

SULAWESI YUNNAN BOSTON ZAMBIA GUJARAT LONDON

DestinAsian

FROM ASIA TO THE WORLD

Perfect Days in Palawan



Exploring
the Philippines'
Last Frontier



FLÂNEUR FOREVER





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FEATURES

74 SECRETS OF THE SULU SEA

From the karst-studded seascape of Coron Bay to the teeming reefs of Tubbataha, back-to-back boat trips in the waters of the western Philippines provide passage to the remoter corners of Palawan.

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ON THE COVER Amid the limestone karsts of northwestern Palawan.
Photograph by **Francisco Guerrero**



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It's one of the most enticing destinations in Indonesia, yet the majority of travelers pass Toraja by in favor of Bali or Borobudur. They shouldn't.

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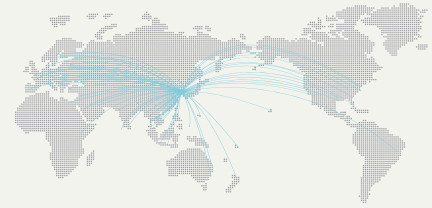
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OH, THE PLACES TO GO

Something about the Philippines

has always piqued my curiosity. As an Indonesian, I innately have an affinity for archipelagos and the way each of thousands of islands can retain a beauty and culture

uniquely its own. And while Boracay is Boracay, the Philippines has always caught my eye for its far-flung islands that must be some of the most spectacular in the world, yet still remain low-key and well preserved. Johnny Langenheim has only furthered my fascination in his two-part waterborne adventure in Palawan (see page 74) where he swims with sharks on scuba dives through some of Asia's best reefs, sleeps in bamboo bungalows stuck in the sand, hangs out with local marine guards, and drinks rum cocktails under the stars. What an enviable trip.

On an entirely different type of journey, one of our longtime writers Jennifer Chen recently relocated from Beijing to Boston and reported back on her new hometown (see page 84). Stepping out from the shadow of New York, Boston sounds to be growing into quite the renaissance city, with its dodgy parts being

claimed by young creative types recasting them as cool neighborhoods, an impressive museum circuit including a new Renzo Piano reformulation of Harvard's galleries, and one of the best food scenes on the East Coast. Further into our pages is a feature on Xishuangbanna, a tea- and tribe-filled region in the tropical hills of southernmost China that may be the country's best-kept secret (see page 96); and back at home, Cristian Rahadiansyah—the editor of *DestinAsian's* Indonesian edition—writes of his trip to Toraja, a mystical region on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi where life still revolves around ancient death rituals (see page 106). It's yet another wonder hidden deep in an archipelago.



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**JENNIFER CHEN****Home Base:** Boston**Wrote:** “Boston Rebooted,” p. 84

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Moving from Beijing to Boston, the biggest adjustment for me was the blue skies. My first few months, I would constantly bump into people because I was gazing upward all the time. And then I would get to my office and gawp out the window for a while. I also couldn't get over the amount of wildlife in Cambridge. So far I've seen rabbits, wild turkeys, and plenty of blue jays and cardinals. It's only a matter of time before I spot a white-tailed deer.

**KATHERINE JACK****Home Base:** Puerto Princesa, Palawan**Photographed:** “Secrets of the Sulu Sea,” p. 74

.....

The best thing about living in Palawan is the people you meet. Sure, the islands are stunning, but for me it's the Palawēños themselves who make each place truly special. They are among the happiest and most welcoming folks I've ever met.

My favorite memory from my days aboard the *Balatik* is sitting on deck watching sea eagles glide and soar over Palawan's remote northern islands.

**CRISTIAN RAHADANSYAH****Home Base:** Jakarta**Wrote:** “A Land Apart,” p. 106

.....

What impressed me most about Toraja is how the people are preserving their culture. More than half of all Torajans now live outside the region, but their ties with their homeland remain close. Their remittances fund the death rituals back home and keep the ancestral traditions alive.

The next time I visit, it will be for Toraja's outdoor activities: coffee picking on Sapan hill, rafting on the Sa'dan River, and trekking in Batutumonga Valley.

**AUSTRALIAN RHAPSODY**

I was delighted to read Claire Scobie's beautifully written story “The Outback of Beyond” [April/May], as it recalled so many wonderful moments from a trip to Australia's Top End that my husband and I took a couple years ago. We didn't have the Cicada Lodge to stay at since it hadn't opened yet, but we did have many happy days exploring Litchfield National Park and Katherine Gorge—and licking termite mounds of our own! The Northern Territory offers so many great moments, as does your article about it.

—Yvonne Kubic, Sydney



LAUDING THE LION CITY I found Daven Wu's insights into the evolution of Singapore to be timely and compelling [“Singapore, Now and Then,” June/July]. Call it overly sanitized and a nanny state if you will, but Singapore really is a miracle of a country and its citizens are today among the most affluent in the region. Here's to the next 50 years!

—Susie Tsu, Hong Kong

FANTASY ISLAND Your June islands-themed issue is sitting on my kitchen table, and those beautiful photos

from the Maldives are making my (rainy) day [“Vela Vista”]. What else ignites one's castaway fantasies like a gorgeous tropical island?

—Aruna Desai, Bangkok

A CASE FOR CORFU Reading your lyrical account of Corfu [“Greek Expectations,” June/July] made me want to start packing my bags. Thanks for the inspiration.

—Cynthia Malone, Singapore

We welcome your views and recommendations. Letters to the editor should be sent via e-mail to letter@destinasian.com or by post to The Editor, DestinAsian Magazine, P.O. Box 08, JKPPJ, Jakarta, 10210A, Indonesia. Published letters may be edited for style, clarity, and length.



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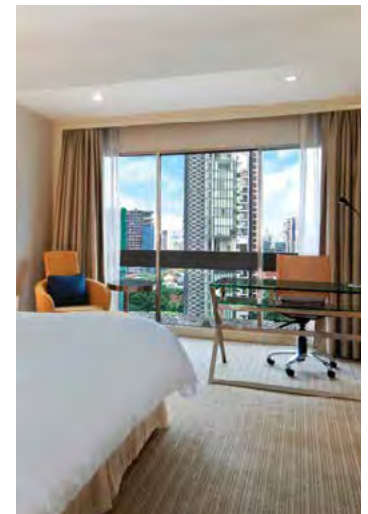
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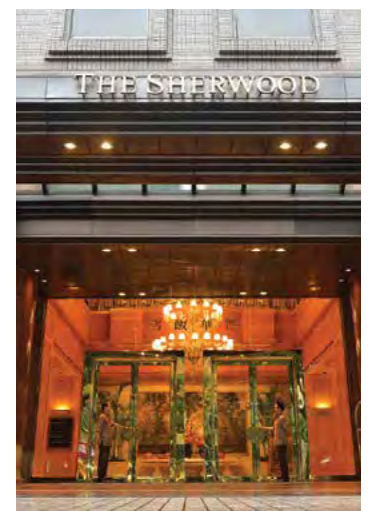
PREFERRED HOTELS & RESORTS

With its Legends of Thailand package, independent hotel collection Preferred Hotels & Resorts is offering travelers who book two consecutive nights at any of its three top-tier properties in Thailand—The Siam in Bangkok, Andara Resort & Villas in Phuket, and the Lanna-inspired Dhara Dhevi in Chiang Mai (pictured above)—a complimentary third night at one of the other two hotels. The deal runs until December 21, with nightly rates ranging from US\$354 at The Siam to US\$638 at the Andara (preferredhotels.com).



Singapore HILTON SINGAPORE

Here's another reason to cheer Singapore's golden jubilee celebrations: until the end of the year, the Hilton on Orchard Road (along with its sister property in the Marina Bay area, the Conrad Centennial) is offering three consecutive nights of accommodation for the price of two, based on the best available rate and provided that bookings are made by August 31. This also serves as the perfect excuse to check out the hotel's new grill restaurant, Opus, where sustainable seafood and prime cuts of house-aged beef are the order of the day (hilton.com).



Taiwan THE SHERWOOD TAIPEI

Marking a quarter century of five-star service in the Taiwanese capital, this Minsheng area hotel has rolled out a 25th Anniversary Room Package that offers three nights in a junior suite for the price of two—a US\$250 value. Valid until September 30, the deal comes with daily breakfast and Wi-Fi as well (thesherwoodtaipeihotel.com).

COURTESY OF DHARA DHEVI IN CHIANG MAI; COURTESY OF HILTON SINGAPORE; COURTESY OF THE SHERWOOD TAIPEI; COURTESY OF DUSTY HANI MALDIVES; COURTESY OF AKYRA MANOR



Maldives

DUSIT THANI MALDIVES

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An all-inclusive Indian Ocean escape awaits in the Baa Atoll with the Dusit Island Getaway special. Starting from US\$499 per person per night for stays up to September 30, the package includes accommodation in a spacious beachfront villa; daily breakfast, lunch, and dinner complemented by select alcoholic beverages; a guided snorkeling tour of the house reef; late checkout; 20 percent off treatments at the Dusit Thani's treetop spa; and discounted seaplane transfers from Male International Airport, a 35-minute flight away (dusit.com).



Thailand
AKYRA MANOR
CHIANG MAI

.....

To celebrate its August 1 opening in Chiang Mai's hip Nimmanhaemin area, Akyra Manor is offering stays in its 60-square-meter Deluxe Suites for just THB4,200 (US\$125) per night—more than half off the best available rate—until October 31. The same period sees the design-centric hotel host an exhibition of Hollywood portraiture by celebrity photographer Andy Gotts (theakgra.com).

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GOOD *to* GO

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Spicing Things Up

The resort's Sala Thai restaurant brings the flavors of Thailand to this corner of Sichuan.



SICHUAN EASE

With pandas, heritage sites, and pleasant mountain scenery at its doorstep, the brand-new **Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain** looks set to give hotels in Chengdu (an hour's drive away) a run for their money. Thailand-based Six Senses' first venture in China is both eco-friendly—airport transfers are in a chauffeured Tesla—and stylishly conceived, with tile-roofed villas awash in pale woods and the latest in-room technology. There's a tea lounge on site, along with three restaurants, a smoothie bar, and a spa that includes cupping and *tui na* massages on its treatment menu. But the biggest drawing card is the resort's location on the western edge of the Sichuan Basin, which puts guests within easy striking distance of the UNESCO-listed irrigation works of Dujiangyan, the Panda Valley habitat, the ancient town of Tai'an, and the Taoist temples and hiking trails of Mount Qing Cheng (86-28/8728-9871; sixsenses.com; doubles from US\$310). —David Tse

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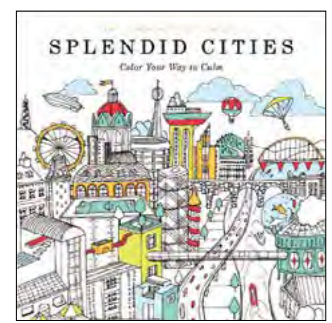
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FINE LINES

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Next time you're looking to relax, consider some crayons. Publisher Little, Brown and Company has introduced a new series of four travel-inspired coloring books for adults, with *Splendid Cities* and *Secret Paris* released in June, and *Secret New York* and *Secret Tokyo* due out in October. Billed as calming stress-relievers, their penned outlines of landmarks and cityscapes, gardens and neighborhoods, and scenes of quaint street life are transporting and intricately artistic—and that's even before color is added (US\$16; littlebrown.com). —David Tse

PARK PLACE

When it opened in the 1950s, the Vremena Goda public canteen served hundreds of people in one sitting. Today, the Brezhnev-era building in Moscow's Gorky Park has ditched its proletariat past in favor of contemporary art. Abandoned for 20 years, the 54,000-square-meter structure was purchased by Russian businesswoman and gallerist Dasha Zhukova and transformed by Rem Koolhaas and his firm OMA into a polycarbonate-clad space for her **Garage Museum of Contemporary Art**, founded in 2008 and named after its original home, a 1920s avant-garde bus depot across town. The museum's new digs retain elements of its past: original Soviet mosaics have been preserved, and decorative tiles were kept intact. But Koolhaas hasn't shied away from reinventing the box-like concrete space, adding the dramatic translucent plastic skin as well as two vertical sliding doors that rise seven meters above roof level when fully opened. And by the end of September, a red metal staircase will provide access to a roof terrace. Five exhibition galleries showcase Zhukova's archive of national contemporary art from the 1950s to the present day, including a piece by Taryn Simon that involves turning liquid radioactive waste into crystallized black glass, and photographs by George Kiesevalter of Moscow's underground art scene in the 1970s and '80s (7-495/645-0520; garageccc.com). —Natasha Dragun



SINGAPORE'S BRITISH INVASION

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In the culinary Hollywood that is Marina Bay Sands, an outpost of Gordon Ramsay's **Bread Street Kitchen** has opened as the complex's ninth celebrity-chef restaurant and fourth location of the famed London brasserie. It's styled with the same well-mannered informality as the original Bread Street—black-and-white tiled floors, staff in gingham button-downs, a glossy black bar, a small wine cellar—and from 11 a.m. onward, a smart crowd pours in for meals little changed from those served in London's Bread Street, with signatures such as potted salt-beef brisket (pictured above) and crisp-skinned pork belly with apple chutney. The view, however, is distinctly Singaporean, with the restaurant's all-glass facade staring straight out over Marina Bay (65/6688-5665; marinabaysands.com). —Gabrielle Lipton

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MALAYSIAN MODERN

At his debut restaurant Dewakan, chef Darren Teoh is shaking up the Kuala Lumpur food scene by fashioning Malaysian cuisine in new ways.

BY GABRIELLE LIPTON

The 10-course menu at Dewakan doesn't list any farm names, no aberrant foraged plants, not even a cocktail. Nothing about it hints at a trend; nothing about it hints at anything, because it's a first.

Opened in March just outside of Kuala Lumpur on the new Glenmarie campus of KDU University College—which runs Malaysia's best culinary arts program—Dewakan is not only Malaysian chef Darren Teoh's first restaurant, but it's also the first restaurant to advance Malaysian cuisine into something modern and imaginative: curried-mango gazpacho, Forbidden Rice porridge with a mushroom broth infused tableside, *gula melaka* marquise. After apprenticing in Europe at restaurants Amador and Noma, Teoh returned home woefully uninspired by his country's food scene, with chefs rarely venturing out of shophouses without relying on



imports like foie gras and salmon to appear more upscale. He decided it was time for Malaysia to stop looking west for ideas and ingredients and start looking to itself.

"I want to show Malaysians that they can take ordinary food and make it fantastic," says Teoh, which has translated into both reinterpretations of Malaysian recipes and new dishes built around native flavors. This, of course, has required establishing quality sources, including permaculture group Eats, Shoots & Roots where Teoh goes to pluck herbs and flowers (for the blue dot of peaberry sauce on the plate of red prawn and prawn tartare) and fishermen who send seafood that was swimming just hours before (like the pomfret—so flaky that if it's not forked properly, it will never make it

to your mouth—lying beside a small pond of sparkling water chestnut foam).

At many talked-about new restaurants, the food often ends up taking second stage to the buzzy scene, but Dewakan is designed for quite the opposite effect. The glass-sided space is elegant but plain; meals are served with a single glass of wine, red or white. Because forward-thinking as it may be, Dewakan is actually quite a classic restaurant—wholly about the food. ●

KDU University College, Utropolis Glenmarie, Jalan Kontraktor U1/14, Selangor; 60-3/5565-0767; dewakan.my; ten courses for US\$55.



Going Native
Clockwise from top left: Red prawn and prawn tartare topped with fried prawn head and *pegaga* greens; chef Darren Teoh; an infusion siphon preparing a broth tableside.

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Glowing Tribute

Mural installations on the stepwell-inspired facade of the Indian Heritage Centre glow at night thanks to color-changing LED lights. Bottom right: The museum's Roots and Routes gallery tells the story of generations of Indian migrants.



CENTER STAGE

A bold new cultural facility traces the ancient roots and influences of the Indian community in Singapore. BY SANJAY SURANA

Chinatown and the old Malay quarter of Kampong Glam have had their own heritage centers for at least a decade now, institutions that pay respective tribute to the pioneering generations of Singapore's two largest ethnic groups. So it was surely only a matter of time before a similar establishment appeared in Little India, the historic hub of the city-state's vibrant Indian community. That place—the US\$15.6 million Indian Heritage Centre—finally opened in May, an artfully realized repository that celebrates the South Asian diaspora and its deep impact on Singaporean society, where one in 11 people are of Indian (predominantly Tamil) ancestry.

Managed by the National Heritage Board, the IHC occupies a corner plot on Campbell Lane, just across from the row of busy 1920s shophouses that constitute the Little India Arcade. The new building, an angular four-story structure of glass and concrete designed by local firm Greg Shand Architects, is at first

glance a wholly contemporary addition to the neighborhood. Yet it cleverly synthesizes both the modern and the ancient with a diamond-patterned glass curtain wall that nods to the lattice-like *jali* windows of classic Indian architecture while providing a translucent facade for a series of external staircases whose geometry is predicated on the *baoli*, or Indian stepped well. At night, when lit up, the building resembles a glowing lantern.

Inside, the oak-floored exhibition spaces are cocooning and transporting. Remarkably, the IHC is the first museum in Southeast Asia to focus on the heritage of the Indian diaspora, and it traces their origins and influences through a series of thematic galleries filled with archival photos, newspaper clippings, and multimedia displays in both English and Tamil. One learns that while Indians were present in Malaya from the 15th century onward, the first to arrive in Singapore came as sepoys and servants with Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819. Another panel describes how Indian traders congregated around Chulia and Market streets, shipbuilders lived near North Bridge Road, and textile merchants honed in on Arab Street, a legacy still evident today. Associations and the print culture developed; Chettiars and Sikhs took on the roles of money lenders; and Indian Singaporeans as a whole excelled in the fields of politics, business, media, and the performing arts, an achievement highlighted on a wall in the lower gallery, where four large busts of Bose, Gandhi, Nehru, and Tagore—gifted by the Indian government—commemorate half a century of ties between the two countries.

The highest concentration of eye candy is in the first themed space, Early Contact, which explores India's influence on Southeast Asia from the first century through the 1800s. Highlights include a 19th-century tiled Islamic facade from the Multan region of modern-day Pakistan; venerable Buddhist statues from India, Sri Lanka, and Java; an Angkor-era chariot decoration from Cambodia depicting the eagle-like Hindu divinity Garuda; Balinese *wayang kulit* puppets; and a trove of antique tunics, shawls, jewelry, and miniatures paintings. Perhaps the most impressive artifact is an ornate wooden Chettinad doorway from the late 1800s, its jamb and lintel decorated with 5,000 minute carvings. And the displays don't focus exclusively on Hinduism; thoughtful interpretations of the role of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam in the lives of the diaspora ensure that, as with Singapore itself, a smorgasbord of cultures coexists in one space. ©

5 Campbell Lane; indianheritage.org.sg



COURTESY OF GREG SHAND ARCHITECTS



OVERNIGHT SENSATIONS

If New York is the city that never sleeps, London could justifiably be called “the town that likes to be tucked in early with a cup of hot cocoa.” But the British capital looks set to get a lot more lively in the wee hours with the September 12 debut of the Night Tube, which will see trains on five of the Underground’s most tourist-friendly lines—Jubilee, Victoria, Northern, Piccadilly, and Central—run around the clock on Fridays and Saturdays. For night owls wanting to make the most of the new service, here’s a list of things to keep you busy till dawn.

BY WILL HIDE

11 P.M.

.....

Hit London’s most famous jazz club, Ronnie Scott’s in Soho, which is just getting going at this time—and keeps going until 3 a.m. on weekends.

Nearest station: Leicester Square on the Northern and Piccadilly lines, a four-minute walk. ronniescotts.co.uk

12 A.M.

.....

Shakespeare’s Globe theater holds occasional midnight matinees in the summer, with the last of the season’s performances—*Much Ado About Nothing*—kicking off at 11:59 p.m. on September 11.

Nearest station: St. Paul’s on the Central Line, a 15-minute walk. shakespearesglobe.com; tickets from about US\$8

1 A.M.

.....

The Blood Shot Supper Club is a monthly gathering of professional chefs at The Dairy restaurant in Clapham, but eight members of the public can apply to join the five-course feast, which only starts at 1 a.m.

Nearest station: Clapham Common on the Northern Line, a one-minute walk. the-dairy.co.uk; dinner from US\$94

2 A.M.

.....

Catch the last hour at Boujis, an exclusive Kensington nightclub favored by junior royals and reality-TV stars alike. Entry, alas, is not guaranteed unless you book a table with a minimum spend of almost US\$800.

Nearest station: South

Kensington on the Piccadilly Line, a one-minute walk. boujis.com

4 A.M.

.....

Fancy a nocturnal coiffure? Actresses about to appear on breakfast TV and ambulance crews finishing their 4 a.m. shifts all get their hair cut at Neil Cornelius’s 24-hour hairdressing salon on New Bond Street in Mayfair.

Nearest station: Bond Street on the Central Line, a three-minute walk. nclstfloor.com; a cut and blow dry starts at US\$118

5 A.M.

.....

Roast octopus with a view? Situated on the 40th floor of a Liverpool Street skyscraper, Duck & Waffle is a round-the-clock restaurant—and the

highest in Britain—that at this hour attracts as many clubbers staggering home as City bankers going to work.

Nearest station: Liverpool Street on the Central Line, a two-minute walk. duckandwaffle.com

6 A.M.

.....

Work off the night’s excesses (or jump-start your day) with a guided 10-kilometer run through Hyde Park. City Jogging Tours can tailor-make an experience that includes trying to keep pace with the horses of the Household Cavalry, who exercise there at first light.

Nearest station: Hyde Park Corner on the Piccadilly Line, which puts you right there. cityjoggingtours.co.uk; from US\$72



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How to Get There

Reachable in three-plus hours by road or rail from Colombo, Kandy is also served by daily flights from Sri Lanka's capital on **Cinnamon Air** (cinnamonair.com; US\$153 one way), a scenic seaplane trip that lands you at the Polgolla Reservoir just 35 minutes after takeoff.

Where to Stay Opened in May, the 122-room **Ozo Kandy** (ozohotels.com; doubles from US\$109) is a spiffy new hotel near the lake with a rooftop pool and bar and the most modern amenities in town.

What Else? Plan a side trip to Minneriya National Park, 100 km to the north. August and September mark the height of the dry season here, when hundreds of elephants congregate around the park's ancient reservoir in an annual migration known as The Gathering. For arrangements, contact safari camp operator **Mahoora** (mahoora.lk).

CAUGHT ON KANDY

With its mild upland climate, pretty centerpiece lake, and rich history as old Ceylon's last Sinhalese capital, the central Sri Lankan city of Kandy is a rewarding destination all year round. Yet there's no better time to visit than during the 10 days of the Esala Perahera, a series of lavish processions held in honor of one of the Buddha's teeth—a sacred relic enshrined in Kandy's moat-fronted Sri Dalada Maligawa, or Temple of the Tooth (pictured). Beginning this year on August 20, the parades will see dancers and jugglers, drummers and trumpet blowers, fire twirlers, whip crackers, and caparisoned elephants wend through the nighttime streets of Kandy in a show of pomp and pageantry that could well be Buddhism's most colorful celebration. —David Tse





PIANO MAN

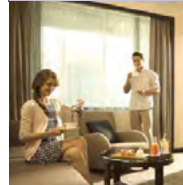


Rail tours aboard the *Eastern & Oriental Express* (belmond.com) ferry passengers not only through the countryside of Thailand and the Malay Peninsula, but also back in time to an earlier, more gracious era of train travel—think wood-paneled compartments, gleaming brass, dressy dinners, and discreet stewards. Adding to the nostalgic ambience is resident Singaporean pianist **Peter Consigliere**, whose repertoire of swing, jazz, and ragtime classics has entertained guests in the *E&O*'s convivial Bar Car for 20 years now. Here, he talks about his time aboard Southeast Asia's only luxury train.

- **KEEPING TRACK** "I've worked on the *Eastern & Oriental* most days of the week for the last two decades. In terms of rail miles, I guess I've ridden well over 1,800,000 kilometers."
- **PLAYLIST** "Most of the music I play harks back to the golden age of train travel, though of course I take requests as well—an Indian couple once asked for a Tamil song, so I played them a tune called 'I Yoh Yoh Samy.' A particular favorite of my own is—no surprise here—'Chattanooga Choo Choo.'"
- **WELL SUITED** "I always wear a tuxedo when I play and never get tired of

dressing up. In the evenings, black tie is also worn by many *E&O* staff as well as by a good number of our guests, helping to set a genteel tone onboard."

