

MALDIVES CORFU SINGAPORE FIJI KOH KOOD SEYCHELLES

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FROM ASIA TO THE WORLD

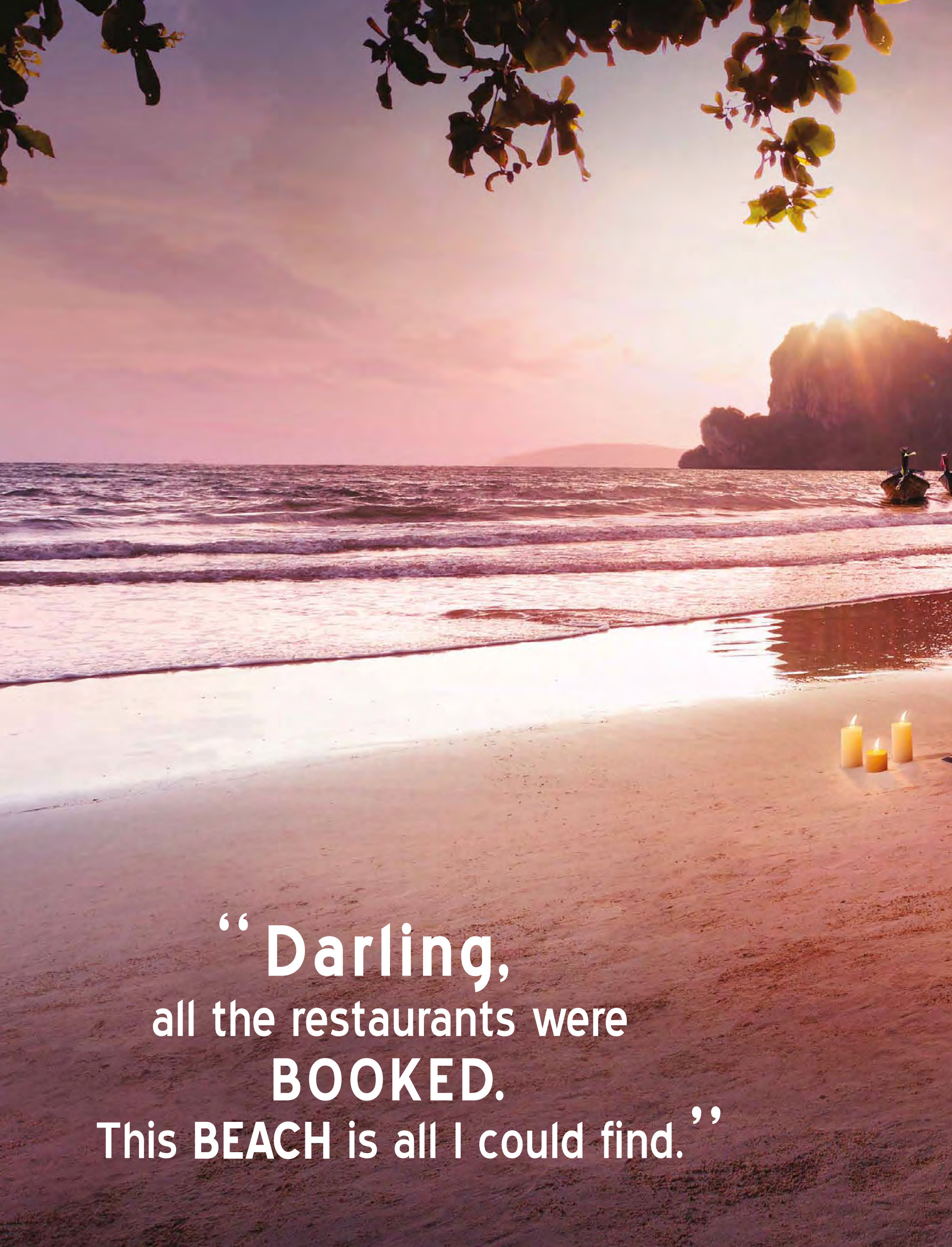
The
2015
Islands
Issue







LANVIN
PARIS



“Darling,
all the restaurants were
BOOKED.
This **BEACH** is all I could find.”



amazing
THAILAND

2015
Discover Thainess



Railay Beach, Krabi

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SINGAPORE, NOW AND THEN

In the 50 years since its independence, Southeast Asia's smallest country has been transformed from a struggling city-state into one of the richest nations in the world. Here's how it happened.

