FOR DINERS · FROM UNCLE JAMES

YOUR TABLE

Four pages for the people who eat at hawker centres: what your plate pays for, what has changed, why being a regular matters, and what you can do about it.

This is a plan, not yet a programme. Where it says the list or the mark "will" do something, read "would, if it goes ahead".

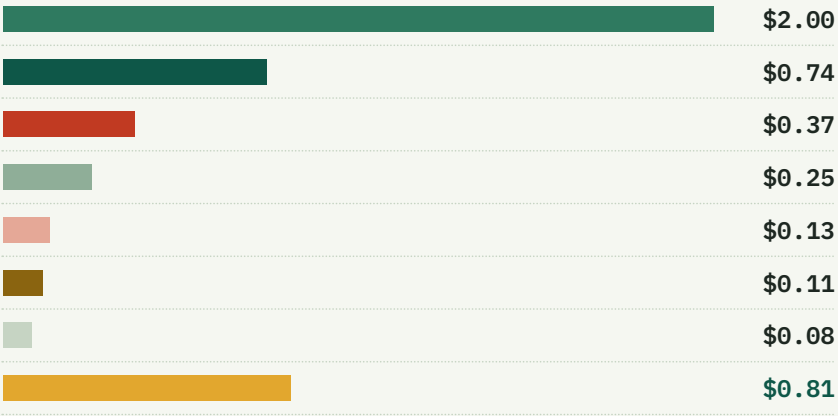
SAVING SINGAPORE'S HAWKER HERITAGE · YOUR TABLE · VERSION 1.9.3 · NOVEMBER 2026 · HAWKER.SILICONWOK.COM/YOUR-TABLE

PAGE ONE

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE

Take a $4.50 plate at a stall in an NEA (National Environment Agency, which runs the public hawker centres) hawker centre – chicken rice, say, or a bowl of noodles. Here is where your money goes, at the model's typical stall in 2026.

WHERE YOUR $4.50 GOES



Modelled, not measured, and rounded to the cent. At a private coffeeshop the same kind of plate costs more, and almost all of the extra goes to the landlord.

Who is cooking it

The cook is probably about 60; that has been the median (the middle figure: half are above it, half below) age of Singapore's hawkers since 2018. The one official figure for what he earns is about $1,470 a month (2021, for hawkers who work alone). That is less than the delivery riders who bring food to your door, on about $1,800, whom the law now protects.

He works about 13 hours a day. At the model's stall that comes to $9.69 an hour – less than the $11.64 the Progressive Wage (the pay ladder the Government sets for lower-wage jobs) sets for the assistant he pays to wash up. And when he falls ill, the stall shuts and the bills do not. Each day closed costs him about $372, because the rent, the fees and the assistant's pay go on; six weeks away cost about $13,400. The employee in the next kitchen would be paid in full for his medical leave.

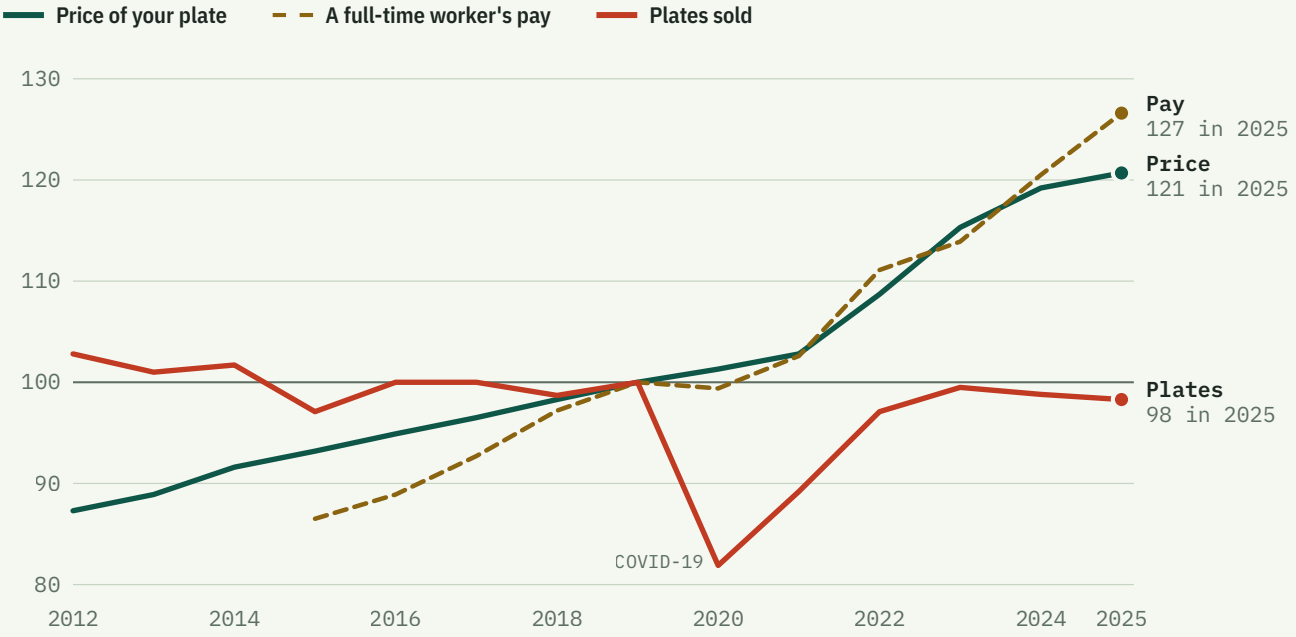
> **That is what this plan is about. Not the price of your plate. The life behind it.**

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WHAT CHANGED SINCE 2012

You are right that your plate costs more than it did. SingStat's chicken rice went from $3.13 in 2014 to $4.24 in December 2024, and at coffee shops, food courts and other eating places prices rose about 36% from 2012 to 2025. Yet the plates did not grow at all: in real terms (value after inflation) those shops sold 1.7% less in 2025 than in 2019, while the median full-time worker's pay rose 46% from 2015. So the squeeze is not in the price of the plate; it is in the number of plates, and in what the same day's work earns against a wage job that keeps climbing.



