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88 CHANGING TIMES IN CHENGDU

Sichuan's provincial capital is more enticing than ever these days as it emerges as a cosmopolitan Chinese metropolis whose backyard just happens to be an incredibly beautiful part of the country.

By *Amy Fabris-Shi*

.....



ON THE COVER On the ramparts of Lisbon's 16th-century Belém Tower, with the Tagus River beyond.
Photograph by *Ulet Ifansasti*



100 SHELL GAME

One man's quest for the perfect Portuguese clam dish provides a fine excuse for some culinary sleuthing in Lisbon, Évora, and beyond.

By *Kendall Hill*

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The cool highlands of Dalat—Vietnam's City of Eternal Spring—provide the setting for a slew of outdoor diversions, from canyoning and biking to teeing off at the region's newest golf course.

By *Sanjay Surana*

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120 SAND CASTLES

It's summertime again in Australia, and the beaches beckon. From Tasmania to Queensland, we round up 10 seaside resorts that you won't want to miss.

By *Natasha Dragun*

.....



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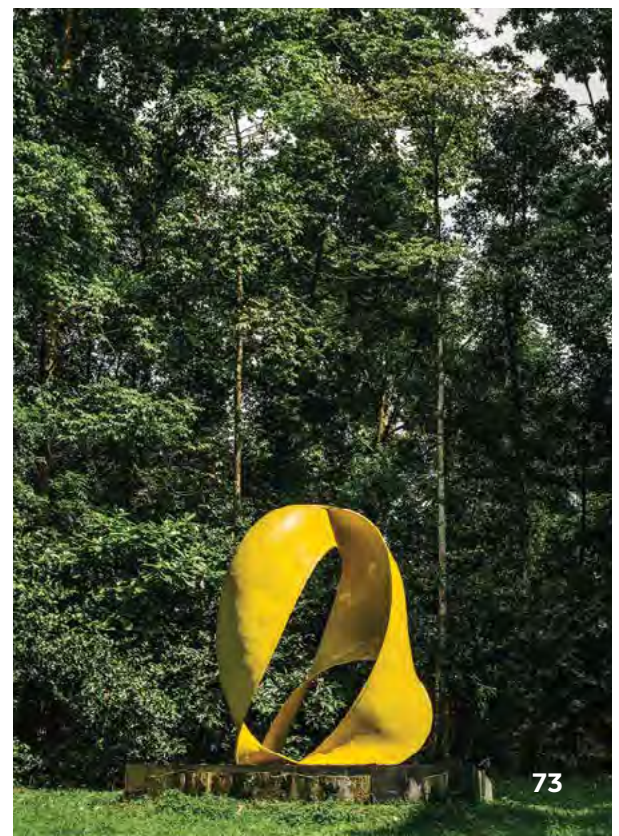
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INTENTS AND PURPOSES

Over the past year, I've observed that now more than ever, travelers are becoming increasingly inclined to travel with a specific purpose in mind. Chalk it up to limited vacation time or struggling economies

worldwide, but gone seem the days of aimless escapism—people want to give reason to where they're going and why. I was particularly taken with this issue's story by Kendall Hill, who flew to Portugal specifically to learn about a certain national dish and its elusive inventor. He explored some of the country's best cities, markets, and restaurants through the lens of a personal passion. It got me thinking—which of my curiosities can I satiate somewhere else? Where in the world should I direct my interests, or, where should I let them lead me?

For those intrigued by China—and travel to the mainland is certainly trending too—we have in this issue a feature about Chengdu, a city on the rise that offers a little of everything: incredible food, eclectic shopping, religious and dynastic history, and pandas. For adventurers, our story on Dalat in Vietnam shows it to be a sleeping

giant of an outdoor destination that's just now shaking off its slumber. And for the ocean-lovers among us, look to Australia, where a host of remarkably conceptual beach resorts (we've rounded up 10) are elevating the classic sun-and-sand vacation into wild, remote journeys.

It's hard to believe a new year is already upon us. It seems like only yesterday I was writing this note for our last December/January issue, and as each year passes by more quickly than the last, I become increasingly aware of the importance of making the time to re-center, recalibrate, slow down—purposes that I also feel perfectly valid about prescribing to my holiday travels. And you should too.



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DestinAsian is published six times a year and distributed throughout Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. The magazine assumes no responsibility for the safekeeping or return of unsolicited manuscripts, photographs, or other material.

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KENDALL HILL
Home Base: Melbourne
Wrote: “Shell Game,” p. 100

.....

The second best thing about touring Portugal and gorging yourself on clams—apart from the actual eating—is the locals you meet along the way, and the emotions aroused by a treasured national dish. Gandhi once said that a nation’s culture resides in the hearts and soul of its people. But in Portugal, you can’t overlook the stomach if you want to truly understand some of the country’s passions.



AMY FABRIS-SHI
Home Base: Shanghai
Wrote: “Changing Times in Chengdu,” p. 88

.....

I was expecting Chengdu to be booming, but I wasn’t expecting it to already be so hip. Alongside the chic restaurants, bars, shopping, and hotels, you can still glimpse the leisurely traditional culture for which Chengdu is renowned, including those crazy ear-cleaners. I’d definitely recommend getting out of the city as well. The nearby mountains are full of ancient villages, and are the best place to see pandas play in their natural habitat.



NATASHA DRAGUN
Home Base: Sydney
Wrote: “Sand Castles,” p. 120

.....

I’m constantly overwhelmed by the beauty of Australia’s beaches—the country has more than 10,000 stretches of sand, from powder-white tropical beaches to wild, rocky coves fed by water coming straight from Antarctica. And if there’s one thing Aussies know how to do well, it’s complement the country’s natural beauty with equally impressive lodgings. Alas, I can’t pick a favorite: all 10 seaside properties on my list are amazing.



TUSCAN TREASURE

My husband and I enjoyed reading about Mavis Teo’s adventures in the Maremma, which is also one of our favorite corners of Tuscany [“Trotting through Tuscany,” Oct./Nov.]. We don’t ride horses, so Ms. Teo’s perspective from a saddle was refreshing and eye-opening, as was her description of the L’Andana hotel in Castiglione della Pescaia, which looks divine. If any of your readers are headed in that direction, we’d also recommend staying at Il Pellicano, a beautiful Tuscan villa with cottages on the Monte Argentario peninsula. Surrounded by olive and cypress groves, it’s a romantic spot that—if you’re in the mood to splurge—will make an unforgettable addition to any Maremma itinerary. No horses, alas, but there’s Michelin-star food, a beach club, and the colorful town of Porto Ercole to explore—Caravaggio died here in 1610, bitten by one of those mosquitos Ms. Teo complained about. —Vivian Dixon, London

ENTHUSIASTIC ENDORSEMENT

You have a great magazine. I value the articles and features you publish; they are very informative and keep me up to date on the latest travel destinations, resorts, hotels, and recommendations in the region. In fact, I plan my company’s staff trainings and off-site meetings based on some of the places that appear in *DestinAsian*. Keep up the great work!
—Chris Yeo, Singapore

AWE INSPIRING As a travel junkie, I have been an avid reader of *DestinAsian* from day one. First and foremost, the magazine delivers a

consistently good read, especially when it comes to sharing the best places to travel in Asia. Some of the places you’ve covered are still on my bucket list, but others I have managed to visit already, and I’m happy to report that I wasn’t disappointed by any of the advice that you gave—most of it has actually been awesome.
—Hazlina Hassan, Kuala Lumpur

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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/ Thailand /

THE NAI HARN

One of Phuket’s original luxury resorts is once again bringing something new to its surrounds. After a top-to-bottom, 18-month makeover, the Nai Harn Phuket is reopening December 28 with not only a sparkling new pool and spa, but also 130 revamped accommodations—lined up a hill overlooking the Andaman Sea—that now include the largest ocean-facing guest rooms on the island. In celebration, the resort is offering 20 percent off of its Deluxe and Grand Ocean View rooms from January 10 until October 31, breakfast included (thenaiharn.com).



Global
BANYAN TREE

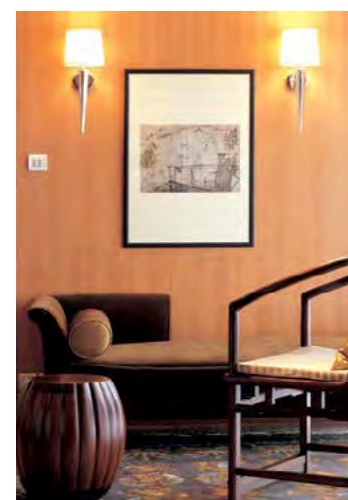
.....
From the beaches of the Seychelles to the skyscrapers of Seoul, and from the islands of Indonesia to the deserts of the U.A.E. (pictured here), Banyan Tree is renowned for its luxurious resorts in locations flung far and wide. At select properties until the end of March, the group is running the Credit Goes To You campaign, which grants guests

staying for two or more nights with credits of up to US\$350 to be used for dining, spa treatments, or shopping at a resort gallery for a unique souvenir to take home (banyantree.com).



Indonesia
SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, JAKARTA

.....
If you’re heading to the Indonesian capital anytime soon, all you need is a week’s notice in order to take advantage of the Shangri-La’s Advance Purchase offer. Across all seven elegant room categories at the hotel, weekday stays booked seven or 14 days in advance receive 15 and 20 percent discounts respectively, while weekend stays booked a week out generously receive half-price rates (shangri-la.com).



China
GRAND HYATT SHANGHAI

.....
On the upper levels of the Jin Mao Tower, the Grand Hyatt Shanghai is coupling its spectacular views—on display through the floor-to-ceiling windows in the 548 guest rooms—with an equally fabulous deal this holiday season. Through the end of January, guests staying two or more nights need only book two weeks ahead of time to receive a third night for free (shanghai.grand.hyatt.com).

COURTESY OF THE NAI HARN; COURTESY OF BANYAN TREE; COURTESY OF SHANGRI-LA JAKARTA; COURTESY OF GRAND HYATT SHANGHAI



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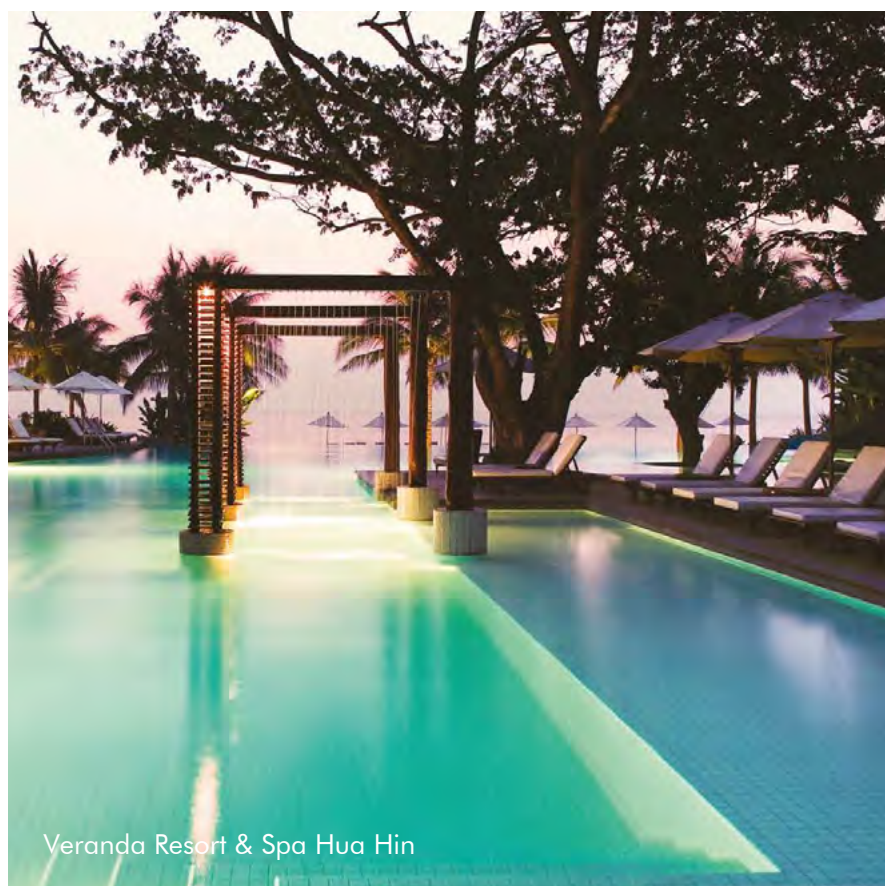
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GOOD *to* GO

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Bangkok's
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restaurants in
Hong Kong
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Tri House
The hillside suites
at Tri Lanka look out
across the waters
of Koggala Lake.



NATURAL SELECTION

Sri Lanka's newest swoon-worthy retreat is bringing style and sustainability to the mangrove-fringed shores of Koggala Lake, a short drive east of the southern city of Galle. Set to open mid-December, **Tri Lanka** features eight sleek suites with “living” walls and gardened roofs that spiral down a hill crowned by a cinnamon-stick-clad water tower, which will house three more rooms of its own. Recycled woods and solar-heated water add to the resort's eco-credentials, while a glass-walled library and spa, both nestled in a bamboo grove, are designed to bring guests as close to nature as possible. The lakeside setting is divine, but guests in need of a change of pace can head to Tri Lanka's private beach club on the sandy shores of nearby Kabalana (trilanka.com; doubles from US\$250). —Gabrielle Lipton



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MEN OF THE TIMES

When Ai Weiwei moved to the United States in 1981, the first book he purchased was *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from A to B & Back Again)*. It was the start of the many confluences of the 20th-century's king of Pop and the 21st's art hero of activism, explored in **Andy Warhol/Ai Weiwei**, the blockbuster summer exhibit of Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria. With more than 300 works, it's the biggest exhibition NGV has ever staged, covering its entire ground floor with works spanning five decades and all mediums: from Warhol's seminal prints—*Campbell's Soup* and *Three Marylins* among them—to his videos and smaller works previously unseen, and from Ai's early drawings and striking self-portraits to works commissioned just for this (including a new installation of his *Forever Bicycles* series, pictured here). The exhibit shows the many similarities between the two artists, tackling issues of politics, pop culture, history, and even social media. Ai is known for his tweets and online outcries, but are Warhol's 500 Polaroids of his celebrity friend circle not an early iteration of photo-sharing too? (Dec. 11-Apr. 24, 2016; ngv.vic.gov.au) —**Gabrielle Lipton**



IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Malls may not be Bali's biggest attractions, but sometimes, having all the best stores in one spot is just convenient. The new **Seminyak Village** fits the bill with elegance, a glass-roofed luxury shopping center with international brands on the ground floor (M Resort, Farah Khan, InTime), Bali brands on the second (Shakuhachi, Buddha Wear, Sensatia Botanicals), a rooftop Spring Spa, and a marketplace of small local vendors—grab some pastel-printed terrycloth from Bali Towel, then hit the beach (seminyakvillage.com). —**David Tse**

TUNNEL VISION

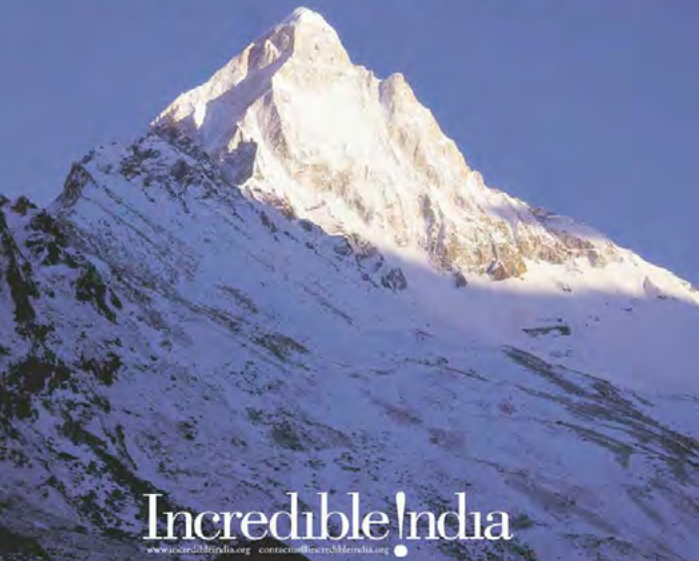
Last year, to celebrate 20 years of successfully shuttling passengers from London to continental Europe via the Channel Tunnel, high-speed rail service **Eurostar** gave itself a makeover. Soon to hit the tracks, the fleet of yellow-and-blue e320 trains were designed by Pininfarina—the Italian firm responsible for the sleek style of Ferraris and Maseratis—with touches of silver, 900 leather seats (up from 750) complete with handmade trimming, and free Wi-Fi. New routes were also added, and one to Amsterdam is in the works (eurostar.com). —**GL**



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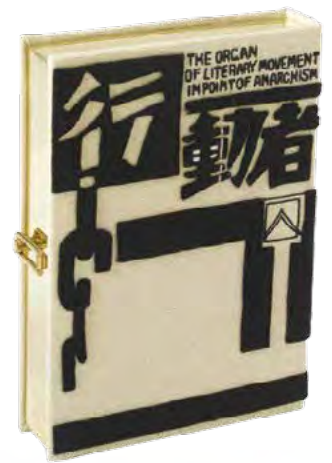
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A Leg Up
Dhoti-like pants from Matter's new collection bear a Singaporean-inspired pattern.



BY THE BOOK

.....
Fashionistas after an erudite look are oft seen clutching one of Olympia Le-Tan's cult-collected "book" purses and minaudières, hand-embroidered with classic covers like *The Great Gatsby*. But when the Parisian designer heard that her beloved Hotel Okura in Tokyo was being closed for demolition, she mourned the loss in **Sentimental Journey**, her latest collection and ode to Japan. Among the new stitches are Akutagawa's *Rashomon* and Kawabata's *Thousand Cranes*, along with Hello Kitty paraphernalia and Polaroids from artist Nobuyoshi Araki that nod to Le-Tan's appreciation for *kinbaku*, or Japanese bondage (olympialetan.com; from US\$940). —DT

COURTESY OF MATTER; COURTESY OF OLYMPIA LE-TAN

FOREIGN MATTER

The story of Singaporean label Matter's colorful new collection of pants and scarves, **Then&There**, is one of history and collaboration. Wanting to bring rural textile artisanship back into fashion, Matter's founders Yvonna Suner and Ren Ho developed (and pulled off) an ambitious concept that reimagines Asian garments and patterns using traditional fabrics and manufacturing methods. They began by enlisting the designers of four prominent Asian brands to re-create a classic pattern from their country, which were translated onto specially-dyed linens, silks, and handspun *khadi* twills via custom woodblock prints. There's a geometric print from Foreign Policy recalling the tile patterns of Singapore's kopitiam; a florid kaleidoscope vision by Botto Studio melding motifs from different parts of India; a triangular pattern from Anthill Fabric Gallery inspired by the Filipino flag; and a pared-down version of Indonesia's Truntum motif, a symbol of solidarity seen across the archipelago, from Populo Batik. Even the garments themselves take notes from customary dress: pants informed by the drapery of dhotis, wrappings of sarongs, and loose silhouettes of Japanese work pants; and hand-embroidered scarves that are long and light. Most importantly, it's all very cute (matterprints.com; from US\$126). —GL

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AN APPETITE FOR ULURU

Australia's most famous natural landmark is more than just a feast for the eyes. BY TATYANA LEONOV

Despite its remote desert location in the rust-hued Red Centre of Australia, Uluru—the massive sandstone outcrop formerly known as Ayers Rock—attracts more than 250,000 visitors every year. They come to learn first-hand about the iconic monolith from its Aboriginal custodians, the Anangu people, and to watch in awe as the great rock changes color at sunrise and sunset. And for those looking for a unique gastronomic experience, there are plenty of options in the area too. Here are four standouts that should be on every foodie's to-do list.

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

This enthralling dinner experience is among the many offerings at Ayers Rock Resort, the tourism complex that lies just outside Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. Guests are chauffeured by camel or coach to a secluded dune where they are met with outback-style canapés and champagne as



Desert Dining

Sunset canapés and champagne kick off the Tali Wiru experience, above. Right: Dining under the stars with Sounds of Silence. Opposite, from top: Outback ingredients feature in Ayers Rock Resort's Bush Tucker Trail dishes; SEIT Outback Australia introduces guests to traditional Aboriginal foodstuffs.

the sun sets; a bush tucker-inspired buffet dinner (wattleseed-infused sausages; pepperberry kangaroo; crocodile Caesar salad) served with a solid selection of Australian wines follows. The evening's entertainment includes an Anangu dance performance, but the star of the show—pardon the pun—is the sparkling night sky, with the Milky Way and the Magellanic Clouds clearly visible amid the southern constellations (ayersrockresort.com.au; US\$138 per person).

BUSH TUCKER TOUR

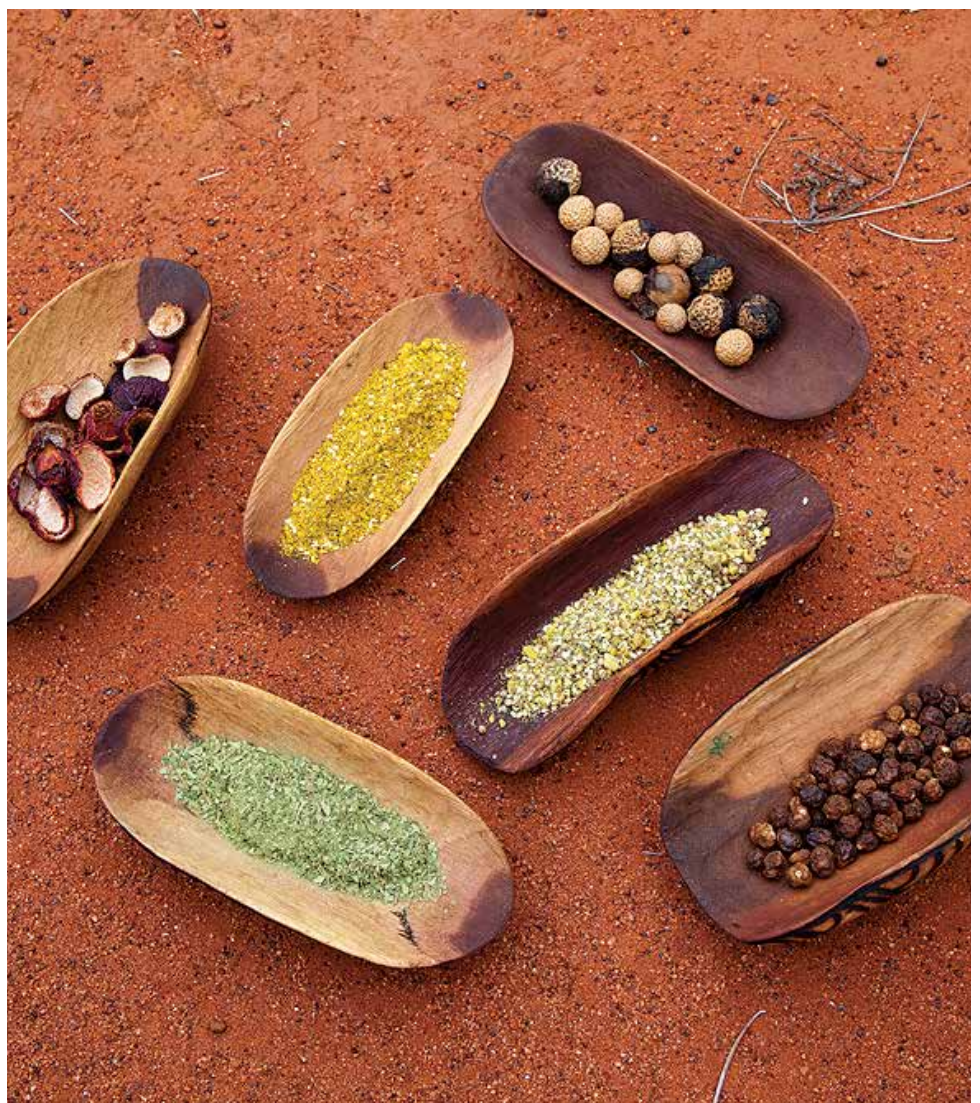
SEIT Outback Australia's two-hour Bush Tucker and Reptiles tour provides a fascinating overview of the local flora and fauna, as well as insights into how the Anangu traditionally used these same resources to survive the harsh desert climate. An Anangu guide leads guests on this memorable and educational journey, demonstrating how native bush seeds are ground and introducing foods that have been eaten by the indigenous people for thousands of years: quandongs (desert peaches), bush tomatoes, honeypot ants, witchetty grubs, and termites—tastings included (seitoutbackaustralia.com.au; US\$67 per person).

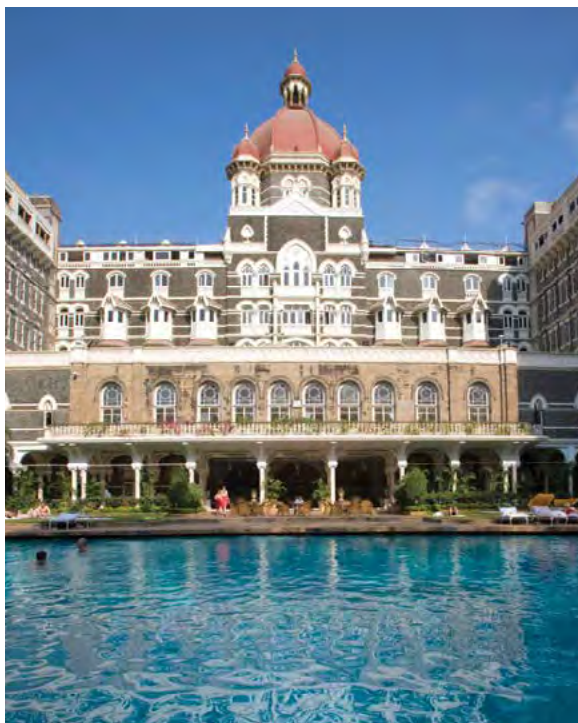
TALI WIRU

This intimate evening for a maximum of 20 diners begins with sunset champagne and canapés set to the haunting sound of a didgeridoo, followed by a lavish four-course dinner atop a *tali wiru* (“beautiful dune”) overlooking Uluru and the distant rock formations of Kata Tjuta. A typical meal could include kangaroo rillettes (with beetroot-and-plum puree, pistachio-nut soil, feta, and a wattleseed wafer), grilled wagyu fillet served alongside wild mushroom ragout and paperbark smoked-onion puree, and quandong pudding, each course accompanied by top-notch Australian wines. Later, guests can study the stars with an astronomer and end the night with a cup of hot chocolate or port sitting around a campfire (ayersrockresort.com.au; US\$237).