- **DOWNTIME** "I enjoy mingling with passengers when I'm not on duty. Many of our guests join us as part of a longer Asian itinerary, and it's always interesting to hear where they have been and where they are off to next. And sometimes there's a brush with celebrity. The *E&O* has hosted its share of royals and personalities since it launched in 1993, most memorably Neil Young, Bryan Adams, and Michael Palin." ©



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HONG KONG BY THE 'HOOD

Longtime Hong Kong resident and journalist Penny Watson has assembled her local knowledge into the city's latest guidebook, *Hong Kong Precincts*, which showcases shops, eateries, cafés, and bars in 15 different neighborhoods. Here, she shares her top 10 spots on Hong Kong Island. **BY PENNY WATSON**



Canto Cool
Outside Sheung Wan's Mrs. Pound. Right: Roast wagyu short ribs with jalapeño puree at Ho Lee Fook.

● **HO LEE FOOK** The city's latest ode to Cantonese cool is a basement restaurant dedicated to *cha chaan teng*-style comfort food with a modern twist that works surprisingly well. The roast wagyu short ribs with jalapeño puree says it all (G/F, 1-5 Elgin St., Central; 852/2810-0860; holeefookhk.com.hk).

● **RONIN** With just 14 leather-clad bar seats, this sleek Japanese dining bar is well worth detouring off Gough Street to find. The team behind it knows plenty about food, people, and Japan, and they have pooled that knowledge to awesome effect (8 Wo On Ln., Sheung Wan; 852/2547-5263; roninhk.com).

● **LE BOUDOIR** There's more than a hint of Parisian burlesque at Le Boudoir, a sumptuous, crimson-hued cocktail bar in a cozy basement space complete with chandeliers, gilt mirrors, and Victorian-era furniture. The drinks will make you swoon too (65 Wyndham St., Central; 852/2530-3870; french-creations.com).

● **PMQ** It's hard to beat the former Police Married Quarters complex for a one-stop shopping experience, with 100 or so outlets selling everything from jewelry, metalwork, and art to homewares, fashion, and footwear. It's particularly good as a platform for homegrown designers and artisans (35 Aberdeen St., Central; 852/2870-2335; pmq.org.hk).

● **MRS. POUND** Disguised as a traditional Chinese stamp shop, this innovative newbie turns out a contemporary take on Asian street-food favorites (beef *rendang*, dumplings, Xinjiang spiced





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City Slickers

Casa Capriz's new Wong Chuk Hang showroom. Left, from top: Black king fish with *shichimi*, sesame, and avocado, on the seasonal menu at Ronin; in the courtyard at PMQ.



For more of Penny Watson's insights, pick up a copy of *Hong Kong Precincts* (Hardie Grant; US\$36), available in local bookstores. The hardcover guide includes maps of each of the precincts covered (including a chapter on Macau), as well as a slew of tips, photos, and illustrations.

lamb) in a hipster-cool setting, neon lights and all (G/F, *Ming Fat House*, 6 Pound Ln., Sheung Wan; 852/3426-3949; mrspound.com).

- **CASA CAPRIZ** The new showroom of designer Irene Capriz occupies a warehouse space in Wong Chuk Hang where you can tiptoe reverently around her fabulous collection of vintage furnishings and collectables: one-off 1950s armchairs, ornate side tables, Chinese medicine jars, and adorable French ice buckets in the shape of pineapples (1/F, *Kwai Bo Bldg.*, 40 Wong Chuk Hang Rd.; 852/9318-1730; casacapriz.com).

- **LA CABANE WINE BISTRO** The exposed brickwork, timber-paling walls, and wine-barrel tables at this gorgeous French bar transport you out of Hong Kong and into the cellar doors of rural France (62 *Hollywood Rd.*, Central; 852/2776-6070; lacabane.hk).

CAFÉ GRAY DELUXE The Upper House hotel's ultra-glam dining room is well known for its

tiptop service, near-on 360-degree views, and cocktails that will knock your socks off. Lesser appreciated is its superb breakfast menu. Buffet be gone, this is Hong Kong's best start to the day (49/F, *The Upper House*, 88 *Queensway*, Admiralty; 852/3968-1106; cafegrayhk.com).

- **UNAR COFFEE** This Tai Hang hive of activity attracts laid-back caffeine fiends, neighborly creative types, and curious tourists who mingle curbside, take-out cups in hand, imbibing the atmosphere (4 *Second Ln.*, Tai Hang; 852/2838-5231; no website).

- **KAPOK ON SUN STREET** Founded by Frenchman Arnault Castel in 2006, Kapok now has stores across the city and beyond. But the brand's original Wan Chai boutique remains my favorite, showcasing hand-stitched bags and wallets by Mismo, fragrances by Heeley, pottery ware, hand creams, and covetable gifts items (3 *Sun St.*, Wan Chai; 852/2520-0114; ka-pok.com). ©



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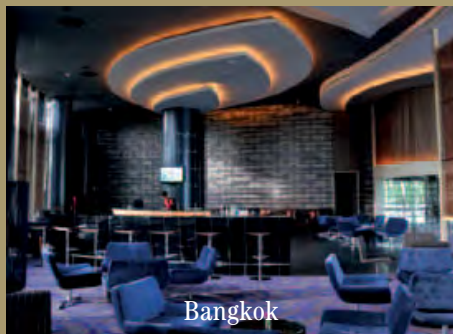
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Body Works

Sak Yant tattoo artist Arjan Boo in residence at The Siam in Bangkok.

**SKIN DEEP**

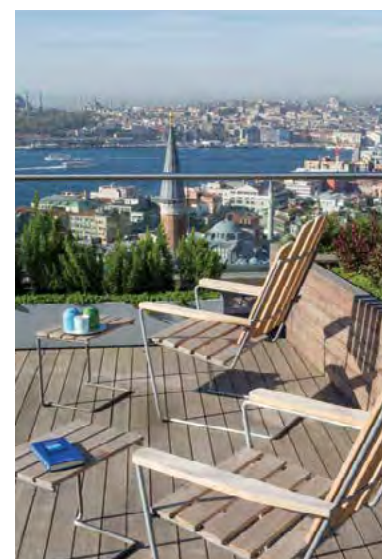
For those looking for a long-lasting Thai souvenir, Bangkok's **The Siam** has recently begun offering a unique tattoo service. In its Opium Spa, the Bill Bensley-designed hotel has opened a studio that specializes in Sak Yant, a Southeast Asian form of sacred tattoo art that's recently become popular among tattoo enthusiasts (model Cara Delevingne has a Sak Yant emblem on her neck). Heading the studio is Arjan Boo, who studied the art at Wat Bangphra—a Buddhist temple about 50 kilometers west of the city—and is renowned for the detail of his work.

After receiving their tattoos, guests are taken to the temple to have their ink blessed, thus activating its powers of warding off evil and bringing good luck (thesiamhotel.com). —David Tse

**HUNG UP IN HANOI**

.....

Although it's undoubtedly one of Hanoi's most stylish new abodes, the **Apricot Hotel** could well be the city's best new art gallery too. Set on the banks of Hoan Kiem Lake, the Apricot showcases more than 600 works from local artists, including Mai Thu, a French-Vietnamese master of silk painting, and Phan Ke An, whose political paintings caused a stir during the Vietnam War. The collection is displayed throughout the 10-story French-colonial building, including its 123 rooms, three restaurants, A'telier tea lounge, and Spa L'Art. The only place art isn't hung is at the rooftop pool and bar, which afford views of the lake and Hanoi's Old Quarter instead (apricothotels.com; doubles from US\$85). —GL

**TOPPING OFF**

.....

In the realm of features that more hotels should have, rooftop gardens are high on the list, and the new permaculture garden crowning the sophisticated **Witt Istanbul Hotel** is perfect proof of why. Designed by a landscape architect and graphic designer, it's an attractive mix of form and function, with a seating area where guests can relax with a drink and views of the Bosphorus, Topkapi Palace, and Galata Tower and gardens growing edibles like herbs, arugula, strawberries, and lavender for the hotel's cuisine (wittistanbul.com).

—Gabrielle Lipton



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GREENER DAYS

A quartet of new or forthcoming golf courses around the world are set to up the game with challenging layouts and stunning scenery.

BY DAVID TSE

Join the Club
The scenic par-4 7th hole at Tara Iti Golf Club on New Zealand's North Island.

1 / New Zealand TARA ITI GOLF CLUB

Designed by American golf architect Tom Doak—it's his second New Zealand course after the acclaimed Cape Kidnappers in Hawkes Bay—Tara Iti lies less than 100 kilometers from Auckland amid the dunes north of Te Arai Point. Routed through a former pine plantation that has been cleared to reveal dramatic ocean vistas from every hole, its fescue surface and gusty conditions will provide a links-like experience when the course opens for play in October. taraiti.com

2 / Canada CABOT CLIFFS

Situated just up the road from acclaimed sister course Cabot Links on Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island, this instant classic cuts through coastal dunes and sheer bluffs above the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Described as "Pebble Beach on steroids," Cabot Cliffs doesn't officially open until 2016, though limited play on its virgin fairways—designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw—began in July. cabotlinks.com

3 / France SAINT-EMILIONNAIS GOLF CLUB

The first nine holes of this Bordeaux-area course were unveiled in May and are already the toast of French golf, laid out as they are across 100 hectares of oak-studded countryside near the UNESCO-listed vineyards of Saint-Émilion village. Tom Doak is also behind this design—it's his first course in mainland Europe—which follows the contours of the valley and wraps around a centerpiece lake that doubles as a rainwater catchment. segolfclub.com

4 / Australia CAPE WICKHAM LINKS

Opening late October on Tasmania's King Island, Cape Wickham offers a mix of coastal and inland holes with views of the Bass Strait and a historic lighthouse. Players who make the trip out to this remote island (it's reachable only by plane, with daily turboprop flights from Melbourne) won't be let down: highlights include an 18th hole that's within a chip shot of a surf beach, spectacular scenery, and some of the world's freshest air. capewickham.com.au

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SENOPATI, SPOT-ON

Just behind Jakarta's Sudirman Central Business District, it seems like there's always a new hot spot opening up along the leafy streets of the Senopati area. Here's the cream of the latest crop.

BY GABRIELLE LIPTON

● **PAO PAO LIQUOR BAR & DIM SUM** An instant hit when it opened late last year, Pao Pao is unlike any other restaurant in the city in terms of style (1950s Hong Kong) or fare (a coupling of fine drinks and traditional dim sum). Old Chinese paintings hang on the walls, waiters in pressed white shirts and clipped ties strut past low tables balancing high stacks of bamboo steamers, and there's live jazz on Wednesdays. Behind the bar, red fluorescent lights in the shape of four Chinese characters advise patrons to "Drink to end your sorrow," and the libations here are just the ticket for that. Cocktails—like the Hong Kong Sidecar of brandy, curaçao, peach, and lemon—change often to incorporate seasonal fruits, and in addition to the eight pages of bottles on the regular menu, there's a separate list of vintage and rare spirits imported from around the world (*Jl. Senopati No. 16; 62-21/2751-0698; no website*).

● **PASAR SANTA** One year ago, it was comical to imagine that the old metal-roofed Pasar Santa market would become one of the hippest places in Jakarta. The building had long sat mostly vacant aside from some vendors of bulk rice and faux leather goods, but when word of its cheap rents spread among young entrepreneurs, they snatched up spaces and turned them into the dream storefronts—vintage kiosks, barbershops, *jamu* stalls, comic book galleries—they never thought they'd be able to afford. There's a coffee school called ABCD whose baristas-in-training serve their practice drinks at whatever price you care to pay; Post, with independently published books and a series of regular readings; Papricano Mexican Cantina with a getup like a beachside taco shack doling out cheesy quesadillas and glasses of



Welcome to the Neighborhood

From top: An order of garlic-butter prawns and potatoes topped with garlic aioli and a sunny-side-up egg at Gastromaquia; Samson Pho at his Pasar Santa record shop.

horchata; and Laidback Blues Record Store, where owner and vinylphile Samson Pho spins rock-steady and disco tunes late into the evenings (*Jl. Cisanggiri II*).

● **GASTROMAQUIA** A narrow residential road in South Jakarta may seem an odd place for a low-key Madrid tapas joint to open its second location, but Gastromaquia's bright Senopati outpost feels perfectly at home. Upon leaving his banking career to pursue his long-time passion for food, owner and Jakarta native Allan Danuwidjaja decided that he wanted to replicate Gastromaquia, whose flavors and hospitable service had given him some of his most memorable meals during multiple trips to Madrid. He spent three weeks in the original's kitchen learning the recipes from its founding chefs Hugo Ecolios Roldan and Ramon Figuls Palos, and most of the dishes on the menu here are deftly duplicated: Galician octopus, porcini cro-



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Bar None
A bartender
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martinis at the
rooftop Amber
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quettes, and seared pork shank with Spanish cheese, not to mention three types of sangria. The two-floor restaurant is sweetly colored in teal, browns, and white with light fixtures cheekily fashioned from cheese graters and bouquets of spoons, but the best place to dine is out on the second-floor terrace, shaded by the surrounding trees (*Jl. Cibiru I No. 1; 62-021/2930-5091; gastro-maquia.com*).

● **AMBER SKY LOUNGE** Just in time for its 10th anniversary this year, Jakarta's Mount Scopus group—whose enterprises include The Harvest bakery chain—unveiled its most conceptual

venture yet, Amber. Each of its three floors is entirely different: the French-style Pastries Boutique as decadent as a scene from Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* on the first; shelves of art books filling comfort-fare restaurant Library on the second; and finally Amber Sky Lounge, a glass-encased rooftop bar with the city's best view of the SCBD skyline. On weeknights, an after-work crowd comes to sip delicious chocolate martinis and stare out at the glistening skyscrapers, while on weekends, international DJs such as Ben La Desh and Tessela come to spin by the glowing marble bar (*Jl. Senopati No. 61; 62-21/2904-4412; amberchocolatebar.com*). ©

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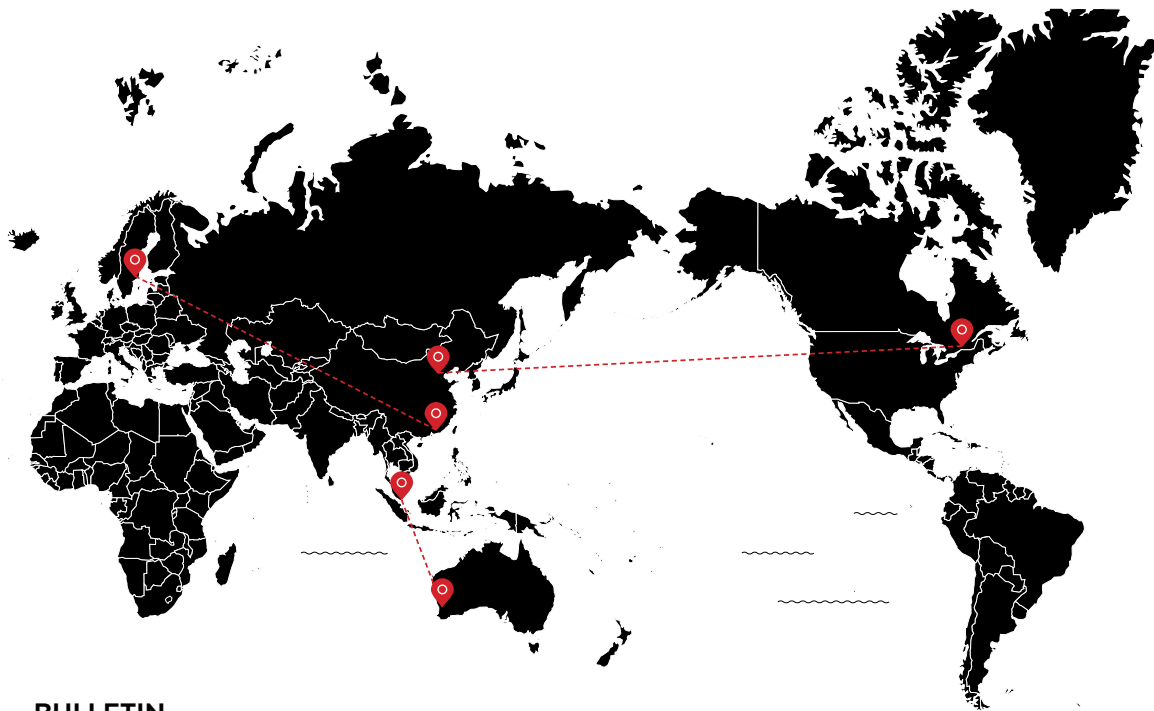
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JAKARTA - DIPONEGORO



BULLETIN

.....

Flight Services Emirates

Booking plane tickets can be stressful when time is running short and travel plans are still tenuous, which is why Emirates has introduced a new online booking feature, Hold My Fare, that's the first of its kind in the airline industry. For a nominal fee, passengers booking flights on Emirates' website can hold their seats and fare rates for 48 hours before confirming their purchase. Canceled bookings incur the fee, but confirmed bookings see it waived (emirates.com).

On the Menu Singapore Airlines

Singapore's flag carrier is finding all sorts of ways to celebrate the country's 50th birthday. After unveiling two A380s with flag-bearing fuselages in June, the carrier collaborated with renowned Singaporean chef and personality Shermay Lee on new in-flight menus of classic Peranakan fare. On select flights departing from Changi through the end of September, passengers can now tuck into dishes such as Hokkien mee soup, nasi padang, and four flavors of the city-state's beloved wafer-sided ice cream sandwiches (singaporeair.com).



Beijing—Montreal Air China

Beginning September 29, Air China will start flying three times weekly between Beijing and Montreal with its Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, marking the first non-stop service between China and the scenic Québec city. Fellow Star Alliance member Air Canada is codesharing the route, which runs on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Sundays (airchina.com).

ROUTE UPDATES

.....

Perth—Singapore Qantas

After a year of suspension, Qantas has resumed its direct services between Perth and Singapore. The flight runs five times weekly excluding Tuesdays and Thursdays and takes just over five hours. It's operated by a Boeing 757 with 156 seats in economy and 12 in business, the latter of which enjoy food from Neil Perry and amenities from Jack and Kate Spade (qantas.com.au).

Stockholm—Hong Kong SAS

The new flights from Stockholm to Hong Kong operated by SAS, which begin September 10, make the carrier the first to offer a direct link between Hong Kong and Scandinavia. Lasting around 10 hours, the flight will run five times weekly and be operated by both the carrier's brand-new Airbus 330s and its upgraded Airbus 340s (flysas.com).



NEW LOOK

ITALIAN STYLE

Sometimes simpler is better. Unveiled in early June, Alitalia's new livery has erased its prior plane-long green band, changed its white coloring to ivory, and boldened the hues of the signature "A" filling the tail. Alongside this, the flag carrier has also recommenced flights to Seoul for the first time in 30 years and begun a US\$387 million refurbishment of its cabins in which Poltrona Frau leather, Frette bedding, and Ferragamo amenities will see them more sophisticated than ever (alitalia.com).



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ITC Grand Bharat, A Luxury Collection Retreat, Gurgaon

Few things could make a visit to New Delhi more pleasurable than pairing it with a retreat to the ITC Grand Bharat. Ensclosed in a mandala with an architecture designed as an amalgam of Indian palaces complete with manifold domes, the all-suite retreat is located on the edge of the city on 121 hectares in the shadow of the Aravali mountains. With a 27-hole Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, courtyard pool, and Ayurveda-based approach to its spa treatments, yoga classes, and healthful cuisine, the ITC Grand Bharat is truly a royal escape.

*Concierge recommends...*the Cuisine Classica cooking program. Led by a team of ITC Master Chefs, the half-day session includes cooking demonstrations, a lesson on the Indian *swasthya* ("well-being") cooking philosophy, a recipe book and chef's knife, and a program participation certificate.

GRAND GETAWAYS

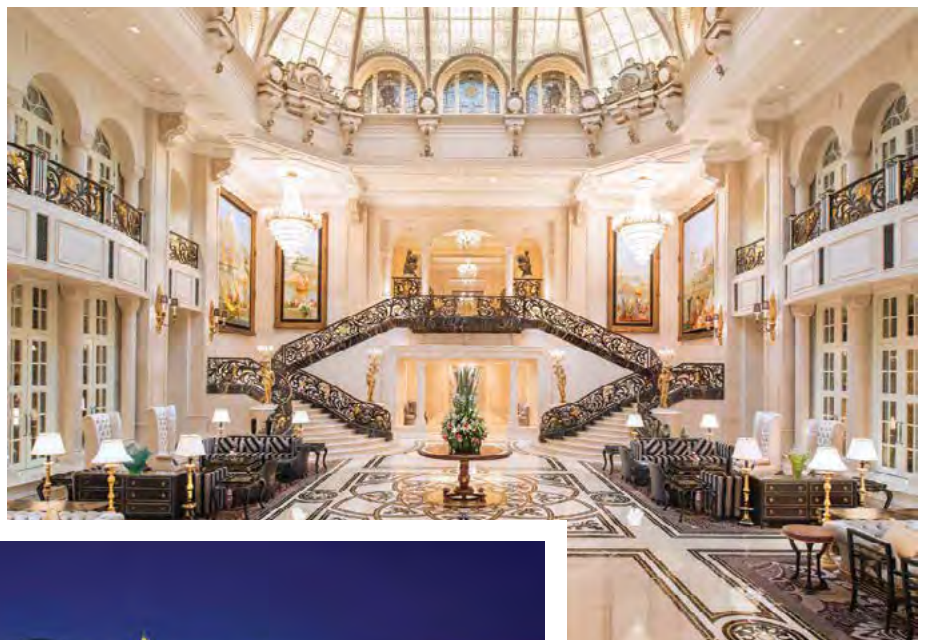
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Luxurious, accessible, and steeped in culture, these four Luxury Collection properties prove that not all destinations need be remote to be a true retreat.

The Castle Hotel, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Dalian

On the side of Lotus Mountain overlooking Xinghai Bay and the Yellow Sea, The Castle Hotel seems plucked from a fairytale, modeled after a Bavarian castle and luxurious enough for a king. Its 292 rooms are sumptuously designed with sateen sheets and marble bathrooms; the 3,000-square-meter Kaiser Spa features treatment rooms with private hydrotherapy pools and three entertainment rooms for post-treatment relaxation; and one of the three restaurants, the Royal Cellar, has its own microbrewery.

*Concierge recommends...*a tour of Dalian specially designed by the hotel to take in the best of the city's sites, including Xinghai Square, the largest public square in Asia; Tianjin Street, lined with craftsmen, food stalls, and rich architecture; and Binhai Road, a 32-kilometer coastal route so scenic that it's known as the "Road of Love".





The Royal Begonia, A Luxury Collection Resort, Sanya

With beautifully gardened grounds and a 370-meter private stretch of beachfront on the southeastern coast of China's tropical Hainan Island, the Royal Begonia is picture-perfect at every turn. Private balconies on each of the 142 guest rooms stare out at the South China Sea, while 18 private villas come with private pools and courtyard gardens. There's plenty to do around the island – village tours, rice-wine brewing lessons – though time here is perhaps best spent relaxing with a local fruit-based treatment in the Abel Touch Spa or with a glass of wine from the hotel's extensive selection of vintages.

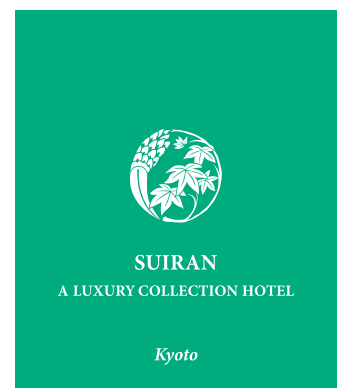
Concierge recommends... an excursion to Hainan's 3,000-year-old Li and Miao Minority Village, where guests can experience traditional rice-wine brewing, bamboo dancing, boat houses, face tattoos, and special fire and knife performances.

Suiran, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Kyoto

Opened in March as the first Luxury Collection hotel in Japan, Suiran is a gorgeous blend of Japanese history and modern comforts. Set in the outskirts of Kyoto on the grounds of the UNESCO-listed Tenryuji Temple, the hotel is modeled after a traditional ryokan inn with low-platform beds, open-air baths, and a restaurant with a menu centered around green tea. Although the city is in easy reach by train, taxi, or even rickshaw, Suiran's views of Hozu River and the Arashiyama hills make it feel a world away.