By **Daven Wu**

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NO SHOES REQUIRED

Despite being one of Thailand's biggest islands, Koh Kood remains a refuge from the crowds.

By **Gabrielle Lipton**



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SOUTH SIDE STORY

Hong Kong Island's southern shores have seen an upswell of new restaurants, galleries, and guest rooms. But could a new MRT line put the brakes on what's emerging as the city's unofficial artistic and cultural center?

By **Jonathan Hopfner**

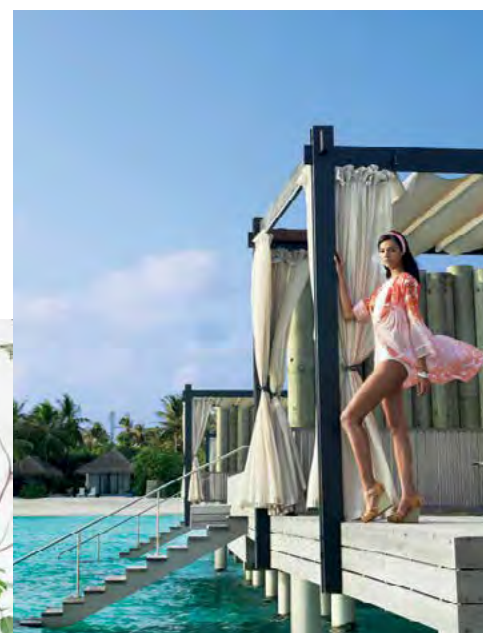
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ON THE COVER

Beachside at Velaa Private Island in the Maldives. Photographed by Nurulita. Styled by Peter Zewet. Swimsuit, sunglasses, and earrings by Louis Vuitton. Model: Laura Muljadi/Jim Models. Hair & makeup: Kwee Sandy.



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VELAA VISTA

Lapped by the translucent waters of the Maldives' Noonu Atoll, Velaa Private Island sets a sumptuous stage for the season's chicest seaside looks.

Photographs by **Nurulita**

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GREEK EXPECTATIONS

A long-deferred sojourn to Corfu proves well worth the wait, with pleasures aplenty to be sought out beyond the crush of the island's main beaches.

By **Daven Wu**

.....



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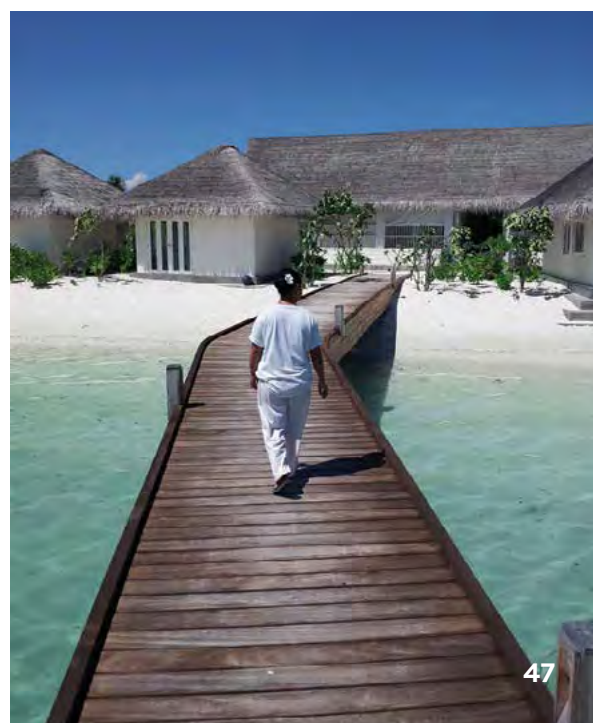
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Statue of Liberty, 1878.