BUSH TUCKER TRAIL

Launched last April, Ayers Rock Resort's Bush Tucker Trail gives guests the opportunity to try dishes prepared with traditional bush ingredients across all of the complex's nine cafés and restaurants. Signature menu items range from fries with bush-tomato chutney and braised pork-belly sliders with Kakadu plum sauce to an outback pizza (topped with emu and smoked kangaroo), a lamb ragout cooked with native thyme, and a number of desserts that feature desert lime. Cocktails get an equally imaginative treatment—quandong caprioskas, anyone? (ayersrockresort.com.au). ©





City Standouts

Clockwise from far left: Shrimp dumplings in ginger broth at The Table; St. Regis Mumbai's rooftop lounge Asilo; the Taj Mahal Palace hotel is home to the city's finest spa, Jiva; inside The Table.

dazzling bird's-eye view of the city all make for a truly glamorous setting. In Colaba, **Woodside Inn** (no website) is an under-the-radar spot favored by professionals, who congregate here after work to drink craft beer and shoot the breeze.

● **SHOP** For design-focused goodies, apparel, and the best of Indian craft and textiles with a contemporary twist, head to **Bungalow 8** ([bungalow eight.com](http://bungaloweight.com)), a gorgeous concept store at the Wankhede cricket stadium. In Kala Ghoda, **Sabyasachi** (sabyasachi.com) is the namesake of India's current top fashion designer, who makes clothes that celebrate the country's wealth of traditions and craftsmanship. Even if you never plan to wear a sari, go take a look: it's practically a museum of fantastic, detailed embroidery and spectacular colors. And you won't find a better spot for souvenirs than **Good Earth** (goodearth.in), where the goods range from beauty products infused with Indian rosewater and jasmine, to colorful cushions in dazzling patterns and organic-cotton kids' pajamas.

● **BLISS OUT** The Taj hotel group's **Jiva Spa** (tajhotels.com) brand is world-class in every way, even while remaining rooted in Ayurvedic traditions. And the outlet at Mumbai's legendary Taj Mahal Palace is no exception. Choose from treatments that relax, de-stress, pamper, and heal, such as the signature Jivaniya, a two-hour ritual that combines an herbal scrub, heated body wrap, and deep-tissue massage. You won't find better. ©

MUMBAI TO THE MAX

Divia Thani, the Mumbai-based editor-in-chief of *Conde Nast Traveller India* magazine, shares her hometown's highlights.



● **EAT** In midtown Mumbai, the always-buzzing **Bombay Canteen** (thebombaycanteen.com) is chef Floyd Cardoz's latest—and possibly coolest—outpost. Dishes like the Goan pork vindaloo “tacos” put a novel spin on regional street food, and the cocktails are just as good. For global comfort food, I often

end up at **The Table** (thetable.in), a favorite South Mumbai destination for the well heeled. The communal table downstairs is perfect if you're dining alone.

● **DRINK** Right at the top of the all-new St. Regis Mumbai is **Asilo** (stregismumbai.com), where cozy alcoves, billowing curtains, and a



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SPRINGTIME IN A TEACUP

In an excerpt from his latest book, *Darjeeling: A History of the World's Greatest Tea*, Barcelona-based food writer Jeff Koehler describes the first flush of the spring harvest in India's most famous tea growing region.



Brass bells wound with garlands of orange marigolds hang from the entrance arch for the faithful to ring as they enter the tree-filled temple complex atop Observatory Hill.

Clean chimes reverberate in the quiet, chilly dawn from Darjeeling's highest spot. Printed prayer flags in bold, solid colors—red, green, yellow, white, blue—strung on hemp ropes between poles, pillars, and tree trunks stir in the spring breeze. A troop of pale-faced monkeys, whose connection to the holiness of temples means that they are left unmolested, roam and maraud, stealing shoes that have been removed by the faithful while they kneel, pray, and light incense and small clay lamps filled with ghee (clarified butter) to one of a pantheon of gods as morning sunlight gradually slides up the surrounding slopes.

The short, early spring rains have passed, and gleamings of verdant freshness are in the Darjeeling hills. Giant ferns blanket the mountainsides. Pink magnolias and camellias bloom, the first of the pinkish-red rhododendrons. The tea bushes, stimulated by the moisture after a winter of dormancy, begin to flush new shoots so quickly that they need to be picked every four to five days. As the light filters through the darting clouds, workers pluck the young leaves: slender and lightly serrated, lacquered green in color, sprightly.

The finished tea comes out of the dryer grayish green. Steeped, it produces a pale-gold to almost-green-toned liquor that's grassy with fresh-cut-field aromas and a floralness in its bouquet, intensely fruity in the mouth, with a hint—no more—of tartness. The season is still cool and breezy in the high hills, and that freshness carries on into the cup.

"First flush is a spring tea," said Glenburn Tea Estate's young manager and resident tea

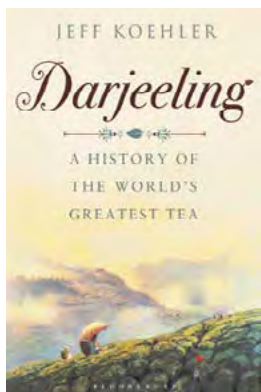
maker, Sanjay Sharma, in the garden's well-lit tasting room. "The cup's light, it's bright, it's fresh, it's green, it's brisk," he recited in rapid-fire singsong, touching the tips of his fingers with each adjective. "It has that hint of astringency, so that lends a little crispness to the cup, it's fresh on the palate."

Standing at the white-tiled counter, he considered the cup he was describing. Looking more like a safari guide than a tea planter, Sanjay wore polished leather Timberland boots with white socks rolled at the calves, khaki shorts, a pressed white polo shirt, and a zipper photo vest with an inch-thick Swiss Army knife snapped into a top pocket. He had a quick grin and ready one-liners, whiskery chin-beard, and an Errol Flynn mustache that gave him a slightly caddish look only somewhat offset by his rimless glasses. His left hand, partly covered with a patchy scar from a childhood cobra bite, fingered the white tasting cup emblazoned with Glenburn's name in elaborate Victorian cursive. "Also it's the time when we have all the citrus plants or trees blossoming, so it's got a very fruity kind of citrusy-ness note to it." It has, he said, "everything synonymous with springtime."

Darjeeling tea is "self-drinking," meaning not only that blending it with another tea is not required—a standard practice among most of the world's black teas—but also that it doesn't need milk or sugar or even, because of the slight astringency, lemon. While the bold and brisk black teas from other regions in India are often prepared as sweet, milky masala chai, spiced by ginger, cardamom, and cinnamon, and slurped scalding hot from a glass held nimbly between thumb and middle finger, Darjeeling's flavors are delicate, easily buried by such additions, and washed out by more than a few drops of milk.

First flush teas are the most delicate Darjeelings of all. Commanding top prices, they are highly anticipated by aficionados, especially in Europe, where certain boutiques and tearooms celebrate their arrival with pomp generally given over to Beaujolais wine. DARJEELING NOUVEAU announces a sign in the window of the legendary Parisian *maison de thé*, Mariage Frères, of the year's first offerings. "*Arrivage spécial par avion*," it says, *Grands Crus* and *Première Récolte* from a highly selective choice of gardens: Aloori, Happy Valley, Ambootia, Namring, Castleton, North Tukvar, Nurbong, Bloomfield, Moondakotee. This is akin to listing Bordeaux's most prestigious châteaux.

Sanjay took a sip and yielded to the tea's gentle, composed embrace in silence. "Springtime in a teacup," he calls it. ☉



Tea lovers and Indophiles alike will enjoy Jeff's Koehler's *Darjeeling: A History of the World's Greatest Tea* (Bloomsbury Publishing; US\$27), an engaging chronicle of 150 years of tea growing in the Darjeeling hills of West Bengal.

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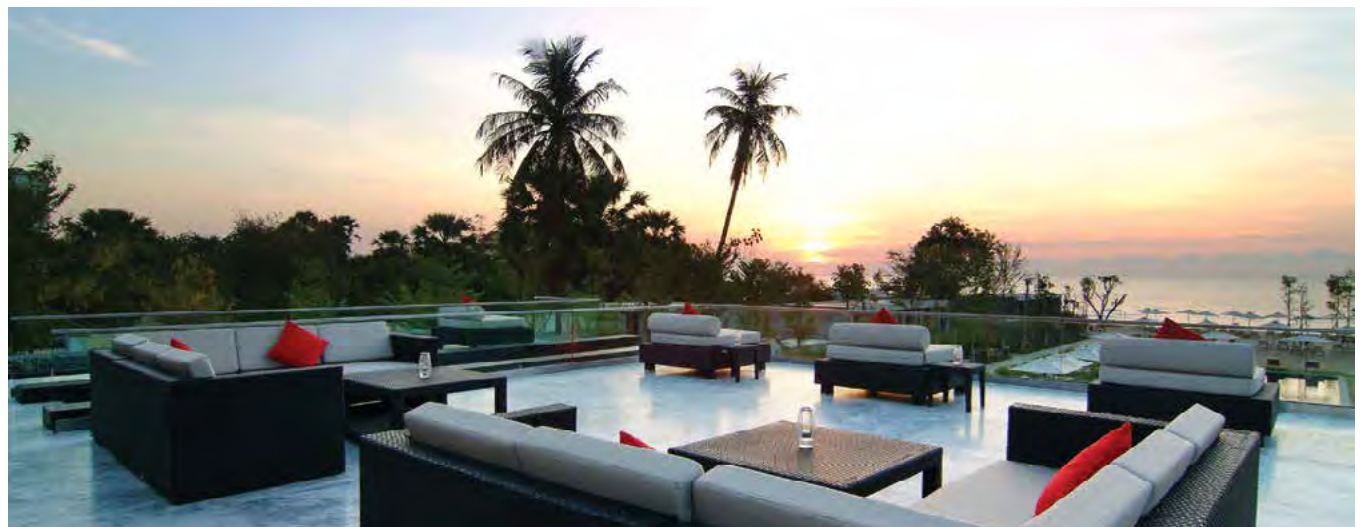
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Sofitel is Magnifique!

With its launch of a new luxury boutique label and stunning hotel openings in Southeast Asia, Sofitel is something to celebrate this season

These are exciting times for Sofitel in Southeast Asia. Eleven elegant Sofitels now dot the region, with lavish properties in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and the Philippines that include flagship hotels of the fashion-forward SO Sofitel and stately Sofitel Legend. What's more, Sofitel has recently introduced its newest label: MGallery by Sofitel. A collection of small luxury hotels dedicated to sophisticated and adventurous explorers, MGallery features charming hotels that each have their own fascinating story to inspire and capture the imaginations of guests.

The Sofitel brand now comprises four labels: Sofitel Legend, SO Sofitel, Sofitel Hotels and Resorts, and MGallery by Sofitel. Although they come with their own distinct styles and personalities, each retains the unique Sofitel identity and core brand values of excellence, elegance, joie de vivre, open-mindedness, generosity, and l'art de vivre—a celebration of French lifestyle and culture with superb design, gastronomy, culture, and wellbeing.

3 Nagas Luang Prabang typifies the new MGallery by Sofitel label, providing guests with a charming and timeless experience in the heart of Laos's cherished cultural and spiritual center. A 15-room hotel set in a beautiful garden oasis bordering the Nam Khan River, 3 Nagas encompasses three elegantly refurbished historical homes, perfectly blending vintage French and classic Laotian design with modern touches. Exuding authenticity and grace, 3 Nagas takes guests on a journey back to the bygone elegance of the colonial era.



For an additional delight, take one of the hotel's magnificent vintage cars on a tour of Luang Prabang.

This year, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Luang Prabang also welcomes Sofitel Luang Prabang, the newest addition to the Sofitel Hotels and Resorts label. Guests can enjoy unparalleled serenity in the landscaped gardens of this all-suite, fully restored governor's residence where every suite opens up to its own private garden and patio area with a plunge pool or oversized hot tub, allowing guests to unwind in total seclusion. Sofitel Luang Prabang is a fusion of Far Eastern exoticism and colonial splendor, making for a haven of calm from which to discover the natural beauty and historic charms of the city.

For something more exclusive, look to the Sofitel Legend collection, a sophisticated brand that harmonizes historical heritage with modern interpretation. Step into fin de siècle-style suites in Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi's colonial heritage building just steps from the Opera House in Hanoi's French quarter. An award-winning flagship from the brand's Legend collection, the hotel sets its refined experiences in centuries-old buildings bursting with character.

SO Sofitel develops uniquely designed hotels infused with lots of local energy. For each new SO Sofitel, world-renowned designers are selected to leave their mark on the brand. The latest to join the collection is SO Sofitel Hua Hin, a playful beach resort just two hours from Bangkok. By turns vibrant, minimal, audacious, and innovative, SO Sofitel Hua Hin takes guests on a journey through the evolution of life. In scenes reminiscent of Paris's Grande Galerie de l'Evolution, abstract animals and playful creatures reveal themselves throughout the resort, creating a spirit of "So Evolution" where life is the ultimate form of art. Stylish socializers will also love Beach Society, the chic new beach club and latest addition to this iconic retreat.

For today's demanding travelers who expect nothing less than beauty, craftsmanship, excellence, and one-of-a-kind experiences at every turn, the many incarnations of the Sofitel brand tick every box.

sofitel.com

Opposite, clockwise from left: The classical white facade with green shutters of Sofitel Legend Metropole Hotel; the award-winning hotel's garden; the restored facade of 3 Nagas Luang Prabang; lush gardens and the pool at Sofitel Luang Prabang; French touches at Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi; the SO Art Room at SO Sofitel Hua Hin; the hotel's ultra-chic Clouds Loft.

OTTAWA ON ICE

Getting There

Via Toronto on **Air Canada** (aircanada.com) or **WestJet** (westjet.com), an hour-long flight.

Where to Stay

Across the canal from Parliament Hill, the **Fairmont Château Laurier** (fairmont.com; doubles from US\$265) —shown here on the right—is a regal 1912 landmark that retains its original copper-clad turrets and Tiffany stained-glass windows.

Be Sure to Try

Beavertails—a quintessential Ottawa snack. The fried dough pastries (shaped, as their name suggests, like the tail of a beaver) are served piping hot with sweet toppings like maple butter.

What Else? Explore the crop of cool shops on Dalhousie Street, at the edge of Ottawa's touristy Byward Market. Highlights include womenswear boutique Isabelle and Workshop, which stocks jewelry and apparel by dozens of Canadian designers.

The telltale sign of a true cold-weather city is its warm welcome of the frigid temperatures. Take Canada's capital, which every year leans into winter with the purposeful freezing of its beloved centerpiece, the Rideau Canal. As soon as the weather allows, a 7.8-kilometer section of the historic waterway is drained low enough so that a heavy ice cap can form on top, transforming it into the Rideau Canal Skateway—the world's largest outdoor skating rink and one of Canada's top winter attractions. Ottawans have been skating the canal since 1971, and these days, more than a million people take to the ice each season, which typically runs from early January to early March. The Skateway is also a hub of Ottawa's annual Winterlude Festival (*Jan. 29–Feb. 15*; ottawatourism.ca), which fills the city with ice sculpture displays, food events, skating clinics, and North America's largest snow playground. —Gabrielle Lipton



EASY RIDER



Aside from its great surf and Pasola war festival, Indonesia's Sumba Island is known for its horses, bred here since the 18th century. Thanks to **Carol Sharpe**, the Sandalwood Stables manager at Sumba's Nihiwatu resort (nihiwatu.com), guests can get to know the equines during rides around the island's southwest coast—or lessons in horse whispering.

- **BIT BY BIT** Finding horses for Nihiwatu was an adventure. Sumba's horses are small, and I traveled quite a few kilometers on promises of having a big animal to look at, only to be presented with yet another 1.2-meter pony. But there are some that have been crossbred with Australian thoroughbreds, and this is the gene pool I've sourced from.
- **SUMBA STYLE** Sumbanese horses adapt to change quickly and rarely flinch at things that would freak out horses elsewhere. They're also very willing, and extremely easy to love.

- **HORSE SENSE** Our horse whisperer sessions teach guests to observe how horses communicate with each other and in turn practice this behavioral language to connect with them. Horses are very receptive to the emotional energy and atmosphere we emit. The best interactions occur when you're in a more open, less distracted state of mind.
- **SADDLE UP** Our most popular experience is the Sunset Beach Ride; there's nothing like watching the sun sink into the sea from the back of a horse. —**Gabrielle Lipton**

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Street Smarts
 Inside neighborhood tapas bar El Chiringuito, left. Below: A selection of Tep Bar's signature yadong (Thai rice whiskey) infusions.



HIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

In Bangkok, a clutch of new businesses is putting historic Soi Nana on the map.

BY BRIAN SPENCER

Sitting on the rooftop deck of an old shophouse he's transformed into an interdisciplinary art space, Australian photographer Nick McGrath chooses his words carefully when discussing the potential—and the possible pitfalls—of a buzzy little scene brewing in an old residential block on the fringes of Bangkok's Chinatown. "We're not trying to make any statements here," he says. "We're not trying to be the next Thong Lor, and the last thing I want to see is for this area to become Khao San Road."

Until recently there was little reason to explore the narrow alleyways zigzagging off Soi Nana. Not to be confused with the notorious Sukhumvit Road area of the same name, this Nana is a quiet street tucked between the Hua Lamphong train station and Yaowarat Road, the lively thoroughfare that leads through Chinatown and the heart of old Bangkok. Yet over the past year, McGrath and a handful of other expat and Thai entrepreneurs, lured by its moldering charm and affordable rents, slowly laid claim

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Nana Newcomer

Below: The entrance to Teens of Thailand, a new gin-centric bar furnished with vintage Thai furniture and raunchy pictures by photographer and co-owner Kachain Wonglamthong.

to the block, turning this unsung corner of the city's Pom Prap Sattru Phai district into an in-the-know weekend hot spot.

"We really don't have a goal," claims McGrath, who lives around the corner from his gallery and event space, **Cho Why** (17 Soi Nana; no telephone). "Each time we do something, though, it has an effect, and probably the biggest one for us so far has been the Jumble Trail." Jointly organized by owners of the bars, galleries, and cafés that have settled into Soi Nana's spruced-up shophouses, the semi-regular Craft and Jumble Trails are one-night bashes featuring open houses, live music, art shows, street food, and of course plenty of booze. The most recent event, held in June, drew a crowd of hundreds, many of whom were visiting the street

for the first time—though likely not the last, given the creativity and ingenuity at work here.

Take, for instance, **Pure Luck Bangkok** (No. 31-33; 66-93/124-5952), launched last year by Tibb Phungtham and partner Brett Casper as the city's first kombucha brewery. Located in a painstakingly renovated three-story shophouse, Pure Luck has a rooftop garden that the two use to grow ingredients for their range of refreshing kombucha, a fermented, mildly alcoholic tea reputed to have myriad health benefits. They crank out roughly 1,000 bottles of the stuff monthly in a range of flavors that include mint-chocolate cookie, hot ginger, and raspberry mangosteen.

Nearby is **Tep Bar** (No. 69-71; 66-98/467-2944), where graphic designer Kong Kangwarnklai is among a group of co-founders who've bucked the "Westernized" bar trend in favor of a decidedly Thai focus. Staff mix handcrafted cocktails with local fruits, herbs, and spirits; a three-piece band plays traditional Thai music nightly; and swaths of solid gold paint on sections of exposed-brick wall nod to the days when Thai people encased golden Buddhas and other religious relics in plaster to hide them from enemies.

"Thais, especially the younger generation, consider everything 'Thai' to be outdated," Kangwarnklai says. "We want to change that perception and present our heritage in new ways."

After living in Spain for six years, Bangkokian Supapron Sae returned home to open **El Chiringuito** (No. 221; 66-85/126-0046), a small, homey tapas bar with vintage furnishings and a chalkboard menu listing items such as *patatas bravas* (fried potatoes) and *tortilla de patatas* (omelets). Street-side tables are available too—perfect for sipping glasses of housemade sangria and cult Menorcan gin Xoriguer. Up the block, **Teens of Thailand** (No. 76; 66-81/443-3784) is one of the latest (and most visually arresting) additions to the Soi Nana scene. Set up by a collective of creatives that includes a photographer, a musician, and veteran Bangkok barmen, this stylish bar-restaurant features a tantalizing cocktail menu refreshed daily and anchored by a top-notch gin selection.

Back at Cho Why, McGrath concentrates on interactive exhibitions like the Rear Windows project, a monthly showcase of thematic works from photographers who take part in audience-driven Q&A sessions. "We've all got different ideas and we've all brought in different things, but I don't know where it's going to head," he says. "We just want to do stuff that's fun, that can be community based, and that can bring people together." ©





PHUKET PARADISE

Celebrating 21 years on the island, Banyan Tree Phuket has enhanced its timeless appeal with a batch of new luxuries

It was by the sparkling waters of Bang Tao Bay that the Banyan Tree hotel group began with the opening of Banyan Tree Phuket, which celebrated its 21st anniversary this year. Since then, the tropical resort has remained the jewel of the Laguna Phuket resort area and the epitome of Thai paradise, immersing each guest in a world where the air is scented with allamanda flowers, palm trees shade serene pools and pristine shoreline, and luxuries abound.

Banyan Tree Phuket has mastered the recipe of being a world-class luxury resort. On exotically gardened grounds spanning out from around a saltwater lagoon are 174 Thai-inspired villas, a variety of dining venues, and a multi-award-winning spa. It certainly sits pretty, but the resort also continually seeks to stay at its best. Following a recent set of renovations, the lobby and main swimming pool have been refreshed, and every one of the resort's villas is now backed with a private pool and spacious wooden deck, making each a true sanctuary of its own.

Bringing the resort's epicurean excellence to a new level, El Bulli-trained Alfonso de la Dehesa has recently joined the resort

as the executive chef, heading the resort's six restaurants and bars—not to mention romantic in-villa dining experiences and dinner cruises. Among the many new offerings, the menus at the resort's authentic Thai restaurant Saffron and Mediterranean eatery The Watercourt have been entirely revamped. Perhaps the best way to fuel days of water sports, wellness rituals, and rounds at the 18-hole Laguna Phuket Golf Course is with the lavish Seafood Sunday Brunch on The Watercourt's new outdoor deck, overlooking the lagoon and set to a soundtrack of live Latin tunes.

Celebrating its completion of these upgrades, Banyan Tree Phuket is offering a special promotion for guests staying before December 20. With the Night On Us Re-launch Offer—Stay 5 Pay 4 (booked online with the code BT2015), guests who stay five nights receive their last night with compliments in addition to daily buffet breakfast and a 20 percent discount on meals at Saffron and The Watercourt.

For reservations, call 66/76-372-400 or visit banyantree.com

COLD COMFORTS

Rebuilt from scratch each winter, these hand-carved ice hotels offer some of the season's coolest (think minus 5°C) accommodation.

BY GABRIELLE LIPTON



✦

Swede Dreams
The spiral-like 7.5° Rø Art Suite at the last edition of Jukkasjärvi's Icehotel.

1 / Sweden ICEHOTEL

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The world's original ice hotel—it first opened in 1989—is refashioned each winter using some 5,000 tons of ice cut from the nearby Torne River in Jukkasjärvi, a small village in Swedish Lapland. From its famous Icebar to its wedding chapel, every part of this subzero sanctuary is a sculptural masterpiece, particularly its 19 Art Suites, each individually carved by a different international artist. This season's designs will include a three-meter-tall ice sculpture of an African elephant and a disco-themed suite called the Love Capsule. icehotel.com; doubles from US\$300; open Dec. 11–Mar. 31

2 / Canada HÔTEL DE GLACE

.....
Set at the base of the Laurentian Mountains just outside Quebec City, Hôtel de Glace lays claim to being the only ice hotel in North America. It's made over the course of six weeks from more than 30,000 tons of snow, with a different theme each year that local sculptors incorporate into its 44 ice rooms and suites, some of which come with fireplaces. An outdoor hot tub and sauna help ward off any lingering chills. hoteldeglace-canada.com; doubles from US\$310; open Jan. 4–Mar. 28

3 / Norway SORRISNIVA IGLOO HOTEL

.....
You know you're above the Arctic Circle when home is a village of 30 igloos. But basic accommodations these are not, decorated with stately bedframes and sitting areas carved from ice and topped with reindeer furs. There's an ice sculpture gallery to peruse too, though the main reason to come to this northernmost part of Norway is to see the UNESCO-listed petroglyphs of the Alta Fjord, some of which date back to 5000 B.C. That, and the chance to witness the aurora borealis, best appreciated with a shot of blue vodka from the hotel's ice bar. sorrisniva.no; doubles from US\$315; open Dec. 15–Apr. 3

4 / France VILLAGE IGLOO BLACKSHEEP

.....
Among the growing number of igloo villages popping up on ski mountains in the French and Austrian Alps, Blacksheep in the La Plagne area stands out for its charm. At 2,118 meters above sea level, the small cluster of two- to five-person traditional igloos forego dazzling design in favor of exactly what guests want after a day on the slopes: heavy sleeping bags and fur blankets, aperitifs and fondue, campfires and champagne. blacksheep-igloo.com; doubles from US\$170; open Dec. 19–Apr. 6



DISCOVER MORE AT HARBOUR CITY

See what's in store at Hong Kong's premier shopping, dining, and entertainment enclave

As one of the fashion and entertainment capitals of Asia, Hong Kong is home to shopping malls galore. No trip to the city is complete without a visit to one—and if there must be only one, Harbour City is the place to choose. As the largest shopping

mall in Hong Kong, Harbour City offers something for everyone, whether that be one of its 450 stores, 50 dining venues, three hotels, two cinemas, art gallery, or enjoying its dazzling view out over Victoria Harbour.