Concierge recommends... a cormorant fishing dinner at Suiran's Saryo Hassui café, overlooking the Hozu River. While dining on a special Japanese menu, guests can watch as local fisherman ply their trade with a technique that's been one of Arashiyama's foremost traditions for more than a millennium.

Discover more at theluxurycollection.com



DISPATCHES

INDIA
On the
textile trail in
Gujarat
p. 50

LAOS
Hill tribes
and tea
harvests
p. 56

Riverside Reverie
On the banks of the
Zambezi at southern
Zambia's Mosi-oa-
Tunya National Park,
just upstream from
Victoria Falls.



UNDER AFRICAN SKIES

From game drives in Pilanesberg National Park to a river safari on the upper Zambezi, a sun-drenched sojourn in southern Africa delivers creatures—and creature comforts—aplenty.

BY CHRISTOPHER P. HILL

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Did something just bite my toe?

With the Zambezi River rushing around me as I clung to the slippery rocks at the edge of Victoria Falls, I was so focused on not losing my grip that the nibble barely registered. But there it was again—something was definitely nipping at my feet. As coolly as I could manage, I shouted over the roar of the water to my guide—a dreadlocked, neoprene-clad Zambian with the unlikely name of Alpha Omega—“Is there something in here with us?”

“Ah, it is just baby fishes,” he said, wiping spray from his eyes. “They give your feet a massage, yes?”

At least they’re not baby crocodiles, I thought as I extricated myself from the rock pool and clambered back to Livingstone Island. Perched above the falls in the middle of the Zambezi, this jungly wedge of basalt is named, as one might presume, for the great Scottish explorer David Livingstone, who stopped here in 1855 during his three-year trek across subequatorial Africa. Today it serves as the staging area for small groups of tourists (only 16 guests are allowed on the island at a time) to partake in what could be Zambia’s most hair-raising seasonal activity: a swim in one of two naturally formed pools at the edge of the world’s largest waterfall. The

Into the Wild

Above, from left: A view of Victoria Falls from the bridge that crosses the Zambezi Gorge; safari guide Mr. Gift at Pilanesberg National Park. Opposite: Faux elephant tusks and leopard statues decorate the domed towers of the Palace of the Lost City.

more famous of the two, the so-called Devil’s Pool, was off-limits during my February visit as the rain-swollen Zambezi was already running too high, but the Angel’s Pool was still open, so I gamely joined Alpha Omega and a pair of strapping young men from Lusaka for a dip. Admittedly, no one has ever died doing this—or so I was reassured—but when all that separates you from a 100-meter cataract is a submerged lip of rock, knowing that doesn’t make the experience any less terrifying. I lasted five minutes before retreating to dry land to towel off. The Zambians stuck it out longer, howling like kids at a water park as the river churned around their glistening torsos before plummeting into the abyss.

Victoria Falls was just one highlight of a nine-day trip to southern Africa. It was my first visit to the continent, and I had elected to keep to what Sun International—the hotel and casino group founded by Johannesburg-born hospitality magnate Sol Kerzner—calls its “golden triangle” of signature properties: the Palace of the Lost City in South Africa’s North West Province, the Table Bay Hotel in Cape Town, and the Royal Livingstone in Zambia.

I began at the Palace, the grandiose showpiece of the Sun City entertainment complex



that Kerzner opened in 1979 deep in the bushveld of what was then the Bophuthatswana homeland. For those of you who remember Steven Van Zandt's anti-apartheid lyrics "I, I, I, I, I ain't gonna play Sun City," that's the place, a onetime symbol of racial inequity that became a much more palatable sort of playground after the country's transition to democracy in 1994. Just watch the Adam Sandler flick *Blended*—filmed here in 2013—to see what fun awaits today. A two-hour drive from Johannesburg through scrubby grassland fringed by low granite hills, the complex still draws punters for its casino, but the emphasis these days is on more innocent pursuits. Apart from two Gary Player-designed golf courses and a lake where you can go jet skiing, there's a water park with an artificial beach and an enormous swimming pool that generates two-meter-high waves every 90 seconds; a zip-line course that bills itself as the world's longest and fastest; a crocodile sanctuary; and a maze of stone passageways that



Getting there

The continent's busiest airport and gateway to southern Africa, Johannesburg's O.R. Tambo International Airport is served by daily flights from Singapore on **Singapore Airlines** (singaporeair.com) and from Hong Kong on **South African Airways** (flysaa.com), which also offers regular services to Cape Town and Livingstone, Zambia.

leads to a beer garden showcasing with local microbrews. And rising above it all are the domed towers of the Palace, a fantasyland of wildlife sculptures and frescoed ceilings and ornate colonnades designed to evoke the lost city of a mythical African kingdom. It's all so over-the-top as to be actually transporting.

Sun City's ace in the hole—at least for a first-time safari-goer like me—is that it's right next door to Pilanesberg National Park, a small but well-stocked reserve that unfolds across an ancient volcanic caldera. Hot-air ballooning is an option on calm days, but keen to be closer to the action, I ended up as the sole passenger in an eight-seat Range Rover driven by a guide who introduced himself as Mr. Gift. We set out on a still-chilly morning and it didn't take us long to spot some big game: first, a bull elephant lumbering through the grass about 200 meters away, then, much closer, a shaggy cluster of wildebeest and a vast herd of impala. Farther on, we passed a pair of giraffes looping their tongues lazily around the uppermost buds of an acacia and came to a halt when a dozen nickering zebras decided to cross in front of us. Mr. Gift, who has worked for an outfit called Mankwe Gametrackers for seven years, told me there were a few leopards in the park, but that a sighting today was unlikely. Ditto the lions, thanks to the tall grass at this time of year. But before we returned to the Palace for lunch, we had managed to spot a family of rhinos grazing among termite mounds on the far side of a lake, as well as a silver-backed jackal loping down the road. Hearing us, it let out a yip and disappeared into the bush.

After my adventure in Pilanesberg, Cape Town came off as a bit, well, tame; perhaps mixing wildlife and urban life doesn't make for the best of holiday cocktails. Still, it's an undeniably picturesque city, particularly on a clear late-summer day when not a single cloud obscured the altar-like summit of Table Mountain and the ocean glittered all the way to the horizon. Nor could I complain about my new digs at the Table Bay Hotel, a grand, gabled affair front and center on the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront. From my room I could look out across the bay to Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was once imprisoned; over afternoon tea in the hotel's atrium lounge, the views were of fishing wharves and the furrowed flanks of Table Mountain.

With only one full day to take in the sights, the next morning I rushed through a decadent breakfast spread and arranged for one of the hotel's chauffeured Mercedes to run me through my checklist. We started in the Cape Malay quarter of Bo-Kaap, its pastel-hued houses gleaming in the early light, before heading up Signal Hill to

watch hang gliders launch themselves over the affluent suburb of Sea Point. At the Old Biscuit Mill in working-class Woodstock, I joined chic Capetonians as they poked about the designer boutiques, art galleries, and antiques shops that have made this former factory complex the hub of the city's creative scene. And on the far side of Table Mountain, I spent a couple of pleasant hours at the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, where I admired one floral spectacle after another: a century-old cycad, an avenue of towering camphor trees, and rolling gardens of fynbos, the native heath.

I spotted fynbos again on the menu that night at Camissa, the Table Bay's handsome brick-walled dining room. The kitchen here is helmed by Canadian chef Jocelyn Myers-Adams, a forager extraordinaire with a passion for wild ingredients such as *rooibos*, *waterblommetjies* (pond weed), fennel, and the aforementioned fynbos, which she used to infuse a vinegar reduction. Paired with vintages from the Cape Winelands, the food was terrific, from the fun-to-pronounce *skilpadjies* with *braai*broodjies (caul-wrapped patties of ground beef and liver with wood-grilled toast) to a Malay-style curried

Stripe Show

Resident zebras grazing on the lawn at the Royal Livingstone in Zambia, a riverside resort just upstream from Victoria Falls.



lobster, served in an iron pot alongside flatbread and sambal. When I asked the waiter what dune spinach was, he brought out the chef, who was more than happy to chat about her foraged finds. After describing the shrub, she said, "Here, I'll show you," and popped out the door. Five minutes later, she was back at my table with a wide smile and a handful of leaves. "From the parking lot," she beamed. Can produce get any more local than that?

Getting to Livingstone in Zambia required overnighting in Johannesburg—or, more precisely, in the city's affluent northern suburbs, where all the best hotels are. Mine was The Maslow, Sun International's smart three-year-old property in the Sandton area.

I've read how inner-city crime rates have fallen in South Africa's biggest city, and with an afternoon to kill I was keen to have a look. But neither my lunch waiter at The Maslow—a young guy from Durban who told me he had been mugged in downtown Jo'burg a few months earlier—nor the driver I hired, an avuncular older man called Themba, thought that was a particularly good idea. So instead, I made do with a drive-through tour of Soweto and a visit to the Apartheid Museum. The latter should have been on my to-do list in any case. Opened south of the city center in 2001, it provides an unflinching overview of the apartheid era, including re-creations of the tiny isolation cells in which political prisoners were kept in solitary confinement; a room with 133 nooses dangling from its ceiling that represent all those hanged under the apartheid regime's anti-terror laws; and reels of raw, emotional film footage from the period. "Very bad times," said Themba, who had offered to walk me through the exhibitions. "But better now, if only we can continue Madi-ba's [Mandela's] legacy."

The next morning a plane to Livingstone in southernmost Zambia brought me back to safari country—and to one of the most thrilling resort arrivals I can recall. After clearing customs, I was picked up by staff from the Royal Livingstone and whisked to a dock on the Zambezi and into a canopied skiff. The boat skimmed downriver through swirling currents and rapids before landing at the foot of a great stretch of tree-studded lawn, where a bow-tied Lozi man in a red pleated skirt and matching vest and cap was swaying and singing in welcome. This was Edward Minyoni, whose title at the hotel is "story-teller." I presume this is because he likes to talk. I never found out what his official duties were, but Edward always seemed to be on hand to show me to my table at the restaurant or shuttle me in a golf buggy to my room.

The Royal Livingstone is a gorgeous place, with 173 rooms (plush and vaguely colonial) stretched out along the east bank of the Zambezi in two-story buildings that look out toward the river and the shores of Zimbabwe beyond. Resident giraffes and a family of zebras roam the grounds freely, and the trees—leadwoods, mahoganies, lowveld milkberries—are filled with birdsong and the occasional chatter of monkeys. And when one tires of riverside massages or sampling the whisky list in the explorer-themed bar, there's plenty to keep you busy in the vicinity, not the least of which is Victoria Falls, which you can walk to in 15 minutes or visit via Livingstone Island, a short boat ride from the resort. One afternoon I joined a river safari, spotting hippos and crocodiles as the boatmen served one gin and tonic after another. The next morning I was up early for a game drive in the adjacent national park with an outfit called Bushtracks, where I was able to add a herd of Cape buffalo to my list of big-five sightings. I walked with young cheetahs at the nearby Mukuni wildlife sanctuary. And one evening I hopped aboard the *Royal Livingstone Express*, a vintage steam train that trundles along tracks planted here

Where to Stay

Palace of the Lost City

Sun City, North West Province, South Africa; 27-14/557-4307; suninternational.com; doubles from US\$548.

Table Bay Hotel

Quay 6, Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, Cape Town, South Africa; 27-21/406-5000; suninternational.com; doubles from US\$450.

The Maslow

Cnr. Grayston Dr. and Rivonia Rd., Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa; 27-10/226-4600; suninternational.com; doubles from US\$365.

The Royal Livingstone

Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd., Livingstone, Zambia; 260-213/321-122; suninternational.com; doubles from US\$885.

in the early 20th century as part of Rhodesia founder Cecil Rhodes' grand design for a Cape-to-Cairo railway. The trip took us down to the middle of Victoria Falls Bridge, where we rattled to a halt just shy of the Zimbabwe border to admire views of the distant falls and the Zambezi Gorge 128 meters below us, before reboarding for a fancy five-course dinner catered by the Royal Livingstone.

My final outing was a helicopter flight over—what else?—Victoria Falls. From the air, I could now see the entire 1.7-kilometer breadth of the great curtain of water and the zigzagging gorges that the Zambezi has carved out downstream over the eons. During the dry season, the falls are reduced to a trickle, but today, the waters thundered over the drop, sending up billowing clouds of vapor. The Lozi call the falls Mosi-oa-Tunya, or “the smoke that thunders.” It's a much better moniker than the one that David Livingstone introduced to British atlases when he named the cataract in honor of his queen. But he also wrote of the falls, “Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight.” And from my aerial perspective, I couldn't think of a more fitting tribute. ☺

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Bric's is a story of achievements and ideas that played an important role in pursuing and anticipating the evolution of leather-goods trends. The Bellagio line is the perfect example of the Italian brand's philosophy: stylish, functional travel bags equipped with all the amenities needed to ensure the maximum comfort demanded by today's traveler. The elegance of the vegetable-tanned Tuscan leather inserts is paired with a high-tech shell made from Makrolon® polycarbonate, the innovative plastic material from Bayer that guarantees maximum resistance to shocks and scratches and extreme lightness at the same time. The result is sophisticated with a retro twist and conceals a design that incorporates a wealth of functional details. The zips feature a rubber coating that makes the closure perfectly water repellent, while four Hinomoto wheels, made to the highest Japanese quality standards, guarantee easy 360-degree rotation and the utmost silence.

One of four Bellagio Spinner Trunks in Black or Orange two of 21" and two of 30"



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- No purchase is necessary to enter.



A PASSAGE TO KUTCH

Amid the remote tribal villages of northwestern Gujarat, ancient craft traditions—particularly textiles—are slowly being revived.

BY LEISA TYLER



Herd Instinct
Men of the nomadic Rabari tribe leading their cattle across the arid wilderness of eastern Kutch.



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It's just after 6 p.m. in the Great Rann of Kutch, and a handful of tourists have navigated the bumpy desert roads from Bhuj, the district capital, to witness the evening spectacle: a sky flushed a thousand shades of pink as the sun sinks over a vast salt plain. They pose for photos on camelback or beside a wind-scoured statue of a mother and baby—a relic left over from some religious festival held here a few years ago—and cartwheel on the salt that cracks underfoot like icing on a lemon cake. When darkness descends, they pile back into their cars and leave the desert's eerie silence to the night.

A vast flood plain in the borderlands of Gujarat that is seasonally inundated by the

True Colors

Above: A Meghwal tribal woman standing in front of her family's ornately painted *bhunga*—a conical mud-brick hut—in the village of Hodka. Opposite, from left: A jeep takes tourists sightseeing in the Little Rann of Kutch, the smaller sibling of the Great Rann; a potter in Khavda village.

Arabian Sea, the Great Rann of Kutch is one of India's most magnificent sights come the dry season, when the waters evaporate and leave behind a snow-white crust of salt that stretches for thousands of square kilometers between the Gulf of Kutch and the Indus River delta in Pakistan. But that's not the main reason for my venturing to the edge of this desert wilderness. Rather, I'm here to explore Gujarat's other prized attraction: textiles.

Forced to abandon agriculture during the summer monsoons, the Hindu and Muslim tribes of the Kutch district developed a rich artisanal tradition that spans leatherwork, earthenware, jewelry, block printing, and embroidered textiles. This region was once part of the Indus Valley trade route linking India with ancient Mesopotamia, and Kutch's fabrics and pottery were deemed among the finest in Asia. Used as currency and exchanged for gold and copper, ancient Gujarati textiles have been found as far away as Egypt, where they were held in such high regard as to be used as burial treasure. But that was then. Kutchi craftsmanship has been in decline for generations now, with changing lifestyles and an influx of cheap manufactured goods and materials undermining the fabric of tribal society. Another blow came in the form of the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, which flattened Bhuj and devastated thousands of villages.

Says Meera Goradia, the director of a textile cooperative called Khamir that works with 750 craftspeople across Kutch, "When we started in 2005 after the earthquake, the majority of artisans had already switched to cheap chemical dyes to churn out second-rate products for the tourist markets in Rajasthan and Delhi. We're trying to bring them back to their roots, to return to traditional applications and techniques."

Among Khamir's initiatives is an effort to revive heirloom cotton varieties like *kala*, a herbaceous cotton that has been grown in Gujarat since the third century B.C. A rustic short-staple fiber with a lovely charcoal hue, *kala* all but disappeared under the Raj, which introduced foreign high-yielding cottons with longer threads that were more compatible with British cotton mills. Genetically adapted to Gujarat's dry climate, *kala* plants, unlike their transplanted counterparts, require no insecticides or synthetic fertilizers and very little water, making them an admirably sustainable crop.

Khamir has already introduced a smart line of hand-woven *kala* shirts and shawls for the upmarket fashion boutiques in Delhi and Mumbai. "For artisans living in remote areas



in India, finding markets for their product is the most difficult thing,” Goradia says. “Enterprises like Khamir aim to create a more level playing field.”

While craftsmanship in Kutch involves both genders, it’s the nimble-fingered work of the district’s female embroiderers that is regarded above all else. But as I learn on a tour of handicraft villages with a guide from Shaam-e-Sarhad, a community-run resort on the outskirts of Hodka village, rarely do the best pieces reach the market. Instead, women save their finest work for dowries, or sell them directly to museums.

We have spent the morning visiting villages north of Bhuj, a flat and seemingly never ending landscape of thorny bushes and parched earth. We meet with Muslim potters painting little cups and saucers; Muslim tanners busy on a range of leather holders for tableware and smartphones; and the Meghwal tribal women—once classified as untouchables under the Hindu caste system—responsible for Gujarat’s exquisitely fine embroidery, who defy the des-



Getting There

The only air service to Bhuj is a daily flight from Mumbai operated by **Jet Airways** (jetairways.com). Another option is to fly into Ahmedabad — **Singapore Airlines** (singaporeair.com) flies there thrice weekly—and hire a car and driver for the 330 km journey west to Bhuj; **Gujarat Tour and Travels** (gujarattravelagent.com) can organize the latter. Traveling via Ahmedabad also provides the ideal opportunity to visit the **Calico Museum** (calicomuseum.org).

ert’s drabness with their kaleidoscopic dresses, hand-beaten silver jewelry, and intricate tattoos. The villages themselves are clusters of conical thatch-roofed *bhunga* huts decorated with tiny mirrors and murals of camels and village life, and for now have been spared the influx of tourism that throngs neighboring Rajasthan. Though not entirely: there’s a tour bus parked outside one house that we visit, and the woman inside is as brusque as they come, slamming the door behind us before launching into a grueling sales pitch for mostly mediocre pieces of embroidery made from fluorescent chemical dyes. None tickle my fancy, but the woman is blocking the entrance, so I hand over a fistful of rupees for the best work and make a beeline for the door.

The next day I stop by the Bhuj showroom of Qasab, a cooperative of 1,200 women from dozens of villages across Kutch that predominately deals with embroidery. It’s designed to “basically cut out the middleman and foster quality over quantity,” says the manager, explaining that the embroiderers set their own



Ruminant with a View
A camel-back photo op for tourists amid the vast salt flats of the Great Rann of Kutch.

prices for their work, and that a portion of the sales goes back into a fund for training other female artisans. While the pieces on display at Qasab are all beautiful, the one that really catches my eye—a two-meter wall hanging with 15 squares of embroidery, each from a different village—sadly isn't for sale. Appreciating my taste for the finer things, the manager tells somebody to “bring the box.” A plain cardboard carton, the box is filled with dowry-quality pieces wrapped carefully in tissue—tapestries with stitches so tight I can barely see them, pieces that have taken the embroiderer months, if not years, to produce, each one more exquisite and flawless than the last. It's an astonishing trove.

The next morning I rise early for the long drive back to Ahmedabad—Gujarat's largest city—and what promises to be another highlight of my trip: a tour of the Calico Museum, regarded as one of the finest textile museums in the world. A visit requires determination, however: there's only one tour a day for a maximum of 20 people, and booking well in advance is expected. As my five telephone calls and three e-mails have all gone

When to Go

The salt plains covering the Great Rann of Kutch are best viewed from November to February.

Where to Stay

Only open from October to March, community-owned **Shaam-e-Sarhad Village Resort** (hodka.in; doubles from US\$50, full-board) offers a range of tents and rammed-earth bhungas on the edge of Hodka village, 65 km north of Bhuj. Closer to town, **Devpur Homestay** (devpurhomestay.in; doubles from US\$48) had friendly family hosts and spacious rooms set in a century-old palace.

unanswered, I show up ahead of opening hours and hope for the best. I'm in luck.

Founded by cotton industrialist Gautam Sarabhai in 1949, the museum is divided between a villa built by Swiss architect Le Corbusier and an intricately carved wooden and rammed-earth haveli. Forbidding cameras, phones, shoes, bags, and anything else that might be considered a nuisance and overseen by a petulant woman with the strident voice of a sergeant major, this dictatorial little museum is nonetheless the holy grail of Indian textiles. Spanning half a millennium, the extensive collection includes tapestries once owned by Mughal rulers, Kashmiri shawls that took three years to weave, 15th-century block prints. There are also several rooms devoted to the fabrics of Kutch, including 18th-century garments with *aari* embroidery produced specifically for the courts and a wall-size piece of embroidered peacocks threaded with gold. It is the finest collection of Kutch textiles I have seen in my travels, and absolutely worth the fuss of getting in the front door. ©

SWEET SAMUI

A stunning setting, heavenly accommodations, and a luxurious package make Vana Belle, A Luxury Collection Resort one of Thailand's top escapes

With gardens and ocean, luxury and privacy, and a locale on one of Thailand's most beloved isles, there's little one could wish for at an island resort that won't be found at Vana Belle. Since it opened in 2013, the Starwood Luxury Collection property on Koh Samui has remained one of southern Thailand's top getaways, and it's easy to see why.

Just south of popular Chaweng Beach, Vana Belle sits on a quiet cove offset by a rocky headland to the north that buffers the tides, keeping the waters swimmable year-round. The Sanskrit-French name Vana Belle translates into "beautiful forest," and ancient trees and rock formations dot the property, making it feel a world away despite its location just a 15-minute drive from the airport.

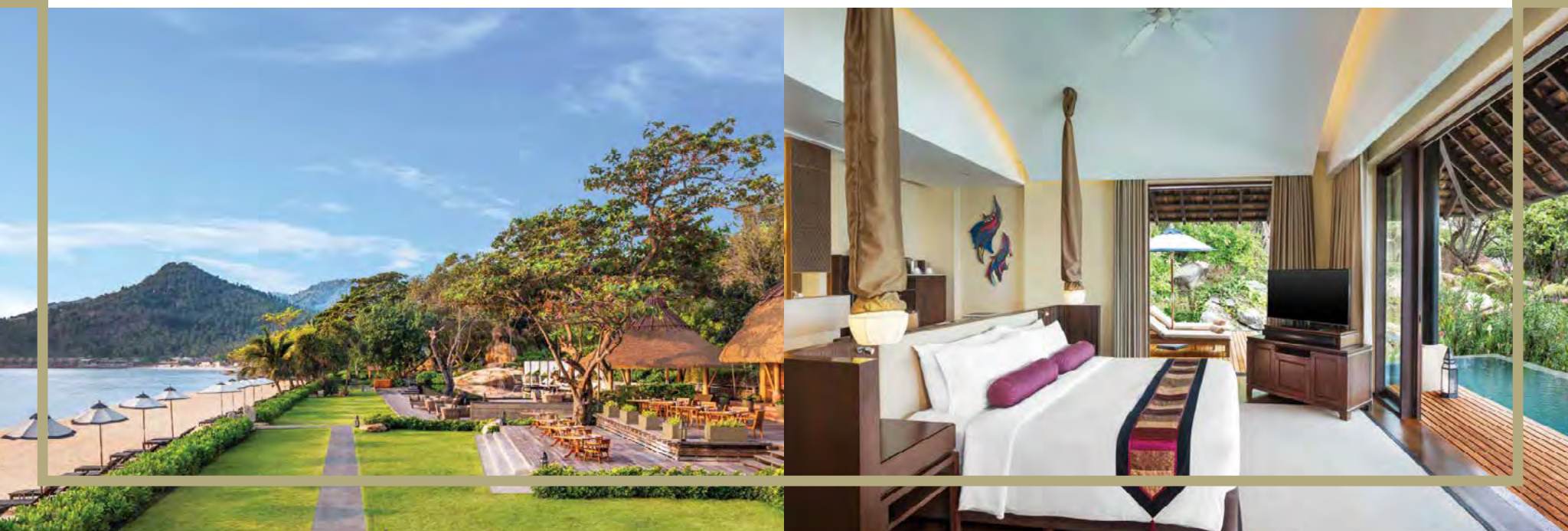
If the setting wasn't soothing enough, the 80 suites and villas couple gorgeous views out over the azure waters of the Gulf of Thailand with an interior design that coolly mixes contemporary furnishings with teakwood and Thai art. Each accommodation comes with a terrace and pool all to itself, while Tropical Pool Villas and Ocean View Pool Suites enjoy butler service as well.

