusty and developing streets that the pontiff left earlier today. While East Timor is nearly 98% Catholic — and effectively half of its population turned out for the pope's Mass there on Sept. 10 — less than 7% of Singapore is Catholic.

During his two-night stay here in Singapore, the pope is scheduled to deliver a closely watched address to government and civil leaders of the economic powerhouse where he is expected to weigh in on social and economic inequalities facing the region. During his less than 48-hour stay, he will also inaugurate a new Catholic facility for the sick and the elderly and preside over a Mass at one of the city's major sports arenas that could draw a crowd of some 50,000.



Pope Francis receives a bouquet of flowers from a group of children as he arrives Sept. 11 in Singapore, the last stop on his four-nation visit to Asia and the Pacific. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

The last pope to visit this nation on the southern tip of Malaysia was Pope John Paul II during a brief five-hour layover in 1986. Since then, the city's population has rapidly grown to nearly 6 million residents and it now has one of the densest populations in the world.

Looming large in the background, however, will be nearby China — a nation that Francis has been keen to engage throughout his papacy and where there has been a recent thawing of relations between the Holy See and the vast superpower, despite a controversial Vatican-China agreement over the appointment of bishops in the country. About three-fourths of Singaporeans are ethnic Chinese.

Upon his arrival here, Francis was greeted inside the airport in a small reception area by Edwin Tong, the minister for culture, community and youth, and a

delegation of government and church officials. The pontiff does not have any more public events on his calendar today, but is scheduled to have a private meeting with the local Jesuit community here later this evening.

Despite a number of underlying health challenges and enduring brutal heat and humidity, the 87-year-old pontiff has shown remarkable stamina throughout the trip, which will conclude on Sept. 13, followed by a 12-hour return flight to Rome.

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