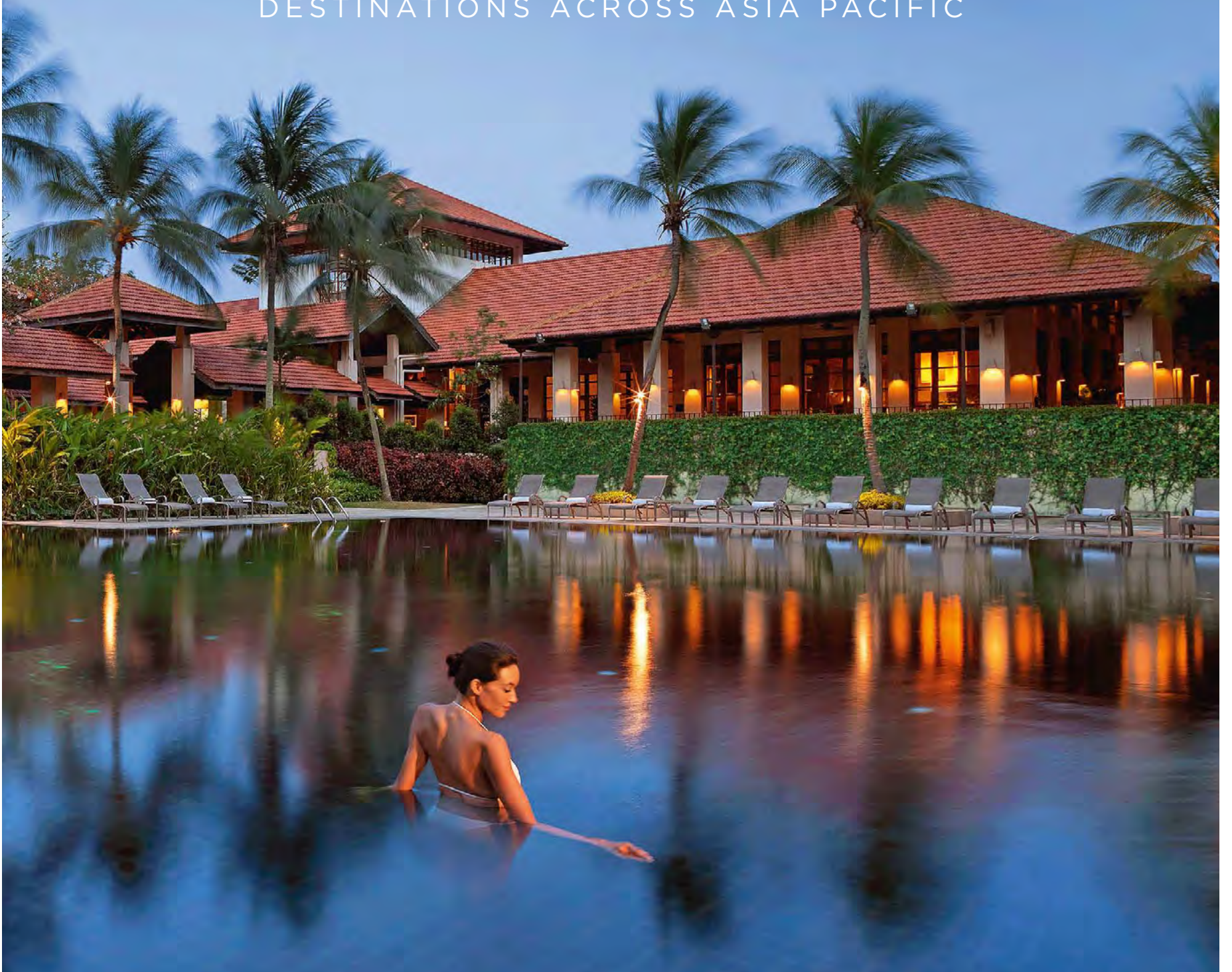
Those in need of retail therapy will certainly find their fix here. The four floors are filled with every kind of store from sports and outdoor outfitters to jewelers, luggage makers, kidswear designers, booksellers, and toy stores. Testament to Harbour City being one of the finest malls in the region, it's also home to the flagships of numerous luxury designers—among them, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Chanel, and Valentino—offering the most comprehensive selections of their wares. For beauty buffs and anyone looking for a hard-to-find cosmetic product, Harbour City is also the place to come, with more than 210 beauty brands under its roof ranging from niche labels to designer makeup lines. And in VITA, the mall's new beauty service section, guests can relax and indulge at luxurious salons and spas.

More than just a shopping destination, Harbour City also offers a host of family-friendly ways to stay entertained. There are more than 40 fashion labels for children and multiple toy stores, including the largest Toys "R" Us in Asia on the kids floor at Ocean Terminal—not to mention the historic Star Ferry Pier right at the mall's doorstep. And as for food, the options are endless. There are chocolatiers and confectioners, burger joints and Italian bistros, and a wide array of renowned Chinese eateries: dim sum at the bustling Dim Sum Bar restaurant, innovative fusion fare at M&C.Duck and House of Jasmine, and of course the Michelin-starred Ye Shanghai, which recalls Shanghai in the 1950s with its classic dishes and Art Deco décor. What's more, Harbour City has the largest number of harborside bars and restaurants in the city, making it the perfect place for anyone looking for a dining room with a view.

harbourcity.com.hk



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HOLIDAY HEAVEN

Create Memorable Stays with Le Club AccorHotels

These days a holiday isn't just a break from the daily routine. It's an opportunity to enjoy a memorable experience, one that will stay with you for years to come. That's why AccorHotels aims to create memorable stays and vacations that will change the way you travel and remain in your thoughts long after you return home. These are just the types of breaks that you will look back fondly on with family and friends and the kind of journeys that leave lasting impressions.

With this in mind, AccorHotels has developed the MyResorts program, which promises to put the magic back into resort holidays and take away stress by managing the little details of guests' stays. Wanting to make holidays as special and easy as possible, the program is designed to give members of the Le Club AccorHotels loyalty program more benefits whenever they stay with AccorHotels: more time, more fun, more surprises, and more recognition.

The program revolves around specially crafted resort experiences that help make travel dreams come true and provide loyalty program members with a taste of the high life. It includes a comprehensive suite of benefits to give every type of traveler something special—MyKids for children; MyGlass for adults; MyConnect to let business executives check their work emails and kids download their favorite movies or games; and MyHost to arrange all special experiences such as restaurants, tours, and activities. Additionally, My ExtraTime allows members to check in early and check out late, so they can fit even more into their holiday.

Nothing says "resort holiday" like a sunset drink, which is why one of the signature elements of the program is MyGlass. For a small fee, MyGlass provides unlimited soft drinks, juice, and water all day long as well as two hours of free-flow wine, beer, or cocktails. You can select where and how you want to enjoy your drinks—by the pool, in the bar, on the beach—and the program will keep you refreshed throughout your stay.

Happy children make for a happy holiday, so AccorHotels created MyKids to provide everything guests need to ensure their kids have a ball, including a welcome gift pack, fun and healthy kids meals and drinks all day long, a surprise treat each day, free in-room children's movies, and free activities at the Kids Club. AccorHotels' Kids Club offerings have also been reinvented to be more exciting with local arts and crafts, treasure hunts, nature trails, and even tree planting, which teaches kids about the environment and awards them with a certificate of ownership for their tree. Best of all, the program allows kids to pick and choose their own activities depending on what they like to do, letting them be the creators of their own perfect holiday.



From top: Make your resort stay extra special with MyKids perks at Sofitel Singapore Sentosa Resort & Spa, Singapore; beachside at Sofitel Bali Nusa Dua Beach Resort, Indonesia; MyGlass keeps guests refreshed with unlimited drinks.

AccorHotels has more than 100 inspiring resorts in the most beautiful destinations across Asia Pacific, from the azure waters of French Polynesia to Fiji; from Bali to Barossa Valley; from Palm Cove to Phuket; and from Goa to the Gold Coast.

For a full list of AccorHotels resorts in Asia Pacific and to find out how to become a Le Club AccorHotels member in a few easy steps, visit accorhotels.com/resorts

HONG KONG'S LATEST HITS

Amid the swirl of the city's ever-evolving dining scene, this trio of newcomers stands out from the pack.

BY CHRIS DWYER



THE OPTIMIST

The latest addition to the burgeoning array of restaurants at 235-239 Hennessy Road in Wan Chai, this sleek three-floor venue is inspired by Spain's *asador* grills, with a touch of Barcelona chic thrown in for good measure. Serious steaks from Galicia and hefty Spanish prawns are just some of the options cooked over smoldering coals, but the *mariscada* platter of raw seafood is also a showstopper, piled high with crab, oysters, lobster, mussels, and more. Try to save room for the classic *arroz con leche*, a creamy rice pudding spiced with cinnamon (G/F, 239 Hennessy Rd., Wan Chai; 852/2433-3324; theoptimist.hk).

THE FAT PIG

Tom Aikens, once the youngest British chef to hold two Michelin stars, is now overseeing his second Hong Kong venture following the success of The Pawn in Wan Chai. At The Fat Pig in Causeway Bay, the feel is more relaxed and less fine-dining across a menu that celebrates every part of the noble swine and involves no fewer than 17 cooking methods. Scotch eggs come with a punchy *sauce gribiche*, while excellent rillettes



Three to Get Ready

Clockwise from above: Tom Aikens at his new swine-centric outpost in Causeway Bay, The Fat Pig; *asador*-baked brie at The Optimist; the casual dining room at Fish School.

are lifted by sour apple chutney. Pork belly, loin, hot gammon, and Cumberland sausages are among the enticing mains, and Aikens' version of the classic Cantonese barbecued-pork bun is sure to impress any *char siu bao* connoisseur (11/F, Times Square, 1 Matheson St., Causeway Bay; 852/2577-3444; thefatpig.hk).

FISH SCHOOL

Sai Ying Pun to the west of Sheung Wan is arguably the city's most dynamic restaurant locale of the moment, and Fish School, which opened in October, brings some serious culinary class to the existing lineup of bistros, izakayas, and noodle shops. Young chef Chris Ma has impressive Michelin experience on his résumé and plates beautiful seafood dishes with fish sourced from small, family-owned fishing boats. Sea cucumber with oxtail and porcini makes for an impressive combination of flavors and textures, while the monkfish liver and foie gras *pressé* is a revelation, especially when served alongside aged tangerine peel and roselle, a type of hibiscus (100 Third St., Sai Ying Pun; 852/2361-2966; fishschool.hk). ©

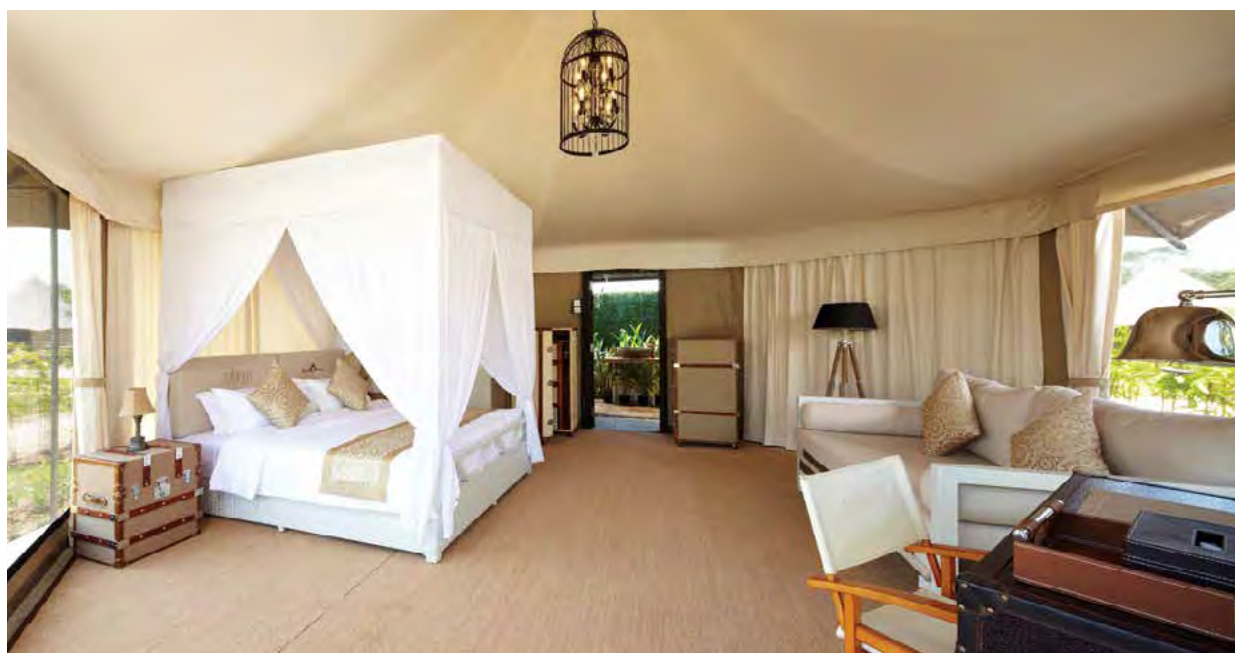
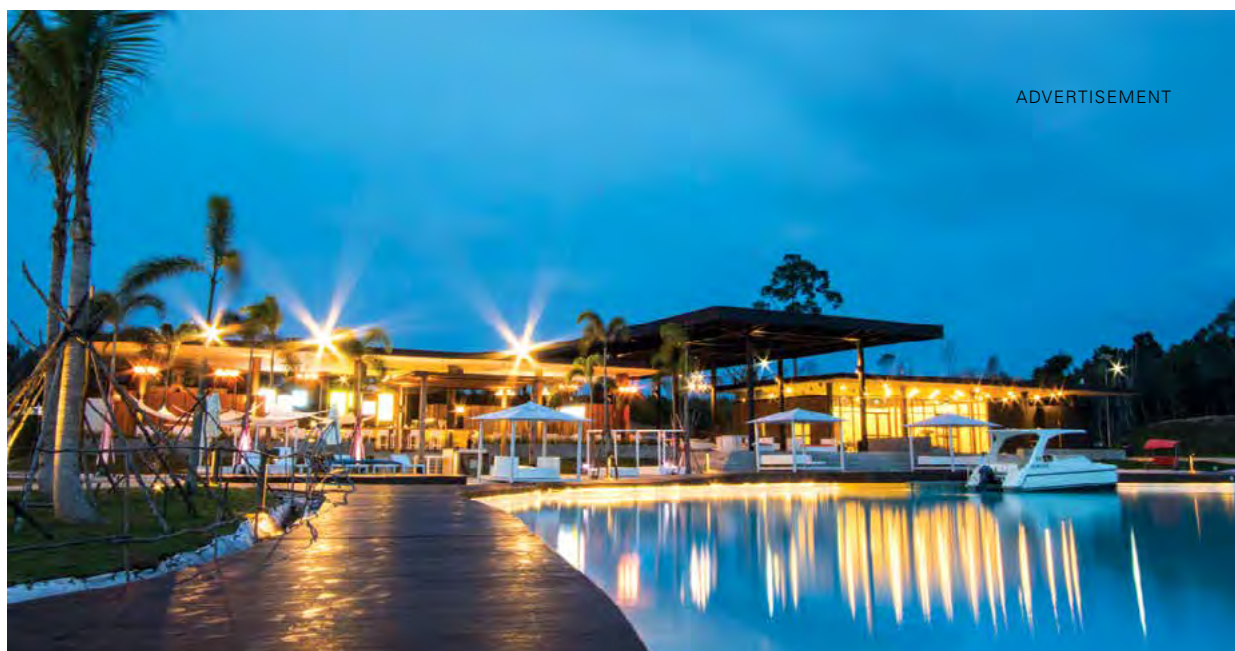
BLOSSOMING BINTAN

Discover the new allures of Indonesia's up-and-coming holiday island

With sunny beaches and mangrove forests, romantic villas and family-friendly resorts, and all manner of activities for adventure-lovers and leisure-seekers alike, Bintan has every ingredient for dream vacations. Just 50 minutes by catamaran ferry from Singapore, Indonesia's rising star of a holiday isle is a must-go destination for anyone wanting a modern and exciting tropical escape.

Over the course of the past year, Bintan's development has been booming with the opening of the ultra-luxurious estate The Sanchaya, sky-skimming Air Adventures Flying Club, and Plaza Lagoi shopping mall. The most recent addition to the island's appeal is the Crystal Lagoon, Southeast Asia's first and largest sea-water body, opened in September. Designed with energy-efficient technology, the 6.3-hectare expanse of crystal-clear turquoise waters is grounds for swimming, kayaking, paddle boarding, and sailing, along with plenty of spots for sunbathing by its sides. The lagoon also offers a refuge during monsoon season; when the ocean gets too rough for water sports, vacationers can take to the waters here instead.

Another new head-turner is The Canopi, a unique resort designed for those intrigued by atypical accommodations. Here, rooms come as 40 tented suites nestled in the forest, imbuing a sense of adventure without sacrificing an ounce of luxury. Each tent measures 37 square meters and comes with four-poster beds, outdoor jacuzzis, barbecue pits, and private gardens hung with hammocks. The Bora Bora restaurant and beach bar gives guests an



intimate dining experience away from the rest of the island's restaurant hubs, while a spa is a secluded wellness sanctuary. In line with its explorer theme, The Canopi also arranges private Mangrove River Safari boat rides through Bintan's wildlife-filled mangrove reserve and hikes with a resident naturalist through the surrounding forest.

There are plenty more enticements on Bintan's horizon, with the trendy Chill Cove entertainment area of restaurants, bars, and boutiques; a bungee jumping center; and Asia's first outpost of the multiple-award-winning Canyon Ranch Wellness Resort all opening in the near future. For an island basking in so much hype, who would expect anything less?

For more information, visit bintan-resorts.com

True Colors

Ritz-Carlton, Bali takes guests to see how Balinese sarongs are made and learn about their cultural import.

**NEW SHORES FOR SHANGRI-LA**

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Two years ago, Shangri-La made its first foray into Africa and took over a secluded Mauritian hideout first built in 1978. The group put the resort through a complete transformation, finally reopening it November 1 as the impeccable **Shangri-La's Le Touessrok Resort & Spa**. There are five new restaurants and bars that include fine Indian cuisine and a Mauritian rum shack; a Chi spa that uses oils gleaned from the gardens; and beachside rooms, suites, and villas done up in light cream, mustard, and cerulean—similar hues as found just outside on the sun-drenched peninsula extending out into Trou d'Eau Douce Bay (shangri-la.com; doubles from US\$300). —Gabrielle Lipton

IT'S A WRAP

Sarongs in Bali (or anywhere else in Indonesia, for that matter) aren't hard to come by, sold in grocery and convenience stores and hawked by touts on just about every beach and street corner. But finding one that's authentic—whose threads have been spun, dyed, and woven into a work of art—is a different story. For guests up for the hunt, the Ritz-Carlton, Bali in Nusa Dua now has a special **Sarong Concierge**, Tresna Dewi, who will lead them on a half-day tour to her native Gianyar region, an area celebrated for its artisanal traditions and gorgeous fabrics. Here, they'll visit a workshop to watch how Bali's traditional *endek* textiles are made, learn how to wrap and wear a sarong according to Balinese etiquette, and—perhaps an even more important lesson—be taught how to walk in it with the elegance of a Balinese royal. Rounding things off is a visit to a temple, where participants will see how sarongs are integrated into the rituals of the island (ritzcarlton.com). —GL

**OUT OF THIS WORLD**

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While biding the time until commercial space travel begins, space-lovers can get their extraterrestrial fix at the Kameha Grand Zürich Hotel's **Space Suite**. German artist Michael Najjar—who has been training for the past three years to be on Virgin Galactic's first flight into space—designed the 115-square-foot room and poured his obsession into every detail. The pattern on the carpet is a mash-up of high-resolution images taken by the Hubble Telescope, light fixtures resemble rocket engines, a spacesuit glove acts as a key holder, and the bed appears to float as if there is no gravity. Fittingly, the nightly rate is astronomical as well (kamehagrandzurich.com; doubles from US\$2,000). —David Tse

COURTESY OF RITZ-CARLTON, BALI; COURTESY OF SHANGRI-LA HOTELS; COURTESY OF KAMEHA GRAND ZÜRICH HOTEL; OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF RITZ-CARLTON, HONG KONG; COURTESY OF ASHFORD CASTLE



ALL IN A ROE

The most expensive kind of caviar in the world is now being spooned out in Asia, and in one place only. Opened in September in the Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong, **Almas Caviar Bar** is the sole spot on the continent to get the exclusive Almas Persicus roe, which hails from the Caspian Sea and is marked by an incredibly nuanced, creamy flavor. If this kingly delicacy is what you're after, note that it requires advanced ordering, as only 100 tins of it are made each year, plated in 23-carat gold, and sold through the French caviar institution Caviar House & Prunier. But the handsome seven-seat bar's other offerings—five additional caviars served with blinis and all the proper fixings, Balik smoked salmon, and Caviar House champagne and vodka to pair—can all be ordered on an extravagant whim (ritzcarlton.com). —DT



MEDIEVAL MAKEOVER

With stone and marble walls, bronze-detailed doors, and scrolled wood massage tables, the new spa at **Ashford Castle** in western Ireland's County Mayo is the buzziest new spot on the global spa circuit—certainly the most opulent. It was the final component of the castle-hotel's two-year,

US\$75 million restoration, which finished in November and now sees the former home to countless nobles and the Guinness family fitted with a hammam, manicure and pedicure salon, relaxation area, well-equipped gym, five treatment rooms, and a terrace overlooking the castle's peaceful lake, Lough Corrib. The only thing to compete with such views is by the indoor pool, where South African ceramicist Jane du Rand created a dazzling mosaic wall mural inspired by Celtic folklore (ashfordcastle.com). —GL

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Circular Logic
The terraces of Moray,
an ancient Incan
archaeological site
near Cusco, Peru.



SMALL TALK



Perhaps the best gift that Small Luxury Hotels of the World received for its 25th anniversary in 2015 was the appointment of **Filip Boyen** as its new London-based chief executive officer. Here, we talk to him about what the world's top collection of independent hotels has in store for next year—and dim sum, Peru, après-ski...

● **WHAT MAKES A GREAT SMALL LUXURY HOTEL?** I think it goes with a sense of place, which I always say is when you don't have to open the curtains to know where you are. Our hotels are imbedded into communities, so they have a huge amount of character. Sometimes they've been handed down through generations. The more different they are, the more we like them.

● **HOW DIFFICULT IS IT FOR A HOTEL TO BECOME AN SLH MEMBER?** We have about 1,000 enquiries a year to join, and only about 5 percent make it through. SLH is a stamp of quality, and we want to make it harder for hotels to join to stay in. We're going to start re-inspecting each hotel every two years.

● **WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2016?** We're bringing the SLH Directory book back, publish-

ing a cookbook with 250 recipes from our best chefs around world, and our new app is coming out in December for Apple and March for Android. We also have some great hotels in Asia in the pipeline opening next year. 7 Secrets Resort and Wellness Retreat in Lombok opens in June with open-air bathrooms, molecular mixology, and catamaran sailing trips. The three-suite Tai Residence opening in Beijing will be the smallest SLH hotel in Asia Pacific, and Anya Resort & Residences Sanctuary in Tagaytay City is opening in March, a beautiful wellness retreat in the Philippines.

● **HOW DID YOU BEGIN WORKING IN HOSPITALITY?** I actually got into it from the kitchen side—I love cooking and was a chef for nine years before joining Orient-Express Hotels, then Belmond. I also love traveling, and my career has taken me to Belgium, England, Turkey, South Africa (the year Mandela was released from prison), then to the Comoro Islands, on to Moscow (five years after the end of Gorbachev and Perestroika), then Bora Bora, and Peru.

● **WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM YOUR TRAVELS?** I spent five years in Lima and two in Cusco, and going from Lima to Cusco is like traveling 200 years back in time. The people I worked with in Cusco were amazing—their humility is unbelievable, and they're proud to work in service there, and that's a very important word. In cities, you don't always find that. I've also learned that when you land somewhere, you should never expect a new culture to bend to you.

● **AS A TRAVELING FOODIE, WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE RESTAURANTS RIGHT NOW?** Give me Asian food, and I'm the happiest man. I'm crazy about Chinese food, and I think wherever I've traveled, I've eaten at a Chinese restaurant. But I was just in New York, and I went to the 21 Club and the Polo Lounge, both formal American and perfectly fit with the city. Here in London, I love Restaurant Story, started by chef Tom Sellers. The last time I ate there, one of the courses was beef drippings, and the server came out with a candle made of beef fat and melted it into a little bowl with rock salt that you dip your bread into. It's like art.

● **WHAT'S YOUR IDEAL VACATION?** Once a year, I go skiing with my family. France's Val d'Isere is top-class, and St. Moritz has really great après-ski. But my favorite is in Italy, in Madonna di Campiglio—great skiing, nice people, and great food in all these little lodges. And when I ski, I sleep eight hours, which for me is paradise. ☺

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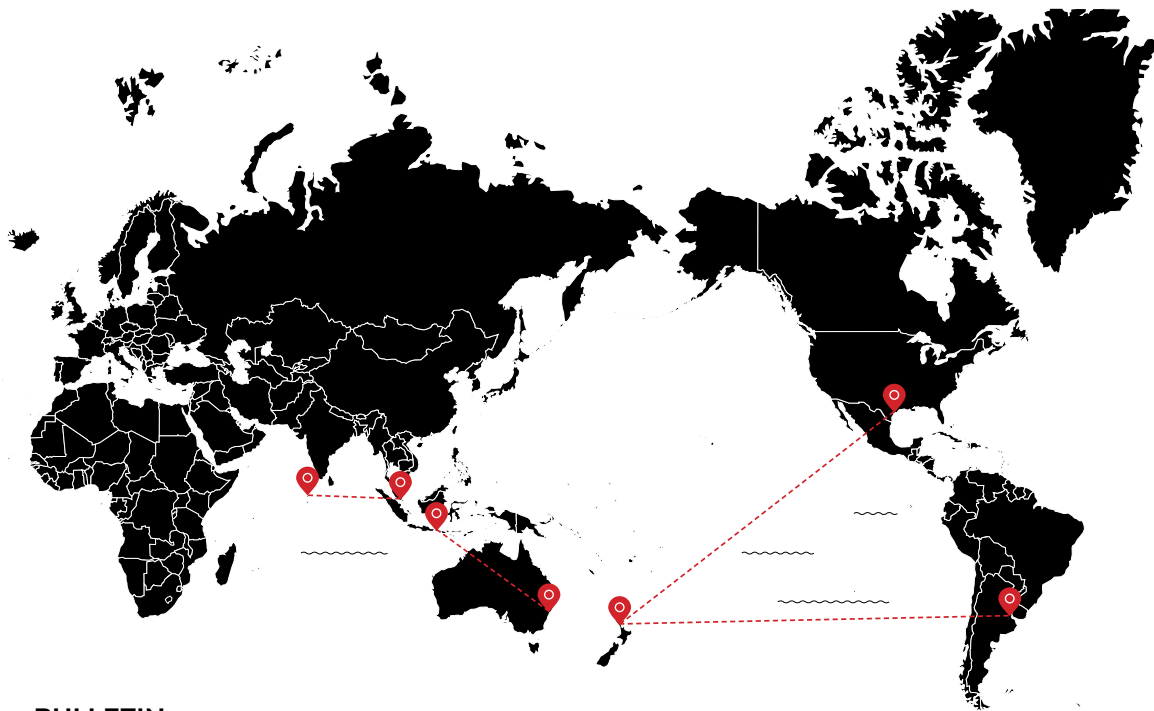
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ROUTE UPDATES

Singapore–Male
SilkAir

The Maldives are hot on the travel circuit right now, and to meet the growing demand, Singapore Airlines is complementing its daily flights to the Maldivian capital with a four-times-weekly service operated by its regional wing, SilkAir. The flight—which takes just under five hours—runs on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays (*silkair.com*).

Auckland–Houston, Buenos Aires
Air New Zealand

As part of the Kiwi flag carrier’s current expansion strategy, two new destinations are being added to its network this December. Both based out of Auckland and operated by the airline’s recently refurbished Boeing 777-200 aircraft, the routes include a thrice-weekly flight to Buenos Aires as of December 1 and a five-times weekly flight to Houston as of December 15 (*airnewzealand.co.nz*).

BULLETIN

Special Cause
Emirates

Giving new meaning to raising awareness, Emirates recently unveiled two A380s with livery featuring images of animals threatened by illegal wildlife trade. The planes, which currently operate on routes to London and Mauritius, are just one component of Emirates’ efforts to support the work of United for Wildlife, a collaborative organization of the world’s largest wildlife charities. The carrier is also playing relevant podcasts and films on its Ice entertainment systems and featuring stories about endangered animals in its *Open Skies* magazine (*emirates.com*).