There's plenty to do around Vana Belle. Cooking classes, Thai language lessons, Pilates workouts, beach soccer, and even soap carving sessions are all options that the concierge will be happy to help arrange. The main restaurant, Kiree, serves fine Thai fare, while more casual bites can be found in the beachside Italian eatery. But the best

thing to do at Vana Belle is to sit back and relax, and there are plenty of ways to do that, be it enjoying a Thai therapy treatment at the Vana Spa or staking out one of the sun loungers sunk into the shallow waters of the beachfront infinity pool.

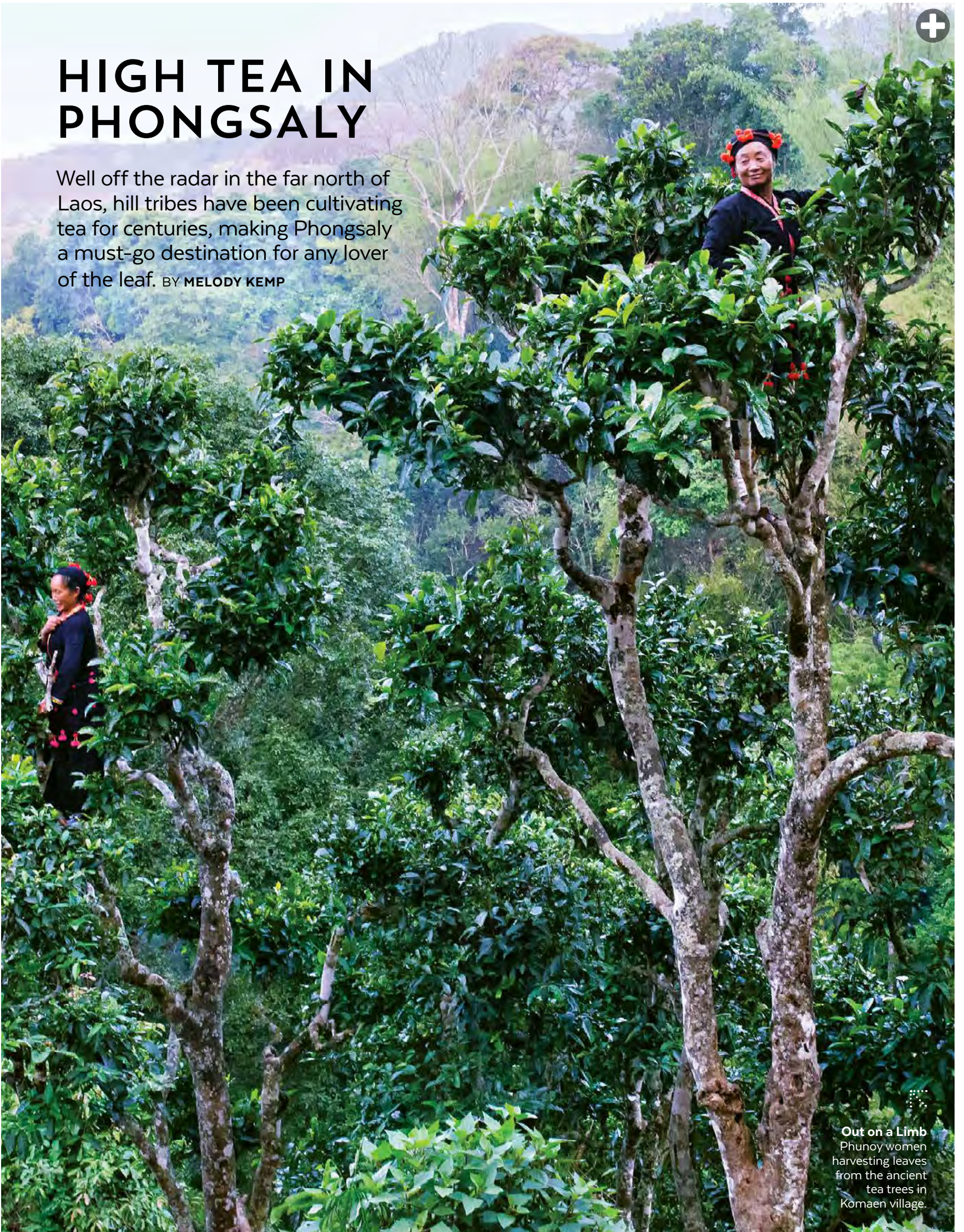
Visiting Vana Belle is even more enjoyable now, with its new Taste of Luxury package running through the end of this year. For nightly rates from THB16,500 in a Classic Pool Suite, the package includes daily breakfast for two, a 60-minute spa treatment for two, one sunrise breakfast with sparkling wine, and the choice of either an in-suite romantic dinner or a four-course barbecue meal with a bottle of Prosecco.

For reservations, call 66-77/915-555 or visit vanabellekohsamui.com



HIGH TEA IN PHONGSALY

Well off the radar in the far north of Laos, hill tribes have been cultivating tea for centuries, making Phongсалы a must-go destination for any lover of the leaf. BY MELODY KEMP



Out on a Limb
Phunoy women harvesting leaves from the ancient tea trees in Komaen village.



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Thunk. A bunch of knobby green tea seeds lands at my feet. Five meters above, the man who dropped them, Phayasi, is laughing at the look of surprise on my face. I had been so distracted watching the red morning sun emerge and fill the cloud-wreathed valley with warm light that for a moment I forgot where I was. The falling seeds—Phayasi’s gift to me—snap me out of my reverie.

It’s 5:30 a.m. Phayasi and his wife Minkhone—both in their sixties—are perched high in one of the treasured 400-year-old tea trees of Komaen village, a Phunoy tribal community in the northernmost Lao province of Phongsaly. The gnarled branches bend and sway alarmingly as Minkhone’s face appears from behind the leaves, her expansive forehead framed by a red pom-pommed hat. Barefoot, the pair work methodically in the morning chill picking just the top two leaves and spear-like bud from each twig. Once aged and processed, these will be used to make the superb tea that Phongsaly is known for among connoisseurs.

This wild, mountainous region, whose old provincial capital (also called Phongsaly) sits at 1,460 meters above sea level, provides ideal



Turning Over New Leaves

Above, from left: Tea leaves are rolled to release their enzymes and essential oils, which begins the oxidization process; *sa bang* tea gets its cigar-like shape from the bamboo tubes in which it is steamed.

growing conditions for *Camellia sinensis*, the tea bush. Given that it neighbors China’s Yunnan province, where Tibet-bound caravans on the ancient Tea Horse Road once stocked up on Pu’er tea, it was perhaps inevitable that this remote corner of Laos also became a center for tea production. As one legend goes, when an old Chinese traveler lay down in front of a local temple and died, the camellia leaves in his pocket took root in his stomach and *voilà*, tea was born in Laos.

Luang Prabang-based photographer Paul Wager and I follow Minkhone and Phayasi three kilometers back to their home as the day warms up. We dodge a swayback pig and mount a steep set of stairs to enter the traditional wood-and-bamboo house. Over an open fire, our driver and interpreter are already making breakfast—pork with noodles, omelets, and sticky rice. Before we eat, Phayasi opens a hemp bag and buries his nose inside, inhaling deeply. A small, almost imperceptible smile indicates he is happy with this batch of leaves that he picked a year or so ago. He puts a handful of them in a teapot with some boiling water from an old dented thermos, letting the leaves soften for a



DIVERSECITY 2015

Kuala Lumpur International Arts Festival

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Art & Soul

This year, the Asian arts scene is being spotlighted anew with the launch of DiverseCity 2015, Kuala Lumpur International Arts Festival. The inaugural edition of what promises to be one of the region's most exciting art showcases, the event is bringing artists of all genres from nations across the continent and the globe to perform and present their works in more than 20 venues around Kuala Lumpur, marking the city's first large-scale arts festival.

Two years in the making, the festival is divided into five categories of performances — comedy, music, traditional, dance, and literature — each curated by one of Malaysia's most accomplished artists and creative individuals, including stand-up comedian Harith Iskander, jazz pianist Michael Veerapen, dancer and choreographer Datuk Ramli Ibrahim, renowned writer and journalist Eddin Khoo of Seni Pusaka, and Mohd Khair Ngadiron, Managing Director of the Malaysian Institute of Translation & Books (ITBM).

The curators have put together an impressive lineup for this year, with

*From September 1 to October 4, Malaysia's capital will be the stage for the first ever **Kuala Lumpur International Arts Festival**, an exciting new celebration of the best of Asia's arts and culture.*

highlights including performances by a UNESCO Living Human Treasure and 3 UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, traditional *Qawwali* masters from Pakistan and *Mugham* singers from Azerbaijan, 12 dance productions specifically commissioned for the festival, a lineup of 60 international comedians, readings from regional writers and poets, a compelling joint performance of traditional Kelantanese shadow play and Japanese puppetry, and performances from some of Asia's top musical acts across jazz, percussion and rock genres with a finale of pop music backed by the National Symphony Orchestra. Additionally, workshops and artist discussions held throughout the month will provide audiences a chance to interact with and learn from top artistic talents.

As the capital of one of Southeast Asia's most culturally rich and diverse nations, Kuala Lumpur is the perfect stage for a festival with such a wide-ranging and far-reaching calendar of acts and artists, which is sure to become one of the region's premier events in years to come.

For tickets, packages, and more information, visit diversecity.my



few minutes before adding more water. This, he explains, is *maocha*, the raw or “unfinished” tea from which all Pu’er is made. Floral, grassy, and slightly bitter, the pale-yellow infusion is delicious.

Later, we take a walk up the village’s cobbled streets. Everyone in Komaen, it seems, is involved in the tea business. We stop in front of a couple named Si and Levy who are lighting a fire under a huge wok set at an angle in concrete. As the metal heats up, Si tips in a bag of freshly picked tea leaves, stirring continuously as they fall. Always in motion, her hands toss and pull, until eventually the heat becomes too much and she slips on a pair of old cotton gloves to finish the job. The cooked leaves, their aroma filling the air, are passed to older women with wonderfully weathered faces to roll and dry in large circular baskets under the sun. Rolling—or “disruption” as it is otherwise known—breaks down the leaf structure and initiates the process of oxidation, releasing the flavor. Later, the processed leaves may be lightly fermented and aged to make oolong, or fermented longer to make Pu’er-style tea.

In nearby Sayloun village, I drink *sa bang* tea with Madame Kham while her cat, its back to the still-smoking fire, snores quietly. At 58, my host still processes her own leaves. It’s this personal touch that makes Lao tea special, particularly when it comes to making *sa bang*, which involves stuffing wild tea leaves into bamboo tubes and then steaming them. When removed, the leaves retain a tubular shape that looks like a dictator’s cigar, each with its own distinct aroma and taste—some of earth and grass, others of flowers and breezes.

The next day sees Paul and me heading north to Nhot Ou, which has the look and feel of a Chinese frontier town. The guesthouse we check in to is clean and comfortable, but we’re really only here to visit a nearby village of Yao people who harvest one of the last stands of wild tea left in Laos. Only five kilometers from the border with Yunnan, the community is culturally and economically linked more to China than to Laos; the village head, a man named Syeuthsan, keeps accounts using elegant Chinese calligraphy, and there are small paths used to carry tea across the border.

I join a group of Yao pickers on a foray to the tea forest, which begins with a 40-kilometer motorcycle trip across the face of a mountain. The path is slippery and only half a meter wide in some spots; eyeing the sheer drop to our right, I decide I’m too old for this. Thankfully, Syeuthsan is driving, and he’s clearly accustomed to the route. We then wade through a glitteringly clear stream where some of the most



Bush League
Phongsaly’s
highland climate
and fertile soil
provide ideal
conditions for
growing tea.

Getting There

A new Chinese-built road has helped ease the drive from the neighboring province Oudomxay, but it’s still a hard eight-hour haul. Thankfully, there’s now a regular **Lao Skyway** (laoskyway.com) light-aircraft service to the airport at Boun Neua, an hour’s drive from Phongsaly town.

When to Go

The tea harvest in northern Laos starts in April and continues for three to five months.

Where to Stay

Accommodation in and around Phongsaly town is basic but comfortable and clean. The pick of the bunch is the hilltop **Phou Fa Hotel** (856-88/210-031; doubles from US\$25), which occupies the old Chinese consulate building. It’s a little rundown, but the views from its garden are beautiful. Be sure to book a VIP room.

fascinating insects I have ever seen seem to find me equally fascinating. Finally, we arrive at the forest. The tea trees are older and spindlier than those back in Komaen, but the Yao zip up them as though they are sturdy oaks and fill their cloth bags with the choicest leaves.

Back at the village a tea ceremony unfolds. Old men sit on low stools smiling and nodding at us, passing around a gurgling bamboo pipe. A plastic box is opened and out come exquisite porcelain bowls and tiny glass cups, which are arranged on a bamboo tray. The ritual is solemn, respectful, and mesmerizing, and the tea itself is rich and complex. Outside, a rooster stands proudly on the back of a pig lying below trays of drying tea.

Our journey ends in Phongsaly town, where we walk the stone-flagged streets of the old quarter as the sun sets on some of the best examples of traditional Yunnanese architecture left anywhere. The floral scent of tea emerges from the evocative wooden buildings and pervades the cooling air.

Oh, and the seeds that Phayasi gave me? I leave them with Paul to plant in Luang Prabang’s botanical garden. By the time you read this, they might already have started to grow. ☉

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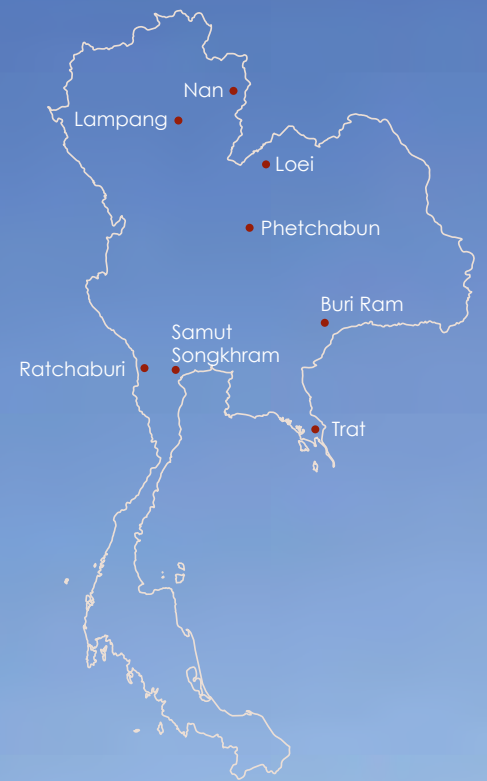
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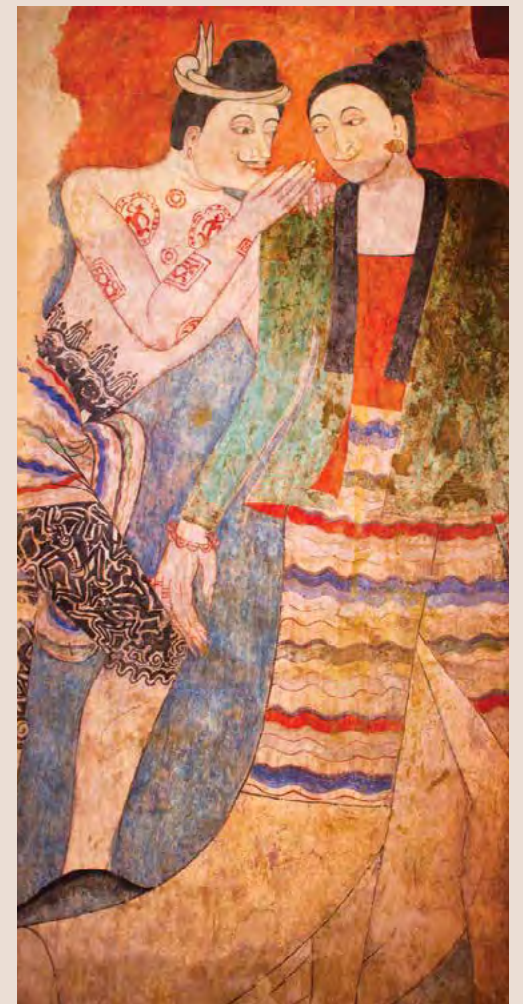


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HIDDEN GEMS OF THAILAND

You don't need a reason to visit Thailand, but if you're looking for one—or eight—you'll find plenty of inspiration among these destinations, taking you from national parks and historic monuments to powder-white beaches. The best bit? They all remain relatively unknown and crowd-free.





Nan

Northern exposure

Not far from the Laotian border in a verdant valley, the sleepy city of Nan is steeped in history, with a long association with the Lanna culture and Sukhothai kingdom. Today, Nan remains the home of numerous hill tribes, offering a glimpse into the region's fascinating cultural milieu through its enduring customs and traditions. One of the best ways to soak up the city's influences is by touring the Nan National Museum, set in a building dating to 1903 and the original palace of the last two feudal lords of Nan. But there are plenty of reasons to step outside as well, not the least of which is the old city wall—built in the mid 19th century—and Wat Phunim, a temple constructed as if it were sitting on the backs of two immense snakes. Longboat racing is a tradition here—visit in September and October for the largest festivals.



Phetchabun

A natural getaway

The northern Thai province of Phetchabun is known for its natural beauty, and for good reason. Set in the fertile Pa Sak River valley, it's marked by soaring mountains, national parks, waterfalls, and lakes. Among the highlights are Khao Kho National Park, often dubbed “Little Switzerland” for its beautiful scenery and surprisingly cool climate; Phu Hin Rong Kla National Park, which is popular for its fields of flowers and colorful deciduous trees; and the Than Thip Waterfall, where you can channel your inner adventurer and ride river rapids. Birders will want to make a beeline for Nam Nao National Park, home to more than 100 avian species as well as ancient caves, virgin jungle, and fragrant pine forests.

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Buri Ram

A traditional twist

A province of dramatic volcanoes, rich silks, and Khmer ruins, Buri Ram in Thailand's Isan (northeast) region offers visitors a raft of spectacular contrasts. While Khmer relics are peppered across the province, the crowning glory is Phanom Rung, a beautifully restored complex climbing to the summit of an extinct volcano—many believe it to be the most spectacular Angkor monument in Thailand. The town of Buri Ram moves at a slow pace and is an interesting destination to soak up Isan life. But the real appeal lies in the sandstone temples and wats—some restored, many in ruins—that surround. And unlike the Angkor complex in Cambodia, many of the Buri Ram sites remain blissfully free of crowds.



Lampang

Lanna culture at its finest

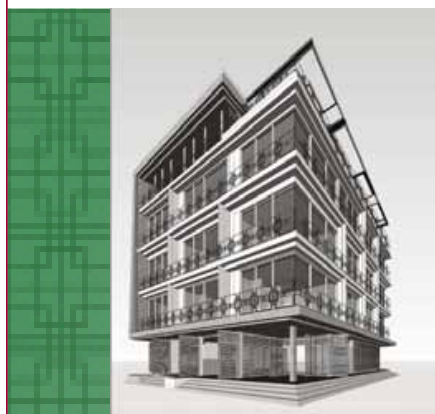
It may be one of Thailand's most important hubs for Lanna culture, but Lampang, about 100 kilometers south of Chiang Mai, remains blissfully underdeveloped and relatively untouristed. Located in the Wang River valley, Lampang also owes part of its charm to the presence of the Ava Burmese and Ayutthaya during the 17th and 18th centuries. Today, this is witnessed in everything from blossoming artistic traditions across the region to historic architecture, not in the least an impressive collection of Burmese temples and the stunning Lanna-style Wat Phra That Lampang Luang. While there are plenty of reasons to linger in its historic heart, Lampang's appeal also extends to its natural surrounds, where you'll find waterfalls amid rain forest, an elephant conservation center, and Chae Son National Park.



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Trat

Island idylls

Thailand is not short of dreamy tropical islands and picture-perfect beaches, but the province of Trat—bordering Cambodia in the Gulf of Thailand—stands out for being home to dozens of the most idyllic drops of land. Far less touristy than Andaman Sea islands, Trat's main draws include Koh Chang, the third largest island in the country. Ringed by some 40 smaller islands, it forms part of the Mu Koh Chang National Marine Park. Needless to say, the diving, snorkeling, and sailing opportunities are world-class, and there are dozens of powder-white beaches to choose from. Seafood barbecues on the sand are a daily ritual, while the local resorts and spas are as blissful as they come.



Ratchaburi

Art et al.

Ratchaburi is also known for its markets and is home to arguably the most famous floating market in the country: Damnoen Saduak, where you'll find hundreds of wooden boats crammed with colorful produce. A region of importance during the Dvaravati period more than 1,000 years ago, Ratchaburi has long been known for its skilled artists and artisans, and the town is home to an impressive list of gallery spaces, studios and theaters. Don't miss the Nang Yai Wat Khanon Shadow Theater, where you can watch performance of this traditional art form; Tao Hong Tai Ceramics Factory for locally made pottery; and the Suan Silp Baan Din Arts Centre, where contemporary art and nature unite.

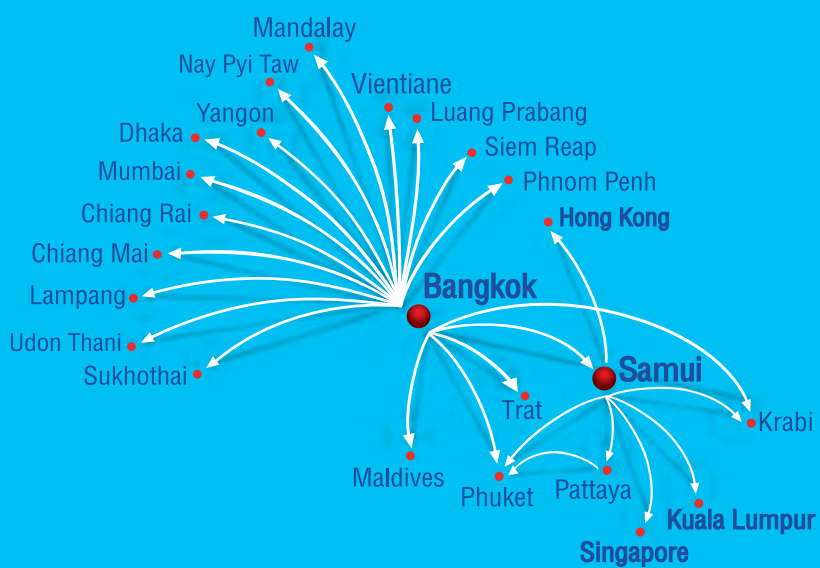




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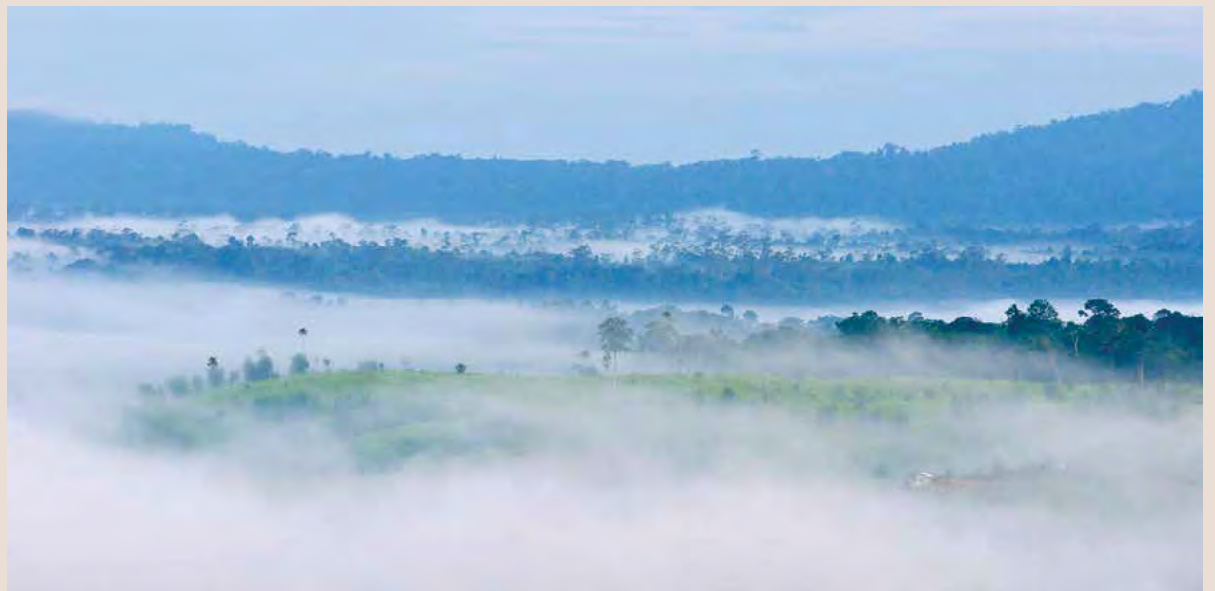


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Samut Songkhram

Life on the river

Situated around the mouth of the Mae Klong River just south of Bangkok, Samut Songkhram is a dream for foodies. The province—Thailand's smallest—is known for its seafood, naturally. But you'll also find fascinating floating markets selling fresh fruit and vegetables. Visit the Tha Kha Floating Market in the early morning, and you'll witness monks beginning their daily alms-round as locals begin to shop, while the Amphawa Floating Market is best visited in the evening when it is set aglow by surrounding shops. Away from the water, you'll find attractions such as Wat Bang Khae Noi, originally built in 1898 on a bamboo raft and tied to a bodhi tree. Today, it sits on dry land and is a showcase for Buddhist statues, carvings, and paintings.