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Centuries-old forests, crystal-clear lakes, and wildlife galore make Queensland's Fraser Island a nirvana for nature lovers.

58 FIJI

The appeal of Yasawa Island is not just its solitude but also the unique culture and cuisine that await visitors.

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF YASAWA ISLAND RESORT & SPA; CHRISTOPHER P. HILL; KALPANA SUNDER

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On the majestic islands of the Maldives, an exquisite tranquility shimmers in the air in this lush sanctuary brushed with dark emerald and yellow green hues. No matter where in the world you are, cosmopolitan Sydney or amidst the fascinating history of Xian, you'll always feel at home with smiles from the heart.



SHANGRI-LA

HOTELS *and* RESORTS

IDYLL WORSHIP

My idea of heaven? A private-island resort in the Maldives. I've so far only managed to sample a few, including a visit last year to The Residence Maldives, a gorgeous retreat in the Gaafu Alifu Atoll. But

each time I make the journey out to the equatorial heart of the Indian Ocean, the combination of soft white sand, turquoise-blue waters, and sublime hospitality—not to mention a healthy boost of vitamin D—delivers what to me is the ultimate island holiday. Thus it was with my latest Maldivian sojourn to Velaa Private Island, which appears on the cover and fashion pages of this, our annual Islands Issue. I'll leave you to examine the photographs for yourselves; a picture is, after all, worth a thousand words. But one thing they don't convey is how much I miss waking up to views of a translucent lagoon from my overwater villa.

This issue also carries a story about another Maldivian resort, Loama (see page 47), which, while providing all the expected luxuries, distinguishes itself with a unique focus on culture and heritage that even the most dedicated sun worshipper will find fascinating. And if culture is high on your agenda, consider traveling farther to Corfu (see page 104), where Daven Wu filled his days wandering the narrow lanes of Corfu Town and dining on superb Greek cuisine.

Closer to home, and in an urban setting, we look back on how much Singapore has changed in the 50 years since its independence (see page 68); it could be the ultimate island success story. And on the southern shores of Hong Kong Island (see page 88), Jonathan Hopfner takes the measure of an emerging creative hub in an unsung corner of the city. So whatever your idea of an island holiday might be, you'll find plenty of inspiration in the pages that follow. Happy island-hopping.



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**DAVEN WU****Home Base:** Singapore and London**Wrote:** "Greek Expectations," p. 104

.....

The thing that surprised me most about Corfu was just how incredibly friendly the Corfiots are. We were having lunch in a taverna in town one day. Next to us was a table of elderly ladies in their Sunday best (black cardigans, sensible heels, pearls) enjoying a huge meal and gossiping. They saw us spying on what they were eating, and they immediately sent over a sampler plate. It was extraordinarily courteous.

**KALPANA SUNDER****Home Base:** Chennai**Wrote:** "Shifting Sands," p. 52

.....

The best moment on my trip to Fraser Island was swimming in Lake McKenzie—the waters were so pure that it totally rejuvenated me. Oh, and finally spotting a dingo on 75 Mile Beach.

My advice to anyone who follows in my footsteps is to be sure to bring along a pair of good walking shoes, as one minute you may be in a creek or on the beach and the next minute trekking through a rain forest.

**JONATHAN HOPFNER****Home Base:** Hong Kong**Wrote:** "South Side Story," p. 86

.....

What impressed me most about Hong Kong's south side was the way a thriving and diverse cultural scene has taken shape independently of any central planning or official influence. The people involved have a lot of genuine affection for the neighborhood and what they do—refreshing in such a cash-driven city.

The next time I go back, I'll sign up for one of Young Master Ales' brewery tours and tastings.