New Look
British Airways

Among the ever-increasing competition in luxury air travel, the U.K.’s flag carrier is keeping pace with distinctive British style. Its new Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners—which began on routes from London to Delhi in late October and to Abu Dhabi and Muscat in November—introduced the airline’s First suites with quilted black-fabric seats, sleek chrome finishings, and fold-out mirrors. Beginning December 10, the Dreamliners will begin servicing Kuala Lumpur, followed by Austin in February and San Jose in May (*britishairways.com*).



Sydney–Bali
Qantas

Aussie summer vacations to Bali are being given an extra dose of luxury thanks to Qantas resuming flights to Denpasar just for the season. From December 4 until January 29, the carrier has four flights weekly running on its Boeing 737s, whose business class comes with Kate and Jack Spade amenity kits and menus from Australia’s esteemed Rockpool restaurant group (*qantas.com*).



FLIGHT SERVICES

CITIES IN THE SKY

City-slicking jetsetters will be pleased that Etihad is now collaborating with the ultra-hip guidebook publisher Luxe City Guides on premium amenity kits. Grooming brand Scaramouche + Fandango designed the six different retro bags—inspired by Abu Dhabi, London, Madrid, Los Angeles, Sydney, and Hong Kong, with more destinations to come—which are filled with all the requisite accessories and toiletries, along with an exclusive Luxe guide to the corresponding city (*etihad.com*).

COURTESY OF BRITISH AIRWAYS; COURTESY OF ETIHAD

KLIA



OMG, KLIA is awesome! There's even a real tropical rainforest in this airport. Can't wait to get to the rest of Malaysia ...

Petronas Twin Towers



Went on the Skybridge between the two towers. 170m off the ground! I wasn't scared at all.

Central Market



Can't believe this used to be a wet market in the 1800s. Handicrafts, demonstrations, cultural performances, there are so many things going on!

AMAZING SIGHTS AND SOUNDS AROUND IN KL

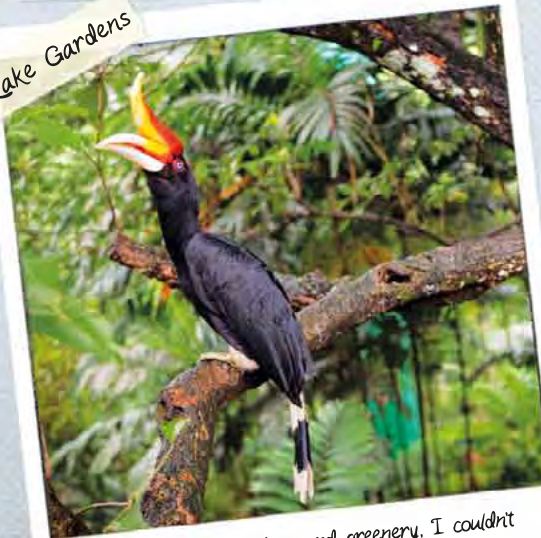


klia2



Off to Penang from KLIA2. Wow, are we in an airport or a shopping mall? Malaysia is so full of surprises!

Lake Gardens



Over 150 acres of gardens and greenery, I couldn't walk it all in a day! Fed a Hornbill at the bird park (which they tell me is the largest in the world).

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Endless Celebrations



SHOOT THE MOON IN BALI!

A modern ode to retro times, Luna2 Private Hotel promises a spectacular stay in Bali

Discreetly tucked in the continuous line of tropical resorts and clubs that borders Seminyak Beach is an unexpected hideout: Luna2 Private Hotel. A five-bedroom house that looks straight from London in the 1960s, it's the only private hotel on these shores. But to say just that would be an understatement—it's also the only place of its kind in Bali, coupling the personalized service of luxury hospitality with the ease and comfort of a private home that's nothing short of a design-lover's dream.

Opened in 2007, Luna2 Private Hotel was created by Melanie Hall, the daughter of a renowned British architect whose influence on modern design has been channeled through Hall and manifested here. The property was named after the first spacecraft to land on the moon in the 1950s, and the house is a throwback to that time, with the rooms, gardened backyard, and 20-meter lap pool all created by Hall with more than a bit of panache—think custom-designed rugs and wallpaper with geometric patterns, retro furniture and fabrics, and Marilyn Monroe reincarnated in mosaic tiles at the bottom of the cabana-rimmed pool, just steps from the beach.



Able to sleep up to 11 guests, Luna2 is one of those rare, malleable places that lends itself equally well to a variety of occasions—family vacations, party trips for groups of friends (there's a back stairway to sneak up after late nights out in Seminyak), wedding gatherings, even small company retreats. The themed bedrooms allow guests to choose their vibe—calm and feminine in a back bedroom inspired by a gorgeous vintage Hermès scarf framed on the wall; regal in the expansive, emerald-green master bedroom—while bathrooms are super sleek with Dornbracht rain showers and Philippe Starck tubs. All of a hotel's amenities are here in full force, from a special pillow menu and laundry service, to iPads loaded with information about the hotel and the surrounds and iPods



that play groovy playlists put together by local DJs and the hotel staff. Pop art bedecks the walls throughout, save for the sitting area right off of the living room, where black-and-white photos of Hall's family taken on their mid-century travels are framed next to a wall of well-loved books with floppy covers—familiar details that make the house feel like home.

The difference between a private hotel and a private villa, however, is the service. At guests' disposal here are some 20 staff members, including spa technicians that can give treatments in-room or on the rooftop overlooking the backyard and ocean; an animated nanny to keep kids happy and entertained; bartenders

who can whip up a delicious fresh juice or cocktail at any hour of the day or night; and Luna2's renowned culinary team, headed by British executive chef Errol Defoe. Breakfast and lunch are served à la carte from menus of classic comfort foods—eggs benedict, a juicy Lunaburger, beer-battered fish and chips—while dinner menus are tailored to guests' wishes and showcase Defoe's Lunafood concept, which infuses gourmet European cuisine with innovation, imagination, and fun. Degustation menus, seafood backyard barbecues, and multi-course private parties can all be arranged, as can wine pairings from Luna2's Wine Spectator-awarded wine cellar, which is one of the best on the island.

From the friendliness of the staff down to the playfulness of the design and funky music, Luna2 Private Hotel offers all the ingredients for a Bali getaway that's unlike any other around. Turn on some oldies, order one too many sunset cocktails by the pool, and relax—the whole point of Luna2 is to have a good time.

62-361/730-402; luna2.com; reservations@luna2.com



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Common Ground
 Horsemen on the gallop during the Common Riding in Lauder. For the festivities, each Borders town appoints an eligible bachelor to carry its flag on a ride through the commons; he is expected to bring it back “unsullied and untarnished.”

/ Scotland /

HOOFBEATS OF HISTORY

protect their burgh’s common land against encroachments by neighboring landlords or raids by Reivers—lawless gangs of castle rustlers and freebooters from both sides of the English-Scottish border. Today, the Ridings count among the largest equestrian gatherings in Europe, filled with galloping cavalcades, pageantry and street parties, and beribboned and brocaded costumes. Yet they are almost unknown outside this corner of southeast Scotland. And it was with this in mind that Glasgow-based photographer Jeremy Sutton-Hibbert set out in the summers of 2013 and 2014 to document the Border towns’ rich cultural tradition. The resulting images are now showcased in *Unsullied And Untarnished* (Brownlie Editions); a vivid photo book that captures not only the enduring legacy of the celebrations, but also, in a series of portraits taken against a white backdrop, the proud spirit of the men, women, and children who keep these customs alive. Until April 24, Sutton-Hibbert’s work will also be displayed at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh as part of the exhibition “The Ties That Bind” by Document Scotland, the photography collective that he co-founded in 2012. —**Christopher P. Hill**

Every summer, the townspeople of the Scottish Borders commemorate their region’s heritage with the Common Ridings, a series of festivals that trace back 500 years or more to a time when young men would ride out on patrol to



Customs of the Land
Clockwise from left: Garry Ramsay, the "Right-hand Man" (or assistant to the town's flag bearer) at Jedburgh's 2014 Jethart Callant's Festival; a boy in costume for the St. Ronan's Border Games in Innerleithen; a festivalgoer in Hawick. Opposite: In Langholm, one curious ritual associated with the Common Ridings sees a man walk around town bearing a pole topped with a salted herring nailed to a loaf of bannock bread. See more of Sutton-Hibbert's work at jeremysuttonhibbert.com.



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MANILA: BEYOND THE BIG CITY

For visitors with time on their hands in the Philippine capital, here are 10 day trips that promise everything from thrilling adventures to relaxing indulgences, all the while adding to Manila's multifaceted appeal



Swimming and Spelunking in Tanay

Tinipak River in Barangay Daraitan is a secluded, little-known gem barely three hours from cosmopolitan Manila. Favored by more adventurous wanderers, this enthralling destination offers a river fringed with boulders and limestone formations—quite a sight to behold. Adding to the thrills is an underwater cave that can be accessed via a narrow passageway when the water level is not too high. Tinipak River was recently declared to be the cleanest inland body of water in this part of Luzon, making the natural limestone pools found along its trail all the more alluring for a dip.

Sun and Sea in Laiya

Not surprising for a tropical archipelago, the Philippines has more than its share of magnificent beaches. But when Boracay and Palawan are out of reach, Manilans drive to Batangas to enjoy the tropical wonders of sand, sea, and sun. Laiya in the municipality of San Juan boasts a stretch of beautiful white sand ideal for sun-soaked revelry. Frequented by young professionals and families from the big city, the coastline is dotted by resorts but the shores are hardly ever crowded. Laiya's appeal lies in the fact that it can have you lounging on the beach—cocktail in hand—in barely three hours.

Culture and Cuisine in Pampanga

Considered the culinary capital of the Philippines, Pampanga attracts travelers with a smorgasbord of gastronomic sensations. The best way to get acquainted with the food and the culture of this part of the country is to spend a day in the kitchen of Atching Lillian Lising-Borromeo in the town of Mexico. Something of an icon in the local culinary industry, Lising-Borromeo is the keeper of heirloom Kapampangan recipes and has hosted cooking classes and food tours since the 1990s. These delicious forays into local culture also include a trip to the town market and a stop at Cusinang Matua, her family's mini-museum of antique cooking utensils.



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Farming and Charity in Bulacan

Located approximately 1.5 hours north of Manila, Bulacan provides a quick countryside break for anyone in the city who longs for clean mountain air, freshly harvested produce, a laid-back atmosphere, and all the other draws of a rural idyll. Gawad Kalinga Enchanted Farm in the town of Angat offers all that and more. Built to support local farmers and social entrepreneurs, the farm provides not only a great immersion into fruit, vegetable, and dairy farming but also allows each visitor the opportunity to take part in a bigger cause. Its multi-layered concept promotes poverty alleviation, social entrepreneurship, and responsible agriculture, among other endeavors. Tour packages include demonstrations, participation in farming activities, and a buffet lunch featuring dishes made with fresh produce and free-range meat.

Hiking in Nasugbu and Cuenca

The province of Batangas is among the most popular weekend destinations for city residents. With its northern border just an hour's drive south of Metro Manila, Batangas is also blessed with a verdant, mountainous landscape that offers a welcome respite from concrete streets and skyscrapers. Mount Batulao in Nasugbu has one of the most visited peaks in the area; it takes around five hours to climb up and down the grassy hiking trails, but the payoff is cool breezes and rolling scenery. You'll spend about the same time exploring Mount Maculot, another favorite of hikers for vistas best admired from a volcanic cliff called The Rockies. Located in Cuenca, the mountain overlooks the majestic Taal Volcano and its surrounding lake.

Nature and Heritage in Bataan

Bataan is one of the most historically significant places in the Philippines, having been the site of violent encounters between Filipino, American, and Japanese military forces during World War II. Nowadays, its storied past is best discovered through the Bataan World War II Museum and the Surrender Site Marker in Balanga City. Mount Samat, where a shrine honoring the bravery of Filipino and American soldiers lords over the town of Pilar, is also worth a visit for its historical value, architectural appeal, and soaring views. Another spot in Bataan that masterfully combines the richness of its history and its natural wonders is Bagac's Las Casas Filipinas de Acuzar, a stunning seaside resort featuring authentic traditional Filipino houses in an alluring coastal setting.

Artistry in Angono and Antipolo

Although it's only 45 minutes away from Manila, Rizal province has somehow managed to maintain its serene, slow-paced atmosphere, and many artists have moved here as a result. Indeed, the town of Angono has been dubbed the "Arts Capital of the Philippines" for its many art galleries and studios; it also happens to be the birthplace of two National Artists, muralist Carlos "Botong" Francisco and composer Lucio San Pedro. Some of the notable spots to visit for a sensory feast are the Blanco Family Museum, Nemiranda Arthouse, and the Balaw Balaw Restaurant and Art Gallery. In the neighboring city of Antipolo, there's also the Pinto Art Museum, a contemporary art space where the works of local talents are showcased in a rustic compound of galleries tucked amid lush greenery.



The New Look of Dusit Thani Manila

Experience the bustling city of Makati from a luxuriously revamped new base

For 65 years, Thai hotel and resort brand Dusit International has been prized for bringing its native warmth, luxury, and design to some of the most enviable destinations around the world. Since it opened in 2008, the Dusit Thani Manila has been a sterling example of all that the brand stands for, with its gracious staff, divine food, and calming rooms combining into a regal residence in the Philippine capital's vibrant Makati business district. But in order to uphold its high standards, the hotel is undergoing a top-to-bottom refurbishment that will be completed in early 2016, seeing the hotel put forth a new version of itself sure to be more dazzling than ever.

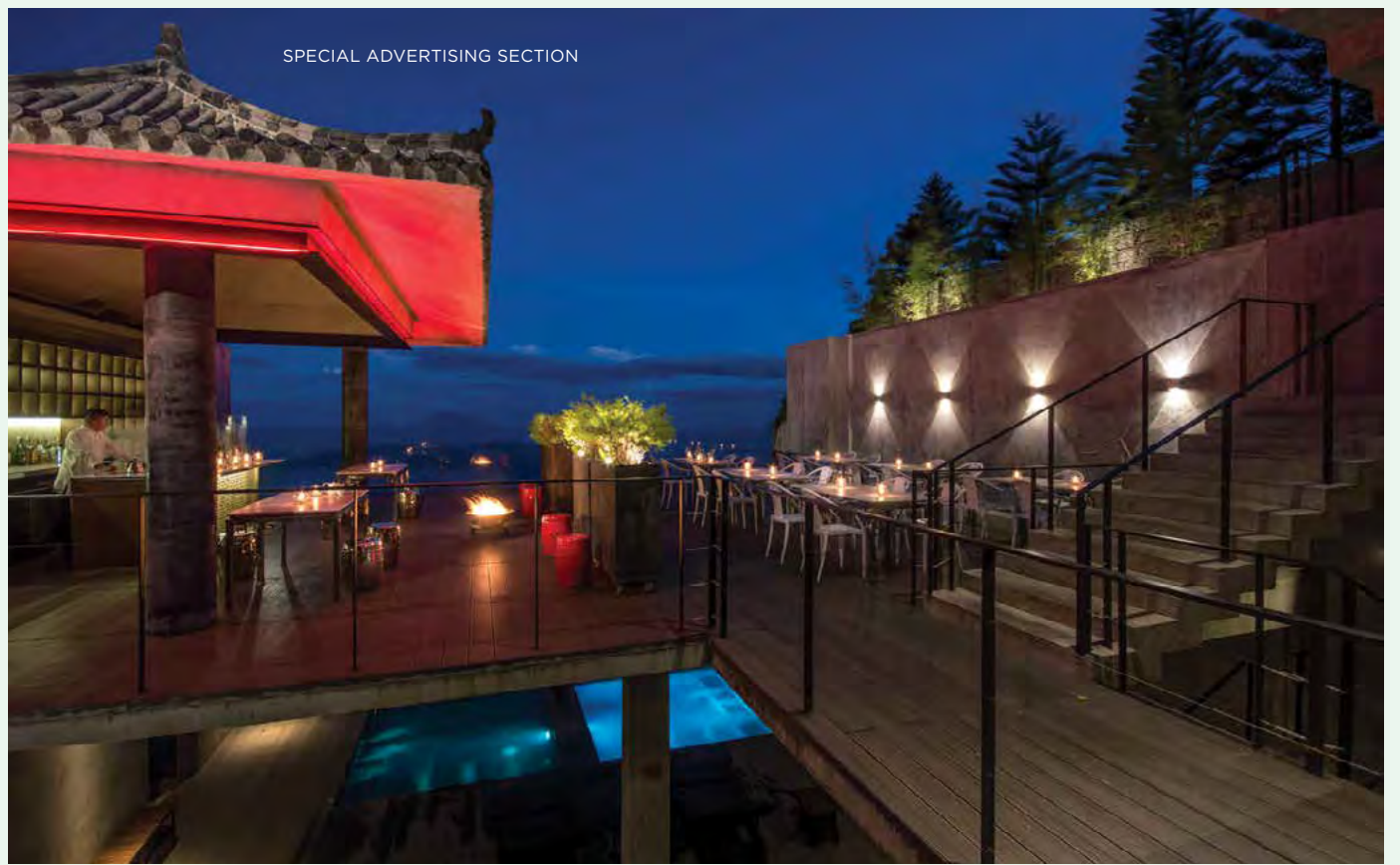
Without forgoing their soothing natural tones and textile-inspired patterned fabrics, the hotel's 537 rooms and suites are being renovated to feature more sophisticated contemporary designs, mixing in details from Thai and Filipino culture. Guests staying in Club Rooms or any of the suites are allowed access to

the Dusit Club Lounge at the top of the hotel, whose meeting rooms and lounge areas have also been redesigned in more modern taste to compliment the views out over the city. On a grand scale, two elegant new ballrooms have been added as venues for weddings, conferences, galas, and the like; in attention to the details, Wi-Fi access has been upgraded throughout the hotel.

With five restaurants offering cuisines ranging from Italian to Japanese and Thai, the Dusit Thani Manila has always been prized for its diverse and authentic dining options. Newly added to the array is The Pantry, a casual all-day-dining restaurant that focuses on using locally sourced, fair-trade, and organic ingredients. Choice is king here, where nine global food stations include a Chinese bao bar, Indian tandoor oven, and brick oven for Italian pizzas in addition to a grab-and-go counter for guests in a hurry to get back out and explore the city.



For reservations, call 63-2/238-8888 or visit dusit.com



Gastronomy and Wellness in Tagaytay

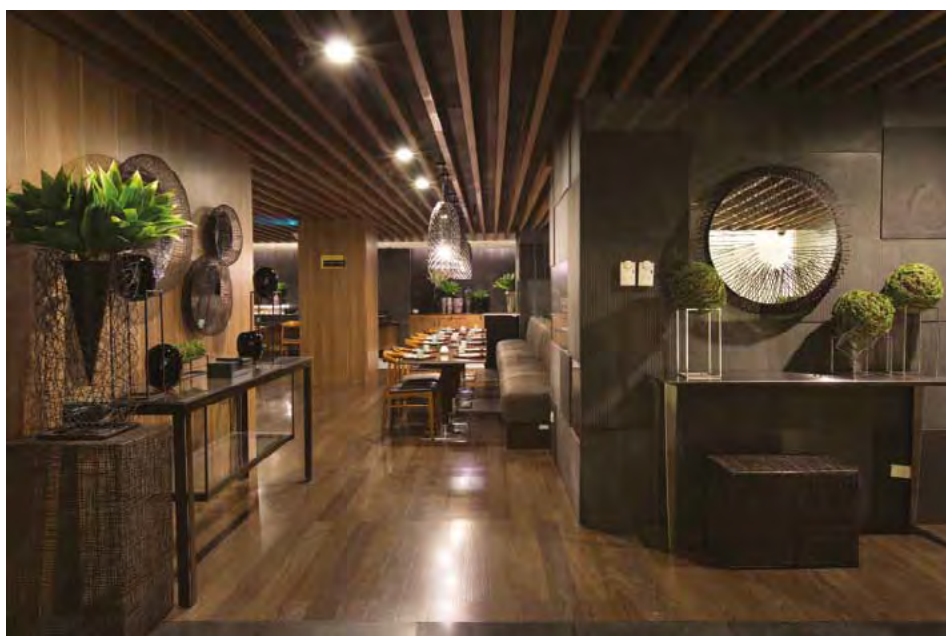
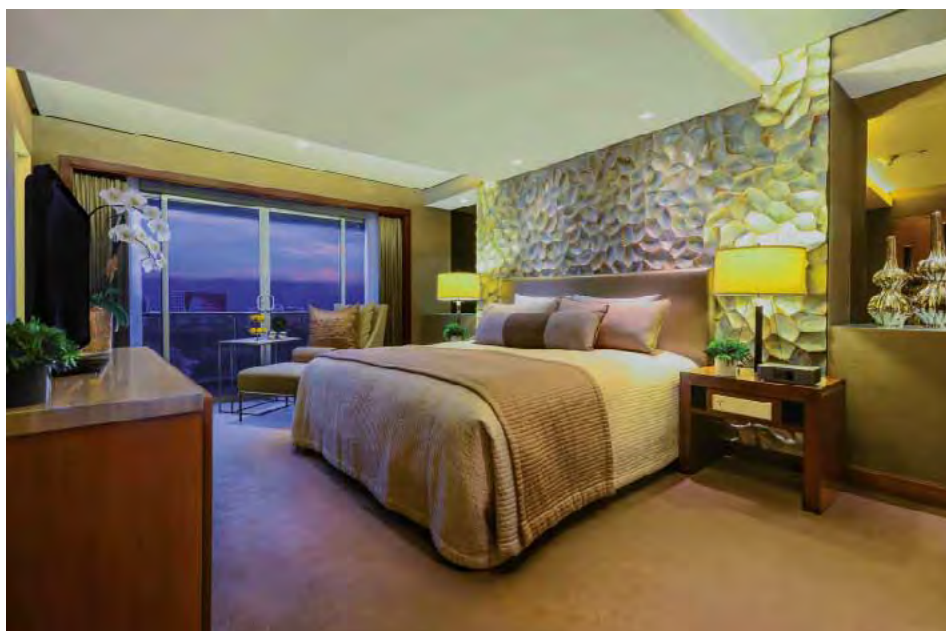
There's something about rural Tagaytay that lends itself to rejuvenating wellness treatments and scrumptious, unhurried meals, which are exactly what Qiwellness Living is about. Perched on a ridge, this decadent destination spa looks out to the serene Taal Lake, providing an idyllic atmosphere for signature treatments such as dry massages and volcanic scrubs. The teahouse here is also superb, serving a seasonal degustation menu and à la carte offerings. And in nearby Tagaytay City, another must-try on the local foodie map is Antonio's, one of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants. Serving Filipino-European specialties in a romantic, colonial-style mansion, this gastronomic gem is in itself a reason to make the trip to Tagaytay.

Trekking in Tarlac

When it erupted in 1991, Mount Pinatubo in Tarlac sent ashes all the way from southern Luzon to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia. More than two decades after that cataclysm, the volcano has simmered down and become a peaceful natural attraction for its jaw-dropping, post-apocalyptic beauty. The common jumping off point is the town of Sta. Juliana, where 4x4 tours take passengers across picturesque ash fields and rocky rivers before stopping at an Aeta village for some interaction with one of the oldest indigenous tribes in the Philippines. Reaching the top of the volcano requires a two-hour trek made worthwhile by the dramatic scenery, particularly that of Pinatubo's blue-green crater lake, which appears like an oasis in the middle of a desert.

History and Mystery in Corregidor

Located at the mouth of Manila Bay, Corregidor played a vital part as a military defense base during World War II. The island is considered one of the most significant historical spots in the Philippines for the events that transpired on its grounds, which led to the invasion and liberation of the country in 1942 and 1945, respectively. Attracting history buffs, commemorative monuments, gigantic cannons, and the remnants of what used to be barracks and artillery batteries are maintained on the island to honor its past. But besides the stories told in history books, Corregidor also lures curious travelers with the haunting tales surrounding its tunnels and ruins.



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DISPATCHES

COPENHAGEN
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On the Prowl
A lion spotted on
safari in the Gir
Forest of western
India, the animals'
last remaining
habitat.



INTO THE LION'S DEN

Tigers may be India's iconic big cat, but in the Gir Forest of Gujarat, it's the Asiatic lion that reigns supreme, thanks in part to the country's only female rangers.

BY KEVIN PILLEY

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Her workplace is a jungle. Her office is the scrub. She shares it with Indian rock pythons, marsh crocodiles, and spectacled cobras. Trupti Joshi is one of the “cat women” of the Gir. Her job is to protect and care for India’s last remaining lions, and she has the scars to prove it.

“Isn’t he a good-looking chap?” Trupti whispered as we crouched 10 meters away from a fully grown male, who lay panting after devouring his breakfast, a spotted chital deer. Nearby, under a flame tree, a sorority of lionesses picked at the remains of the carcass. Vultures lurked in the treetops; a crested serpent eagle circled above. There is a strict hierarchy among the scavengers. Hyenas would not be far away.

Tigers are found across 17 Indian states but lions in only one, Gujarat, where the dry de-



To Serve and Protect

Above, from left: One of the Gir Forest National Park’s female rangers out on patrol; a male Asiatic lion.

ciduous forest of the Gir is the last remaining habitat of *Panthera leo persica*, the Asiatic lion. Paler and slightly smaller than their African counterparts, these regal animals once roamed from Arabia to Persia and the mountains of Balochistan, but by modern times their range had been reduced to India, where trophy-seeking princes and nabobs hunted them to near extinction. Credit for their survival in Gujarat, India’s westernmost state, goes to the last Nawab of Junagadh, who banned lion hunting in the early 20th century and set aside vast tracts of forest for their habitat.

I had checked in to the family-friendly Fern Gir Forest Resort—a 400-kilometer drive from Ahmedabad—the day before. The roster of activities here is voluminous, everything from kite-flying to jiggery making, beginner’s *kabaddi* lessons to a game of *kho kho* (tag), musical chairs, and an invitation to “Make Your Own Lion Mask.” But I was here to see lions and meet the ladies who work to protect them, so early on my first morning, I set out on a three-hour jeep safari through the heart of the Gir Forest National Park, a 258-square-kilometer wildlife sanctuary.

There were four of us on the dawn tour: a ruddy-faced American, a thick-kneed German couple, and me, a bandy-legged, bald-headed Brit. With Trupti as our guide, we bumped up and down through the scrub, dodging tree roots as best we could. At 7 a.m. the temperature was already 40 degrees. Soon after our encounter with the dozing male lion, we met

up with another lady ranger, Rasila Vadher, a 28-year-old from Bhanduri village. Pulling up on her Hero Honda motorbike, she said with a flourish, “Welcome to the home of the jungle king!”

Rasila told us she had worked at the park since 2008, making her one of the first members of an all-women brigade of khaki-clad *vanrakshak sahayak*, or forest guards, some of whom also serve as “lion nurses.” Once she needed 15 stitches in her wrist after being attacked while trying to tag a leopard with a microchip. She has undertaken over 800 rescues. “The most memorable was trying to rescue a lioness who had been badly injured by a porcupine quill. We spent a whole day trying to get her into the cage,” she recalls.