Loei

Adventure awaits

Northeastern Thailand may be hot and dry, but the region is home to a surprising land of lush green mountains where adventure awaits. The city of Loei is surrounded by mist-shrouded mountain ranges that provide a fertile base for plants and flowers. Sharing a Mekong River border with Laos, Loei is an up-and-coming ecotourism destination, with plenty of outdoor pursuits available as well as cultural attractions. Phu Kradueng National Park is the gateway to a high-altitude plateau, cut through with trails and peppered with cliffs and waterfalls, while Phu Lom Lo is a riot of color thanks to its fields of wild Himalayan cherry blossoms.

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/ New York /

1954

Inspired by Paris's Gare d'Orsay and the Roman Baths of Caracalla, New York's original Pennsylvania Station, completed in 1910, was a masterpiece of Beaux-Arts architecture. Its pink-granite exterior bristled with 84 Doric columns; its concourse (pictured above) was roofed by a lofty barrel-vaulted ceiling of steel trusses and glass panels; and its waiting hall, clad in Italian travertine, was, as Tom Wolfe once wrote, "vast enough to hold the sound of time." But as intercity train travel declined in the 1950s, the cash-strapped Pennsylvania Railroad deemed the building too costly to maintain. The air rights to the three-hectare site were sold to make way for the new Madison Square Garden complex, and in 1963, demolition work on the old station began, though the tracks and platforms below remained in service, as they do today. A *New York Times* editorial condemning Penn Station's destruction noted, "a city gets what it wants, is willing to pay for, and ultimately deserves." The paper's architecture critic, Ada Louise Huxtable, added that New York would some day be judged "not by the monuments we build but by those we have destroyed." Indeed, the scope of media attention and public outcry after the demolition piqued the architectural consciousness of the city, and is often cited as a catalyst for the implementation of New York's landmark preservation laws. The legislation—which celebrates its 50th birthday this year—later spared Grand Central Station from a similar fate to the Penn's. —Natasha Dragun

A man in a dark suit and blue tie stands in a newsroom, gesturing with his hands. The background is filled with computer monitors and red office chairs.

IS E-COMMERCE REALLY GROWING SIX TIMES FASTER IN CHINA THAN THE USA?

STEPHEN ENGLE
Global Perspectives. Local Insights.
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Before the Mast
Captain Gener Paduga adjusting the jib of the *Balatik*, a 22-meter outrigger that is the largest traditional *paraw* in the Philippines.

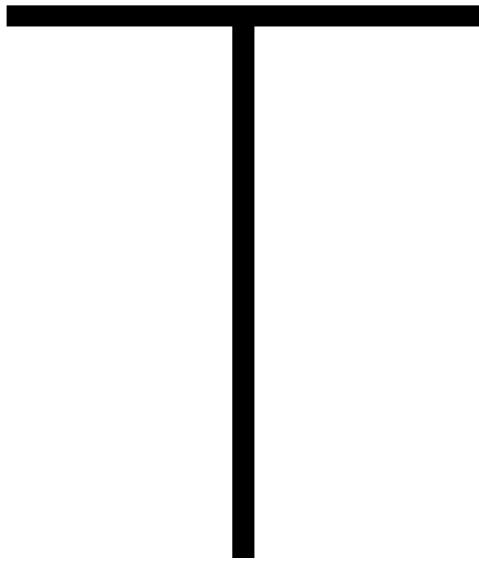


FROM THE KARST-STUDED SEASCAPE OF CORON BAY TO THE TEEMING REEFS OF TUBBATAHA, BACK-TO-BACK BOAT TRIPS IN THE WATERS OF THE WESTERN PHILIPPINES—ONE ABOARD A TRADITIONAL *PARAW* OUTRIGGER, THE OTHER ON A JACUZZI-EQUIPPED DIVE YACHT—PROVIDE PASSAGE TO THE REMOTER CORNERS OF PALAWAN.

Secrets of the

Sulu Sea

BY **JOHNNY LANGENHEIM** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **KATHERINE JACK**



The rain struck my skin like a thousand acupuncture needles, driven by a wind that almost bore my weight as I leaned into it. The only real shelter on board the *Balatik* was the wheelhouse, where 15 or so bedraggled guests huddled around Toto the tiller man as he squinted into the squall. But four or five of us preferred to stay outside with the crew as they hurried to lower the sails, everyone shouting and roaring with laughter at the fury of the elements. For the seasoned crew this was nothing, of course—the Philippines is a magnet for some of the fiercest tropical storms on the planet. It was just a bracing prelude to rainy season.

Still, hampered by the low visibility and unable to hear the shouted warnings from the bow, Toto ploughed into the rope floats bordering a pearl farm and we had to carefully reverse, while one of the crew dove under the boat's keel to disentangle us. I made my way to the stern to check on the pig that had been brought on board earlier that morning. It looked surprisingly unfazed. Or resigned to its fate, perhaps, since it was destined for the spit that night.

We were four days into an island-hopping voyage in the Palawan Archipelago, our vessel a native Filipino outrigger known as a *paraw*—at 22 meters, the largest of its kind in existence. On board were a couple dozen sunburned, barefoot wannabe buccaneers of varying ages and nationalities whose itinerary included exploring hidden reefs, kayaking past jungle-clad limestone monoliths, and sleeping in bamboo huts on deserted beaches. It was a way of experiencing the islands that felt refreshingly unfiltered.

Named after its main island, Palawan, the Philippines' westernmost province is also its largest and least inhabited, and it's being positioned as the country's new tourism jewel. Its biogeography is distinct from the rest of the country, sharing many species of flora and fauna with Borneo, and its 1,700-odd islands feature dramatic karst formations, powdery beaches, and swathes of tropical rain forest. Developers are apparently queuing up to grab beachfront plots.

For this trip, I'd forsaken landlubber luxuries in

favor of boats. First was this leisurely expedition between El Nido at the northern tip of Palawan and Coron on Busuang Island, some 150 kilometers to the northeast. After that, I would spend a week on a well-appointed dive boat at Tubbataha, an isolated marine park farther out in the Sulu Sea that's earning accolades not just for its underwater attractions, but also for sustainable management.

In fact, both segments of the trip boasted impressive ecotourism credentials. Tao Philippines, which part-owns the *Balatik* along with 10 other boats, has been running voyages like this for a decade and has built 16 camps scattered through the islands of north Palawan in partnership with local communities. Founders Jack Footitt and Eddie Brock Agamos started out with just one boat and a simple desire to explore the region. "We began bringing backpackers along because we hadn't realized how much it costs to run a boat," Eddie told me after my trip. "It grew organically from there and pretty soon we had the communities working with us and we were able to help them out with infrastructure, building schools, providing access to water. We've been able to build an economy—an entire ecosystem, really—around Tao. But we never had investors or a business plan, it just unfolded very naturally." These days, Tao is held up as a model of ecotourism, and both Jack and Eddie give lectures all over the world.

The Tao Organic Farm in San Fernando village, where we spent our second night, is by far the largest and best-equipped of the outfit's camps, with ocean-facing bamboo guest pavilions strewn along the beachfront, an impressive permaculture enterprise, livestock, and a giant bamboo edifice that serves as a community center for various cooperatives. It was here that I met Melot, a grizzled old salt who had lost an arm dynamite fishing some years before. His whole life, in fact, had been one of hardship, as he recounted one evening outside his home, a beach hut cluttered with nets and buoys and driftwood. Recruited by communist rebels as a child and taught to shoot a gun, he was then sent off by his father to join a crew of compressor divers—arguably an equally dangerous pursuit. Breathing air pumped through a simple plastic hose, compressor divers descend as deep as 40 meters hauling vast nets, which they manoeuvre over shoals. Many of Melot's friends died, either from the bends or by getting tangled in the nets. He said he took up dynamite fishing to feed his growing family.

"Life's better now," he told me. "I look after the water and electricity here, my wife runs the massage cooperative, and my daughter's going to college in Puerto Princesa." The latter is thanks to Tao's scholarship fund, which supports promising young students from the local villages.

Palawan's relative remoteness meant that it was sparsely populated until about four decades ago, though human remains have been found here dating as far back as 10,000 years. In the 1970s, migrants

Pictures from Palawan

Opposite, from top left: A bamboo beach house at Tao Philippines' community-owned base camp and organic farm near San Fernando; a freshly caught mackerel on its way to Tao's Kantina beach restaurant; swimming with a whale shark at Tubbataha.





Making a Splash

A warm welcome awaits the *Balatik* on its arrival at San Fernando. Opposite: Ancient karst formations in Bacuit Bay.



Island Idyll
Waking up to the
waves at the Tao
base camp on tiny
Ginto Island.



WE WERE IN THE WATER BY 7 A.M., DROPPING
IN ON THREE WHITETIP REEF SHARKS AND AN EAGLE RAY
SNOOZING ON A SANDY LEDGE ABOVE A CORAL WALL

started arriving from the Visayan Islands, which form the central part of the Philippines between Luzon in the north and Mindanao in the south. Today, like everywhere else in the country, Palawan's fish stocks are under pressure thanks to a spiraling population and destructive fishing methods. Local families who've fished for generations have been forced to turn to farming, resorting to slash-and-burn in the absence of agricultural know-how.

Tao has been gradually introducing permaculture techniques that are more sustainable. "We grow a wide variety of native vegetables, fruits, and herbs, and we keep livestock," Eddie told me. "Everything is locally available and integrated, so there's no waste. Now we're setting up a marketplace with local farmers where we buy excess crops for our trips."

It all seems to be paying off—the food offerings at the Organic Farm camp and throughout our voyage were excellent. Our first stop was Cadlao Island in El Nido's Bacuit Bay, where we waded onto a white beach in the lee of an enormous limestone crag. Jeff, our jocular and tireless chef, cooked up a delicious mung-bean stew served with giant trevally while the ship's dog, a solemn Jack Russell puppy named Datu, dug for crabs. We ate out under the stars, as we did every evening. The next morning, there was an impromptu game of beach volleyball for those of us not nursing hangovers from the lethal rum cocktails served from sunset each day. And then, after a refreshing cold shower, came a breakfast of watermelon slices and eggs with banana-flour fritters loaded with onion and green pepper.

There's no set schedule on board the *Balatik*, but there is a lot of time spent in the water. Palawan lies within the Coral Triangle, a million-square-kilometer bioregion that's home to more marine species than anywhere else on the planet. The reefs were mesmerizing, colorful subaquatic gardens teeming with tropical fish and occasionally larger pelagic species including turtles and trevally. On one of my last dives, the day after the rainstorm, I felt something nipping my chest and looked down to see a remora that must have mistaken me for a shark. It stuck around for the rest of the dive, nibbling at my skin—and once quite painfully on my lip.

I'd sometimes join our captain, Gener Paduga, up at the bow, where we'd sit wearing headphones, beer in hand, gazing at the blue-on-blue horizon. As we neared Coron and the end of the voyage, he told me he'd spent two years building the *Balatik* after stumbling across the design in a book. "The last of these boats stopped trading in the 1970s," he said. "But

they've been around since before the Spanish—they were once used as warships, with 100 warriors rowing on the outriggers." Building it was a major undertaking as there were no master shipbuilders familiar with the old design, and Gener insisted on using traditional materials, employing local tribes to carve indigenous motifs into the wood.

After one night in Coron, a ramshackle town that's mostly used as a jumping-off point for the surrounding islands, I caught a flight back to Palawan's capital, Puerto Princesa, to pick up my boat to Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park. The *Stella Maris Explorer* proved a very different creature to the *Balatik*. A modern 36-meter aluminum cruiser, it came with 10 cabins, a plush galley complete with a giant flat-screen TV, decks strewn with sun loungers, and a Jacuzzi.

Tubbataha is a nine-hour voyage from Palawan and we cruised through the night to get there. I woke early the next morning and went on deck where all was blue save for the setting moon, a distant storm cloud, and a tiny dot on the horizon before me. That dot gradually resolved itself into the surreal image of a domed structure built on stilts in shallow, electric-blue water beside a searing-white spit of sand. This was the Tubbataha Ranger Station, where a crew drawn from the Philippines navy, coastguard, and staff from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) do two- to three-month shifts watching over the park.

The dive season at Tubbataha lasts for just three months between April and June, when the currents and weather are at their tamest. And it is all about the big stuff—sharks, turtles, tuna, barracuda, mantas, and recently whale sharks. There were only six of us on board as this was the *Stella Maris's* penultimate trip of the year, so we had the luxury of four dive masters between us and four scheduled dives a day. We were in the water by 7 a.m., dropping in on three whitetip reef sharks and an eagle ray snoozing on a sandy ledge above a coral wall. The second dive in the same spot showed up very little for the first half hour, and I was fiddling with my GoPro when I glimpsed a huge form below us in the blue—a tiger shark, at least four meters long. With nothing else to tap on my tank, I used the camera, which promptly fell off its mount and sank, luckily landing on an outcrop of rock. My dive master, Shao (short for Shaolin, so named for his bald pate and Zen-like manner), went down to retrieve it and as he headed back up, the tiger shark followed him, passing within spitting distance of both of us before heading up over the reef above. It was a tense but exhilarating moment—tiger sharks are considered



The Details

Tao Philippines' four-night cruises between El Nido and Coron on the *Balatik* cost about US\$596 per person including all meals; to avoid the monsoons, sailings are between October and June only (taophilippines.com). **Expedition Fleet Liveboards**, which operates the *Stella Maris Explorer*, has an even shorter season at Tubbataha, where from March through June it offers six-night dive trips from US\$2,600, including meals and four dives a day (expeditionfleet.com).





Out to Sea

Above, from left: A ranger at Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, 130 kilometers from the nearest inhabited island; breakfast at Tao's Kantina restaurant in San Fernando. Opposite: The *Balatik* sailing through the islands of Bacuit Bay.

aggressive, and though attacks are rare, you can't help but feel nervous when 500 kilos of muscle and teeth cruises past and fixes you with an inky black eye.

That afternoon, I spent a few hours with the rangers. Marooned on their tidal atoll, they have lots of time on their hands when not out on patrol. They tell me they go jogging on the sand spit, play occasional games of volleyball, and catch fish—based on a strict quota, of course. We discuss the intensifying territorial dispute in the Spratly Islands, just a few hundred kilometers to the west in the South China Sea. One ranger had been stationed there for six months and had seen firsthand the massive land reclamation project China has been undertaking. “If they're claiming the whole of the South China Sea, what's to stop them invading Palawan?” he exclaimed with a wry smile.

It turned out that WWF researchers were in the park tagging turtles, and so the next day I spent the afternoon on their vessel chatting with Tubbataha's site manager Angelique Songco as a succession of green turtles were unceremoniously tagged and given a laparoscopy to check their reproductive health and history. This involved upending the unfortunate turtle and placing its head through a hole in a table, while turtle expert Dr. Nicolas Pilcher inserted a cam-

era into its soft underbelly. “They must swim back to their mates with tales of alien abduction,” he laughed.

“Tiger sharks, whales sharks—they're both new to the park these last couple of seasons,” Angelique told me. “It's good news. The presence of apex predators like sharks is a sure sign of healthy reefs.”

It was Sod's law that while Angelique and I were discussing whale sharks, my fellow divers briefly spotted one cruising along the wall. I'd long dreamed of swimming with these placid giants and it looked like I might have missed my chance. But on the last day at Black Rock, a vertical wall thick with giant fans, Tubbataha delivered in spades. Not just one, but two whale sharks emerged out of the blue, swimming past in formation. And then one of them turned and I found myself directly in her path; she swept past so close that I could see scars and barnacles among the beautiful constellation-like markings on her skin, and I had to backpedal to avoid her enormous tail. This happened on each of the three dives that day, with the same female doing four or five sashays each time.

These days, it's not hard to swim with whale sharks, thanks to feeding aggregations. But this felt special—a wild, unsolicited encounter. Which in many ways sums up my experience of Palawan. ©

Rise and Shine
A morning jog
along the tree-
lined Charles
River Esplanade.



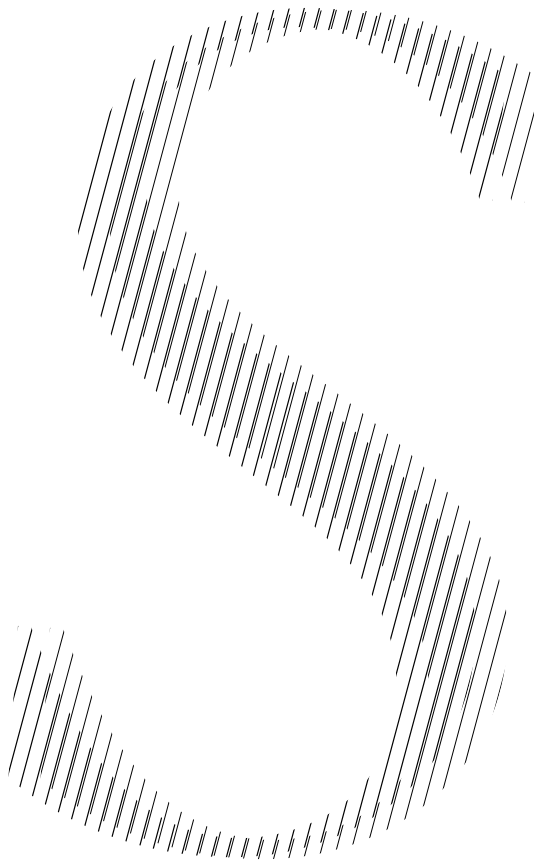
BOSTON

AFTER LIVING IN ASIA FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, A NEW ENGLANDER RETURNS TO ONE OF THE OLDEST CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES TO FIND A PLACE BUZZING WITH LIVELY NEIGHBORHOODS, A VIBRANT RESTAURANT SCENE, AND AN EVEN STRONGER SENSE OF ITSELF.

BY **JENNIFER CHEN**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **MATT DUTILE**

N

Rebooted



Sometime between the fifth and sixth blizzard of the now infamous New England winter of 2015, the thought crossed my mind that my husband and I might have made a terrible mistake in relocating to Boston from Beijing. The first few storms had given the city and surrounding towns a stark, almost majestic beauty. Glistening cascades of icicles hung from the eaves of centuries-old clapboard houses. After each storm, the streets of our neighborhood in Cambridge were blanketed in fine, powdery snow, which muffled the sound of any car or pedestrian foolhardy enough to venture out.

But by February, the once-picturesque drifts had become dirt-splattered ice mountains, while Yankee stoicism had dissolved into squabbling over where to put the blasted white stuff. Sub-zero temperatures ruined the water pipes and our resolve. At the window of her studio, an artist hung a sign with “Remembering the summer” written unevenly in magic marker. It seemed less an exhortation than a plaintive utterance about better days. It taunted me every weekday as I skittered across the icy sidewalk to the bus stop.

Or it might have been just a simple reminder. For in Boston and everywhere in New England, every brutal winter eventually gives way to spring with its smell of rain and damp earth. Before you know it, the buds on the maple and honey locust trees have unfurled into leaves, and the early purple crocuses have made room for a riot of daffodils, narcissus, and lilies of the valley. Out on the streets, a steady stream of cyclists both young and old makes the daily commute. Joggers crowd the footpaths lining the Charles River, where racing shells manned by handsome Harvard undergrads glide across the water. In the morning, the soundtrack to work starts not with the crunch of thick-soled boots breaking through fresh crusts of snow, but with the staccato beat of a couple of very determined and hungry downy woodpeckers.

One bright Saturday in late May, I greeted a

neighbor as my family headed out to the park. Over the winter, Bianca and I had regularly bonded over our futile attempts to clear the sidewalks and driveway. At one point, we had both stood, shovels piled high, laughing hysterically because we had nowhere left to dump the onslaught of snow. “It’s like the world has emerged again!” she exclaimed.

She was right—hibernation was officially over. And unlike New York City, where the warmer months quickly slide into stickiness and short tempers, Boston hits its stride in summer.

Actually, snow or no snow, Boston has been hitting its stride for the better part of a decade now—though it’s taken a while to get here.

In the pantheon of great American cities, the Massachusetts capital has long had a reputation for provincialism, be it among the stiff-upper-lipped Brahmins of Beacon Hill or the more rough-and-tumble Irish-Americans of South Boston. That is, a provincialism peculiarly married with a puffed-up sense of its own importance. Before we moved here, a friend sent us an *Onion* article from 2013, headlined: “Pretty Cute Watching Boston Residents Play Daily Game Of ‘Big City.’” Indeed, my husband and I marveled at how the population of the city of Boston was about 650,000 people, equivalent to a block in our old Beijing neighborhood.

In recent American popular culture, Boston has also suffered at the hands of its own booster club. Between Dennis Lehane’s grim, hard-boiled crime novels and Ben Affleck’s *nouveau-noir* flicks—not to mention *The Departed*—outsiders might understandably be wary. The town, or so it was portrayed, must be crawling with Red Sox-capped thugs with gold chains, speech impediments, and a propensity for using vulgarities as subject, verb, and object—in a single sentence.

To be fair, some of the bad rap is well deserved. The childhood homes of Ben Bradlee, the late legendary *Washington Post* editor, reflected the hidebound nature of the blueblood Boston Brahmin class to which he belonged. His family moved from “211 Beacon Street to 295 Beacon Street to 267 Beacon Street and finally to 280 Beacon Street,” the *New York Times* obituary reported, adding that “his boyhood, as he wrote, was ‘not adventuresome.’”

Closer to home, a friend and fellow former Asia expatriate described pulling up his bike at a stoplight and making eye contact with the driver of the car next to him. His amiable nod was greeted with a snarled “Do I know you?” Another friend of mine who’s relocated to Boston claimed that in the first few weeks of his arrival, he found himself walking behind two construction workers—clad in the local working-class uniform of baggy jeans, paint-splattered hoodies, and Carhartt jackets—arguing the merits of a “chowdah.” (Both conversations, of course, included more profane language.)

Period Drama

Opposite: Crossing Cambridge’s John F. Kennedy Street, which runs from the Charles River to Harvard Square.