Dearer plates, no more of them. Each line is set to 100 in 2019. Plates are real sales at cafés, food courts and other eating places (coffee shops in, hawker stalls out); hawker prices for 2015–18 are estimated; pay is the median full-time income from work. SingStat, MOM (Ministry of Manpower), MTI; our arithmetic.

The median that did not move

The Government says the rent of a stall has hardly changed, and it is right. The rent of a non-subsidised NEA stall held at about $1,250 for a decade. Still, a median hides who pays it. The cheap seats are going: 53% of cooked-food hawkers paid a subsidised rent in 2013, and about 30% in 2023, as the pioneers on the old rents retired.

The newcomer who pays the bid

A newcomer does not pay the median. He pays what he bid. Win a stall at the 2023 median bid of about $1,800 a month, against a valuation of $1,450, and under the renewal rule of November 2024 you pay $18,900 above that valuation in your first six years before your rent comes down to it. That is the young cook we say we want.

> **So when you hear that the median rent has not moved, believe it. Then ask who is not in the median.**

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WHY YOUR REGULAR MATTERS

Ask a hawker who keeps him going and he will not say the tourists. He will say the regulars: the uncle whose kopi is on the counter before he sits down, the auntie who takes four packets of kway chap home every Sunday. The plan gives the neighbourhood a way to say so out loud. It is called the Regulars' List.

WHO COUNTS

A regular is one named person who orders from the stall at least once a week, to eat there or to take away. The unit is the order, not the plate: the auntie with four packets is one regular, counted once.

TWENTY NAMES

A stall is listed when 20 of its regulars put their names to it. You endorse a stall once, checked lightly by your mobile number, and nothing is ever given for it: no prize, no discount, no lucky draw. Nominations open at all 123 government hawker centres from Year 1.

THE GRADES

The listing is Bronze. Silver, Gold and Platinum follow at 50, 100 and 250 names – or sooner, when a small stall's regulars already place a big enough share of its orders, so that a small stall with a loyal following is not held back by its size. The share comes from the hawker's own count, and no stall's share is ever published.

NO WAY DOWN

Grades only go up. A stall leaves the list only if its hawker chooses to, or when it closes. There is no yearly re-test, and no one is ever struck off for standing still.

Why it matters

Because regulars are what a sound stall runs on. No one has measured this for hawkers, so the plan borrows from restaurants and takes a durable base to be about a third of a stall's orders coming from its weekly regulars (35%, an assumption the first year's count of orders will test). At a typical stall that is about 168 people: past Gold. Your name on the list is not charity. It is the stall's business, written down.

A compliment, never a grade

The decal on the counter will say "a dish this neighbourhood wants kept", with the grade and the year it was listed, and nothing else. It does not say the food is the best; that is what the awards are for. No one scores the hawker's manners, and there is no complaint box. A stall that stays at Bronze for ten years has a neighbourhood that wants its dish kept, and the list says only that.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO, AND WHAT WE ASK

I am not asking you to pay more for your lunch. I am asking for five small things, from the lightest to the heaviest.

1. **Endorse a dish.** When the list opens, put your name to the stalls you go back to every week. Twenty of you are enough to list one.
2. **Look for the Heritage Plate mark.** From about Year 3, a hotel, restaurant or caterer that cooks a master's dish under licence will show the mark, name the master and point you to the stall. A disclosed 50 cents a plate is priced in, so you opt in by ordering, and 40% of it goes to the master's family.
3. **Spend your vouchers at a stall.** More than $2.1bn of CDC (Community Development Council) and SG60 vouchers was spent at hawkers and heartland merchants over four years. The plan asks the Government to put a hawker tag on the vouchers it already sends, for the households that need help most, so that the money lands where the cooks are.
4. **Give to the Endowment.** Once the Hawker Endowment exists, a gift of any size is matched dollar for dollar until the $10M matching pool (public money that matches gifts dollar for dollar) is used. It helps pay for the masters who teach, the cooks who learn and the relief cooks who keep a stall open when its hawker falls ill.
5. **Visit a Lighthouse (the first two pilot centres, Chinatown Complex and Geylang Serai).** Chinatown Complex and Geylang Serai would be the first two centres to run the whole plan, from Year 1, if their own hawkers vote for it. Until then, walk through a day at one (hawker.siliconwok.com/day), from the first wok at dawn to the last tray.

AND ONE THING WE ASK OF THE GOVERNMENT

Count the stalls at risk, and put the count in Singapore's next report to UNESCO, due on 30 June 2027.

Today no one keeps that list; the Government said so in Parliament this October. Everything else the plan asks of the State, and what the plan costs, is in the Executive Summary.

> **Hawker culture belongs to the people who cook and the people who eat. I have written the rest of this plan for the cooks and for the officials. This part is yours.**

UNCLE JAMES · OCTOBER 2026

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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Initiated by	Uncle James
Contributors	None yet. The project began with one person and hopes to grow into a team that cares; contributors will be credited here by name.
The library	1 Executive Summary 1.9.3 · 2 The Plan 1.9.3 · A The Record 1.9.3 · B The Budget Book 1.9.3 · C Hawkers and Social Protection 1.9.3 · D Follow the Plate 1.9.3 · E Succession Economics 1.9.3 · F Method, Levers and Data 1.9.3 · G The Technical Paper 1.9.3 · S Sources 1.9.3 · Your Table 1.9.3
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