There are now some 50 female rangers working in the Gir, with more soon to be recruited. They patrol 20 kilometers a day and earn 5,200 rupees (about US\$78) a month. The idea of involving more village women in conservation work was the brainchild of India’s current prime minister, Narendra Modi, back when he was Gujarat’s chief minister. He has described them as “gutsy girls.”

Getting There

Jet Airways (jetairways.com) flies daily from Mumbai to the onetime Portuguese enclave of Diu, from where it’s a two-hour drive to the Gir Forest. If you’re arriving instead via the Gujarati capital of Ahmedabad, expect a seven-hour drive.

When to Go

November through February are Gujarat’s cool months. The Gir Forest National Park is in any case closed from mid-October to mid-June; for more information, visit girnationalpark.in.

Where to Stay

A choice of cottages, villas, suites, and tented rooms await at **The Fern Gir Forest Resort** (91-287/728-5999; fernhotels.com; doubles from US\$110), where the facilities include a swimming pool, spa, and two restaurants serving international and pan-Indian cuisine. Don’t count on a bar, though: Gujarat is an alcohol-free state.

“Lion numbers in the park are rising because of these women guards,” Divisional Forest Officer Dr. Sandeep Kumar, who supervises their work, told me later. “The lions trust them more than men. They respond better. And the women have created new awareness about conservation in villages as well as among the Maldharis, Gujarat’s semi-nomadic herdsmen.”

Indeed, lion conservation in the Gir is a rare success story, at least according to the park’s 2015 lion census. The annual survey, which involved 2,200 people, 625 counting points (mainly at waterholes), and, for the first time, camera traps, drones, and GPS tracking, put the number of lions at 523—a 27 percent increase in five years. “The Gir has become a model for the study of human-wildlife management,” Kumar told me.

Over lunch, a ranger named Kiran enlightened me further. “We are preserving our heritage,” she said. “The lion is the symbol of Indian sovereignty; it’s even on our bank notes.” I fished in my pocket for a one-rupee bill and sure enough, there in one corner was a depiction of four lions standing back-to-back. This is India’s national emblem, an adaptation of

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View of Machinchang Cambrian formation from Seratusa, Pantai Kok



the Lion Pillar erected by emperor Ashoka in Sarnath around 250 B.C. But Kiran wasn't done. Gautama Buddha, she continued, was known as Sakyasimha, "the lion of the Sakyas," and his first sermon was called Simhanada, "the lion's roar." In Hindu mythology, the lion is the symbol of royalty, and the king and his throne—the *singhasan*, or lion's seat—are inseparable. Singh, which simply means "lion," has been a common middle or surname among Hindus and Sikhs in northern India since the seventh century.

To keep its emblem alive, India enacted the Wildlife Protection Act in 1972 and amended it again in 2002. Hunting is now punishable with prison time, and there are fines for illegal grazing, teak woodcutting, fires, and other environment depredations. To protect natural habitats, the Gir was made a national reserve in 1965 and a national park in 1975. "In the 1960s, 75 percent of the lion's diet was domestic livestock," Kamlesh Adhiya, founder of the Asiatic Lion Protection Society, told me later. "By relocating and compensating the Maldhari outside the forest and increasing the ungulate popula-

tion, the share of domestic cattle in the menu of the lion has been reduced. The lions at Gir have changed their choice to chital, wild boar, sambar, and langur."

But no amount of food can keep the animals in one place. "Lions are great nomads, great wanderers," Adhiya said. Drought and dry riverbeds caused by illegal mining have driven lions out of the Gir, and satellite colonies have been established in coastal areas as far away as 200 kilometers. Forty percent of the lion population is thought to now live outside the forest, and this is causing problems. Roaming lions are being electrocuted, drowned in wells, and hit by cars and trains—260 lions have been killed in the past two years, and lion attacks have increased as well. The need for translocation is becoming urgent.

Nevertheless, their protectors' hopes remain high. As we watched one of the impressive animals yawn and stretch in front of us, Trupti said, "They are remarkably resilient. These lions have shown that given half a chance, they can survive. And thrive." ◎

Pride of India

Above: Lion conservation in Gujarat is a success story, though the animals' tendency to roam beyond the borders of the Gir Forest remains a threat to the species.



Island Romance

See a different side of Koh Samui at the InterContinental Samui Baan Taling Ngam Resort

Before the paradisiacal Thai isle of Koh Samui became the famed vacation island that it is today, InterContinental Samui Baan Taling Ngam Resort opened on a westward-facing cliff top as a far-flung getaway and the island's first luxury resort. That was in 1993. Since then, Koh Samui's stunning shores and relaxed charms have put it on the map of travelers far and wide, but the InterContinental Samui still remains an exclusive escape with all the privacy and natural beauty of the island at an earlier time.

Set far from where most of the other luxury resorts are gathered on the island's eastern shores, InterContinental is a sanctuary of peace and tranquility. Perhaps best summed up by its name—Baan Taling Ngam—that means "home on the beautiful cliff," the resort comprises 67 guest rooms layered down the lush cliff-side and 12 beachfront pool villas, all with private balconies and views of the Gulf of Thailand. Along with seven different pools, a 150-foot pier from which speedboats

whisk guests off to dive the surrounding reefs and explore uninhabited islands, and a serene spa at the top of the property, there are four unique dining venues that include the resort's famous Air Bar—a stunning outdoor cocktail bar that's known for having perhaps the best sunset views on the island.

For lovebirds this season—or anyone wanting an extra-indulgent vacation—the InterContinental Samui's Romantic Escape with Sunset Cruise package bundles some of the resort's most fanciful offerings into what's sure to be an unforgettable trip. For nightly rates starting from THB 10,675 for an Ocean View Room, stays of three nights come with a candlelit dinner on the beach, a couple's massage, a bottle of sparkling wine, and two cocktails of your choice daily at Air Bar.

For reservations, call 66-77/429-100 or visit samui.intercontinental.com

OPEN SEASON

As hard to pronounce as it is delicious, *smørrebrød*, Denmark's traditional open-faced sandwich, has been reinvented for the 21st century by a handful of local chefs.

BY GEMMA Z. PRICE



Out to Lunch

A smørrebrød topped with baby potatoes, crumbled pork crackling, and seasonal herbs at Aamanns.



Curried herring with egg, boiled shrimps, and mayonnaise. Fried turbot with creamy rémoulade. Corned veal tongue topped with a dollop of creamed horseradish and herbs. I'd never seen the humble open-faced sandwich elevated to something so creatively nutritious and decadently delicious. As my friend Niklas ushered me in from the cold and down the old tiled steps toward tables draped in pristine white tablecloths, I spent several minutes trying to shake off the snow and take in the myriad dishes illuminated by the light of oil lamps suspended from the restaurant's low wooden ceiling beams.

"It's customary that the first courses are always fish, usually starting with pickled and curried herring and then smoked salmon and fried plaice," Niklas said, handing me a plate. "But make sure you leave room—the *rugbrød* [rye bread] is pretty heavy, and we still have roast beef, pork, and duck *smørrebrød* to go."

It turned out that the run-up to Christmas was the best time of year for me to delve into Denmark's signature lunchtime tradition, smør-

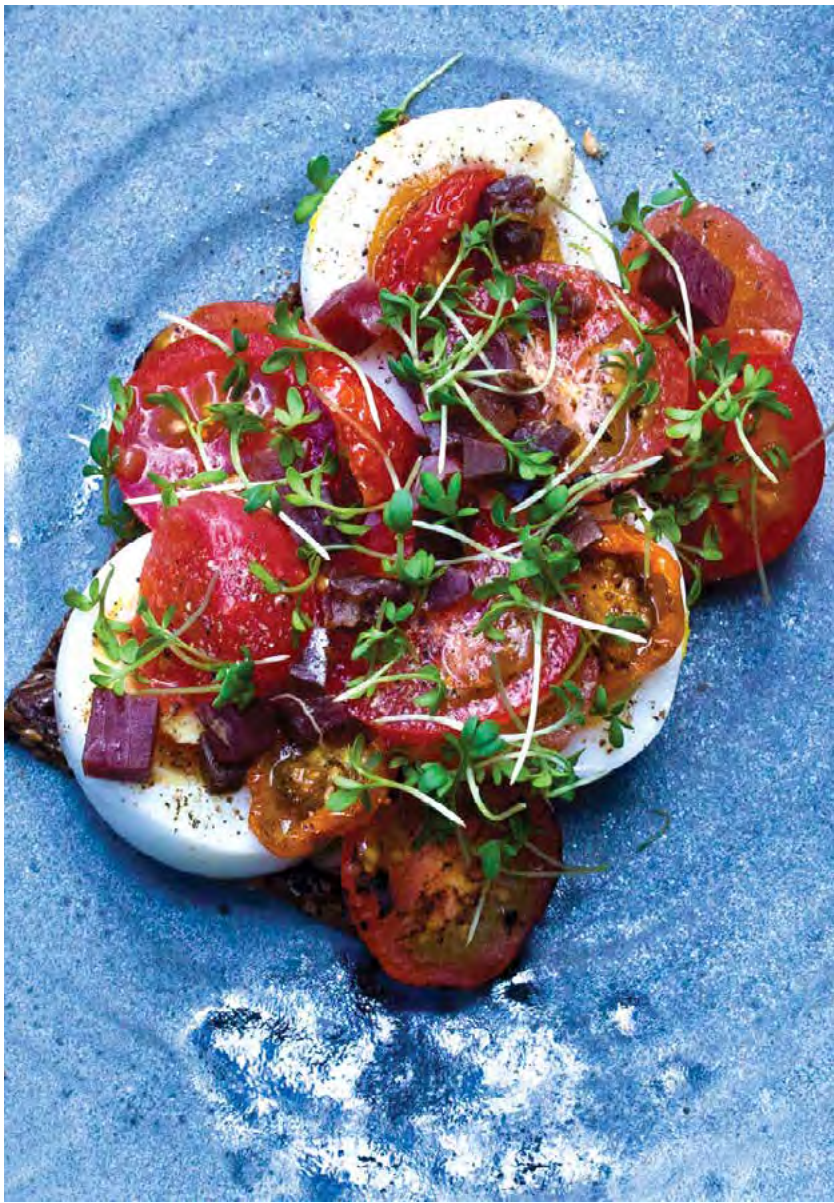


Bread-and-butter Business

Above, from left: Chef Adam Aamann; the terrace at Fru Nimb; boiled eggs and organic tomatoes crown this smørrebrød at Øl & Brød; Royal Smushi Cafe owner Lo Østergaard with chef Michael Jorgensen.

rebrød, which involves thick slices of sourdough rye bread accessorized with a seemingly infinite variety of toppings. Starting mid-November, friends, colleagues, and families all over Copenhagen line up lengthy *julefrokost*—Christmas lunches—where tables groan beneath the weight of their favorite dishes. And as courses are always accompanied by 80 proof aquavit, or *snaps*, as its more commonly known here—as the Danish saying goes, “the fish need something to swim in”—these affairs can last anywhere from two to five hours and always get rather jolly.

My *julefrokost* with Niklas was taking place at Restaurant Kronborg, an old-fashioned establishment set below Copenhagen's cobbled street level that is as famous for its smørrebrød as it is for its *hygge* (cozy) setting and extensive snaps menu. Many of its distillations are infused in-house; the carefully paired selection for this lunch included options flavored with hawthorn and sea buckthorn botanicals served in vintage Jacob Eiler Bang decanters. “Skål!” said Niklas, proffering a glass.



As for the smørrebrød, I was hooked. And the more I discovered about the open-faced sandwich's place in Danish culinary tradition, the more infatuated I became. Literally translating as "buttered bread," smørrebrød (pronounced *smuhr-broht*) is said to have roots in the Viking era; rye bread smeared with butter or animal fat was the Norseman's sustenance of choice while out pillaging. With the onset of industrialization in the second half of the 19th century, smørrebrød, which made a handy packed lunch, emerged as the standard factory workers' midday meal. From there, it became an urban staple. But as Danish diners developed a taste for gourmet cuisine—particularly French fine dining—in the 1960s and '70s, smørrebrød began to fall out of fashion. For hip Danes, it was seen as something their grandparents would eat—a lump of bread topped with the previous night's leftovers.

Now, thanks to a handful of Copenhagen chefs, smørrebrød is undergoing a revival, with contemporary—and delicious—reinterpretations of this lunchtime classic popping up

Getting There
Singapore Airlines
(singaporeair.com) operates a nonstop flight to Copenhagen five times a week.

Where to Stay
In the up-and-coming Vesterbro area, **Bertrams Guldsmeden** (Vesterbrogade 107; 45-70/208-107; guldsmedenhotels.com; doubles from US\$170) has 47 cozy rooms outfitted with four-poster beds, claw-foot tubs, and Balinese decor. For something more lavish, the 17-room **Nimb Hotel** (45-88/700-000; hotel.nimb.dk; doubles from US\$405) in the Tivoli Gardens is Moorish on the outside, New Nordic within, and comes with three restaurants (including Fru Nimb) and a well-stocked cellar wine bar.

all over town, winning over young foodies and traditionalists alike.

Tellingly, when the Nimb Hotel, which occupies a Moorish-inspired 1909 building in the Tivoli Gardens, was looking for a new dining concept to pad out its raft of acclaimed eateries a year ago, it chose a smørrebrød restaurant. Fru Nimb today serves more than 45 different versions of the sandwich, running the gamut from a simple, classic pickled herring with capers and pickled red onions to decadent steak tartare crowned ostentatiously with oysters. My favorite, the eponymous "Mrs. Nimb," fell somewhere in the middle—fried smoked eel with creamy scrambled eggs and shaved truffle.

Elsewhere, microbrewer Mikkel Borg Bjergsø says he chose smørrebrød for his first foray into the restaurant business partly because he wanted to try something new after opening five bars in less than a year, and partly because his new 10-table eatery Øl & Brød ("Beer and Bread," also a pun on *øllebrød*, Denmark's traditional beer-and-bread porridge) wasn't allowed to have a stove. Located on the ground floor of a

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19th-century residential building in Copenhagen's rapidly gentrifying Vesterbro neighborhood, the space "was perfect for smørrebrød as these are often served cold, with pickled or cured fish and meats," Bjergsø explained. "And I always liked smørrebrød; I'm glad to see it's coming back. Also, it goes really well with beer."

In addition to its seasonal smørrebrød lunch offerings (if available, try the blood sausage with apple compote and cinnamon), Øl & Brød serves a smørrebrød-inspired tasting menu for dinner that is likewise all about the ingredients: fromage from artisanal cheese brand Arla Unika; meat from an organic butcher; and fish hand-sourced from the Øresund coast, which Bjergsø pickles himself.

Adam Aamann is another local chef credited with rebooting the smørrebrød tradition. He opened his original eatery, a laidback deli and takeaway shop called Aamanns, in 2006, topping his sandwiches with organic vegetables, cheeses, and free-range meats and winning an award from the Danish Academy of Gastronomy in the process. His smørrebrød menu (also available in the adjacent Aamanns Etablissement restaurant) changes regularly as ingredients come in and out of season; on one of my repeat visits, I happily devoured a perfect rectangle of rye bread topped with pork terrine, mustard seeds, thinly sliced plum, bacon, and celery, capped off with fluffy plumes of thyme and flowering cress from the chef's own garden.

Then there's "smushi," the imaginative creation of the kitschy-chic, tea salon-inspired Royal Smushi Cafe. Set behind a courtyard between the Royal Copenhagen and Georg Jensen shops in downtown Copenhagen, the restaurant's signature offerings are dainty, sushi-size takes on classic smørrebrød presented on beautiful Danish blue-and-white ceramics. Options include venison terrine, chicken mousse with pickled lingonberries, and *fiskefrikadeller* (fish cake) topped with a dollop of rémoulade, and their size allows you to sample a range of combinations (three pieces will set you back about US\$20). The idea has proven so popular that owners Lo Østergaard and Rud Christiansen opened an offshoot of the café in Tokyo in 2010. Perhaps even more gratifying for them is that smushi now features on the syllabus at the Copenhagen Hospitality College.

Other fashionable restaurants, including some of the city's most lauded dining rooms, have also embraced the once-humble smørrebrød. Claus Meyer, who co-founded Noma with René Redzepi in 2003, serves a regular selection of sandwiches at his high-end outlet Almanak. Likewise, the lunch menu at Tårnet, Rasmus Bo Bojesen's "grandmother-style" haute eatery atop the Danish Parliament, centers on the chef's take on old favorites such as the Stjernes kud ("Shooting Star")—of the handful of smørrebrød recipes recognized by

Small Wonder

The signature offerings at Royal Smushi Cafe put a sushi spin on smørrebrød.



name, this is one—here topped with fried and poached plaice fillets, pickled white asparagus, and whitefish roe.

But it's important to remember that while many New Nordic chefs are just starting to get on board, some of the earliest smørrebrød champions—like Restaurant Kronborg—never gave up on this working-class dish, sticking with it through thick and unfashionably thin to take their place among Copenhagen's most celebrated family kitchens. This is true of Restaurant Ida Davidsen on Kongensgade, whose namesake owner's great-grandfather began serving smørrebrød at his wine bar as far back as 1888. That tradition has continued through five generations, with Ida Davidsen now offering more than 250 variations of smørrebrød, a record-breaking repertoire that includes sandwiches named after famous patrons such as the Victor Borge (gravlax, shrimp, caviar, crayfish tails) and the Bendt Bendtsen (roast beef and pickles with a fried egg). Amid the lunchtime crowds here, it's impossible to imagine smørrebrød ever going out of vogue again. ©

Where to Eat

Aamanns Deli & Take Away

Øster Farimagsgade 10; 45-35/553-344; aamanns.dk.

Fru Nimb

Nimb Hotel, Bernstorffsgade 5; 45-88/700-020; frunimb.nimb.dk.

Øl & Brød

Viktoriagade 6; 45-33/314-422; ologbrod.dk.

Restaurant Ida Davidsen

Kongensgade 70; 45-33/913-655; idadavidsen.dk.

Restaurant Kronborg

Brolæggerstræde 12; 45-33/130-708; restaurantkronborg.dk.

Royal Smushi Cafe

Amagertorv 6; 45-33/121-122; royalsmushicafe.dk.



Clockwise from left: A RedLevel suite; the hotel's owner, Johanness Suriadjaja, and staff after receiving the TTG award this year; the hotel glistens at night; afternoon tea in the RedLevel Lounge.



CITY SANCTUARY

At Gran Meliá Jakarta, a tradition of heartfelt service gives unique warmth to luxury hospitality

THERE'S NOTHING BETTER THAN ARRIVING AT A HOTEL AND immediately feeling right at home, which is exactly what guests experience at the Gran Meliá Jakarta. As one of Spanish hotel group Meliá Hotels International's 350 hotels worldwide, the luxurious Gran Meliá Jakarta has every comfort and convenience a modern traveler could desire, coupled with passionate service and personalized care that make the hotel just the type of haven guests look forward to returning to time and time again.

Indonesia has a long heritage of both artistic design and heartfelt hospitality, and Gran Meliá Jakarta incorporates both throughout the four types of rooms in the hotel. Yet nowhere is this felt more than in the exclusive RedLevel, whose premium rooms, reception, and lounge create the warm ambiance of being in a small luxury hotel. Here, staff members of the efficient and intuitive Red Glove Service—specially trained to make stays unique with a “red touch,” from the moment of arrival until the memorable farewell—greet guests with a welcome drink before showing them to their rooms, which are quiet, spacious, and chic with a mix of soothing neutral tones and batik

textiles. The Red Glove staff is on-call day and night to take care of all guests' needs, though after a day of work or travel, the perfect way to unwind is to put on some music through the iPod dock and relax with the aromatherapy amenities and a wonderfully large bath.

Conveniently located by the toll road in Jakarta's prestigious Kuningan area, Gran Meliá Jakarta is in easy reach of Jakarta's best neighborhoods for dining and entertainment, but the hotel has plenty of options of its own: Yoshi Izakaya for Japanese, Tien Chao for Chinese, El Bombon for European pastries, and Café Gran Via for international buffets and 24-hour à la carte dining. For a soothing setting, the Lobby Lounge by the grand entry fountain serves fine coffees and premium liquors to a soundtrack of live piano and cool jazz, and for those in Jakarta for business, it's ideal for meetings or working. And for RedLevel guests, the gorgeous, chandelier-lit RedLevel lounge is equally lovely for curling up with a book and crème caramel during afternoon tea as it is for an evening chat and cocktail while gazing through the windows at the city lights at night.

It comes as no surprise that for the past two years, Gran Meliá Jakarta has been awarded as the Best City Hotel in Jakarta at the annual TTG Travel Awards. As anyone who has stayed can attest, it's not just the luxuries that make it so renowned, but also the care for each guest that truly makes the hotel a home away from home.

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Breaking New Ground

A dystopian landscape by Malaysian artist Fadhli Shaimy on display in the subterranean gallery of the Rimbun Dahan arts center.



KL'S CREATIVE EDGE

A visit to the Malaysian capital reveals an art scene that has emerged as one of the most dynamic in the region.

BY GABRIELLE LIPTON

My friend, an accomplished Indonesian poet named Khairani Barokka, was glowing when she described her residency at Rimbun Dahan, a private arts center just outside Kuala Lumpur. For six months, Okka had lived on a wildly gardened property in an old Malay house writing poetry all day, breaking just to chat with the other residents or go for a swim. A harmless python resided atop one of the houses and monkeys were known to pay visits. Though she would never let on how prestigious a stay at Rimbun Dahan really is, she was effusive about her time there—the backstory of the owners, the field trips to openings and exhibitions at galleries in the city, and the excitement of Kuala Lumpur’s art scene in general.

Okka’s enthusiasm convinced me to go and see what was happening for myself. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Singapore have largely been regarded as the two primary—albeit very different—art hubs, but recently, Malaysia’s art scene has hit a major growth spurt. Since 2010, four Malaysian art auction houses and a host of new galleries have opened, giving the country’s artists more visibility both at home and internationally at events such as Art Basel Hong Kong and the Asia Art Fair in New York.

“Everything’s really changed in the past five years,” said Harni Jonet, the manager at Galeri Chandan, which opened eight years ago in Damansara and was one of the first galleries to display Malaysian art abroad. I’d come to visit its second location situated in a line of contemporary galleries at the top of the enormous Publika mall, the closest thing in sprawling Kuala Lumpur to an art neighborhood. It was the month of Ramadan at the time, and on the walls was an exhibition called “Tawaf: A Sacred Journey,” which included works by four artists who had recast Arabic calligraphy as the subject of colorful oil paintings, the scripted letters formed into motifs and designs. The literal meanings were spiritual, but the larger objective of the works was to reinterpret a Malaysian tradition as contemporary art.

As I continued to galleries in Publika and elsewhere around the city, I noticed that much of the art I was seeing was inspired by Malaysia in some way, often in concept more than visuals. The results are distinct, a sure sign of a burgeoning art scene that can sustain growth. At Shalini Ganendra Fine Art in the well-to-do neighborhood of Petaling Jaya, I was immediately met with a massive wooden wall-hanging just inside the entryway. I knew from one glance that the piece was by Anniketyni Madian, a Rimbun Dahan alumnus whose work Okka had raved about after their residences had coincided. In an intensely laborious process, Madian carves



The Details

Rimbun Dahan

Km. 27 Jl. Kuang,
Selangor; 60-3/6038-
3690; rimbundahan
.org; visits by
appointment only.

Shalini Ganendra Fine Art

8, Lorong 16/7b, Petaling
Jaya; 60-3/7932-4740;
shaliniganendra.com.

Galeri Chandan

L/G4, Block C5, Publika
Shopping Gallery, Jl.
Dutamas 1; 60-3/6201-
5360; galerichandan.com.

Richard Koh Fine Art

229 Jl. Maarof, Bangsar;
60-3/2095-3300;
rkfineart.com; visits by
appointment only.

Wei-Ling Gallery

8 Jalan Scott, Brickfields;
60-3/2260-1106;
weiling-gallery.com.

Lostgens’ Contemporary Art Space

8C Jl. Panggung;
60-19/683-8397;
lostgenerationspace
.blogspot.com.

small pieces of mixed hardwoods that, when pieced together, become patterns inspired by the woven Dayak textiles of Sarawak, her home. Her studio attire consists of a dust mask and carpenter gloves, but the finished products—often some three meters in diameter—are graceful, feminine, and distinctly Malaysian.

“Being from Malaysia is a strength,” says Ganendra. “It can’t be contrived. It’s an identity that needs to be organically developed. We only represent [Malaysian] artists who are doing that.” Originally from Sri Lanka, Ganendra has been an art collector most of her life and started SGFA in 1998 with the primary goal of educating Malaysian collectors on how to recognize and invest in art that will appreciate—the core of a profitable art market. Now, it’s at once a gallery, residency, advisory, and stage for art events unlike any others in the region, including an annual pavilion installation and lecture series endorsed by the UNESCO Observatory that brings in top curators from around the world. Even the building is—like Ganendra herself—impeccable and visionary, one of the first buildings in Malaysia to receive a Green Building certification.

The curators that come are in thanks to Ganendra’s connections from years of activity in art world circles. They come to speak, but also to scout for an undiscovered breed of art that could be the next big thing. Ganendra says they’re always shocked at the quality of art



they encounter, which is carefully selected from regional artists, many Malaysian. When I visit, the second floor of the wind-chimney-cooled space is hung with large-scale oil paintings from one of the country's top living artists, Zac Lee, which at first appear as wild murals—of fighting hawks, a fat boar, a wide-eyed tiger—but reveal themselves as visual fables with political morals. On another wall hangs a series by Bibi Chew of small sheets of different woods, each representing a different Malay skin tone and etched with the silhouette of a human face. Within the outline of the visages, Chew lifts up bits of lacquered wood with a penknife, as if the face is covered in dewdrops, or tears.

Over the remaining few days of my trip, I make sure to see the bookends of the gallery scene. On one end, there's Wei-Ling Gallery and Richard Koh Fine Art, the Gagosians or Paces of Malaysia; on the other, there's Lostgens' Contemporary Art Space, a co-op atop a shop-house in Chinatown where the works are far more experimental, often commenting aggressively. The galleries at Publika and a few others scattered around the city fall somewhere in

between. And then, like a buffet with tastes of them all, there's Rimbun Dahan, which I head out to visit on my final day.

In the early 1990s, architect Hijjas Kasturi—widely held as the most significant Malaysian architect—inherited a five-and-a-half hectare piece of land just outside of the city in Selangor. As a way to give back to their respective countries, him and his Australian wife Angela converted it to a residency, each year hosting one Malaysian and one Australian artist, all expenses paid. At the time, the Malaysian art market was just getting its footing, and Rimbun Dahan was one of the places where it had its first steps.