J.F. KENNEDY ST

ELIOT ST







*FOR EVERY
MIDDLING FRENCH
BISTRO IN BACK
BAY, THERE ARE
NOW SLICK PLACES
LIKE ISLAND CREEK
OYSTER BAR, WHICH
WOULDN'T BE
OUT OF PLACE IN
MANHATTAN*



Boston Uncommon This page, clockwise from right: A store clerk at the Black Ink gift shop in Harvard Square; a view of the Charles River and Boston's skyline from Cambridge; lobster roe noodles with braised short rib at Island Creek Oyster Bar. Opposite, clockwise from top left: The dining patio at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum's Café G; outside the revitalized Harvard Art Museums complex; lunchtime at Kirkland Tap & Trotter; the Harvard Art Museums' Calderwood Courtyard.





Breaking the Ice

Washington oysters dressed with strawberry-and-rhubarb mignonette at Cambridge's Café ArtScience. Opposite: Some of Boston's best cocktails are served alongside New American cuisine at Alden & Harlow.





Getting There

As of May, **Cathay Pacific** (cathaypacific.com) operates a four-times weekly nonstop service between Hong Kong and Boston, with a flying time of almost 16 hours. Alternatively, fly via the U.A.E. on **Emirates** (emirates.com), whose daily Dubai–Boston route will be expanded to a twice-daily service starting October 1.

Where to Eat

Alden & Harlow
40 Brattle St.,
Cambridge; 1-617/864-2100; aldenharlow.com.

Island Creek Oyster Bar
500 Commonwealth Ave.; 1-617/532-5300; islandcreekoysterbar.com.

Bondir
279A Broadway,
Cambridge;
1-617/661-0009; bondircambridge.com.

Bronwyn
255 Washington St.,
Somerville; 1-617/776-9900; bronwynrestaurant.com.

Café ArtScience
650 East Kendall St.,
Cambridge; 1-857/999-2193; cafeartscience.com.

Continued on page 95

Mass Appeal

Opposite, clockwise from top left: The approach to Boston's historic Faneuil Hall; crab tacos at Kirkland Tap & Trotter; a statue of George Washington in the Public Garden; pan-roasted clams with smoked pig's tail at Alden & Harlow.

More somberly, Boston, like so many cities in the United States, slid into a steep descent in the 1960s and '70s, fuelled by economic stagnation and the racial violence sparked by the city's attempt to integrate schools. When its comeback began in earnest in the '90s, Boston had in its court advantages deeply rooted in its past. For not only was it ground zero for the American Revolution, but it also served as the beacon of the American Renaissance of the 19th century. Then, to be a man of letters and learning, you probably spent time in Boston or nearby Concord in the company of Thoreau, Hawthorne, Emerson, and Longfellow. America's first public library was founded in Boston, as was its first public secondary school.

To this day, the Greater Boston area is home to 53 colleges and universities, ranging from such exalted institutions as Harvard and MIT to laser-focused establishments like the New England School of Photography. And it was on these impressive academic credentials as well as a good dose of Yankee ingenuity and pluck that Boston, led by the late, great mayor Thomas Menino, began to gun its economic engines and become one of the few consistently bright spots in the post-2008 U.S. economy.

This isn't simply a story about transformation, however. Boston's sense of self resists wholesale reinvention—there's no reckless urge to tear down those Georgian brick edifices, Victorian brownstones, and humble, early 20th-century triple-deckers. From Bunker Hill and the USS *Constitution* in Charlestown, to Minute Man National Historic Park in Concord (where the opening battle of the fight for independence took place), monuments to history are woven into the landscape.

There are more prosaic reminders of Boston's steadfastness as well. When we first arrived in the fall of 2013, I was struck by sights that I remembered from childhood visits with my family. Perfectly coiffed ladies in pearls and twinsets still walked their retrievers and labs in the grassy mall that stretches along Commonwealth Avenue in Back Bay. The swan boats still languidly slid across the lagoon of the Public Garden, and antiquated trolleys still lumbered along the Green Line from gritty East Cambridge to the genteel, leafy neighborhoods of Brookline.

Prior to our move, my deepest entanglement with Boston dated to the early 1990s, when, as a high school student from Connecticut, I hung out with friends in Harvard Square at the temples of adolescent artistic striving: Café Pamplona, Newbury Comics, and Oona's, where I once bought a black cashmere topcoat glossy with age. Now a fortysomething mom, I'm startled by the fact that all those establishments have survived the onslaught of fancy gastropubs and chain stores that have encroached on the Square. But I'm also weirdly comforted by their presence, as I am by the Fugazi and other late '80s post-punk bands that the tattooed and flannel-shirted young baristas at our

local café, Dwelltime, like to blast when they make, as locals say, wicked good lattes and cappuccinos.

Instead, with its mixture of old and new charms, Boston has just become more accessible to the outside world. For every middling French bistro in Back Bay, there are restaurants like Island Creek Oyster Bar, where my husband and I recently took some friends from New York. Slick with chrome and glass, the dining room wouldn't be out of place in Manhattan, except for the fact that it's cavernous and the bearded servers are endearingly friendly and earnestly helpful. The oysters—the ever-changing selection hails mostly from the shores of Massachusetts—were plump and briny, but the real surprise was the thoughtful wine list. Our server recommended an Austrian riesling so good that as soon as we kicked the bottle, we ordered another to remind ourselves immediately of what it tasted like. Even the New Yorkers are impressed.

The grande dames of Boston's art scene, the Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, still loom, but there's fresher energy in the form of the Institute of Contemporary Art's new digs, which opened in 2006. Occupying a stretch along a revitalized seaport, the museum's minimalist, heavily cantilevered form was a shock to this architecturally stodgy town. But it has since seduced Bostonians and visitors alike with its edgy contemporary art shows, DJ nights, and open-air concerts.

More recently, a radical reinterpretation of the Harvard Art Museums complex by celebrated Italian architect Renzo Piano has given art lovers a reason to cross the river into Cambridge. As you would imagine from one of the world's richest universities, Harvard has accumulated a massive art collection of more than 250,000 pieces, ranging from ancient Chinese Buddhist cave paintings to murals by Mark Rothko. But the former cramped quarters of the Fogg Museum, the German-focused Busch-Reisinger Museum, and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum of Asian art never did justice to the magisterial scope of the collection. Enter Piano, with his love of glass and natural light. Keeping the neo-Georgian red-brick entrance and Italianate courtyard of the original Fogg building, Piano has extended the space upward and outward with a mix of concrete, glass, and steel. It's not the loveliest structure to look at, but inside, it gives the artworks on display room to breathe.

This past winter, the museums also served as an easy weekend sanctuary for us. It didn't take long after we moved to the U.S. for my husband and I to decide to settle in Cambridge. With Harvard and MIT anchoring it, Cambridge has long been buffered from the ups and downs that plagued other areas of Greater Boston. But despite its population of students—many of whom are moneyed and cosmopolitan—and well-educated professionals, Cambridge has never been hip. It was always the sort of town where you could get a decent and filling meal, but not a great and memorable one.

Sweet Talk
Union Square
Donuts purveys
gourmet treats
in the fast-
gentrifying
Boston suburb
of Somerville.
Opposite: A
gallery at the
Institute of
Contemporary
Art.



Where to Eat**Kirkland Tap & Trotter**

425 Washington St.,
Somerville; 1-857/
259-6585; kirkland
tapandtrotter.com

Oleana

134 Hampshire St.,
Cambridge; 1-617/
661-0505; oleana
restaurant.com

Puritan & Company

1166 Cambridge St.,
Inman Square; 1-617/
615-6195; puritan
cambridge.com

Union Square Donuts

20 Bow St., Union
Square, Somerville;
1-617/209-2257; union
squaredonuts.com

Where to Stay**XV Beacon** (15 Beacon St.; 1-617/670-1500; xvbeacon.com;

doubles from US\$445) is a stylish downtown boutique hotel housed in a 1903 Beaux Arts building. Nearby—and right on the Freedom Trail—**Nine Zero** (90 Tremont St.; 1-617/772-5800; ninezero.com; doubles from US\$365) is another chic standout just steps away from Park Street Church.

But thanks to a thriving biotechnology sector, Cambridge is undergoing a boom, the likes of which is comparable to what has been happening in San Francisco's Bay Area, complete with soaring real estate prices and disenchanting locals. That boom, however, has also precipitated the emergence of a much more sophisticated restaurant scene, from the 2001 opening of Oleana, chef Ana Sortun's take on Turkish and Mediterranean meze, to Café ArtScience, a modernist newcomer in Kendall Square where every plate is a perfect visual and gustatory feast.

On our rare nights out, my husband and I are often overwhelmed by the choice of great restaurants, all within a couple kilometers of our condo. Less than a five-minute walk away, we can quaff sweet iced tea in mason jars and sup on maple-brined pork loin in the moodily lit Tupelo, a homage to down-home Southern cooking with a svelte, sophisticated crowd. Or we can stroll down to the sleek Puritan & Company and share a dozen oysters from Wellfleet before digging into more astonishingly fresh seafood including scallops paired with peas and mint and squid caught off the coast of Port Judith in Rhode Island. (One essential tip to ordering in any restaurant in Greater Boston, or indeed, anywhere in coastal New England: you will never, ever go wrong with seafood.)

With its emphasis on the freshest local ingredients and unpretentious preparation, New American cuisine has found its natural home here. In tiny Bondir on Broadway, the devotion to locavorism reaches almost parody levels; during a recent dinner there, I half-

expected the waiter to introduce my chicken as "Colin." It's a similar scene at Alden & Harlow, a convivial basement restaurant in the same building as Harvard Square's beloved Brattle Theatre. Chef Michael Scelfo's (not-so) secret burger has become a must-eat for any food-focused trip to the Boston area, while patrons find themselves returning time and again for the wildly inventive cocktails dreamed up by bar manager Seth Freidus.

Still, the revival in Cambridge pales in comparison to what's going on in neighboring Somerville. This, I admit, is a story of Cinderella-like transformation. An industrial town, Somerville slumped into a decades-long decline when the auto assembly plants moved out in the late 1950s. Marred by highways and street gangs, Somerville was once known as "Slumerville," valued for little else other than its cheap housing.

As anyone familiar with the story arc of gentrification in American cities knows, those cheap houses and apartments attracted artists, graduate students, and other liberal-minded types who slowly made neighborhoods like Davis Square and Union Square more livable, one indie bookstore and café at a time. These days, property prices around Davis Square rival those in Boston's tonier suburbs, while young families and tech entrepreneurs are moving into Winter Hill, once the stomping ground of the eponymous crime syndicate that was Boston's most notorious gang.

Some controversy has clouded Somerville's rush toward farmers' markets, gourmet donuts, single-estate coffee, and funky neighborhood bistros like Kirkland Tap & Trotter, where chef Tony Maws turns a simple grilled veal chop or fried whitebait into pure hedonistic pleasures. A US\$1 billion plan to redevelop Union Square, where a Green Line station is expected to open in 2020, has some longtime residents understandably worried about being displaced by rising rents. As the owner of a recently closed café wrote in a farewell to his customers, "The writing on the wall in Union Square is: brunch, bistros, and booze."

These changes are in the back of my mind during a recent Friday night. We've ventured out to Bronwyn, a German joint run by husband-and-wife team Tim and Bronwyn Wiechmann that has caught the attention of the national media for its house-made wursts and sauerkraut and European brews on draft. We're here because of its beer garden, which seems the perfect venue to celebrate the official start of summer. It's nothing more than a wooden patio with rough-hewn picnic tables. But the addictively soft giant pretzels and equally gargantuan perogies—as well as our server's laid-back charm—win us over. The sky above is still a translucent blue when we take our leave. Next door, the owner of a bodega trades neighborhood gossip with a local resident. He's in a Sox cap, and they stop for a minute and coolly assess us as we walk by. But instead of dismissing us as the interlopers that we are, they break out into smiles and wish us "a good one." They're here to stay, and so are we. ☺





Minority Report
A Jinuo man in
Bapo village, one
of several minority
communities in
the mountains of
Xishuangbanna.

BY GABRIELLE LIPTON PHOTOGRAPHS BY CALLAGHAN WALSH

YUNNAN'S TROPICAL TREASURES

Sharing a border with Laos and Myanmar, the lush, mountainous region of Xishuangbanna is a slice of Southeast Asia in China, complete with hill tribes, tropical gardens, and steamy rain forests. Let the adventure begin.

TRAVELING ALONE

has a way of landing you in some very unusual situations. One of my more recent encounters with this was when I found myself standing on a mountain-top in southern Yunnan with a young man talking to a rock.

The young man was Tommy, or at least that's the English name Qian Zhen Min has given himself, and as for the rock, he hid it on the roof of a small pagoda there when he was 11 and vowed to come back and tell it every time a personal milestone—college, marriage, kids—had been achieved. It had been eight years since his last visit, and I'm not sure where I fell on his spectrum of importance, being just a guest for four days at the resort where he works as a recreation guide, but after letting out a loud "Ha!" he handed me the rock and told me it was my turn to tell it something too. A secret? A wish? Anything, it could be anything. I looked down through the branches of 800-year-old trees to the Luosuo River and a small cluster of blue-tiled roofs on its far bank, but the moment was meditative in such a way that I couldn't pull out of it, and I found I had nothing to say. Perhaps that was the point.

When I'd stepped off my plane and onto the moonlit tarmac at the Xishuangbanna Gasa Airport three days before, having just arrived in China for the first time, it smelled like smoke, a musky scent of something damp and natural heated slowly to a glow. I knew that smell. Growing up in Atlanta, I would sometimes dine out with my family at a restaurant called Little Szechuan on Buford Highway, a corridor that cuts through the city's various ethnic communities. Over the course of several visits, we came to know the owner, a man named Kong Ko. One dinner, he told us the story of how he fled Maoist China in the 1950s, swimming to Hong Kong with nothing but the clothes on his back. Xishuangbanna smelled like Little Szechuan.

But Kong's China, I was quick to learn, was not Tommy's China, nor was it ever. Prior to my arrival, the managers of the resort I was headed to—the Anantara Xishuangbanna—were the only people I could find who had been to the region, and they repeatedly told me how it was nothing like China at all. The southernmost prefecture of Yunnan province, Xishuangbanna was once called Mengbalanaxi, "an ideal and wonderful paradise," part of the northern Thai kingdom of Lanna that extended as well through parts of present-day Laos and Myanmar. With its tropical climate, herds of wild elephants, and a population dominated by ethnic minorities who are being preserved through exemption from the one-child policy—the Dai, the Yao, the Bai, and the Jinuo, to name a few—Xishuangbanna has more

in common with Southeast Asia than it does with anywhere else in the PRC. It wasn't even until 1953 that the central government began assimilating the region into the rest of the country, establishing it as the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. Kong, whose home was a six-hour drive to the north in Sichuan province, was already planning his escape from China before Xishuangbanna was even noticeably part of it.

An ideal and wonderful paradise. The biggest city is Jinghong, where the airport is, which by Chinese standards hardly counts as a big city at all, with just 450,000 people, some chain restaurants, and a Walmart that never opened. Its palm-lined streets quickly give way to wild green hills. Some have been sewn with a patchwork of rubber and tea trees planted neatly into rows, but many are cloaked in an unbroken shroud of emerald virgin forests.

The Anantara sits next to Menglun, Tommy's hometown atop the high banks of the Luosuo, a tributary of the Mekong. Sure, the resort is set apart from its modest surrounds, but it doesn't feel at odds. That smoky smell always seems to gather beneath the lofty pitched ceiling of the open-air lobby, and the 80 enormous rooms and 23 pool villas are filled with richly patterned wood, creams, and soft yellow light—atmospheric and mellow like the damp, dim mornings and soft copper evenings. There's an extravagant calmness to the days here, which roll along slowly under the blanket of thick heat.

More luxury resorts are on their way, but it's hard to imagine the Anantara ever being upstaged. The accommodations are enormous; the spa, a heavenly enclave of light-flooded villas as treatment rooms; one of the five restaurants is ceilinged entirely in teal mosaics. And informed by the region's traditional architecture, which is largely synonymous with Thailand's, the resort looks like a scene from an old picture book—a pocket of pagoda rooftops backdropped by mountains and seemingly more gardens than buildings with lantern-lined pathways winding through the flowers. I often passed my interludes between outings on a recliner by the riverside infinity pool, my book a mere prop as I instead stared blankly across the slow flowing river to the lush greenery on the other side.

The other side is in fact the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden. Created in 1959, it's the largest botanical garden in Asia, covering a 1,125-hectare island wrapped in a bend of the river. It's also a remarkable showcase of the prefecture's biodiversity; though covering less than one percent of China's total land area, Xishuangbanna is home to 16 percent of the country's plant species and more than a fifth of its animals. A rain forest covers more than half of the island, with the rest dedicated to an array of sub-gardens—orchids, succulents, aromatics, edibles, and the like—as well as the Chinese Academy of Sciences, where research is conducted

Scenes From China's Far South

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Anantara guide Tommy at the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden; a bowl of *guoqiao mixian* (crossing-the-bridge noodles) at the resort's Mekong restaurant; the Anantara's garden-view rooms look out over the lush landscaping; the reception area at the resort's spa.





on everything from endangered plant species conserved in germplasm banks to plant-based medicine.

Over two days, Tommy guided me through as much of it as my legs could take, which is to say, we hardly touched the place. He started shy. Fluent in Han and two ethnic languages, Dai and Li, Tommy told me that despite studying English every night, he wasn't too good at it. Yet I found him both intelligible and charming; what words he didn't know he translated via a smartphone app, and those he did know he wove into poetic utterances such as, "An old man once told me that the stars are those we love." And his botanical knowledge proved extensive. He knew which bush had leaves so delicate that if he sung to them, they would begin to dance with the vibration of his voice; and that if he lightly tickled a *mimosa pudica*, or "sensitive plant," its fronds would curl in on each other. Walking through a grove of fruitless persimmon trees, he told me it wasn't their season, like it wasn't the season for him to be a teacher, but it would be one day. The season of his life, he meant.

He took me around to all his favorite spots—a hidden bench by a grove of towering palm trees; a hike up to a pair of peaks personified as man and wife; the pagoda with his rock. After our first day of wanderings, he routed us back to the resort in a way different than how we'd come, crossing over a bridge farther upriver and pausing in the middle to take in the scene: a couple of old men staked out in beach chairs by the languid river with a cooler of drinks and a couple of fishing polls, the hazy sky darkening into evening overhead, and Menglun humming with dinnertime. But while these were Tommy's stomping grounds to proudly show off, I was repeatedly struck by the effervescence of the entire resort staff. As a map in a back office marked with each member's hometown showed, many of the employees were not from the area or even from Yunnan, which I gleaned was the reason for the hushed excitement of working here. I'd become friends with the resort's assistant communications manager, Rebecca, and she repeatedly described how her friends and family back home in Qingdao always gawk at her pictures—"Rebecca, you work in heaven!" Xishuangbanna's tourism is growing, but for now, coming here still feels like being let in on a secret.

But locals know they live in a natural wonder-

land, and many don't venture far to try and prove otherwise. Mi Ying Ping—or Aunty, as she's known around the resort, where she teaches Dai cooking classes—lives in a nearby Dai village and has never been farther than Jinghong. One foggy morning, I accompanied her to the farmers' market in Menglun. Under a high tin roof were baskets and blankets piled with eggs and eggplants, purple and white garlic, silvery fish and snails, coriander and leafy greens, honeycombs filled with fat white worms, and bowls of squirming centipedes whose deliciousness, Aunty said, couldn't be described in words. Lined up a long wooden table of meats running up the middle of the market, butchers raised mallets and knives up above their heads before swinging them down with loud bangs. Aunty told me that in Dai villages, this is the sound that a festival is about to begin.

It's always a good time around Aunty. Prior to joining the culinary team at Anantara, she ran a restaurant of her own, where she was known to spontaneously break into song and dance. Now, she's constantly proposing new local dishes to add to the resort's menus in addition to running the cooking classes. Her own community grows all its own food and buys little aside from vegetable oil, and though she's seen American farms on TV and said she envies their size, she promptly added, "But it's a good thing Western food is tasteless, or else I'd be fat." The chicken, beef, and soup dishes we cooked together were strong with ginger, chives, lemongrass, lime, cilantro, and chili—acidity and spice, she said, help balance the body in such a hot, humid climate.

Aunty's village is about a 10-minute walk away, but just outside the resort's gates is a Dai village of 116 families that I visited with Rebecca, Tommy, and another

recreation guide, Ai Guan, whose family has lived there for generations. Menglun, by comparison, is a booming metropolis. We paused as we came in by the entry shrine and Buddhist temple currently being restored by its monks before continuing through the narrow dirt streets overhung by tamarind trees. Tommy plucked a pod-like fruit off a low branch and offered me a bite, which coated the insides of my cheeks with a lingering tartness. Every plant in sight was edible, Tommy said—weeds, flowers, bushes.

What aren't always edible, however, are the chickens, especially Ai's white one, which he had proudly arranged to show off in a *gai duo*, or cockfight. A friend of his arrived shortly with a black

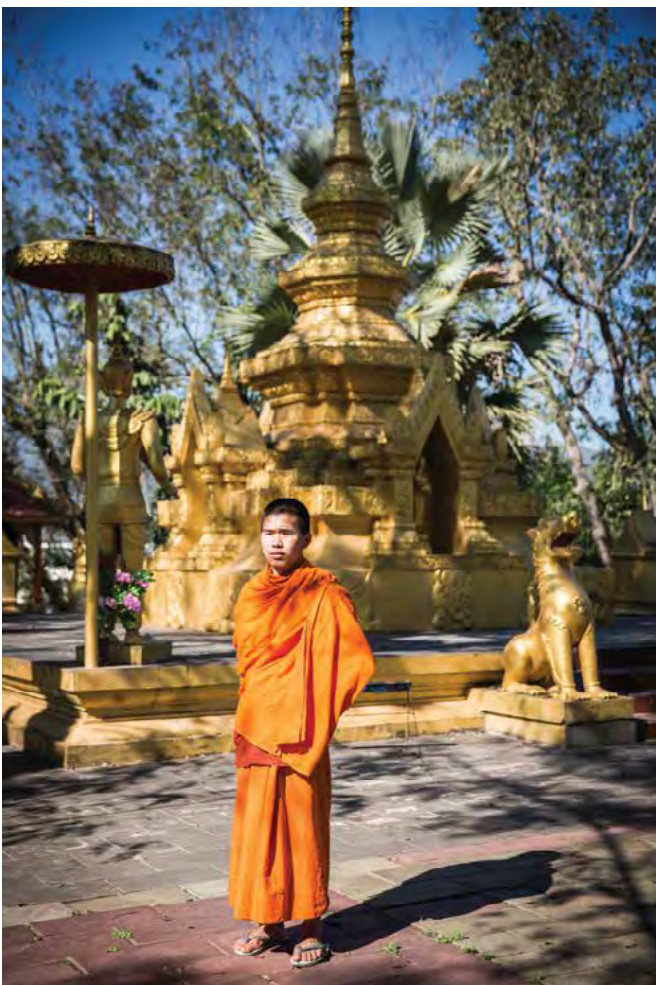
UNDER A HIGH TIN ROOF WERE BASKETS AND BLANKETS PILED WITH EGGS AND EGGPLANTS, SILVERY FISH AND SNAILS, HONEYCOMBS FILLED WITH FAT WHITE WORMS, AND BOWLS OF SQUIRMING CENTIPEDES

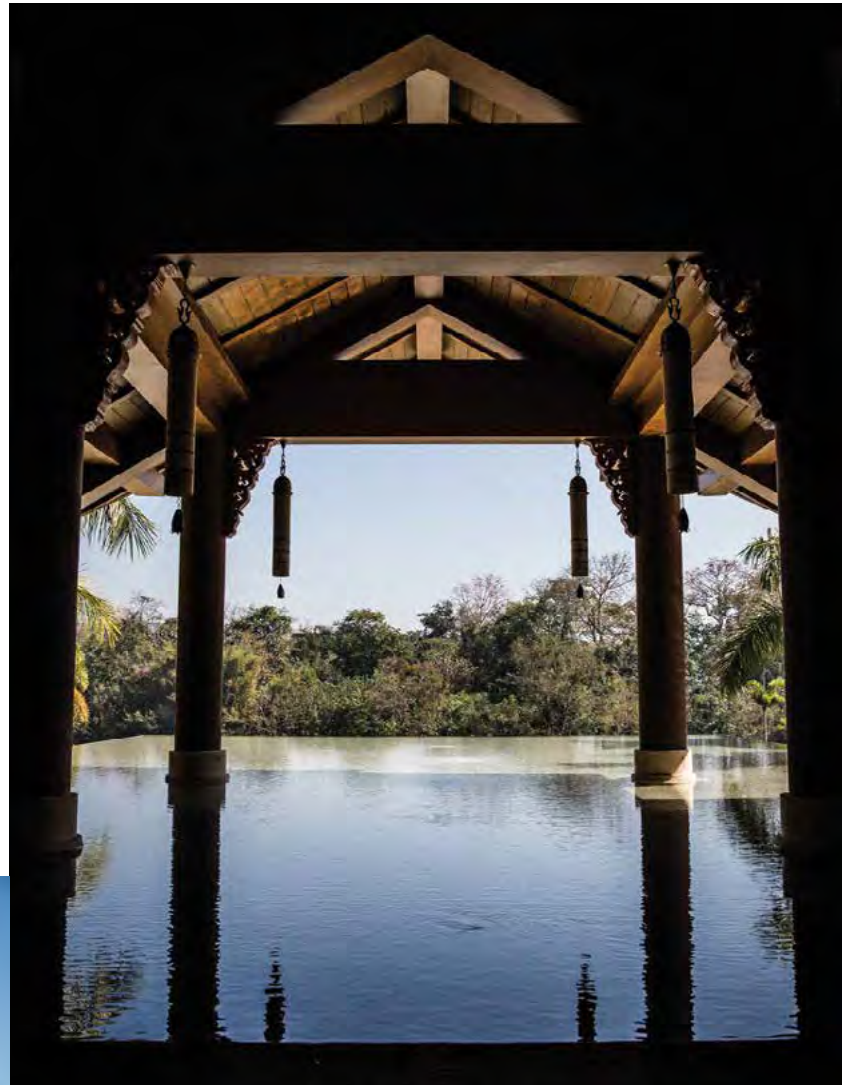
Thai Style

Opposite: A garden pavilion amid the lushly landscaped grounds of the Anantara Xishuangbanna recalls the architecture of northern Thailand's Lanna kingdom, which once ruled this region.