MAKING PLANS FOR PERU

I am a big *DestinAsian* fan and just wanted to say that I really enjoyed the recent story on Peruvian food ["Peru on a Plate," April/May]. I've been hearing about how hot Peru's food is, but I had no idea that the country had such a rich culinary tradition. The images and text really made the food come alive. This is a destination that is high on my bucket list and I look forward to visiting soon. As always, it's a pleasure to read your magazine.

—Julia Gajcak, Bangkok

ISLAND HOPING I came across your April/May issue on a recent trip to Singapore and really enjoyed it, especially the article about the Mergui Archipelago ["First Footsteps"]. Admittedly, a yachting holiday isn't really my sort of thing, but I do hope that in the near future the Myanmar government will permit travelers to stay among the islands with fisherfolk. As an artist, I'd love to have the chance to do a series of sketches in this region.

—Chang Fee Ming, Kuala Terengganu

AN APPEAL FOR TIBET The recent earthquakes in Nepal have been devastating, causing great loss of life and widespread damage. Less well known is how this has impacted tourism in neighboring Tibet, where the affected areas have been limited to Nyalam County on the China-Nepal border. After the first quake in April, many tourists canceled their

trips to Tibet, even though its major attractions—Lhasa, Tsetang, Namtso Lake, Nyingchi—remain safe and intact. I am writing on behalf of a Tibetan travel agency to inform your readers how dire this situation is for many Tibetan people. Tour guides, drivers, and other members of the community have no other form of income, and they are now struggling to feed their families. Without tourism, there's no money. So while our thoughts and prayers go out to the people of Nepal, we also hope that travelers will continue to see Tibet as a safe and fascinating destination.

—Susan Lee, Lhasa

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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FOUR SEASONS TENTED CAMP GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Until September 30, Four Seasons is helping travelers see the best of Thailand with its Summer Compliments offer. Three-night stays at the group's Tented Camp Golden Triangle in northern Thailand not only include all meals and beverages, activities and excursions, and a daily spa treatment, but they also come with a complimentary two-night stay in either a Garden Pavilion at the Four Seasons Chiang Mai or a one-bedroom villa at the beachfront Four Seasons Koh Samui (fourseasons.com).



Maldives

VICEROY MALDIVES

.....

Given its 60 luxurious villas and remote location on a private island in the northern Shaviyani Atoll—50 minutes by seaplane from Male—the Viceroy Maldives is a place that guests want to settle into for as long as possible.

Luckily, that's easier to do this year with the resort's Breathe Easy and Linger Longer deals. Running until December 19, they respectively get you four nights for the price of three and seven nights for the price of five, breakfast and dinner (until September 30) included (viceroymaldives.com).



China

THE PENINSULA HONG KONG

.....

Since 1928, the Peninsula Hong Kong has stood as one of the city's beacons of luxury, complete with a Philippe Starck-designed restaurant, helipad, and some of the most glittering views in town. Through the end of September, its Suite Life offer gives guests who book a two-night stay in a suite the second night for free, for savings of as much as US\$676. The deal also includes use of one of the hotel's chauffeured Mini Coopers for three hours a day (hongkong.peninsula.com).



Sri Lanka

KAHANDA KANDA

.....

Until July 31, stays of three nights or longer at Kahanda Kanda, a retreat of nine individually designed villas set on a lush working tea plantation 30 minutes by tuk-tuk from Galle, are eligible for an upgrade to a half-board plan as well as two spa treatments—a US\$300 value that is sure to help guests further unwind as they take in the surrounding greenery (kahandakanda.com).

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Pictures from left to right: The Laguna, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa, Nusa Dua, Bali; The Royal Begonia, a Luxury Collection Resort, Sanya; Vana Belle, a Luxury Collection Resort, Koh Samui; The Naka Island, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa, Phuket; ITC Grand Bharat, a Luxury Collection Resort, Gurgaon, New Delhi Capital Region

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GOOD *to* GO

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new bites

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whiskey trail in
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ISLAND SCENE

The lowdown
on La Digue,
Seychelles

p. 34

Plush Perch

The bedroom of
a two-story Tree
Pool House villa at
Keemala.