"It was just the right thing at the right time," said Angela nostalgically, curled up on a black leather couch in her and Hijjas's home on the property, looked down upon by two big, gleeful oil portraits of them both—gifts from Chong Siewying, a resident in 2000. "We developed a reputation for having all the best artists—Haslin Ismail, Samsudin Wahab, Ahmad Shukri Mohamed—and it's simply because we gave them an opportunity to develop their craft on a full-time basis." It also drew all the nascent serious

All Hung Up

Above: The gallery space at Shalini Ganendra Fine Art displays works from Malaysian painter Zac Lee and wood sculptor Anniketyni Madian. Opposite: The gallery's namesake founder, backed by a row of works from Bibi Chew.



collectors with its annual exhibition of work from the residents. The night before the exhibit's opening, Hijjas would go to the gallery, and with the company of a cigar and a whiskey choose one piece for Rimbun's private collection. Every other piece always sold. Since then, Rimbun's residency program has expanded and now offers shorter sponsorships to a wide range of artists from around Southeast Asia. It also accepts artists from outside the region who pay to stay. The annual exhibitions sell out before they even open.

During my visit, the residents include an improvisatory performance group as well as Malaysian artists Hasanul Isyraf Idris and Yeoh Choo Kuan, both of whose works I had just seen that morning at Richard Koh as part of Koh's special 10-year anniversary exhibition. I was enraptured with a triptych by Yuan of massive paintings slathered sculpturally thick with black oil paint and lacquer when the gallery assistant informed me that Yuan was presently at Rimbun as part of a special program to give some of Koh's artists a space to work uninterrupted. (The assistant, it turned out, was up-and-coming sculptor and painter Haffendi Anuar, who'd received a residency as well.)

Just as my friend Okka described, it's hard to imagine a more inspiring place to create. Angela, whose first love is botany, has spent years planting the land with native species—durian

and rambutan trees, endangered dipterocarps, a spice garden—which clear occasionally for sculptures commissioned for the grounds. Restored heritage houses from Malaysian villages sit in one part, while other artists live in apartments above studios in another. But the centerpiece of the property is hidden: the gallery where Rimbun hosts its exhibitions, underground.

As Syar Alia, the arts manager, led me down the stairs to the gallery, we passed a poem painted on the wall—the work Okka left behind—before entering into a circular white space centered around a hollow glass colonnade extending up to the ground, tunneling in sunlight to illuminate the colossal works hung all around. There was an oil painting of a meat hangar by Malaysian painter Justin Lim, who wanted to paint something no one would ever want to see on a wall (the result is stunning); a mural painted on sarongs by Htein Lin, a Burmese artist who stayed at Rimbun after being imprisoned for more than six years under charges of planning opposition activities, using inmate uniforms as canvases and having guards smuggle him paint; an Escher-esque work by Australian artist Megan Keating of palm trees trapped inside a grid, lamenting the environmental problems associated with monoculture in Malaysia. It was an exhibit that could have put that of any international gallery to shame, yet couldn't exist anywhere else but here. ©

Change of Art

From left: Rimbun Dahan co-founder Angela Hijjas walks beside the main pond and pavilion on the center's grounds; the mixed-media ceramic work "Dinner With Someone...?" by Umibaizurah Mahirismail displayed at Galeri Chandan.

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TERMS & CONDITIONS One entry per person only. • Competition is open to all readers who are 18 years of age or older except for employees of DestinAsian and prize sponsors. • The prize is not transferable, with no cash alternative. • Rooms are subject to availability. • Advance booking is necessary. • The winner will be notified within 14 days after the draw and results will be published in the April/May 2016 issue of DestinAsian. • No purchase is necessary to enter.

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Overlooking the Indian Ocean on the second floor of KU DE TA,



Clockwise, from above: Oxtail soup; chicken and lobster tsukune meatballs; ginger-and-lemon-skin gelato.

the dining room of Mejekawi – which loosely translates to mean “sacred table” – is modern and sophisticated. An open kitchen allows guests to watch as renowned chefs Ben Cross and Stephen Moore and executive pastry chef Nuño Garcia wield high-tech cooking equipment to prepare their five- or 12-course tasting menus, whose forward-thinking recipes were created in an adjacent food laboratory designed by Will Goldfarb and replete with high-tech cooking equipment from Sub-Zero & Wolf. Cocktails are made with evaporators and ultrasonic homogenizers, and the wine list earned the restaurant an Award of Excellence from Wine Spectator. With “hidden”



courses added in for an element of surprise, meals at Mejekawi are as entertaining as they are refined, ideal for celebratory gatherings.

Although certainly the most progressive, Mejekawi counts only as one of nine sub-venues within KU DE TA, any of which lend themselves well to pre- and post-nuptial activities. Indoor bar and dining areas transition into an outdoor dining deck, which backs up to manicured gardens and the beach beyond. Additionally, a new two-story bar and restaurant called Tuile offers some of the finest tapas and cocktails around. With magnificent sunset views (and mojitos), the evening atmosphere is warm and lively, and come nightfall, world-class DJs regularly spin into the late hours as revelers venture down to the beach and dance under the night sky.

Jl. Kayu Aya 9, Seminyak, Bali, Indonesia; 62-361/736-979; kudeta.net

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From top: SKY is ideal for receptions, ceremonies, and photos alike; a private pool villa at AYANA.

and a team of wedding consultants and butlers to assist with every need and seamlessly convert the ceremony set-up into one for a dinner reception, prepared by the resort's renowned culinary team. As champagne is poured, the sun sets over the horizon, and candles light the grounds, there's no place more magical to raise a toast to a new Mr. and Mrs.

Jl. Karang Mas Sejahtera;
62-361/702-222; ayanaresort.com

HOTEL BOROBUDUR JAKARTA

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EVERY BRIDE ENVISIONS WHAT HER dream wedding looks like, and for those who imagine a grand ballroom filled with friends, family, banquets, and dancing, Hotel Borobudur Jakarta is the place to realize these dreams. From the logistics of the ceremony to the decorations of the reception and concept for the dinner and party, Hotel Borobudur's beautiful venues and dedicated staff ensure that every wedding detail is exactly as desired.

Jakarta is known for its sizable weddings, and Hotel Borobudur has a variety of venue options to accommodate large numbers of guests. Near the opulent lobby, the inviting



Clockwise, from above: A poolside wedding; the Flores Ballroom; the Timor Room.



Timor Room is the smallest of the options, accommodating 300 to 500 guests, while the high-ceilinged Flores Ballroom is the largest, able to host anywhere from 1,000 to 5,000 guests with room expansions. For a more traditional setting, the Sumba Room features Javanese wood paneling, while in nice weather, the Singosari and Poolside area is perfect for an alfresco reception under romantic hanging lights.

To ease the planning process, Hotel Borobudur offers five different wedding packages that vary based on guest number. Wedding parties can relax knowing that the hotel's passionate wedding specialists will handle the preparations leading up to the wedding and make sure everything runs smoothly throughout the day, from pre-ceremony photography through the end of the affair. The hotel is also

flexible, and couples are welcome to use outside caterers, though the award-winning culinary team can serve a variety of cuisines, including Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Chinese, or a mix, depending on what's desired by the couple for their special day.

*Jl. Lapangan Banteng Selatan No. 1,
Jakarta, Indonesia; 62-21/380-5555;
hotelborobudur.com*

MAYA SANUR RESORT & SPA

A BEACHSIDE BEAUTY FOR BREATHTAKING CEREMONIES

IMAGINE SAYING “I DO” IN AN elegant glass-and-marble chapel surrounded by blossoming frangipani trees and overlooking glorious views of the ocean. On the eastern shores of Bali, Maya Sanur Resort & Spa has created The Pavilion Wedding package to offer just that, adding special flourishes to modern romance and an idyllic setting for couples to start their life together.

A professional wedding coordinator will organize and manage all wedding details, from a post-ceremony champagne toast in the garden to personalized canapé and dinner menus and even booking couples' spa experiences and post-wedding stays. For larger or smaller weddings, the resort additionally has an elegant ballroom and a gardened rooftop that are equally wonderful venues, and also come with



From top: The resort's main pool; a wedding set-up overlooking the ocean.

packages that include all the same personalized attention and care. What's more, Maya Sanur is the perfect place for couples to ease into their honeymoons once all the festivities are through.

*Jalan Danau Tamblingan, Sanur,
Bali, Indonesia; 62-361/849-7800;
mayaresorts.com*



MAYA UBUD RESORT & SPA

WHERE LOVE IS SURROUNDED IN TROPICAL PEACE

OVERLOOKING THE DRAMATIC Petanu River Valley between villages to the east and rice fields to the west, Maya Ubud Resort & Spa is a 10-hectare retreat of tropical gardens, thatched buildings, private pool villas, and luxury guest rooms. Just an hour's drive from Bali's international airport, Maya is a secluded, tranquil haven for weddings.

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*Jl. Gunung Sari Peliatan, P.O. box 1001,
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From left: The pool above the Petanu River valley; a couple's massage at the Spa at Maya.

THE KAYON RESORT, MANAGED BY PRAMANA

INFUSING WEDDINGS WITH BALINESE TRADITION AND FLAIR



From left: A private couple's dinner; wedding ceremony decorations at Puspaka Chapel.

SURROUNDED BY WILD GREEN HILLS and inspired by the mystical stories of Balinese Hinduism, The Kayon Resort is a place for weddings steeped in local tradition and culture. Above the waters of the Petanu River, the resort's Puspaka Chapel creates weddings that couldn't

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Drawing on the love story of King Rama and his wife Shinta, Puspaka Chapel – so named for the carriage that Rama and Shinta ride off in together after her devotion is deemed true – comes adorned with an abundance of fragrant flowers, handcrafted wooden seats tied with golden bows, and an antique Balinese royal carriage for the couple after they exchange their vows. Set to a soundtrack of the rushing river and a backdrop of rice paddies and lush tropical forests, weddings here seem like an exotic dream.

Banjar Kepitu, Desa Kandran, Tegalang, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia; 62-361/479-2553; thekayonresort.com

KAMANDALU UBUD

RELAX IN THE ROMANCE OF THE HEART OF BALI

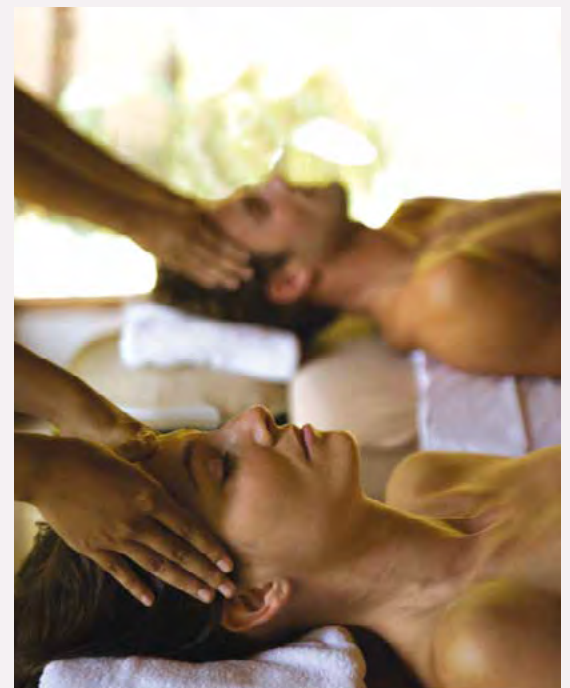
SURROUND YOUR SPECIAL DAY WITH serenity at Kamandalu Ubud. Modeled after Panglipuran village – one of the island's oldest settlements – and nestled among emerald rice paddy hills, it's intimate, relaxed, and just the place for an extraordinary honeymoon.

To ensure couples make the most of their precious time together in Bali, the Kamandalu Ubud has put together a special Romantic Experience package. The special experience starts with a morning session of yoga in the peaceful Rumah Yoga pavilion, rejuvenating the mind, body, and spirit. After, it's time to learn the secrets of authentic Balinese cuisine with an interactive cooking class conducted by the resort's chef. This involves a visit to a market in Ubud to pick out the freshest ingredients, herbs, and spices. Guest then can enjoy a picnic



From left: A romantic picnic cruise on the waters of Kamandalu Ubud; a couple's massage at Chaya Spa.

lunch on a boat drifting along the gentle waters of the lagoon surrounded by shores of tropical gardens. A one-hour massage using traditional Indonesian techniques follows, and just as evening begins to turn to night, couples sit down to a six-course dinner specially prepared



by the chef and served under the stars in the gorgeous privacy of the Alun-Alun venue overlooking the Petanu River Valley.

Jl. Andong, Banjar Nagi, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia; 62-361/975-825; kamandaluresort.com



/ New York /

1969

Back in the golden era of air travel when a plane ticket was an entrée to a rarefied world barreling glamorously into the future, John F. Kennedy International Airport's TWA Flight Center was built to match. Completed in 1962, the Trans World Airways terminal was a beacon of modernity—one of the first terminals with baggage carousels, electronic schedule displays, a food court, and premium-class lounges like the Constellation Club. Designed by Eero Saarinen, it was a masterpiece of neo-futuristic architecture with swooping staircases, curvilinear walls, elliptical hallways, and a roof shaped like the wings of a bird in flight. Saarinen died a year before the building opened, and though it's unfortunate he never enjoyed the fanfare surrounding its debut, it may be for the best that he didn't witness the aftermath. As air travel became mainstream, passenger numbers and planes both began to outgrow the capacity of the terminal, which was designated a New York City Landmark in 1994. The TWA Flight Center was closed in 2001 and has since sat neglected by all except those staring wistfully at the empty bird from the taxi queue outside JetBlue's adjacent Terminal 5. But not for much longer. As part of a recently announced US\$265-million project, JetBlue is partnering in the redevelopment of the terminal as the centerpiece of what will be JFK's only in-airport hotel, complete with a spa, an aviation museum, and an observation deck alongside two new six-story towers housing 505 rooms. It's all set to open in 2018. —*Gabrielle Lipton*



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CHANGING TIMES IN CHENGDU

Always a draw for its pandas and hotpots, Sichuan's provincial capital is more enticing than ever these days as it emerges as a cosmopolitan Chinese metropolis whose backyard just happens to be an incredibly beautiful part of the country.

BY **AMY FABRIS-SHI** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **CALLAGHAN WALSH**

Urban Enclave
Old and new
coexist at the
Sino-Ocean
Taikoo Li complex,
a 10-hectare
development
in downtown
Chengdu.





EVERYONE

loves pandas. They are right up there with terra-cotta warriors and holy mountains on China's bucket list of attractions. And the southwest provinces of Sichuan, Gansu, and Shaanxi are the only places in the world where you can find the endangered species living in its native habitat.

Like most travelers, playing with pandas and scorching my taste buds on *ma-la* ("numbing-spicy") Sichuanese cuisine were the main incentives for me to board the 3.5-hour flight west from Shanghai to Chengdu. But touching down in Sichuan's provincial capital, it became clear that the red-hot allure of this city of 14 million is evolving in new ways too.

Chengdu's location has always given it a strategic edge. As far back as two millennia ago, it was the starting point of the Southern Silk Road, an ancient trade route linking China, Southeast Asia, India, and the Middle East. Caravans bound for Burma and Afghanistan would leave here laden with locally manufactured Shu silk brocade, textiles, and bronze. When they eventually returned, it was with a wealth of ivory, seashells, and porcelain.

Today, Chengdu is the gateway to China's rapidly developing west and is fashioning itself as an automotive, software, and logistics hub. Two-thirds of the world's iPads are currently manufactured here, and in September, a report by California-based think tank the Milken Institute named Chengdu the best-performing city in China. Infrastructure has expanded quickly, including two subway lines (with another three in the works). Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport is one of China's four busiest, welcoming flights from 83 international destinations including London, San Francisco, Melbourne, and, as of mid-December, Paris. Construction of a second airport designed to handle 90 million passengers annually is currently underway southeast of the city, with its first phase expected to open in 2018.

For now, Chengdu's past and present, grit and glamour coexist in one madly bubbling hotpot. As my taxi navigates the wide, traffic-choked streets, we pass epic-scaled skyscrapers and ritzy malls that sidle up to ancient temples. Fancy new hotels—a St. Regis and Niccolo among them—rise above the hubbub. And at Tianfu Square, a 30-meter-tall statue of Chairman Mao dominates the central plaza, his arm outstretched over milling crowds and dancing fountains.

My immediate destination is the mysteriously titled Bitieshi Street, the only lane in the city that has retained its Manchurian name from the Qing era. We pull to a stop outside a stylishly weathered gray-brick wall, whose scarlet gate marks the entrance to Chengdu's hottest new hotel, The Temple House. The entrance is through the garden courtyard of a century-old building where government scribes once translated documents between Mandarin and Manchurian, the language of China's Qing dynasty rulers. Behind carved wooden doors and balustrades are vaulted chambers now home to a contemporary

Warm Welcome

Opposite: A Temple House staffer outside the hotel's reception area.



Shelf Interest

The vast Fang Suo Commune bookstore at Taikoo Li. Opposite, clockwise from top left: A staff member at the Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain; a bowl of Sichuan cold noodles from a street vendor; the owners of a backstreet noodle shop in Dujiangyan; the art gallery at The Temple House.

探索之必要 片刻寧靜之必要

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art gallery, a residents' library, an event space, and the reception area.

The third property in the Hong Kong-based Swire Hotels group's House Collective (the other two are in Beijing and Hong Kong), the months-old Temple House has dispensed with check-in desk procedures, so after a cheerful greeting I proceed into a dramatically upsized modern Chinese courtyard framed by streamlined gray towers housing 142 rooms, suites, and serviced residences. Like all the guest rooms here, mine is spare and hip. Light oak floors and walls are contrasted strikingly with ink-black open-plan bathrooms, and large windows overlook Chengdu's urban patchwork.

The Temple House anchors the new Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li complex, a 10-hectare open-air mall constructed around six ancient buildings, including the millennium-old Daci Temple, one of the city's most revered holy sites. Worshippers can now light their incense sticks then amble across the courtyard into any of the 300 restaurants, luxury-brand boutiques, and creative galleries that inhabit Taikoo Li's art-adorned lanes and piazzas. Bypassing the shiny Gucci and Hermès stores, I discover some interesting homegrown brands and boutiques, like the staggering subterranean Fang Suo Commune. Defined by dramatic concrete pillars and catwalks, the 4,000-square-meter bookstore and creative space is filled with a handsomely curated mix of books, fashion pop-ups by Chinese designers, artsy knickknacks, and a café. Nearby, Monosociety stocks a sophisticated collection of stationery, adult coloring books, and puzzles, while an outlet of Hi Panda comes with serious pop-culture attitude emblazoned across sweatshirts, tees, and caps. If you're looking for some fun souvenirs, this is a good place to start.

Whether in the fashionable coffeehouses and wine bars of Taikoo Li or the city's authentic older quarters, Chengdu is renowned for its leisurely lifestyle. This can be glimpsed in its traditional form within the leafy grounds of People's Park. At all hours of the day, the park buzzes with local residents practicing tai chi and fan dances, fraternizing with their songbirds, or paddling on the lake. The daily huddle of senior citizens peering at printed personal ads laid out on a park bench is the over-60s dating club.

People's Park is also home to a couple of alfresco teahouses, a beloved part of Sichuan culture. Beneath pavilions strung with red lanterns, locals recline on cane armchairs to snack on bowls of soupy noodles, sip tea in small porcelain cups, play mah-jongg, and

chat. Can't hear the conversation clearly? No worries. The twang of tuning-fork tongs herald the arrival of Chengdu's roving earwax cleaning masters, armed with an alarming arsenal of copper prongs, long scoops, and goose-feather brushes. Locals claim that these time-honored practitioners will not only rid you of earwax, but also leave you addicted to the process. I decide to take their word for it.

Chengdu's famous Wide and Narrow Alleys (Kuanzhai Xiangzi) lack authentic charm; a better bet for a glimpse of heritage is Jinli, a narrow pedestrian street lined with Ming- and Qing-era houses and willow trees. Among the usual tourist junk, you can find folk artisans creating and selling traditional wares, from molten-sugar sculptures and fresh gardenia-bud bracelets to vintage handmade toys and beautiful fans made from woven cane. For some respite from the crowds, duck inside the nearby Wuhou Shrine. Originally built in 223 A.D., the complex is dedicated to Zhuge Liang, a revered third-

century military strategist who has been immortalized in one of China's most beloved literary works, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The life-size statues and etched tablets in the main halls may seem a bit dull and dusty to those who aren't familiar with the story's characters, but everyone can appreciate the beautiful walkways and gardens filled with cypress trees and lotus ponds.

One of Chengdu's biggest draws is its cuisine. Combining the burn of the region's red and green chilies with the tongue-tlingling sensation of Sichuan

peppercorns, the bold flavors simultaneously induce suffering and satisfaction. The best-loved dish is the Sichuan hotpot, where diners dunk sliced meats, seafood, vegetables, tofu, and other chosen ingredients into a communal pot of bubbling broth to cook and then devour them with various dipping sauces. Hotpot has gone global in recent years, but nothing quite prepares you for the eye-wateringly spicy, red oil-slicked pots at Biao Biao, a local institution. For a lighter, fresher version, Fun Fondue is a trendy spot that takes inspiration from sushi trains, allowing you to pick fresh ingredients from the conveyor belt at the bar and cook them in your individual pot, washed down with cooling rosemary-infused tea.

Back at The Temple House, the exquisite Mi Xun spa shares a heritage courtyard dwelling (I'm told it once housed monks) with a vegetarian teahouse. This soothing, apothecary-inspired venue is a fine spot to sample other local dishes like bamboo shoots in red oil, *dandan* noodles, and wild-vegetable salad with white fungus and chestnut, accompanied by

WHETHER IN THE FASHIONABLE COFFEEHOUSES AND WINE BARS OF TAIKOO LI OR THE CITY'S AUTHENTIC OLDER QUARTERS, CHENGDU IS RENOWNED FOR ITS LEISURELY LIFESTYLE

Getting There

The Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport is now the fourth-largest aviation hub in China, so access is easy. Among the many carriers serving the airport, **Silk Air** (silkair.com), **Dragonair** (dragonair.com), and **Thai Airways** (thaiairways.com) offer direct flights from Singapore, Hong Kong, and Bangkok, respectively.

Getting There

Thanks to a slew of recent openings, Chengdu has no shortage of luxury hotel accommodation. **The Temple House** (86-28/6636-9999; thetemplehousehotel.com; doubles from US\$300) is the newest addition to the mix, and is perfectly placed to explore the shops and heritage sites of the Taikoo Li complex. Also on hand are the **St. Regis Chengdu** (86-28/6287-6666; stregis.com; doubles from US\$250), where highlights include a sommelier-curated wine bar and a rooftop lounge; and the **Niccolo Chengdu** (86-28/8220-8888; marcopolohotels.com; doubles from US\$140) at International Finance Square, a mixed-use retail development in the center of town that includes an Imax cinema, an ice-skating rink, and a sculpture garden.

Further afield, the **Six Senses Qingcheng Mountain Resort** (86-28/8712-6666; sixsenses.com; doubles from US\$300) provides the perfect roost for exploring the countryside around Mount Qingcheng.

**Fifty Shades
of Green**

Overlooking the lush surrounds of the Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain, whose namesake summit is revered as the birthplace of Taoism.







All in Good Taste
A spread of farm-style Sichuanese dishes at Zhang San Feng Bistro in Dujiangyan; The Temple House's apothecary-styled Teahouse serves green tea plucked from the slopes of nearby mountains. Opposite: The courtyard at the Teahouse.

a selection of delicate green teas from the nearby mountains.

In the mild evenings, Chengdu's penchant for outdoor socializing finds a stylish interpretation at The Temple House's Jing bar, where locals and guests begin congregating from late afternoon to sip craft cocktails like the Sichuan Mule, spiked with peppercorn and ginger. Later, the resident DJ spins ambient house music from a booth suspended above the gem-toned bar.

Chengdu is the gateway to an incredibly beautiful part of China, and it's worth heading out of the city to explore the surrounding mountains, ancient villages, and panda sanctuaries. This has become much easier to accomplish in style since the recent opening of the Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain, whose sleek Tesla transfer whisks guests along brand new highways to Qingcheng Mountain Town, an hour's drive from the city.

Or you could ride a high-speed train to Qingcheng Station in just 49 minutes—the new transport infrastructure is the beginning of a large-scale transformation of the area. China's Wanda Group—which intends to surpass Disney as the world's largest tourism company by 2020—is investing some US\$17 million to create a “cultural tourism city” complete with an indoor ski slope, horror theme park, high-

end hotels, and folk-music bars. The massive site is already taking shape, but fortunately—for now at least—you need only turn off the main highway to discover authentic mountain communities. Here, tiny red tuk-tuks and tractors are the preferred modes of transport. The local market is a sensorial fairground as farmers display seasonal produce on straw mats—sweet kiwi (Mount Qingcheng is the home of the original Chinese gooseberry), white walnuts, porcini mushrooms, and loads of chili and fermented pastes—while the local street dentist attends to cavities as crowds look on.

The first Six Senses property in China epitomizes rural resort idyll under the calming gaze of Mount Qingcheng, a holy peak revered as the birthplace of Taoism. Spacious lodge-style suites look out to scented gardens filled with pomelo and pomegranate trees. Making the most of the region's bounty, an organic farm on the property grows rice, seasonal vegetables, and mountain herbs that are served in the three hotel restaurants. One morning I'm invited to collect warm-laid eggs from the chicken coop, which the chef then poaches with local smoked pork for a delicious eggs Benedict.

Guests will be tempted to spend their days lazily gazing at the mountain from garden loungers and getting pampered at the spa, which floats atop a meditative pond. But it's well worth rousing oneself





Countryside Chic

Above: A room at the Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain. Opposite: Yucheng Lake is a popular tourist stop on the slopes of Mount Qingcheng.

for more energetic adventures. A three-hour hike from the resort takes you to the “front mountain” of Qingcheng, which was inscribed as a World Heritage Site (along with the nearby Dujiangyan Irrigation System) in 2000. The sense of peace and spirituality is palpable as you climb forested trails, passing well-preserved temples, villages, and caves that have been a wellspring of Taoism and tai chi for millennia. And if the fantasy-like temples with exaggerated wing-tipped rooflines and steep mountain staircases look familiar, that’s because they were the inspiration for the movie *Kung Fu Panda 2*; the Dreamworks Animation team spent several months in these mountains to study the architecture and martial arts.

On my second evening, I take a short drive to Dujiangyan, best known for its ancient irrigation system (built in 256 B.C., it’s still in use today.) A stroll around the area by day takes you over suspension



bridges and past venerable shrines, but the old town is more exciting after dark, when its cobblestone lanes and magnificent frescoed wood bridge are festooned in colorful lights. Even the fast-flowing Min River is illuminated in Technicolor blue. From here, I hail one of Dujiangyan’s adorable black-and-white “panda taxis” for the short ride to Zhang San Feng Bistro, a rustic local eatery serving farm-style dishes like rich *mapo* tofu, juicy beef in a bed of red and green chilies, and ribbons of streaky pork stuffed inside flatbread. It goes down remarkably well with an urn of house-aged yellow wine infused with sour-sweet dried plums.