Tea Country
Clockwise from left: A serving of Pu'er tea at the Anantara Xishuangbanna; Jinuo guides in Bapo village; a monk at a hilltop Buddhist temple near the resort. Opposite, clockwise from top: A pedestrian-only suspension bridge across the Luosuo River connects the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden with Menglun town; a reflecting pool at the Anantara; a Buddhist temple complex in the Dai village neighboring the resort.









How to Get There

The Xishuangbanna Gasa Airport in Jinghong receives flights primarily from Kunming, though direct flights are available from a handful of major cities as well, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Bangkok.

Where to Stay

About an hour's drive from Jinghong, the **Anantara Xishuangbanna Resort & Spa** (Menglun Town; 86-691/893-6666; anantara.com; doubles from US\$282) is the region's sole luxury abode, with spacious rooms and villas, beautifully landscaped grounds, and an infinity pool set right on the banks of the Luosuo River.

some parts though, mainly the six original Pu'er mountains. On one of them sits Bapo, a Jinuo village that I visit with Rebecca and Ai. Ai was assigned to be the leader of this expedition because one of his friends is from Bapo, but when we arrived, his friend couldn't be contacted, as he'd gone off into the rain forest that morning on some errand and hadn't yet returned. So a petite Jinuo girl named Bu Yang walked us through the village instead. In 1979 the Jinuo became the last of China's 56 ethnic minorities to be officially recognized, and though Bapo is now a paid-entry destination for tourists to learn

about their culture, it hardly feels as such. Rebecca had been dying to visit since she started working at the resort. Outside the house of the village chief, two old women with mocha-colored skin sat quietly smoking pipes, clad in woven pantsuits striped with neon rainbows. When I asked if they only wear these to show visitors, Bu, who was similarly dressed, said that these are still their everyday clothes. Decorated like shrines, cow skulls sat on porches as mementos of when 14- and 15-year-old boys killed the animals with bamboo spears to initiate their manhood. The Jinuo have no written language of their own, and prior to adopting Chinese characters in the 1950s, they used carvings to record things; displayed on the walls are bamboo ornaments that served as love notes and notched rods that kept track of how much who owed whom, and outside, totem poles with crazy-eyed faces and wagging tongues represent the village leaders' dreams. Ai seemed as enraptured with it all as we were; his own Dai culture, he said, is so much simpler.

For my last meal in Xishuangbanna, Rebecca and Tommy took me to a Dai restaurant just beyond the resort's back gate. The menu apparently was just a formality, as Rebecca flagged the owner and went straight to the big refrigerator full of fish, poultry, vegetables, and tofu and began pointing and smelling and switching faces between excitement and disgust for about 10 minutes before our meal was decided. We walked into the back of the restaurant where large families were gathered around spinning lazy Susans, seated ourselves, rinsed off our plates with hot Pu'er, and soon our own feast began to arrive: fried pork skin with tomato sauce, sweet greens, fatty pork with chili flakes, white fish from the Luosuo with crisped skin, soupy rice noodles, a mash of cucumber and tomatoes, thin sheets of moss to wrap around bites of sticky rice, and a big bottle of Coca-Cola to cut the spice. As we finished, Tommy handed me a neon bracelet woven by monks. "It will bring good luck," he said, before adding shyly, "Don't forget to come back and tell the rock." ◎

rooster, and the boys quickly got to wrapping yarn around the sharpest talons and looping a long sheet of green plastic into a circle for the arena. Nature took it from there: the birds placed a wing on the other and circled like medieval dancers before backing off, eyeing, plotting, and then leaping into the air to smash bodies and fall into a screechy wrestle. It didn't take long for a crowd to gather—an adorable toddler ran around with a balloon as her mom chased after to keep it from being popped by the beaks, while another of Ai's friends put everyone in fits playing sportscaster. When the birds began to tire, it was decided the white had won. Handed the bird for a photo op, I asked Ai how much it was worth: 10,000 yuan, about the same price as my MacBook.

Above the fighting ring was Ai's house. Like the rest of the village homes, it's set atop cylindrical stilts whose shape makes them harder for snakes to climb, and rather than being held together rigidly by nails, beams have interlocking joints that flex during the region's frequent earthquakes. Ai's father had just returned from working in the surrounding rubber-tree fields, and he sat down with us to talk. Every morning, he said, he gets up at 4 a.m. to tap the trees while they are the softest, or "in the mood." Later, at around 10, he goes back and collects the thick white sap to bring to his local broker.

It's a new career for him—his family had always grown Pu'er, which originated in Xishuangbanna and has been prized for centuries as one of world's best teas. Despite its high price elsewhere, here it seems to flow like water and is infused into everything from candles and yogurt to the scrubs and oils used in the lavish Pu'er treatment at the Anantara's spa. And it was over a hot jug of Pu'er that Ai's father told me how he wished he could replant his rubber fields with tea. In the 1980s, the Chinese government made a big push for locals to adopt cash-crop rubber farming, but surrounding regions in Laos and Thailand began to do the same, sending the market value on a downward slope, and the 30 yuan Ai's father once got for a kilo of latex has slid to eight.

Tea growth has remained largely undisturbed in

Naturally Gifted

Opposite: A hilltop lookout at the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden affords expansive views of the surrounding rain forest.

Lush Life
Overlooking a
verdant corner
of Tinimbayo
Valley from the
mountain crest at
Batutumonga.



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Toraja is one of Indonesia's most enticing destinations, yet the majority of travelers pass it by in favor of Bali or Borobudur. They don't know what they're missing.

BY **CRISTIAN RAHADIANSYAH** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **SURYO WIBOWO**

— RA TO — JA

June is a bloody month in Toraja. As the dry season descends on the southern highlands of Indonesia's Sulawesi Island, funeral season also arrives, and so it is that I've come to the village of Barana to attend the funeral of the mother of a man named Almen. She's been dead for six months, but I've arrived just in time to witness her Rambu Solo ceremony, one of Indonesia's oldest, bloodiest, and costliest traditions in which the dead are ushered into the afterlife with animal sacrifices, dancing, chanting, and feasting ceremonies that can last for days.

Mourners are supposed to present something to the family of the deceased, and I've brought a pack of cigarettes with me to give as a gift. But despite this gesture, I quickly violate a slew of cultural norms as Almen shows me to my seat. Toraja runs on a caste system, and being an outsider, I don't rank on the social pyramid. Yet Almen leads me to the front of the granary, a spot generally reserved for upper-crust Torajans, and serves me food as we wait for the ceremonies to begin. Soon, a pastor starts chanting a prayer, and then comes the slaughter. In a meadow nearby, hundreds of pigs and a dozen buffalo are killed one by one, stabbed in their bellies and sliced at their necks like a scene out of a slasher movie. By noon, the meadow is drenched in red, and though the deaths are nauseating to watch, I can't look away. Maybe it's true that sadism has its own charm, or maybe I'm trying to wrap my head around just how much is sacrificed here for a single death.

Toraja is a land unlike any other in Indonesia. Long isolated from the outside world, this former mountain kingdom—some 300 kilometers north of

Makassar—developed a caste system and an animist religion called Aluk To Dolo (“way of the ancestors”) that values the afterlife far more than life itself. Even in the 21st century, modernity seems to be kept at bay, and Toraja's two biggest cities—Makale and Rantepao—are little more than half-asleep towns. I've rented a motorcycle for my trip, and every turn on the twisting roads brings a new breathtaking view: hills of jungle and coffee farms, rice paddies stretching across valleys like verdant tapestries, and small neighborhoods of *tongkonan*, Toraja's distinctive traditional houses with facades richly painted in symbolic patterns and long, curved roofs shaped like the hull of a boat.

The first outsiders to come to Toraja were Dutch missionaries, who arrived in the early 20th century. They succeeded in converting some 80 percent of Torajans to Christianity, and churches are now stationed along roadsides and an enormous hilltop cross looks down over Rantepao. But try as the missionaries did to squeeze out Aluk To Dolo, the old beliefs endured, and its funeral traditions and rituals still remain intact as a window into the culture of ancient Toraja.

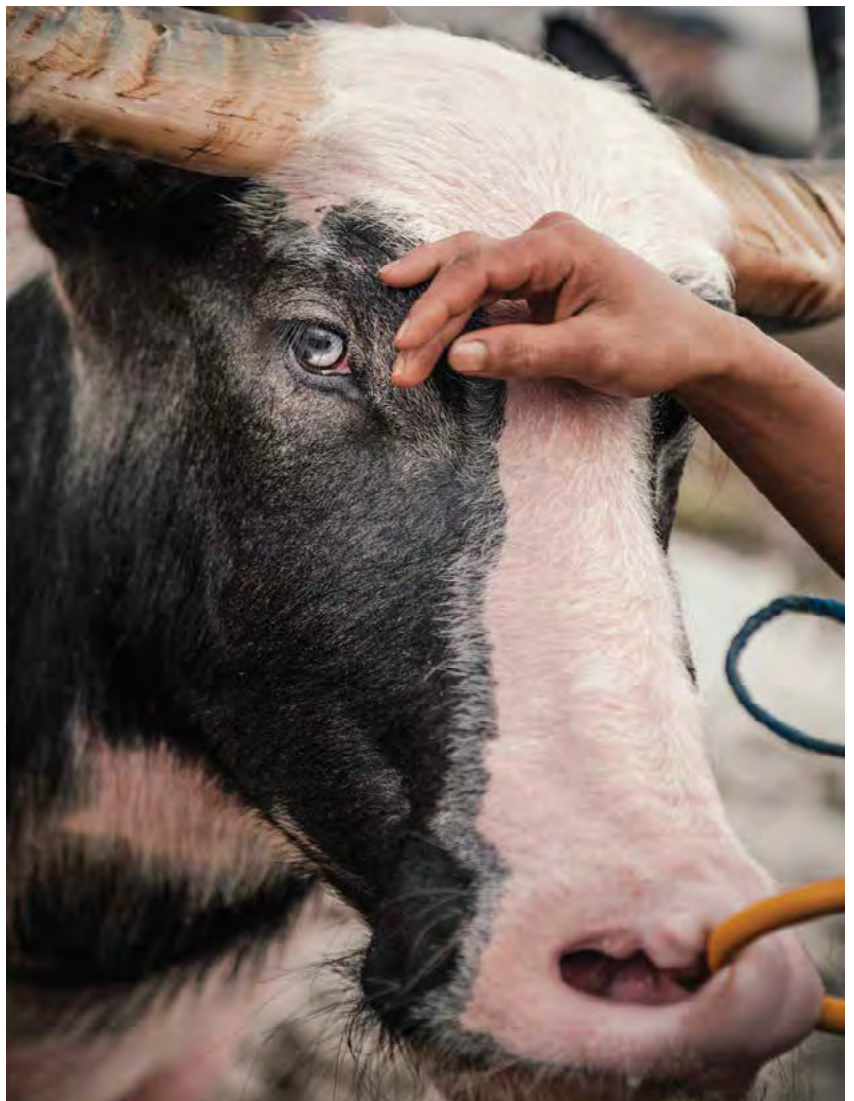
Speaking to Almen about his mother's funeral, he tells me that for the six months after her death, her embalmed corpse had been kept at home like a living member of the household. Those who die are not considered dead until the first animal is sacrificed in the Rambo Solo ceremony, and its spirit can carry the soul of the deceased beyond the horizon to paradise, known as *Puya*. For some households, this means keeping the dead around for years while they save enough money for a funeral. In Toraja, the per capita income is less than 30 million Indonesian rupiah (about US\$1,120), and with pigs priced anywhere from one to three million rupiah each and buffalo, depending on their weight and markings, anywhere from 300 million to one billion rupiah (about US\$75,000), funerals are a costly business. Almen spent a decade's worth of savings on his mother's.

And Rambu Solo is just the beginning. Following the ceremony, the bodies are carried in painted coffins to graves carved into the sides of cliffs or inside of jungle caves, and life-sized wooden statues called *tau-tau* are placed outside as grave-markers. For some nobles, a menhir (standing stone) may be planted in the ground as well, a tradition that goes back to Toraja's megalithic roots. Every August, corpses are brought from their graves, cleaned, dressed in new clothes, and reunited with their families and villages. In Toraja, it's as if the deceased never really leave.

Funerals are also what introduced Toraja to the world. In 1972, there was an extravagant Rambu Solo ceremony for Puang Sangalla, said to be the last great pureblooded king of Toraja. More than 400 tourists showed up for the funeral, along with journalists from *National Geographic* and brothers Lawrence and

Living Legends

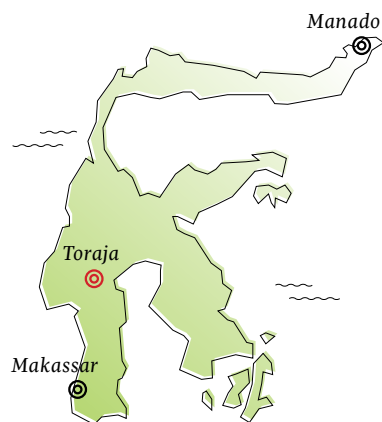
Opposite, clockwise from top left: Spinning organic cotton thread in Sa'dan, a Torajan village known for its woven textiles; a church amid the paddy fields of Sa'dan; sacrificial buffaloes sell for a small fortune in Rantepao's Bolu market; cooking pork at a Rambu Solo funeral feast.



High Places

The towering cliff of Londa, a centuries-old burial site whose rocky face is hung with coffins and inlaid with hundreds of *tau-tau*, life-like effigies marking the tombs of those buried there.





Getting There

Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi, can be reached from Singapore on **Silk Air** (silkair.com), from Kuala Lumpur on **AirAsia** (airasia.com), and from Jakarta and Bali on several Indonesian airlines. A number of bus companies serve the nine-hour route from Makassar to the Toraja's capital city Rantepao, but Makassar-based **Primadona** (62-811/449-7212; no website) offers some of the most comfortable rides. Buses leave from Makassar at 9:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. daily.

When to Go

The dry months of June through August are when most funerals are held, making it the best time to visit if you want to witness one of these bloody spectacles.

Where to Stay

In addition to its 134 charming rooms laid out in traditional *tongkonan* houses, **Toraja Heritage Hotel** (62-423/21-192; toraja-heritage.com; doubles from US\$81;) in Rantepao offers a swimming pool and tours to surrounding sights. Just outside of town, the 98-room **Misiliana Hotel** (62-423/21-212; toraja-misiliana.com; doubles from US\$78) sits on eight hectares with two pools, a restaurant, and a spa.

Lorne Blair, there to film a documentary financed by Ringo Starr for the BBC. Puang's death was Toraja's first international media event, and the spectacle was broadcast throughout Europe.

Tourism surged. In 1976, there were some 12,000 arrivals, a number that grew to nearly 200,000 in the '80s. The Indonesian government designated Toraja the "prima donna" of Sulawesi and the country's second official destination after Bali, and a picture of a *tongkonan* was printed on the 5,000 rupiah note. New hotels and roads were built, and getting to Toraja became easier. These days, though, Toraja is a much quieter place. Tourists—both foreign and domestic—seem to have moved on to other, more accessible Indonesian destinations; the only regular flight service to Toraja was halted in 1997 and has yet to resume. Getting there today requires a nine-hour bus trip from Makassar. This ride is comfortable enough—my coach came outfitted with electric chair massagers—but it's admittedly not for everyone.

The **Londa cemetery** is a burial cave just south of Rantepao. Despite being one of Toraja's main

on a palace balcony. Unlike older *tau-tau* with their darker skin, smaller irises, and coverings of plainer cloth, these effigies have shapely figurines and features so realistically carved that my camera's face detector picks them up. They're clearly more modern, perhaps in honor of more recent deaths—or perhaps they're replacements. After the word got out about Toraja in the 1970s, international art collectors came hunting for artifacts, especially *tau-tau*. Indonesia's *Kompas* newspaper reported in 1980 that eight effigies had been stolen from Lemo, another gravesite whose cliff face is lined with hundreds of such statues. In 1984, a *tau-tau* was sold at a gallery in Paris for US\$75,000. By the end of the decade, almost all the original *tau-tau* had disappeared.

Toby Volkman, a cultural anthropologist who has published extensive research about Sulawesi, reported in the '80s that European art brokers sent field agents equipped with 300-millimeter camera lenses to Toraja to photograph *tau-tau* for potential buyers. Surprisingly, though, they often weren't the thieves. "Strangers, people say, could have no access to these difficult sites," Volkman wrote in the *American Eth-*

IN THE MIDST OF A BAMBOO FOREST IN THE VILLAGE OF KAMBIRA IS A TREE WHERE BABIES WHO DIE BEFORE THEIR TEETH HAVE COME IN ARE BURIED WITHOUT FUNERALS, PLACED IN SHOEBOX-SIZE HOLES CARVED IN THE TRUNK TO GROW INTO THE LIFE OF THE TREE

attractions, there are only four other visitors when I arrive. I'd once seen Londa in a brochure on a cruise ship advertised like an Indiana Jones adventure, but as I pull up to the entrance, it seems perfectly packaged with cement pathways, a seating area, and "If Tomorrow Never Comes" sounding out from the souvenir shop. However, as I follow my guide up to the cliffs, the feeling of being at a well-trodden attraction quickly fades into a hair-raising eeriness. Inside the caves, we pass old wooden caskets, some completely decayed around piles of bones, and skulls are lined up in rows on top of rocks. Lawrence Blair once wrote that entering a Torajan tomb was "like bears pretending to be spiders," and as my guide lights up a Petromax lantern and takes me into a winding tunnel, I understand what he meant. The ceiling gets lower and lower until I have to crawl on all fours with my guide's lamp illuminating skeletal remnants on either side, and I get the sensation that I'm inside a giant sarcophagus, praying our lamp doesn't run out of kerosene.

When we emerge from the cave happily back into the daylight, I pause to snap a couple shots of the *tau-tau*, placed above the cave's mouth like nobles

nologist journal in 1990. "It is generally assumed that effigies are stolen from the cliffs by children or young relatives of the families themselves." Of course, this shook up many locals. "Selling *tau-tau* is like selling our own grandmother," my guide tells me, explaining that they're considered holy representations of the deceased. It also might explain the downturn in tourism. Why come all the way to Toraja to ogle *tau-tau* when you could see better examples in galleries and auction houses in Europe?

Although grave visits and blood-drenched funerals may sound like a strange way to spend a vacation, each place here is fascinatingly different and stunningly beautiful. One day I visit Suaya, a cliff grave used exclusively for the tombs of the royal Sangalla family (including King Puang) that looks out over a valley of ponds and rice paddies. At Bori Kalimbuang, I wander through a field of giant *menhir*—the taller the stone, the higher the nobility it represents—before heading up into a forest, following a small trail past enormous boulders, each belonging to a different family. And high in the hills in the small village of Kambira, a large tree in the midst



Preparing for Paradise

Above: *Tau-tau* statues sit behind a trellised iron door in Ke'te Kesu, a 400-year-old village that now serves as a living museum for visitors. Opposite: In Rantepao, performers ready for a *Ma'randing* war dance, traditionally performed on the second day of funerals.

of a bamboo forest is where babies who die before their teeth have grown in are buried without funerals, placed in small shoebox-size holes carved in the tree's trunk and covered with black fiber, growing into the life of the tree.

As I take in one place after another, I can't help wondering why Toraja isn't packed with tourists. At the village of Sa'dan, known for its traditional weaving, I wander past a few women who seem to be lost in their own thoughts, buy a ticket, and write my name in the guest book. The last entry was from two weeks ago. "This village used to be so filled with tourists that I didn't have time to eat," said one of the weavers, Aminah.

On my way back into Rantepao, I find myself in need of a pick-me-up and stop by Hotel Pison, known for having some of the best coffee in town.

The manager's uncle, Elifas Pongrekun, is the founder of Kaana Toraya, a coffee brand that has gained a cult following. He introduces himself to me as Eli and explains how he grows the beans on a plantation in the highland village of Awan and then brings them back to process in the roaster just across the hotel's garden from the guest rooms. "It's better to let it settle in the cup for a moment," he suggests as he sets a steaming cup in front of me. "Like washing a new shirt in a bucket, let it steep until the water has absorbed its color." I follow his instructions, and unlike my favorite Gayo coffee from Aceh that jolts the system, his drink ignites a melancholy calm, as if trying to persuade me to grab a book and lie down.

But to lie down would be to squander another of Toraja's assets: outdoor adventure. There are white-water rafting expeditions led by a number of outfitters down the Sa'dan River, which provides both scenic paddles past riverbanks teeming with wildlife and thrilling rides through grade-five cascades. Trekking options range from pleasant day hikes to multi-night excursions with stops at village homestays along the way. There's even some rock climbing to be had, though burial cliffs are of course off-limits.

Or, for travelers like me, a motorcycle and a map can provide pleasure enough. One morning, I drive up to the top of Batutumonga, a small peak that looks down over Rantepao. The road is full of potholes waiting to swallow my bike, but it's hard to pull my eyes from the surrounding panorama of paddy fields where bamboo-hatted farmers are starting their days. Finally reaching the top, I turn off the engine and take in the view—a swath of bucolic scenery that recalls the landscapes of the colonial-era Mooi Indie ("Beautiful Indies") school of artists. For a land that has dwelled so long on death, it certainly has a beautiful life. ☉



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AIR BAR @ INTERCONTINENTAL SAMUI BAAN TALING NGAM RESORT

Perched high above the Gulf of Thailand on the cliffs of Taling Ngam, Air Bar is a destination cocktail lounge in Koh Samui. Known for its stunning sunset views, the sleek terrace attracts both hotel guests and visitors to come and sip signature cocktails prepared by world-class mixologists and enjoy delicate tapas, sushi, and sashimi as the sun sets over the gulf waters.

Whisky Sour

INGREDIENTS

- 3 parts Bourbon whisky
- 2 parts Lemon juice
- 1 part Simple syrup
- 1.5 parts Egg white
- Maraschino cherries

METHOD

Fill a shaker with ice cubes, and pour in all of the ingredients together. Shake well, and strain into a chilled rocks glass filled with ice cubes. Garnish with a cherry, and serve. For a brandy, tequila, or pisco sour, simply switch the whisky with the same part of the alternate liquor.