THAI TALES

Though it won't open until later this summer, **Keemala** is already shaping up to be one of Phuket's most imaginative retreats. Set in the hills above Kamala on the Thai island's west coast, the resort takes its inspiration from a fictional narrative about four tribes of ancient settlers, with its 38 pool villas divided accordingly into a quartet of camps—clay cottages, tent villas, tree houses, and “bird's nest” villas—centered on a main pool. But there's nothing prehistoric about the amenities. Scattered across the forested grounds are a wine cellar, a cocktail bar, a restaurant with an organic garden, and a streamside spa where visiting practitioners will offer everything from traditional Maori healing and Mayan massage to vibrational attunement therapy (66/76 358-777; keemala.com; four-night packages from US\$1,710 until December 23). ©



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Sky-high

A sweeping view over lower Manhattan and Brooklyn from One World Observatory.



ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Last November, One World Trade Center opened as the Western Hemisphere's tallest building, its mirror-like blue facade and spire rising more than 541 meters above the streets of lower Manhattan. As of May 29, it now offers views of the skyline it reflects with the opening of **One World Observatory**, New York's highest vantage point and top new attraction. To get up to its perch on floors 100–102 (the building is 104 stories tall), visitors are whisked up in one of five Sky Pods—among the fastest elevators in the world—whose LED-lit walls show a virtual time-lapse of the skyline's development over the centuries during the 47-second ascent; the ride down plays a flying, Superman-like lap around the building's exterior. The Observatory itself comprises a 3-D theater experience, a “concierge” who uses gesture-recognition technology to point out sites, and a floor screen playing live footage of the streets below that when stood upon gives the dizzying effect of looking 380 meters down. But even all this high-tech gadgetry can't top the views, which take in the entire island and its surrounding boroughs (oneworldobservatory.com; US\$32 per adult). —Gabrielle Lipton



LISTEN UP

.....
This summer, music lovers will want to tune in to these three festivals. Staged in Montego Bay, the **Reggae Sumfest** (July 12–18; reggaesumfest.com) is a weeklong party celebrating Jamaica's most famous export: reggae. Highlights include steamy dancehall nights and concert performances by the likes of Chronixx and Stephen Marley. • In-the-know Parisians flock to the Mediterranean island of Corsica each July to take in **Calvi On The Rocks** (July 3–8; calviontherocks.com), a chic seaside festival of groove, funk, swing, pop, and *música tropical*. • In Malaysian Borneo, Sarawak's **Rainforest World Music Festival** (Aug. 7–9; rwmf.net) combines ethnic music with a jungly backdrop. Featured performers this year include folk ensemble Alaverdi from Georgia and Bargou O8 from Tunisia, while other highlights of the program—now in its 18th iteration—range from workshops to jam sessions. —David Tse

JUST IN CASE

.....
The next time you're looking to upgrade your luggage, consider **ShelfPack**, a first-of-its kind roller suitcase designed to save you the effort of unpacking your clothes while on the road. Created by California's McKaba Luggage, ShelfPack is as smart as it is stylish, with four internal shelves (and three zippered compartments) that can be expanded or collapsed on retractable supports, keeping your clothing items flat, organized, and easily accessible. It sounds like the perfect solution for short hotel stays—almost as good as having your own butler (shelfpack.com; US\$349). —DT