I rise early on our last morning in Qingcheng, easing into the day with some tai chi moves taught by a local master before setting off for Panda Valley, a 10-minute drive from the resort. There are fewer than 1,900 giant pandas on earth, and only around 120 in the wild, with most of the remaining pandas living in research and breeding sanctuaries in central China. Breeding programs are proving successful, with 17 cubs born to Chengdu pandas this July and August alone. But reintroduction to the wild is still tricky, and this is an important focus at Panda Valley.

Although smaller than the panda breeding base in Chengdu, Panda Valley is home to around 30 giant pandas and is blissfully free of crowds. I arrive before 9 a.m. when the docile animals are at their most active, stripping and crunching sticks of bamboo, the husks piling up on their ample bellies until they roll over languidly to reach for the next branch.

Wandering in the early-morning sunshine through the peaceful mountain park past trickling streams and bamboo grottoes is a delight, and, as expected, being up close to these remarkable creatures is definitely a high point of my trip. But in this “Land of Plenty,” it’s just one of many. ☺

One man's quest for the perfect Portuguese clam dish provides a fine excuse for some culinary sleuthing in Lisbon, Évora, and beyond.

BY **KENDALL HILL** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **CHRISTOPHER WISE**

S H E L L





L G A M M E



Atlantic Bounty
Restaurante Mar do Inferno in Cascais serves up some of the finest seafood around, including a memorable rendition of clams Bulhão Pato. Opposite: Fishing from a nearby cliff.

You won't know Raimundo António de Bulhão Pato. Even his fellow Portuguese struggle to recall why his fame endures more than a century after his death. Except for the clams.

Amêijoas à Bulhão Pato is a classic national dish. Like most Portuguese cuisine, it's remarkably simple to make. Officially there are just four ingredients: clams, olive oil, garlic, and coriander. Some chefs add a squeeze of lemon juice, often some salt and pepper, sometimes onions. But purists stick to the basics, letting the quality and freshness of local ingredients win diners over to the unique gustatory pleasures of the Iberian Peninsula.

I first fell for these clams in the summer of 2014, under a bright blue sky on the terrace of Mar do Inferno. The "Sea of Hell" restaurant, named for a nearby blowhole carved by Atlantic waves into a limestone cliff, serves the finest seafood in Cascais, the resort playground of Lisbon's smart set. It was recommended to me by Heleen Uitenbroek Rosa da Silva, the Dutch-born owner of the boutique hotel where I was staying in Lisbon's Chiado neighborhood. When I asked where to find the city's best seafood, she directed me straight to Mar do Inferno. Have the clams, she said. So I did, and I was hooked.

The purplish mollusks arrived piled high in a *cataplana*, a metal dish shaped, appropriately, like a clam. They were drenched in rich juices, briny but somehow also buttery, each mouthful heady with the twin hits of crushed cloves and pungently fragrant coriander. The clams were so fresh they almost leapt from their shells. I soaked up the juices with pillowy white bread rolls, gazed across the Atlantic to where yacht sails winked in the breeze, and kicked myself for having overlooked Portugal until now.

From that moment I became obsessed with clams Bulhão Pato. I ate them every day for the rest of my trip, always quizzing restaurant staff about the dish and the man behind it. But the more I asked about him, the less I learned. All anyone seemed to know of Senhor Bulhão Pato was that he had been a 19th-century politician, poet, and epicurean. Beyond that, nada. As a journalist, that frustrated me.

So a year later I returned to Portugal determined to accomplish two things: eat as many clams Bulhão Pato as is humanly possible in a bid to find the best, and discover something more of the man who be-



queathed this gastronomic gift. An esoteric quest, sure. Frivolous even. But if all else failed, at least there'd be clams.

Shortly after my 30-hour flight from Australia touches down in Lisbon, I head straight to market. The Moorish-accented Mercado da Ribeira supplied fresh food to generations of Lisboetas from 1892 until it fell into disuse earlier this century. After a multimillion-dollar makeover sponsored by *Time Out Lisbon*, it was reopened in 2014 as a hip showcase of the city's signature chefs and food stores, complete with a revived fresh-food section.

At lunchtime on Thursday the market's 750 seats are thronged with diners tucking into acclaimed chef Alexandre Silva's pork belly, *pata negra* ham from the Alentejo plains, and the city's signature *prego* (steak sandwiches). It takes me six tries to find a stall selling



Iberian Intrigue
 Clockwise from far left: Lisbon's hilltop Graça district offers the best views over the city; a gardener picking olives in an Évora churchyard; bottles of 1850 Verdelho Madeira at Gambrinus; the terrace at Marisqueira Azul, a top spot for seafood at Lisbon's Mercado da Ribeira.

clams, but I finally stumble upon Marisqueira Azul, tucked behind the skylit main hall. I take a seat at a marble bench facing an ice shelf of lobster and gooseneck barnacles and order my first plate of clams Bulhão Pato in a year.

Azul's version is unorthodox, using garlic, coriander ... and white wine. But the clams are good. Very good. A small mountain of shells in a cloudy puddle of wine and juices riddled with great hunks of garlic and wilted strands of coriander. My jet-lagged palate zings to life. I'm as happy as a you-know-what.

Célia Pedroso and Lucy Pepper are journalists, guides, and co-authors of *Eat Portugal*, a definitive reference to the tastes of a nation. I contact them to ask if we could meet to discuss—and digest—clams, and they accept eagerly. To the Portuguese, and even English transplants like Lucy, an invitation to eat clams is irresistible.

Célia suggests Pinóquio, a favorite *cervejaria* (beerhouse) on touristy Praça dos Restauradores. It's a lively place where the decor is a time capsule from the 1950s and the waiters' green shirts match the minty hue of the interior. Two giant gray groupers, skewered on hooks in the front window, eye our terrace table as Célia and Lucy school me in native cooking customs.

"The thing about Portuguese recipes," says Lucy, "is that everyone claims their recipe is the only way, and that it's traditional. You can sit and have an argument about it all afternoon. It's fiercely debated."

**En Route
to Évora**

A view of the
rolling Alentejo
countryside.
Opposite: The
dining room at
Tasquinha do
Oliveira.







Local Flavor

Above, from left: Market workers in Évora; scarlet prawns at Cervejaria Ramiro; Évora's pretty central square, Praça do Giraldo; Carolina Oliveira in the kitchen of Tasquinha do Oliveira; the ever-busy terrace at Pinóquio, on Lisbon's Praça dos Restauradores.

When it comes to clams *Bulhão Pato*, my companions have very firm views. “The essential thing,” counsels Célia, “is not to mess it up by adding wine.”

“That makes it too rich,” Lucy nods. “It’s already rich enough.”

Onions are heresy: “They overpower everything else,” Célia says. The freshness of the coriander can make a big difference, as can preparation in *cataplanas*. “The flavors get more intense,” she assures me.

“It’s amazing that you can get so many different variations with just three ingredients,” Lucy laughs.

So how are the clams at *Pinóquio*? They arrive piping hot and swimming in a soupy sauce that is richer and more deeply flavored than usual. It’s really quite delicious, but there’s something fishy about it—and it’s not the clams. Pressed to reveal

Pinóquio’s secret, our waiter confesses their version is spiked with butter and mustard. “There’s nothing in the rules against adding mustard,” he shrugs. “Some people put *beer* in it.” He shakes his head and makes a face.

I wonder what *Bulhão Pato* would have to say. I’m also still wondering who on earth he was. Lucy thinks her husband might have some answers. Rui Ramos is a respected author and columnist who also happens to be one of Portugal’s foremost political historians. She calls him at his office at the Universidade de Lisboa and relays his comments to me.

Born in 1829, Raimundo António de *Bulhão Pato* emerged as a strongly left-wing republican in the second half of the 19th century, one of a band of agitators seeking an end to Portugal’s constitutional monarchy. Unlike his more hardline conspirators, the radical poet dreamed of a bloodless revolution.



Getting There

British Airways

(britishairways.com) flies to Lisbon daily from Hong Kong via London; from Singapore, the fastest route is with **Air France** (airfrance.com) via Paris.

Where to Stay

The months-old **Santiago de Alfama** (351-21/394-1616; santiagodealfama.com; doubles from US\$180) occupies a former 15th-century *palácio* amid the winding cobbled lanes of Lisbon's historic Alfama district. There are just 19 suave rooms and suites—ask for one with a view of the Tagus River. Located just outside the old city walls of Évora, the **Vitória Stone Hotel** (351-266/707-174; vitoriastonehotel.com; doubles from US\$185) is among the best digs in town, while the spacious, boho-chic **Vila Monte Farm House** (351-289/790-790; vilamonte.com; doubles from US\$130) in Moncarapacho makes a tranquil base for visits to the eastern Algarve.

“A rainbow revolution,” Ramos explains, “with everyone happy, birds tweeting. So people ridiculed him.”

It isn't much, just a glimmer of a ghost really, but Ramos's insights spur me on. Whenever possible I search online for more clues, but the most promising references are all in Portuguese, which I can barely understand. (Google Translate is next to useless in the matter. It insists his name is Mr. Bulhão Duck.) Meanwhile, the English entries have scant detail and virtually all note that the man is far better remembered for his food than his poetry or politics. This I already know.

Célia and Lucy both maintain that Lisbon's best clams are to be found at Ramiro, an always-packed *cervejaria* in edgy Intendente. I visited there on my first trip but go again on their recommendation. The place is just as I remembered it: bursting at its

polished-oak and marble seams; the kitchen a blur of industry and noise; waiters strutting purposefully between tables and bubbling seafood tanks. There is no better spot for seafood in Lisbon, largely because nowhere else is this busy, so the seafood is always the freshest in town.

That's the secret to Ramiro's clams, I'm sure. The sauce is good but not great, thinner than at Mar do Inferno and a little sharper (possibly due to my enthusiasm with the lemon wedges). But the clams are briny and brilliant, each one a heart-shaped mouthful of the Atlantic waters that, until very recently, invigorated its valves and ventricles.

I also revisit Mar do Inferno and manage to recapture the same sense of delight I felt the previous year. My terrace table is the best in the house and the restaurant's matriarch, Maria de Lourdes Tirano, drops by to say hello. We smile awkwardly at each



Where to Eat**Cervejaria Ramiro**

1 Avenida Almirante Reis, Lisbon; 351-21/885-1024; cervejariaramiro.pt.

Gambrinus

23 Rua das Portas de Santo Antão, Lisbon; 351-21/342-1466; gambrinuslisboa.com.

Marisqueira Azul

Mercado da Ribeira, Avenida 24 de Julho, Cais do Sodre, Lisbon; 351-912/293-170.

Mar do Inferno

Avenida Rei Humberto II de Itália, Boca do Inferno, Cascais; 351-21/483-2218; mardoinferno.com.

Pinóquio

79 Praça Restauradores, Lisbon; 351-21/346-5106; restaurantepinoquio.pt.

Tasquinha do Oliveira

45 Rua Cândido dos Reis, Évora; 351-266/744-841.

Expert Advice

Célia Pedroso and Lucy Pepper's **Eat Portugal** (eatportugal.net) food tours in Lisbon and the Algarve are well recommended. They can also tailor itineraries to specific interests and appetites.

other because we have no words in common, but it's a lovely gesture all the same. The clams here are, I still maintain, better than those at Ramiro. Perhaps it's the suave, silky olive oil they use from Herdade de Apariça in Alentejo. More likely it's because here, the shellfish come with a side order of sunshine and shimmering ocean.

The tastings continue at Gambrinus, a clubby, old-school restaurant on a cobbled pedestrian street that has been catering to Lisbon's elite for 80 years. As headwaiter Octavio Ferreira puts it, "We are a very traditional restaurant. We haven't changed." There is a menu, of course, but regulars just ask for whatever classic Lisbonite dish they're craving. The kitchen can usually oblige. Alas, its clams *Bulhão Pato* are not the best. There's "just a touch" of white wine in the liquid, but enough to remind my dinner companion of Brussels-style *moules frites* (mussels with fries), and once he says that, I can't think of anything else.

Yet Gambrinus has one distinction that, for me, will always eclipse its food. The restaurant serves Madeira by the glass from vintages up to 165 years old. I order one from 1850 and imagine that *Bulhão Pato* might have enjoyed this very same drop. "We are a small country but we have nice wines," the barman grins as he hands me a crystal glass of antique ruby liqueur. "And nice food."

Célia e-mails with some tidbits she's found about our man Raimundo. She says that in his book *O Poço da Cidade, Crónicas Lisboetas*, the respected journalist and Lisbon expert Appio Sottomayor claims the clams were made *for*, not by, *Bulhão Pato*. It's a crucial distinction, but one few Portuguese are aware of. And that wasn't the only surprise. It turns out Raimundo was actually Ramón, a Spanish émigré born in Bilbao and raised there until he was nine, when his family hired a Danish brig to take them to Portugal. According to José Garzón Sáez in *Antzina*, the magazine of a Basque historical association called *Antzinako*, the clam recipe originated from *Bulhão Pato*'s desire to recreate the clams in green sauce he remembered from his childhood in Vizcaya. He mentioned his cravings to João da Mata, a renowned chef at the now defunct Hotel Bragança, and *amêijoas Bulhão Pato* was born. Garzón Sáez maintains the addition of coriander is what makes the recipe exceptional. "The peculiarity is certainly coriander, whose consumption in Portuguese cuisine *Bulhão Pato* helped popularize," he writes.

My clam quest takes me next to Évora, the UNESCO World Heritage-protected capital of the Alentejo region, where I score a table at the tiny, highly recommended *Tasquinha do Oliveira*. Beyond the potted olives, lanterns, and welcome mat at the roped-off entry, the *tasquinha* ("little tavern") is homely inside: a clutter of tables and wall deco-

rations between the bar, staffed by host Mañuel Oliveira, and the kitchen, where his wife Carolina presides.

The menu is entirely in Portuguese, but no matter; I'm only after one thing. Mañuel conveys my order to Carolina who, I note from one of the framed certificates in the dining room, is a past winner of the Portuguese Academy of Gastronomy's grand prize for traditional cuisine. He also insists that I try his wife's *patanisca de bacalhau*. Cod cakes are another classic of the Portuguese cooking canon and, like clams, they have a poetic connection; one of the country's most revered contemporary writers, António Lobo Antunes, famously put them on a par with *Os Lusíadas*, the epic poem penned by Luís Vaz de Camões in the mid 16th century. "To know how to make codfish cakes is as important as to have read *The Lusíadas*," Antunes declared.

Mañuel delivers a plate of his wife's golden-fried fish fritters, whispering, "This is very special." He forks a Frisbee-size cake onto my plate. It's surprisingly light, a disc of fried cod and flour seasoned sparsely with parsley. I could easily eat them all but restrain myself. There are clams to come.

Oh, the clams. They are perfection. Mañuel assures me they use only the very best shellfish sourced from the Alentejo coast, just west of here. They are prepared in the proper way, with only olive oil, garlic, and coriander. The coriander is so pungent, its flavor so bright, fresh, and loud that it must have been pulled straight from the ground. On a scale of one to ten? A nine, I think, not least because I am made to feel like an honored guest in the Oliveiras' home while eating them.

A few days later, in the village of Moncarapacho in the southern Algarve region, I ask the staff at the gorgeous farmhouse hotel Vila Monte where I can eat clams nearby. The verdict is unanimous. I must go to *Marisqueira Fialho*, a "very simple place" revered for the seafood it sources straight from its backyard, the Ria Formosa lagoon.

Fialho is just a 10-minute drive away and is, as promised, very basic. Forlorn, even. In fact, it is closed.

Of course it is. The fishermen of the Algarve don't work Sundays, which means any restaurant that respects its seafood (and its clientele) doesn't open on Monday. Through the chain link-and-bamboo fence I spy an outdoor canteen of wood tables and mismatched chairs in timber, aluminum, and plastic, shaded by umbrellas sponsored by a global soft-drink brand. A rusting ice-cream sign complains in the warm wind. A black-and-white cat is sprawled, asleep, on one of the tables. It's more like a scene from *Paris, Texas* than *Pinheiro*, Portugal.

On the other side of the dirt road lies the lagoon, with the Atlantic beyond. It's the perfect setting for clams. It's also, I decide, the perfect reason to return to Portugal and continue the quest next year. ©

Mollusks on the Menu

Opposite: Digging in to a serving of clams *Bulhão Pato* at *Cervejaria Ramiro*, Lisbon's busiest—and arguably best—seafood restaurant.



Misty Mountains
Overlooking the
rolling, wooded hills
north of Dalat.



FRIENDS *in* HIGH PLACES

With the romance of its cool highland setting and the growing allure of its great outdoors, Dalat—Vietnam’s City of Eternal Spring—is as appealing today as it was a century ago, when French colonials first came here to escape the heat of Saigon. Perhaps even more so, for it now offers a slew of fresh diversions, from canyoning and caviar to teeing off at the region’s newest golf course.

BY **SANJAY SURANA** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **LIEM TRAN QUANG**

“Jump, jump, jump!”

barked a Vietnamese guide at his group of bearded German backpackers, urging them to rappel down an incline on the slopes of an otherwise tranquil pine forest. It was a practice run for the real thing to come a few minutes later, when they would attempt to abseil down a sheer rock face. The Europeans seemed a little nonplussed—it was 8:30 in the morning, after all—but at least they were game, bunny-hopping backward down the slope even as they wiped the sleep from their eyes.

My group was practicing a little farther downhill and our guides, thankfully, were more restrained. Seven of us, mostly strangers from different corners of the globe, had signed up with local operator Phat Tire Ventures for this five-hour canyoning excursion in the hills outside Dalat, where we would pick our way down drop-offs and waterfalls, leap off cliffs, and chute down natural waterslides, all in the name of thrill-seeking adventure.

Canyoning is just one of the activities that Phat Tire—and some of the town’s less established operators—offers, making Dalat a prime destination for visitors in search of a buzz greater than that delivered by a morning cup of *ca phe*. Situated 1,500 meters above sea level on a mountain-ringed plateau in Vietnam’s Central Highlands and blessed with eternal spring weather, Dalat seems almost tailor-made for outdoorsy types, be they mountain bikers or trekkers, white-water rafters or rock climbers. The salubrious conditions I encountered in April—cool and sunny, as it tends to be year-round—were unlike any I’ve experienced in Southeast Asia, even in the upper reaches of Malaysia’s Cameron Highlands. It was the kind of

weather that made me, a resident of sticky Singapore, ecstatic enough to actually jump off a cliff—and into a river 10 meters below.

Dalat’s climate is, in fact, its *raison d’être*, historically speaking. Though a scattering of mountain people inhabited the plateau for centuries before the French showed up, the town itself was only established after a colonial physician named Alexandre Yersin identified it in 1893 as an ideal spot for a health resort. Dalat was officially founded in the early 20th century as a refuge where French *colons* from Saigon could cool off, recharge, and rehabilitate—a Gallic version of the hill stations of British India, complete with gracious villas, an Art Deco train station, a swish hotel (the 1922-built Lang Bian, now the Dalat Palace), and three summer palaces belonging to Vietnam’s last emperor, Bao Dai, who also preferred Dalat’s cool climes to the heat of the imperial seat in Hue. Today, almost a million Vietnamese tourists are drawn here annually by that same weather, as well as by the town’s European architecture, fragrant pine forests, and more playful—some would say “kitschy”—attractions, such as the horse-and-cart owners dressed in cowboy costumes, and Xuan Huong, a scenic central lake stocked with swan-shaped pedal boats favored by nuzzling paramours.

A new lure to add to that list is The Dàlat at 1200, so named for its elevation above sea level. The development—a joint venture between Singapore-based Centurion Properties and Vietnamese businessman Nguyen Viet Quy—surrounds a reservoir lake and will comprise many parts, including a golf academy and private villas. For now, though, there’s a gorgeously contoured 18-hole golf course designed by Burmese golfer Kyi Hla Han, which was being readied for private play during my visit. It’s slated to feature on the 2016 Asian Tour circuit.

The 30-minute drive out there took me past patchworks of tilled land, rice terraces, plots of orchids and tiger lilies, and hills shrouded in morning mist. “This landscape, there’s nowhere else like it in Vietnam,” The Dàlat’s general manager, a dry-witted Englishman named David Hill, told me shortly after I arrived on site. “It’s cooler than the Cameron Highlands and without the crush.” Jumping into a four-by-four golf cart for a look around, we bumped over rocks and around

City in the Hills

Opposite, clockwise from top left: The banks of Dalat’s centerpiece Xuan Huong Lake are enjoyed by young and old alike; Dalat Cathedral; a street vendor preparing *banh trang nuong*, a quintessential Dalat snack often described as a cross between a pizza and a burrito; artichokes at Dalat Market.





Wet and Wild
On the shores of
Tuyen Lam Lake.
Opposite: Phat Tire
mountain-biking
guide Minh.





All of a sudden, the view opened to a
panorama of the city and the mountains
around it, **the vista honeyed by the tweets
of swallows** and the dull, beating drum of
the Truc Lam monastery far below us

a soggy track next to a freshly watered hole before bolting through the jet of a sprinkler. “Don’t write that I did that,” Hill chuckled. Birdsong filled the air, punctuated by the hooting of owls and the rhythmic *chk-chk* of sprinklers. We weaved past a pump station and stacks of iron beams to the course’s second nine, which was in the midst of being grassed. A solitary wild mango tree stood between two holes like a giant broccoli. “We’re keeping that,” Hill said.

Once The Dàlat’s clubhouse (which will offer 24 guest rooms of its own) is completed, the next part of the project will kick in. This includes a second lakeside course, a hotel, villas and apartments, a golf and tennis academy, equestrian and water-sports centers, and hiking and biking trails across 850 hectares of thickly wooded terrain. At the far end of the site’s reservoir lake, the contours of the neighboring village looked a little like the rolling hills of a Tuscan hamlet. “Nice spot, isn’t it?” Hill remarked with considerable understatement as he turned around to survey the development. “We’ll use the tagline ‘The Great Escape.’” I could see why.

Back in town I met with Barry Israel, whose own building project near Bao Dai Palace II may not be as ambitious as The Dàlat at 1200, but it’s every bit as telling of Dalat’s future. Israel, an American lawyer-turned-entrepreneur, has lived in Vietnam for more than a decade. For a while he owned the Dalat Palace hotel, a bastion of old-world elegance where guests sleep in canopied beds and dine on fine French cuisine at the wood-paneled Le Rabelais restaurant. Now, he and his Dalat-born wife Le Ngoc Khanh Tam are developing a gated residential enclave called La Vallée de Dalat in the hills above town. When complete, the one-hectare site will be home to eight colonial-style villas, which, to judge by Israel’s own 600-square-meter residence—which doubles as a show home for prospective buyers—will be gorgeous, with Spanish limestone-clad bathrooms, high ceilings, and white-oak floors. “We

designed them with the view in mind,” Israel told me. I understood what he meant the moment I stepped out onto the back veranda. A steep valley was trailed by a series of mountain ridges, with the undulating humps of Elephant Mountain to the right. Blackberries and lemons and hydrangeas sprouted from trees and bushes by the side of the house. I pictured myself spending many meditative hours here, staring at the horizon thinking about nothing except what lies in front of me.

“Dalat will take off,” Israel continued. “It will become a national city under Hanoi’s control in 2016 and will receive more funding from the capital. Apart from the great climate, there’s a good university and lower wages than Saigon or Hanoi. I think it would make a great location for the country’s high-tech industry.”

Israel and Le kindly offered to show me some other projects around Dalat. For an unassuming city of 250,000, there is plenty going on. Our first stop was Binh An Village, a newly built resort of 17 bright yellow villas next to Tuyen Lam Lake, with vibrant, blossoming landscaping and a sense of pervasive calm. “The sunrises are spectacular,” Israel said as we walked around, whispering so as not to disturb the tranquility. Next we visited Dalat Hasfarm, a flower-growing operation on the outskirts of Dalat where more than one million roses, chrysanthemums, carnations, begonias, and cyclamens flourish year-round in plastic-sheathed greenhouses that glow at night like lanterns. Closer to town, a venture called VMV Asia imports bulk wine from Europe and South America and bottles it here, offering a welcome alternative to the locally grown Vang Dalat, which tastes like it was left to cook in the sun. Dalat is also the base of spawning operations for Caviar de Duc. Owned by Le Anh Duc, a lively man with a trove of outlandish tales that he recounts in Russian-accented English (he lived in Moscow for 13 years), Caviar de Duc exported five tons of osetra caviar in 2014, mostly to Russia, though it has a growing local

Grande Dame

Opposite: Originally opened in 1922, the Dalat Palace hotel still embodies the European elegance that homesick French colonials once enjoyed, from the fine French dining at Le Rabelais restaurant to guest rooms done up in period furnishings.

business. “I have almost two million sturgeon [across five farms in Vietnam], and in five years I will produce 100 tons of caviar,” he tells me. “I want to grow this on an industrial scale, to be cheaper than Russia, to bring caviar to the table of ordinary people!”

On my third day in Dalat it was time to explore the town itself. Thankfully, walking here is remarkably pleasant and safe. The traffic flows in a typically Vietnamese laissez-faire manner but even though there are no traffic lights here, it is almost provincial in its lack of intensity. Roses fill flowerbeds built into the road medians.

As dusk fell I ambled over to Tran Hung Dao Street to admire some of the city’s finest French villas. Their faded stone walls, clay roof tiles, and asymmetrical rooflines were a reminder of the town’s colonial boom days, and I stood outside each one trying to picture the city back then. I then walked down to Xuan Huong Lake. Along with the Dalat Cathedral (where some of the stained glass looks Mondrian-esque), a miniature Eiffel Tower, and the surreal Crazy House sculpture project—cum-hotel, the man-made lake is one of city’s main sights. At night its still, ink-black waters reflected the neon lights of the lakefront Thuy Ta restaurant like a mirror. Old men in wool hats fished along its banks and carousing teenagers zipped around on tandem bikes. In the nearby market area, food stalls offered skewers of meat, bowls of *pho* pulled from big vats, and *banh trang nuong*, a Dalat snack that can best be described as a cross between a pizza and burrito—processed cheese, sausage, mayonnaise, and charcoal-grilled fish rolled into a rice pancake. The gentle hum of scooters, the constant soundtrack, slowly wound down over the course of the evening, and by 10 p.m. the roads were virtually empty.

As in all agriculture towns, Dalat rises early, and the following morning so did I to inspect the abundance of local produce. On the way to the market I greeted anyone that passed by with a hearty “*Xin chao*”—hello—and they invariably broke into large grins. When I arrived at the market at 6.30 a.m. it was already in full swing, with vendors doing a brisk business in artichokes, avocados, cauliflowers,

strawberries, blackberries, and leafy greens with robust stalks. As I scanned the highland bounty, I had to remind myself I was in Southeast Asia.