295 Moo 3, Taling Ngam Beach Suratthani,
Koh Samui, Thailand; 66/7742-9100;
ihg.com/intercontinental



RIVER CAFÉ @ MAYA UBUD, BALI

Perched above the banks of the swirling Petanu River in the central foothills of Bali, the River Café at Maya Ubud is all about “conscious cuisine” and the balance it brings to one’s wellness. In keeping with the tenets of the Slow Food movement, the kitchen here focuses on sustainable and seasonal produce, including organic vegetables and herbs from the hills of nearby Bedugul and wheat alternatives such as quinoa, buckwheat, and coconut flour. Clean, fresh, natural, and crisp, the resulting dishes are as wholesome as they are delicious, such as this super-healthy tropical salad that you can easily make at home.

Red-rice Encrusted Tuna on a Salad of Green Mango and Star Fruit

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 4)

- 12 Tuna medallions, about 1 cm thick
- 2 Green mangoes, thinly sliced and julienned
- 2 Star fruits, sliced
- 2 small Rose apples, sliced
- 2 small Shallots, sliced
- Coriander for garnish

RED-RICE CRUST INGREDIENTS

- 1 cups Red rice
- ½ tsp Coriander seeds
- 1 Star anise
- 1 tsp Ground ginger
- 2 tsp Chili powder
- 1½ tsp Sea salt

DRESSING

- 225 ml Tamarind juice
- 225 ml Honey
- 3 Shallots, thinly sliced
- 1 Red chili, seeds removed and sliced
- 1 Green chili, seeds removed and sliced
- Juice of 2 limes
- 1 tsp Sea salt (to taste)

METHOD

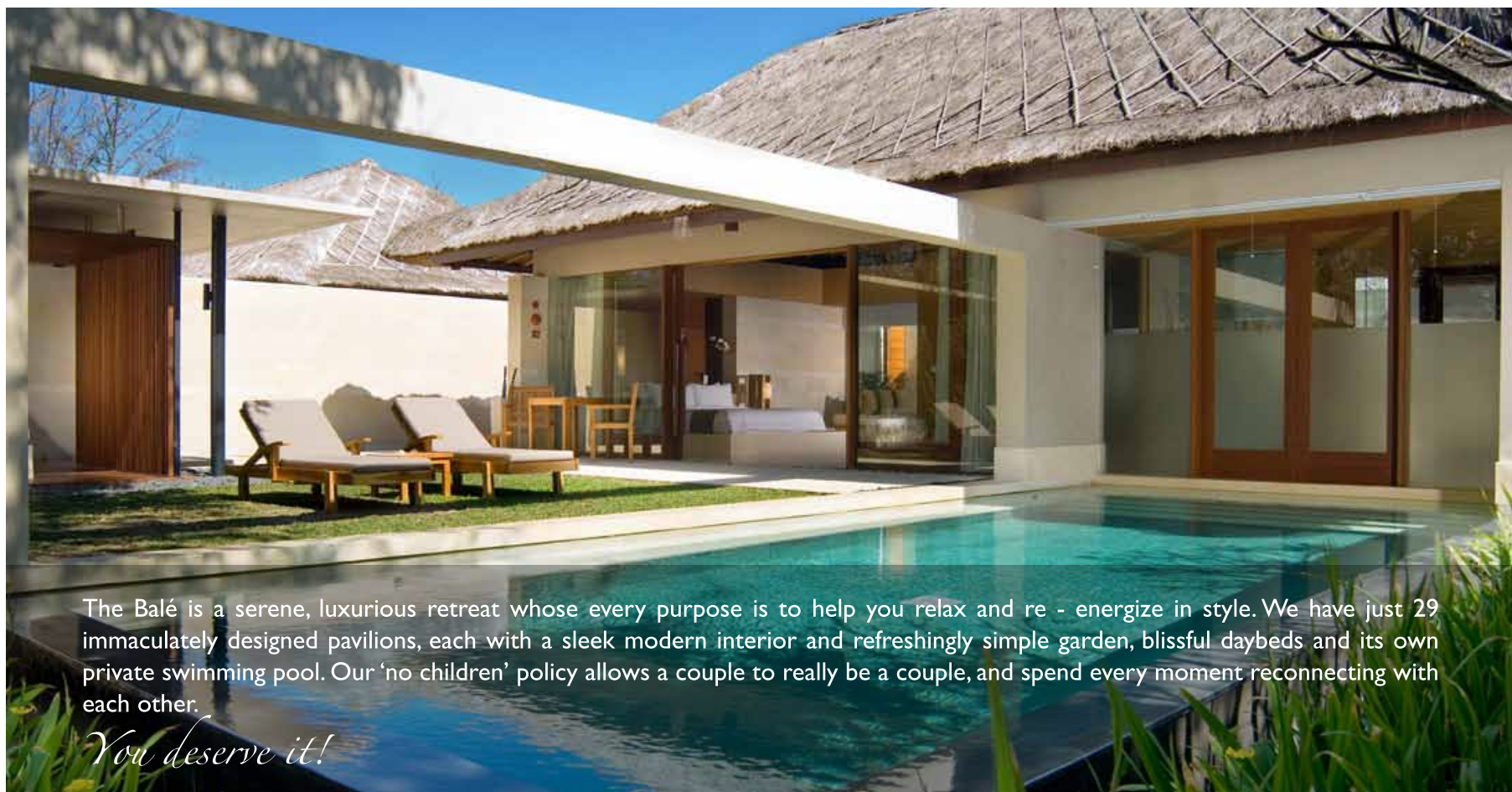
To prepare the salad, place the green mango, rose apple, and shallots in a bowl and toss together. Separately, mix all the dressing ingredients then add to the bowl, tossing well. Let sit for five minutes to marinate. To make the red-rice crust, place the rice, coriander seeds, and star anise in a pan and toast until slightly brown, then grind to a coarse consistency in a spice grinder. Spread the mix on a plate and coat the tuna medallions with it. Heat a pan with a little canola oil, add the tuna, and cook each side for one minute. Remove the fish from the pan and drain on a paper towel. In four bowls, arrange the salad nicely and place the tuna on top. Finish with a sprig of coriander.



Jalan Gunung Sari Peliatan, Ubud, Bali,
Indonesia; 62-361/977-888; mayaresorts.com

THE BALÉ

nusa dua - bali



The Balé is a serene, luxurious retreat whose every purpose is to help you relax and re - energize in style. We have just 29 immaculately designed pavilions, each with a sleek modern interior and refreshingly simple garden, blissful daybeds and its own private swimming pool. Our 'no children' policy allows a couple to really be a couple, and spend every moment reconnecting with each other.

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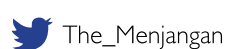
THE BALÉ

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PANDA PERKS

Guests of the newest luxury hotel in Sichuan's provincial capital—the 230-room Niccolo Chengdu—can look forward equally to pampering and panda encounters with the property's "DestinPanda with Niccolo" offer. Benefits include complimentary High Tea for two, daily breakfast, and entrance tickets to the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding—China's largest panda sanctuary—with round-trip transportation. Quote "DPanda" when making your booking, and DestinAsian readers will also enjoy late checkout until 4 p.m.

For more information, call 86-28/8220-8888 or visit niccolohotels.com

HOLDING COURT

Following its record-breaking success last year, BNP Paribas WTA Finals Singapore presented by SC Global will return to the state-of-the-art Singapore Sports Hub on October 23 with 10 days of spectacular women's tennis. Tickets are already

on sale for the season-ending tournament, including bundled tickets and season passes that offer dedicated fans even greater savings. And this year's event promises to be more exciting than ever, with the singles and doubles competition expanded from seven to eight days and the introduction of two "supersized" sessions—for fans to watch up to four matches per session—held on October 26 and 30. Add to that a record US\$7 million purse, and you have all the makings of the most thrilling competition on Singapore's sports calendar.

For more information, visit wtafinals.com



MAGNUM OPUS

Long at the forefront of Orchard Road's dining scene, the Hilton Singapore is not one to rest on its laurels, as the recent opening of its innovative Opus Bar & Grill attests. Taking over the lobby-level space formerly occupied by Checkers Brasserie, the new restaurant is helmed by Australian chef Nick Philip and features Singapore's first bespoke Himalayan salt-tiled dry-aging cabinet, in which hand-selected prime cuts of meats are dry aged between

14 and 36 days before being charcoal grilled over an open flame for beautifully tenderized results. Also on the menu is sustainably harvested seafood—think seared Hokkaido scallops and black cod carpaccio—alongside a zesty range of Asian-inspired cocktails. Kaya Toast Martini, anyone?

For more information, call 65/6730-3390 or visit hilton.com



RIVERSIDE REDUX

Standing proudly beside the Mae Ping River on the manicured grounds of the Anantara Chiang Mai resort, the newly minted The Service 1921 Restaurant & Bar occupies a handsome colonial residence that once served as the northern Thai city's British Consulate, complete with a courtroom, croquet lawn, and stables for elephants. Now refitted with old-world decor—antique rugs, vintage lamps and fans, and artifacts from the days of British teak-logging interests—the two-story venue also boasts a well-stocked wine cellar, a private whiskey-tasting room, and alfresco seating on wraparound verandas. As for the food, expect a distinctive menu of contemporary Thai, Chinese, and Vietnamese dishes such as locally raised duck-breast salad with green apple, ginger, mint, goat cheese, and chili-lime dressing; and northern Thai-style braised pork spare rib with young jack fruit.

For more information, call 66-53/253-333 or visit chiang-mai.anantara.com

TOQUE TALK

With a stellar résumé that lists stints at Gordon Ramsay's eponymous three-Michelin-starred restaurant in London and at two-starred Chez Bruce across the Thames, young Australian chef Matthew McCool has found his way to Indonesia's favorite holiday island, where he now overseas Starfish Bloo at the W Retreat & Spa Bali – Seminyak. Previously the chef de cuisine at Sydney's award-winning Altitude Restaurant, McCool brings with him innovative ideas and cutting-edge approaches to cooking that will take the cuisine at Starfish Bloo—the resort's signature beachside dining destination—to the next level, enhancing both the extensive Sunday brunch that the restaurant is known for as well as its seafood-centric menu of pan-Asian fare mixed with Western touches.

For more information, call 62-361/300-0106 or visit starfishbloorestaurant.com



TUILE OF FORTUNE

This summer, legendary Bali hot spot KU DE TA has given itself a major update with the opening of Tuile, a remarkable new dining and cocktail venue perched above the beachside complex's freshly refurbished Fidel's Bar. With a contemporary-tropical aesthetic from young Italian architect and designer, the indoor-outdoor space, rich

with tiling and wood, is just as impressive when it comes to the menu, highlighted by items such as house-made camembert, foie gras parfait, Black Angus steak tartare, tea-soaked raisin salad, Washington oysters, and Sturia caviar. Nor will cocktail aficionados be disappointed: made with high-tech equipment and seasonal ingredients, drinks include such standouts as the Gin and Juice, a Tanqueray-based drink with pomelo, Campari, pomegranate, and grapefruit; and the Mandarin Napoleon with Ketel One Citroen, cranberry juice, and bergamot.

For more information, call 62-361/736-969 or visit kudeta.net

BIRTHDAY BONUS

Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Beach Road is celebrating Singapore's 50th birthday with an exceptional offer. Until December 30, the SG50 Promotion invites guests to enjoy a minimum two-night stay in a 45-square-meter suite from S\$270 a night, an unbeatable deal that puts them right on the doorstep of the vibrant Kampong Glam neighborhood and within easy reach of Marina Bay. Another draw is the property itself: apart from the tastefully furnished accommodations, there's a state-of-the-art fitness center, a rooftop pool with show-stopping views of the Singapore skyline, and 24-hour personal assistants who take care of guests' every need. The offer also includes buffet breakfast (except on Sundays and public holidays) and complimentary shuttle-bus service to key shopping and business destinations around town.

For more information, call 65/6678-8888 or visit panpacific.com



UBUD ENTICEMENT

A tranquil Balinese boutique resort set in the lush green hills of Ubud, Kamandalu Ubud is making itself even more beguiling with its Kamandalu Experience Package. Starting from US\$1,080 for a three-night stay in a Pool Villa, the offer includes daily morning yoga sessions at the spectacular Rumah Yoga and hearty breakfasts at Petulu Restaurant, as well as a host of other activities: a guided trekking or cycling excursion through Ubud's serene countryside; a gourmet picnic lunch overlooking the peaceful rice terraces; a one-hour Indonesian massage session for two; and a romantic candle light dinner specially prepared by the chef.

For more information, call or 62-361/975-825 or visit kamandaluresort.com





**MOZAIC
BEACHCLUB**

From its paradisiacal beaches to its traditional temples, Bali has a whole range of draws, not the least of which is its thriving culinary scene, buzzing with trendy eateries and fine-dining restaurants alike. At the top of the must-try list is Mozaic Beachclub, a hip hangout spot in Seminyak with some of the best food on the island, recently made even more noteworthy with its mid-May opening of Mozaic Brasserie.

As the sister outpost of Mozaic Restaurant in Ubud—which has previously been listed by the renowned *Les Grandes Tables du Monde* guide as one of the world's best restaurants—Mozaic Beachclub pairs complex, creative cuisine with a cool, laid-back atmosphere. A more casual re-imagining of the Club's prior restaurant, Dining Room, the Brasserie's design is stylishly contemporary yet relaxed—charms further exuded by the Club's cabana-rimmed pool, breezy open-air seating, and



views of Batu Belig Beach.

Headed by chefs James Ephraim and Ashley Garvey, Mozaic Brasserie's kitchen puts forth an expertly conceptualized menu that blends Western and Southeast Asian cuisine. Drawing strongly upon traditional Indonesian flavors, there are dishes such as tomato tartare spiced to taste like Sumatranese *rendang*; smoked duck and foie gras with mango and tempe under a spicy

peanut *rujak* sauce; and the restaurant's signature Slipper Lobster Bouillabaisse, full of locally caught seafood and infused with kaffir lime and brandy.

With everything from classic arrays of charcuterie and *fruits de mer* to pastas and vegetarian fare, the menu is diverse and imaginative. This is best showcased in the special six- and 12-course tasting menus, the latter including a surprise course showcasing the chefs' latest innovations. Additionally, Mozaic's wine menu is one of the best in Bali, having received the prestigious Wine Spectator Award of Excellence for the past two consecutive years, with sommeliers on hand to help guests find the perfect pairing for an unforgettable meal.

Jl Pantai Batu Belig, Seminyak, Bali; 62-361/473-5796; mozaic-beachclub.com

**SCHOTT ZWIESEL**

A brand of Germany's Zwiesel Kristallglas, whose legacy of craftsmanship dates back to 1872, Schott Zwiesel is the global market leader for crystal glass in the sphere of international haute cuisine and high-class hospitality. Its innovative functionality and timeless design is valued by renowned chefs, sommeliers, bartenders,

and an ever-increasing number of private households. The latest line to join the Schott Zwiesel family, Estelle, continues the brand's tradition of innovation and excellence in a graceful stemware series designed for the most demanding wine connoisseur. The smooth transition from stem to bowl gives each Estelle piece a timelessly elegant silhouette, while the prominent bend in the goblets' contours offers a generous surface for the wine to

breathe. With their multitude of shapes, Estelle glasses guarantee an uncomplicated but sophisticated pleasure when drinking wine, as well as a high degree of durability. The series is made with Tritan Protect, a technology that doubles the surface strength of the stem and thus considerably increases scratch resistance and reduces breakages.

4A Temple Street, Singapore; 65/6324-2931; info@zwiesel-kristallglas.sg; zwiesel-kristallglas.com

**AMADEA RESORT
AND VILLAS**



In the thick of Seminyak, Amadea Resort and Villas is a tropical oasis where guests can come to unwind. Seven suites and 86 guest rooms are modern in style, while seven two- and four-bedroom pool villas are ideal for families. Conveniently just a five-minute drive from the beach, the hotel also has two lap pools and a kids' pool—not to mention a rooftop spa and garden—for escaping the crowds. Casual dining is offered in Bistro Batu Kali, though guests can order room-service from any of the surrounding restaurants.

Jl. Laksmana No. 55, Seminyak, Bali; 62-361/847-8155; amadeabali.com

**SOHAM WELLNESS
CENTER**



A wellness center that comes complete with modern fitness facilities, a spa, healthful café fare, and a lifestyle boutique. SOHAM Wellness Center is Bali's best bet for staying in shape. A four-story building in the heart of Bali's Seminyak neighborhood, the center features state-of-the-art gym equipment in a 2,000-square-meter indoor area, an outdoor Olympic-size swimming pool, a sauna and Jacuzzi, and a dedicated cycle room. One-on-one sessions with nationally certified personal trainers are available, as are yoga, hot yoga, and Pilates sessions alongside other inventive total-body and mind workout classes. SOHAM truly is the most comprehensive wellness and lifestyle experience on the island.

Jl. Lebak Sari No.7, Petitenget, Seminyak, Bali; 62-361/739-090; macavillas.com

**TELUNAS
PRIVATE ISLAND**



Situated just south of Singapore in Indonesia's laid-back Riau Islands, Telunas Private Island is an escape into simple luxury. Here, 15 stylishly rustic Sea Villas—each sizing 90 square meters with furnishings made from repurposed wooden boats—offer spectacular views of azure sea and the rugged terrain of nearby Sugi Island. Services include in-villa massages, a variety of sea and land activities, a new poolside canteen, and even an Orion 130ST telescope for stargazing. Apart from relaxing on three white-sand beaches or enjoying a traditional Malay meal in a nearby village, guests can also enjoy access to the facilities at sister resort Telunas Beach, a five-time TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Award winner, just across the cove.

62/811-7710951; telunasresorts.com

**ASTON PRIMERA
PASTEUR**



A four-star hotel and conference center located in the heart of Indonesia's third largest city, the Aston Primera Pasteur is the perfect choice for business and leisure travelers visiting Bandung, West Java. The recipient of a 2015 Certificate of Excellent from TripAdvisor, the hotel features 278 well-appointed rooms and suites, an indoor swimming pool, fine cuisine, and the city's most advanced conference and meeting facilities, including an enormous ballroom that can accommodate as many as 1,500 guests.

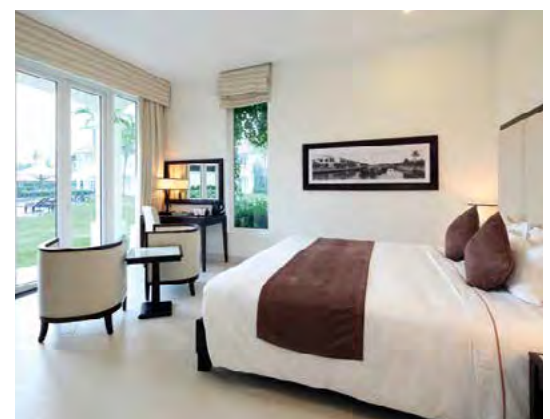
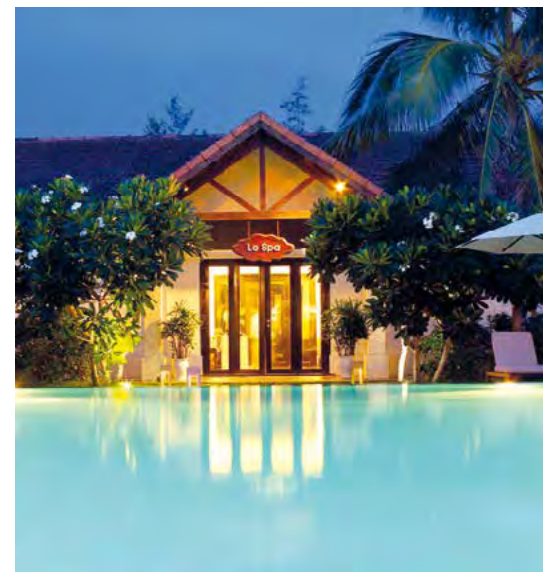
Jl. Doktor Djunjunan No. 96, Bandung, Indonesia; 62-22/206-0123; astonpasteur.com

**BOUTIQUE HOI AN
RESORT**



With its umbrella-shaded sun loungers dotting a quiet white-sand stretch of Cua Dai Beach, the Boutique Hoi An Resort is just the spot for a low-key vacation in central Vietnam. Its 82 rooms and villas designed elegantly with a palette of creams and black all boast ocean-facing private balconies, and a serene outdoor pool and expansive spa make relaxation come easy. In addition to three restaurants, cooking classes are offered for a taste of Vietnamese cuisine, and as for outside its gates, the resort offers tours of Hoi An's Old Town, a five-minute drive away, and excursions to ancient temples farther afield.

Cam An, Hoi An, Vietnam; 84-510/3939-111; boutiquehoianresort.com



**MÉTIS RESTAURANT,
LOUNGE & GALLERY**



The newly opened lounge at MétiS gives Bali visitors yet another reason to head to one of the island's most sophisticated settings. Overlooking a beautiful lily-pond garden and designed with a high-tech retractable roof, the space serves cocktails and Mediterranean-influenced tapas, making it a great starting point for a night out in Seminyak. Or, come earlier for one of its two High Tea Packages and sip carefully selected teas paired with exquisite bites.

The well-established kitchen is always bringing new cuisine to the fine-dining restaurant, most recently with the Meat and Poultry menu, an expertly crafted list of seven gourmet entrees and classic sides. Keep an eye on adjoining MétiS Gallery as well, as it regularly unveils new collections of antiques, artwork, and home goods from around Southeast Asia.

Jl. Petitenget No. 6, Kuta, Bali;
62-361/473-7888; metisbali.com



THE HILL VILLAS



For couples and families seeking a hideaway that's romantic and exotic, there's no better place than The Hill Villas. Perched on the secluded peak of Mumbul Hill in Nusa Dua, the one- to three-bedroom villas are designed with traditional architecture and authentic artifacts, giving each a unique character and ambiance. Embodying Balinese luxury, each of the 10 villas also comes with its own pool, garden, and breathtaking views of the surrounding Jimbaran and Pecatu hillsides extending out to Tanjung Benoa Bay. There's a spa, an assortment of cooking classes, and access to a private beach nearby, as well as a private chauffeur for guests who wish to explore any of Bali's beaches, restaurants, and attractions further afield.

Jl. Taman Giri, Banjar Mumbul, Nusa Dua, Bali;
62-361/847-8888; thehillvillas.com

X2 SAMUI RESORT



With its 100-meter beachfront on the Gulf of Thailand and 27 design-centric villas tucked amid 50-year-old trees, X2 Samui provides the perfect backdrop for pre-wedding photo shoots. To entice betrothed couples further, the award-winning resort is now offering a Sweet Romance package priced from THB15,900 that includes a night's stay in a Deluxe Pool Villa with champagne breakfast for two, day use of the resort for photo shooting, and a romantic set dinner, alongside other benefits.

442 Moo 1, Baan Hua Thanon, Koh Samui,
Thailand; 66-77/233-033; x2resorts.com

**THE SULTAN HOTEL &
RESIDENCE JAKARTA**



Ideally located across from the Sudirman Central Business District, the Sultan Hotel & Residence Jakarta has everything that business and leisure travelers could want for an exceptional visit to the Indonesian capital. Sprawled over nearly 13 gardened hectares are 707 guest rooms divided into five tiers of five-star luxury hotel accommodations—Deluxe, Executive Club, Suite, Lanais, and Penthouse—as well as apartment-style residences, an Olympic-size outdoor swimming pool, several restaurants and lounges, 11 tennis courts, a full-service spa, a retail arcade, and even a 500-meter jogging track. Situated in the center of town, the Sultan also puts guests within easy reach of sophisticated shopping malls, a golf club, and a driving range, ensuring a relaxing and indulgent stay.

Jl. Gatot Subroto, Jakarta, Indonesia; 62-21/570-3600; sultanjakarta.com





REMAINS OF THE DAY

colonial period. Situated a short walk from Fatahillah Square in the heart of what was then known as Batavia, the crumbling three-story structure has inspired countless photographers and illustrators, including Jakarta-based graphic artist Dhar Cedhar, whose vivid watercolor appears on this page. “When I first looked at this building, for a moment I thought it could collapse anytime,” Cedhar recalls. “It was built in the 19th century and came to be owned by a renowned Sumatran businessman called Agus Musin Dasaad, who set up his offices here as well as an automobile showroom displaying Cadillacs and Chevrolets. Whatever successes he achieved are now far in the past, and the building remains a monument of sorts to the fleeting nature of greatness.” ©

Roofless and long derelict, the Dasaad Musin Concern building in Jakarta’s Kota Tua (Old Town) area is as forlorn a sight as it is evocative of an era that Indonesians call *Tempoe Doeloe* (literally “olden times”)—the heyday of Indies culture during the Dutch



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