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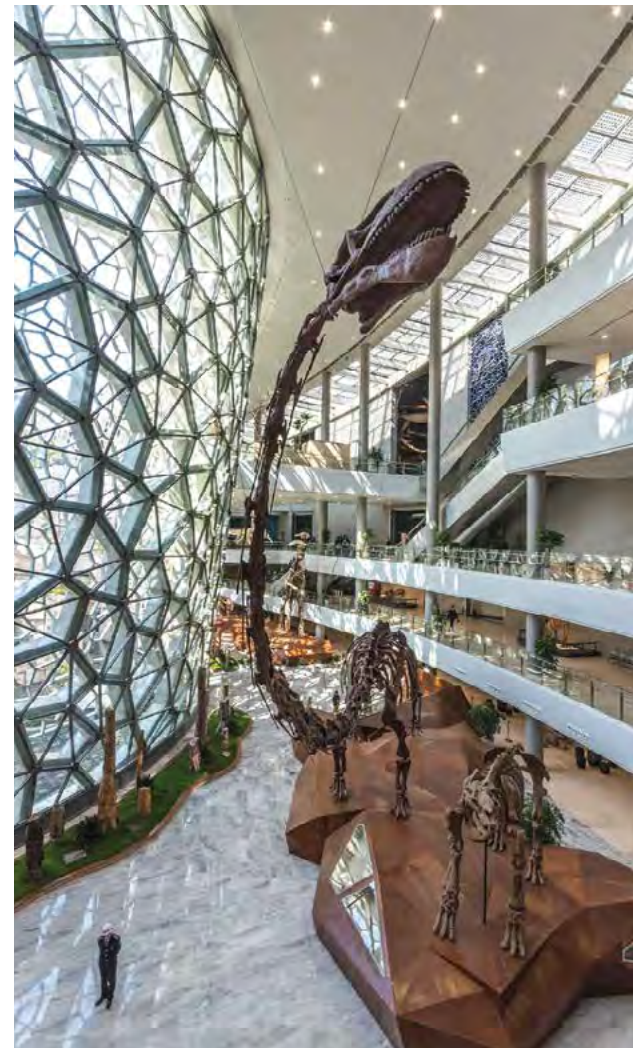
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NEW DIGS FOR OLD BONES

From a thundering Tyrannosaurus rex to 140-million-year-old Mamenchisaurus bones, Shanghai's newest attraction is a veritable Jurassic Park of excitement. Established in 1956, the **Shanghai Natural History Museum** was previously housed in the 1920s Shanghai Cotton Exchange, where only a fraction of its assemblage of artifacts could be displayed. A new architectural landmark in the downtown Jing'An Sculpture Park now does full justice to

Natural Selection
Above, from left: The museum's soaring entrance lobby; dinosaur skeletons take pride of place in the central atrium, whose latticed facade references the cellular structure of plants and animals.



the museum's incredible 10,000-piece collection, displayed across a whopping 45,000 square meters. Designed by Chicago-based architect Ralph Johnson of Perkins+Will and inspired by a nautilus shell, the six-story building coils around a sunken courtyard of Chinese-style landscaped rockeries and waterfalls, filling the underground exhibition spaces with natural light. Starting on the top floor with a starry-skied interpretation of the Big Bang, visitors descend through a series of elegantly designed spaces describing various aspects of creation and evolution, accompanied by bilingual background notes on touchscreens. Fossils and bones are brought to life through a menagerie of full-size moving models of ancient mammoths, whales, and other wildlife. Fun interactive technology includes machines to measure the cranial capacity of human skulls and 360-degree movie pods. But it's the Chinese dinosaurs that steal the show. The journey winds up at the base of the lattice-walled central atrium where re-created skeletons of Asia's largest dinosaurs, including the 26-meter-long Mamenchisaurus, provide a last jaw-dropping impression and spectacular photo ops set against the Chinese garden backdrop (260 Yan'an Dong Lu; 86-21/6321-3548; snhm.org.cn). —Amy Fabris-Shi

COURSE WORK



When it comes to knowing the contours of the nine-hole, Gary Player-designed golf course at One&Only Le Saint Gérân in Mauritius, no one is quite on par with caddie master **Ramesh Seeballuck**, who more than four decades ago helped plant its palmed-lined greens and fairways and has been their chief keeper ever since.

- **MY PASTIME GROWING UP** was watching the golfers at the Gymkhana Club, the oldest course on the island. Formerly part of a British military base, this is where golf was first introduced to Mauritius in 1844.
- **I BEGAN AS A GARDENER** on Le Saint Gérân's course in 1973, two years before the resort even opened, and later became a caddie. Over the years, I have been offered other opportunities at the resort, but I've always chosen to stay at the golf course—it's my home.
- **LAID OUT ON A PENINSULA** between

the Indian Ocean and the Belle Mare lagoon, the course is a beautifully designed par 33. Hole six, for example, has exceptional sea views.