Ready for more adventure, I signed up for a hike and kayak excursion. My guide was Nhat, a smiley young man from Hue who’d studied tourism at university here—“there was lots of Marx and Lenin in the coursework,” he told me with

an air of resignation—then stayed on to work with Phat Tire. The first part of our walk took us past fields of potatoes and artichokes, groves of avocado trees, greenhouses full of white roses, and tangles of Arabica coffee plants. Soon we entered a pine forest on the slopes of Phoenix Mountain, startling a wild boar and sending it scurrying into the underbrush. The track narrowed as we continued uphill and ferns closed in about us. Nhat’s steady clip was set at a harried–New Yorker pace and I struggled to keep up. We spoke about minorities, politics, and religion—standard throwaway topics for a cool mountain stroll. At one point he recounted a Vietnamese aphorism. “In an election, most people think you should vote for a skinny man, not a fat man. A skinny man is hungry, and hasn’t been corrupted. But in truth you should vote for a fat man because he’s already enjoyed the fruits of so much corruption, he doesn’t want any more.”

All of a sudden, the view opened to a panorama of the city and the mountains around it, the vista honeyed by the tweets of swallows and the dull, beating drum of the Truc Lam monastery far below us. As I admired the scenery, Nhat pulled on a pair of long, thick socks—to protect against leeches, he said. I tucked my trousers into my thin, short cotton socks and prayed for mercy. I needn’t have. Half an hour later we emerged unscathed into a lakeside clearing, welcomed by the booming bass of Vietnamese pop music emanating from the sculpture park across the water. “Vietnamese tourist areas, they have to have music,” Nhat said, smiling wryly. He pulled a couple of kayaks from a locked hut and soon we were skimming across Tuyen Lam, the lake I’d seen from Binh Anh Village a couple days earlier. The setting was hauntingly serene, with no other boat in sight, though I did see a fisherman waiting patiently by his net, and another man wading in the shallows, using his feet to find clams. When thunder clapped nearby I asked Nhat how long before the rain rolled in. “Thirty minutes,” he confidently replied. Thirty seconds later it began to pour.

The next day, another Phat Tire guide, Minh, took me mountain biking. Within 15 minutes we were in the hills outside town, passing newly erected greenhouses that attested to the town’s booming agricultural trade. We crisscrossed bone-rattling stretches of knotted tree roots and compacted clay and tackled steep climbs where my legs and balance failed me. Eventually we stopped at the crest of a small hill for a snack of banana bread. Wind whipped through the pine trees, making a sound like rushing water.

“People come here and get confused because they think they can hear a waterfall or the ocean,” Minh said. As I lay back on a patch of grass blanketed by pine needles, the sun filtering through the trees on a dry, cool, cloudless day, the sound of “water” filling the forest, all I could think was, “Who needs the sea?” ●



Getting There

Multiple flights on **Vietnam Airlines** (vietnamairlines.com) connect Dalat with Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang.

Where to Stay

For the grandest accommodation in town, book a room at the **Dalat Palace** (84-63/382-5444; dalatresorts.com; doubles from US\$170), where old-world charm is matched by world-class service. **Binh An Village** (84-63/380-0999; binhanvillage.com; doubles from US\$140) is a more serene affair on the shores of Tuyen Lam Lake, with villas and suites in a beautifully gardened setting.

What to Do

Golfers will appreciate Dalat’s handful of courses, the latest of which is the Kyi Hla Han—designed layout at **The Dalat at 1200** (dalat1200.com), which will open to non-members with the completion of its clubhouse in the summer of 2016.

For other outdoor pursuits, contact **Phat Tire Ventures** (ptv-vietnam.com), whose range of activities includes white-water rafting, canyoning, and mountain biking.

Town and Country

Opposite, clockwise from top left: An old French villa on Dalat’s Tran Hung Dao Street; one of The Dalat at 1200’s legion of caddies; the multi-tiered Datanla Falls is a popular tourist site within easy reach of town; a lakeside fairway at The Dalat at 1200’s newly opened golf course.



With summer's arrival in Australia, it's the perfect time to head down under for a break on one of the continent's countless beaches. To help you choose which one, here are 10 seaside resorts—from Tasmania to Western Australia, tropical Queensland to the outskirts of Sydney—where comfort is king and the setting is spellbinding.

BY NATASHA DRAGUN

SAND CASTLES

Shore Enough
Exploring a sandbar
near Hayman
Island in the Great
Barrier Reef.



Hanging Out
Relaxing in a
beachside tent at
Sal Salis. Opposite:
Mediterranean
colors meet
Australian-style
charm at
Halcyon House.



Best for Marine Encounters:
SAL SALIS

WHERE: Stretching for 280 kilometers along Australia's west coast, Ningaloo Marine Park is home to an estimated 250 species of coral and 500 species of fish. It's here that you'll find upscale tented wilderness camp Sal Salis, set among sand dunes within Cape Range National Park about 1,200 kilometers north of Perth.

WHY: It's not easy to beat a Great Barrier Reef marine experience, but the packages on offer at Sal Salis win for the fact that they give guests the chance to glimpse the world's largest fish: the whale shark. Growing up to 12 meters in length, these gentle giants migrate to Ningaloo Reef between April and July. Guests checked into the retreat's nine luxury tents, backdropped by the park's coastal dunes and dramatic gorges, can book expeditions to explore the reef or simply enjoy the airy, stilted accommodation, replete with plush beds, hammocks, and private en suites.

LAY OF THE SAND: Steps from the sand, Sal Salis is a magical place to get up close and personal with the native fauna; red kangaroos and emus are regular visitors to the camp. A few kilometers south of is the aptly-named Turquoise Bay—the water here is crystal-clear year-round, which means that snorkelers can enjoy perfect visibility as they go eyeball-to-eyeball with parrotfish, stingrays, trevally, and more.

—61-8/9949-1776;
salsalis.com.au;
doubles from US\$530;
closed December 1–
March 14



Best for Country Swagger:
DRIFT HOUSE

WHERE: Victoria's Great Ocean Road on the blustery southwest coast is known for its wide expanses of sand and epic surf breaks—and, thanks to Drift House, accommodation that you'll never want to leave. Located at the far reaches of the scenic coastal strip, Drift House is set amid Port Fairy's wide, slow streets lined with full-skirted Norfolk Island pines.

WHY: A pilgrimage along the Great Ocean Road is enough of a reason to consider a visit to Drift House, its four individually designed rooms set over two floors of a bluestone building and crafted with just the right amount of color, salvaged timber, artwork by the owner, and bathrooms decorated with Japanese tiles—one also comes with a balcony overlooking the Moyne River and an open fireplace. Instead of a restaurant, expect generous breakfast hampers, which are best enjoyed by the pool. Music fans will want to visit in March for the Port Fairy Folk Festival.

LAY OF THE SAND: While the closest water is the Moyne River, which Drift House overlooks, Port Fairy's long East Beach is just a short stroll away. Visitors can also cross a causeway to Griffiths Island, home to the town's historic lighthouse and an important breeding ground for migratory shearwater birds from September to April annually.

—61-3/5568-3309; drifthouse.com.au;
doubles from US\$268



Best for Surfers:
HALCYON HOUSE

WHERE: Spanning more than 35 kilometers of sand, the Tweed Coast in northern New South Wales deserves its place among the most scenic shores in Australia. Here, the sleepy town Cabarita Beach is an unlikely location for one of the country's newest boutique hotels, but that hasn't stopped Halcyon House from earning considerable applause since it opened its doors in May.

WHY: A 25-minute drive north of Byron Bay, this former 1960s surfside motel has been transformed into a blissful beach retreat, uniting the colors of the Mediterranean—whitewashed walls beside overstuffed blue lounge chairs—with quintessential Australian charm. The 21 rooms are individual in design, from the handpicked artwork to the eclectic antiques, which also spill into the Paper Daisy restaurant where chef Ben Delvin prepares dishes such as paperback-grilled fish and pippies with potatoes while you gaze over pandanus palms to the pool.

LAY OF THE SAND: It may be located halfway between the glitzy Gold Coast and bohemian Byron Bay, but Cabarita Beach is a world away from both in ambiance. A magnet for surfers for decades—world-class pro Joel Parkinson is based here, and gives lessons—it's also popular among divers and whale-watchers.

—61-2/6676-1444; halcyonhouse.com.au;
doubles from US\$390



Best for True Isolation:

THE BERKELEY RIVER LODGE

WHERE: Only accessible by air from Darwin or Kununurra, this remote Northern Territory lodge sits on the edge of the Berkeley River and a vast yet unnamed beach overlooking the Timor Sea.

WHY: The resort's 20 villas are positioned along a 65-meter-high dune to command 180-degree panoramas sweeping from Joseph Bonaparte Gulf to Reveley Island, or from the mouth of the Berkeley River to its rugged red gorges beyond. Nothing has been spared in fitting out the accommodations, which come with custom furniture, spacious decks, and deep soaking tubs. But the real allure is in the activities: barramundi fanatics flock here for some of the best fishing in the Kimberley region—the resort offers heli-fishing expeditions—and there are also cruises to gorges and Casuarina Falls, where saltwater crocodiles lurk in the shallows.

LAY OF THE SAND: The long stretch of sand abutting the lodge may not have a name, but it's certainly an attraction, especially during the nesting season for flatback turtles. Join resident naturalists on a sunset four-wheel-drive tour of the beach.

—61-8/9169-1330; berkeleyriver.com.au; doubles from US\$1,176; closed November 1–February 28



Best for Celebrity Spotting:

ONE&ONLY HAYMAN ISLAND

WHERE: The northernmost of the Whitsunday Islands in Queensland's Great Barrier Reef, Hayman is blissfully free of development, save for this stunning hideaway tucked into a cove on the 400-hectare island's south coast.

WHY: Acquired in 2014 by the One&Only group, the resort is a perfect mix of barefoot luxury and outrageous luxury—surfboards and mindblowing yachts; silver-service restaurants and sand-floored bars. The 160 rooms, suites, and villas are the epitome of tropical style, with an earthy palette complemented by cool flourishes and natural materials. Also on hand are seven restaurants and bars and a lavish spa.

LAY OF THE SAND: If you check into one of the Kerry Hill-designed villas, you can step out your sliding glass door onto a perfect stretch of sand, replete with coconut palms and an inner reef that attracts turtles and stingrays. Slightly farther afield is Whitehaven, regarded as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Hayman can organize a private 45-minute helicopter transfer to the powder-white strip—you'll fly over Heart Reef to get there—with a champagne lunch by the water when you arrive.

—61-7/4940-1234; hayman.oneandonlyresorts.com; doubles from US\$569

Best for Animal Lovers:

SOUTHERN OCEAN LODGE

WHERE: You don't check in to this South Australian property on a whim—the 45-minute flight from Adelaide to Kangaroo Island is followed by a 1.5-hour car transfer, often along corrugated roads. But arriving at the dramatic glass-and-stone structure, sweeping along cliffs on the south coast of the island, is enough to make you forget the commute. The glass of bubbly awaiting you in the lobby also eases the pain.

WHY: From the eco-attuned accommodation to the mostly foraged meals and wild setting, Southern Ocean Lodge is hard to fault. The 21 suites are designed with recycled timber, hand-cut limestone, sandblasted floors, and designer furnishings. The Great Room deserves its name, with plenty of lounge chairs to sink into and a walk-in cellar showcasing mostly South Australian wines. Likewise, the spa here uses local botanicals, and the ever-changing menu in the dining room makes the most of what's local, seasonal, and fresh. When it comes time to explore the surrounds, personalized itineraries include visits to Admirals Arch, known for its fur seals, and Seal Bay, home to one of Australia's largest colonies of sea lions; Kangas & Kanapés, a sunset excursion pairing oysters and bubbles in a field of kangaroos; and a nocturnal tour where you'll spot koalas and wallabies.

LAY OF THE SAND: Kangaroo Island is more about long walks on the beach than it is swimming—with the water coming straight from Antarctica, only the brave dip their toes in here, even in warmer months. But there's something incredibly invigorating about strolling along the windswept stretch of sand at Hanson Bay, foam hitting your face, knowing that a fire and glass of wine await nearby.

—61-2/9918-4355; southernoceanlodge.com.au;
doubles from US\$1,568

Best for a Taste of the Tropics:

LIZARD ISLAND

WHERE: Positioned off Cape York Peninsula in the Great Barrier Reef, Lizard Island is the most northerly island resort in Australia. Together with the three smaller islands of Palfrey, South, and Bird, it encircles a 10-meter-deep lagoon that is legendary among divers and snorkelers.

WHY: Tropical Cyclone Nathan left the resort in tatters when it whipped through Far North Queensland in 2014. The remote retreat, accessible only by charter flight from Cairns, took more than a year to welcome guests again, re-crafting the 40 accommodations including the resort gem: The Villa, set on a ridge with two bedrooms, a private pool, and Sunset Beach views. Most meals and activities are included—from

Southern Exposure

Cliffside suites at Kangaroo Island's Southern Ocean Lodge. Below: The terrace of an Anchor Bay suite at Lizard Island. Opposite, from top: Cooling off in a Berkeley River rock pool; poolside cabanas at the One&Only Hayman Island.



glass-bottom boat tours to stand up paddleboards and snorkeling—but there are add-ons that you'll want to pay for. Wine-and-cheese sunset cruise, anyone?

LAY OF THE SAND: The namesake of a 1,000-hectare national park, Lizard Island—itsself only 10 square kilometers—is home to a staggering 24 beaches. There are also plenty of walking trails, and depending on what time of year you visit, you'll be treated to sightings of green sea turtles (May), humpback whales (July), and manta rays (December). Guests can also book a visit the Lizard Island Research Station, part of the Australian Museum and at the forefront of the world's coral reef research.

—61-7/4043-1999; lizardisland.com.au;
doubles from US\$1,210

Best for Outdoor Enthusiasts:

CAPELLA LODGE, LORD HOWE ISLAND

WHERE: A volcanic landfall about 600 kilometers off the east coast of Australia, Lord Howe Island piques the interest of nature lovers for good reason. A World Heritage Site, the crescent of land is a tangle of tropical forest, with many of the plants and animals endemic to the island. With imperious mountain twins Gower and Lidgbird rising dramatically above, Capella sits overlooking the white sands of Lovers Bay, surrounded by the world's most southerly coral reef.



WHY: The nine suites at Capella have been designed with the environment in mind. From the moment you arrive, all walkways and windows point to sand, palm trees, and the ocean beyond. Activities begin steps from your light-filled room, with guided snorkeling expeditions, glass-bottom boat rides, surf trips to the breaks at Blinky Beach, or tours around Ball's Pyramid—the world's largest sea rock—on offer.

LAY OF THE SAND: The resort's own Lover's Bay may be small, but what it lacks in size, it makes up for in ambiance—ask to have your dinner alfresco on the beach. Rest assured that although you're well and truly in the middle of the forest, there are no snakes, no venomous or stinging insects or plants, and no dangerous daytime sharks off the beaches. There are, however, birds: at least 202 different species.

—61-2/9918-4355; lordhowe.com;
doubles from US\$1,050

Best for Getting Back to Nature:

SAFFIRE FREYCINET

WHERE: Luxury retreats don't get much more remote than Saffire Freycinet, two and a half hours by car north of Hobart in Coles Bay on Tasmania's east coast. To get here, you'll pass through some of the wildest national parkland in Australia, where koalas cry into the night and wallabies appear on your doorstep in the morning.

WHY: Designed to resemble a giant stingray, the main lodge at Saffire is a shrine to Tasmanian design. Soaring cathedral ceilings top enormous windows that look out over the 20 suites and jagged pink-hued Hazards mountain range in the distance. Stone and wood furnishings are grounding, as is the spa, where deep soaking tubs are the perfect entrée to treatments inspired by the surrounding bushland. Meals range from oysters—pluck and shuck them yourself on one of the resort's complimentary excursions—to multi-course meals showcasing the state's stellar produce.

LAY OF THE SAND: The lodge sits among eucalypt forest fronting Great Oyster Bay, a white-sand beach scattered with rust-red lichen-covered boulders. But perhaps the beach of choice in this part of the world is Wineglass Bay. Saffire organizes guided treks to the crescent of sand, which you'll likely have to yourself, despite the fact that it's regularly voted among the world's most beautiful beaches. Book the Le Pique Nique Experience to enjoy a private lunch at the end of your walk before a boat transfer back to the resort.

—61-3/6256-7888; saffire-freycinet.com.au;
doubles from US\$1,390

Best for Fine-dining in Style: PRETTY BEACH HOUSE

WHERE: An hour's drive—or a 20-minute seaplane ride—north of Sydney on a peninsula jutting into Broken Bay, this all-inclusive retreat celebrates its location in Bouddi National Park with a sensitive design that nods to nature throughout—think local sandstone and mudbricks, upcycled timber and muted fabrics.

WHY: Partly destroyed by a fire in 2012, Pretty Beach House reopened in 2015 with the same team at the helm as nearby Bells at Killcare Boutique Hotel, including applauded Italian chef Stefano Manfredi, who has crafted a seriously indulgent menu for guests. Meals—from wood-fired pizzas to degustations—can be enjoyed alfresco, in-room, or in the dining area of the main house, where you'll also find a bar, expansive wine cellar, and pool.

LAY OF THE SAND: All four pavilions enjoy beautiful views of ancient angophoras dotted down a hill to Pretty Beach. It's an easy stroll to the water, where private boat charters depart on half-day excursions to remote beaches and coves, with seasonal dolphin and whale spotting included. Also within reach are Killcare Beach for great surf and stunning Tallow Beach.

—61-2/4360-1933;
prettybeachhouse.com;
doubles from US\$1,425



Bay Watch
A view of the Brisbane Water estuary from the pool at Pretty Beach House. Opposite: Lord Howe Island.

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This holiday season, Pan Pacific Orchard, Singapore is offering a host of ways to enjoy treasured moments with loved ones. Families with young children can enjoy special kids amenities and bathrobes, daily buffet breakfast, and an extra bed all with compliments, while lovebirds can indulge in packages that include

treatments at the renowned Gregory Spa. The month of December is filled with merry feasting at the hotel's award-winning restaurant 10 at Claymore with special dishes such as chardonnay-poached cod and foie gras, and for true gourmands, the annual Christmas Family Luncheon with roast turkey, honey-baked ham, and a sumptuous buffet of sides and desserts is not to be missed. [For more information, call 65/6737-0811 or email orchard@panpacific.com](mailto:orchard@panpacific.com)



ON RESERVE

Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, is a newly opened Balinese haven that captures the true spirit of the island's traditional lifestyle. Surrounded by lush greenery and paddy fields, this luxurious getaway of spacious, flurid suites and villas is nestled in Ubud, the cultural heart of the island. The location is integrated into the

resort with activities such as traditional Balinese dance classes and morning yoga practiced by the Ayung River or in a village temple. A mix of the finer things in life and a focus on nature prove that the two are not mutually exclusive: the riverside spa offers holistic Balinese treatments, the kids' club comes as the Green Camp teaching outdoor education, and four restaurants serve an extensive wine menu along with meals made with ingredients from the chef's organic garden.

[For more information, call 62-361/479-2777 or visit mandapareserve.com](http://mandapareserve.com)

PACKAGED UP WITH PADMA

Celebrating Padma Resort Legian's 25th anniversary and the recent opening of its sister property, Padma Resort Ubud, the two resorts have joined forces to offer the Mountain and Beach Package, giving guests a unique way to experience Bali's best destinations. Three nights at the tranquil Padma Resort Ubud see guests unwinding in a lush river valley, followed by four nights enjoying Seminyak's style while staying at Padma Resort Legian. The package is available for stays until March 31 and additionally includes a host of enhancements: daily breakfast and afternoon tea, one dinner for two at Padma Resort Ubud's Puhu restaurant, a 60-minute massage for two at either of the resorts' spas, and free yoga, bicycling, and trekking at both resorts.

[For more information, call 62-361/752-111 or visit padmaresortlegian.com; or call 62-361/301-1111 or visit padmaresortubud.com](http://padmaresortlegian.com)



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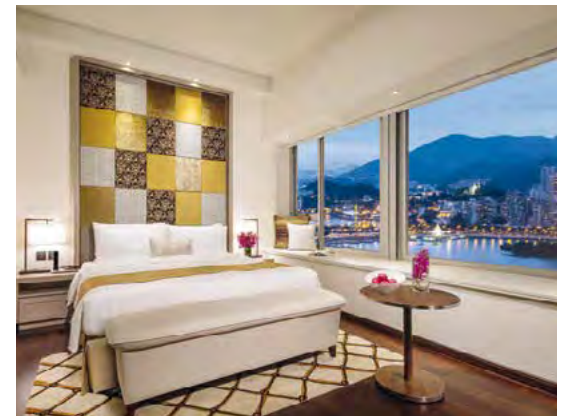
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Nothing enriches a stay in a foreign city more than some local wisdom on where to go and what to do. With its Ascott Lifestyle program, The Ascott Limited offers guests at its serviced residences just that, ensuring that traveling or living abroad brings all the excitement of exploring a new part of the world along with the domestic and lifestyle comforts of home. From artistic workshops to food tours, fitness classes, and language lessons, guests around the world will get to enjoy a myriad of bespoke experiences with Ascott.

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introducing guests to onsen baths around the Citadines Karasuma-Gojo Kyoto. Foodies can sign up for chocolate-making workshops in Brussels or join food tours around Manila's neighborhoods, and guests at Somerset Harbour Court Dalian who enjoy whipping up a feast in the kitchen can use the freshest organic produce delivered straight from local farms. For those who like to keep fit, a wealth of options ranging from classes to access to local health clubs, yoga sessions, and personal trainers ensures that guests have a wide variety of active options.



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the-ascott.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 many of Seminyak's hippest restaurants are just steps away outside.

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

ASTON PRIMERA PASTEUR



In Bandung, Aston Primera Pasteur is exactly the type of hotel travelers will look forward to calling home while in Indonesia's third-largest city. The 278 rooms are comfortable and sophisticated, and for those looking for the most luxurious stays, the hotel's Executive Floor exclusively houses the top three room categories and has its own lobby, restaurant, and well-equipped meeting room. Additional meeting rooms and a brasserie are available to all guests, while to take a break from Bandung's bustle, there are two pools—indoor and outdoor both—and a spa, making the hotel an ideal base for business, pleasure, or a happy mix of both.

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

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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.

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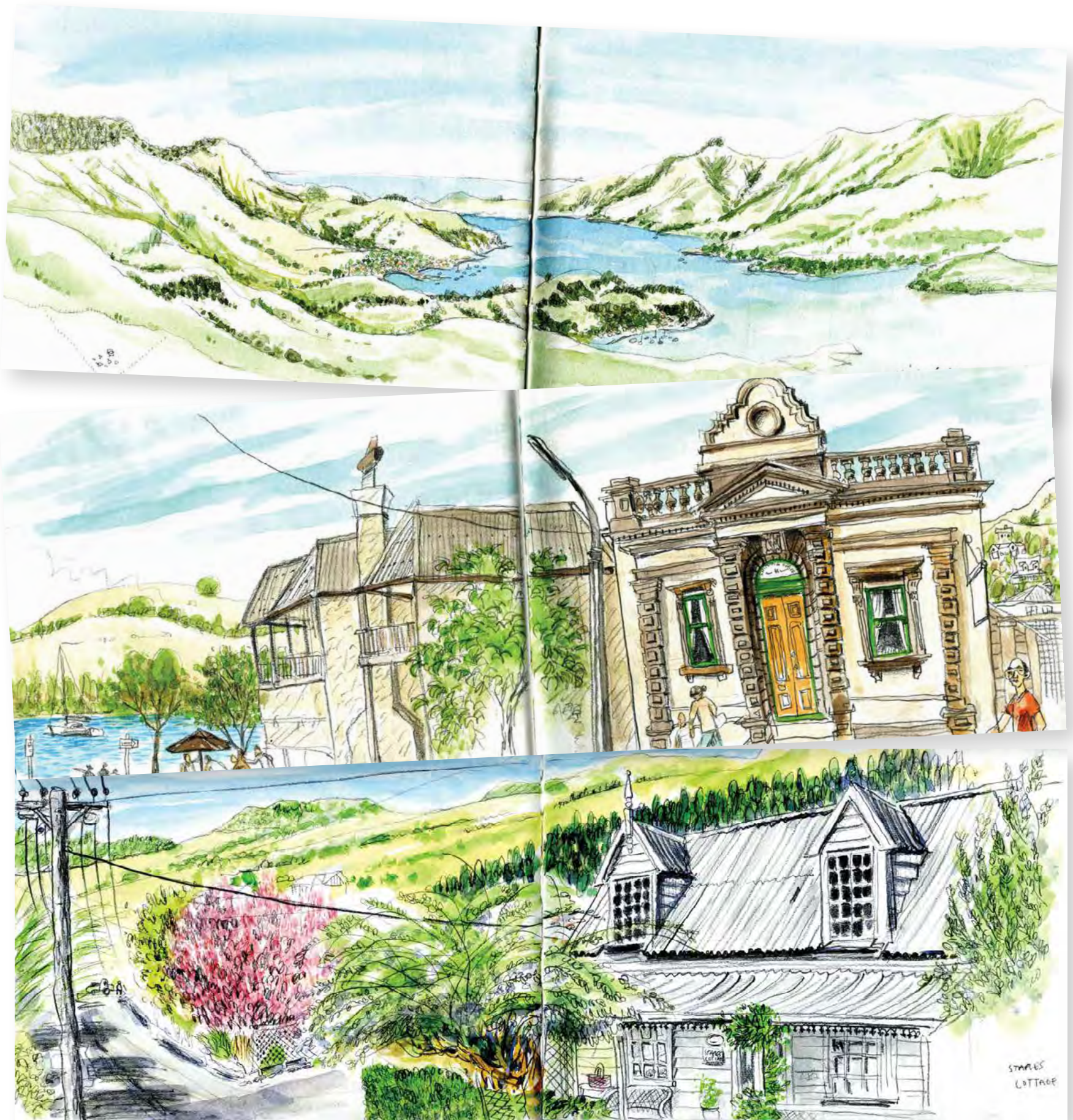
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KIWI CHARMER

“If there’s one thing Akaroa does well, it’s cute old cottages,” says Auckland-based graphic artist Murray Dewhurst of the oldest colonial town on New Zealand’s South Island. Settled by a shipload of French émigrés in 1840, Akaroa overlooks the sheltered waters of its eponymous “Long Harbor”—as the name translates from Maori—and provides visitors with both stunning scenery and a trove of quaint clapboard cottages and buildings. Since the 2010–2011 Canterbury earthquakes shut down the cruise-ship facilities at Christchurch’s port of Lyttelton, Akaroa has also become a principal stop on the South Island cruise circuit. “Several thousand new tourists arriving every other day must be a real bonus for local businesses,” says Dewhurst, who sketched these scenes on a visit last April. “Those numbers can be a bit overwhelming for a town with a permanent population of about 700, but luckily, there are many spectacular attractions in the area to help absorb the influx.” ©

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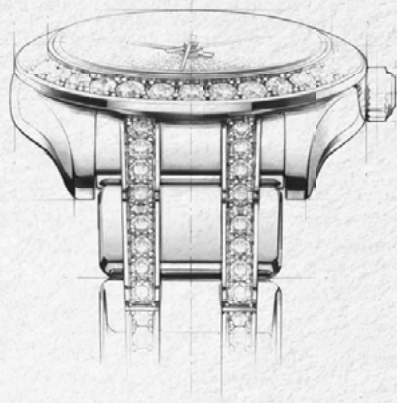
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