● **I CONSIDER IT PRICELESS** that I've gotten to play with pros like Gary Player and Nick Faldo. But the best part of my job comes with helping guests improve their game.

● **GOLF IS DIFFICULT** because we fail more than we succeed, but I always encourage guests to see their mishaps as par for the course rather than as a reflection on their abilities.

—Gabrielle Lipton

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NEW BITES IN BALI

From Ubud to Nusa Dua and Seminyak, this trio of dining rooms offers a tantalizing taste of Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and beyond.

BY NATASHA DRAGUN

BEJANA

One of the island's newest resorts, The Ritz-Carlton, Bali in Nusa Dua channels the culinary traditions of the Indonesian archipelago at its freshly unveiled signature restaurant. Set over three levels, Bejana features a "Culinary Cave" cooking school and chef's table as well as indoor and outdoor dining areas designed with striking wood paneling and palm gardens. For a taste of West Java, begin with the Bajigur cocktail, traditionally served warm (and sans alcohol) from street vendors; here, mixologists give the recipe a kick by adding rum and Malibu to coconut milk muddled with ginger, pandan, and lemongrass. On the menu, the *soto pesmol*—a spiced coconut and seafood soup—offers flavors from Jakarta, while the *bebek betutu* takes roast duck, a Balinese favorite, and serves it on banana leaves (62-361/849-8988; ritzcarlton.com).



Food for Thought

Above: With its open kitchen, Bejana's Culinary Cave provides a unique setting for gourmet cooking experiences. Top: The upstairs dining room at Hujan Locale in Ubud. Right: A T-bone steak at Plantation Grill.

HUJAN LOCALE

Scottish chef Will Meyrick's third Bali restaurant, Hujan Locale in Ubud, adopts a "found and foraged" philosophy when it comes to produce. Much of the menu is inspired by what is currently growing in Meyrick's on-site garden and farm, which is then transformed into dishes inspired by traditional kitchens across Asia. Current highlights include a Dutch-Indonesian croquette of salted cod, brought to life with chili mayonnaise and sambal; and scallops cured with Sri Lankan spices and topped with coconut and salmon roe. Even the cocktails nod to in-season ingredients: eye-popping beetroot margaritas are the perfect way to start a meal in the airy dining room (62-361/849-3092; hujanlocale.com).

PLANTATION GRILL

Another newcomer, Seminyak's Double-Six hotel has seen Australian restaurateur Robert Marchetti—behind Sydney's Icebergs and North Bondi Italian—design five restaurants and bars, including the just-opened Plantation Grill. The glamorous, Prohibition-inspired space unites marble, crystal, and dark leather under soaring ceilings, while on the plate, diners can look forward to house specialties such as dry-aged beef and line-caught seafood cooked over grills or in the wood-fired oven. The whole rock lobster Thermidor here gives the very '70s dish a sophisticated twist with VSOP Cognac and black truffles in the sauce; the baby-back pork ribs are given an equal injection of class thanks to a sake marinade and dry-spiced Texan rub (62-361/734-300; plantationgrillbali.com). ©





CHEF DE CUISINE

MATTHEW MCCOOL

CHEF MCCOOL HAS BEEN AWARDED THREE HATS BY 2014 GAULT & MILLAU SYDNEY FOR ALTITUDE RESTAURANT. PRIOR TO JOINING STARFISH BLOO HE HAS SPENT MORE THAN 14 YEARS WORKING IN MICHELIN STARRED RESTAURANTS IN LONDON, SICILY, BEIJING AND SYDNEY INCLUDING GORDON RAMSEY, TOM AIENS AND PETER GILMORE. HE NOW GIVES HIS GLOBAL EXPERIENCE INTO A UNIQUE PAN-ASIAN DINING EXPERIENCE

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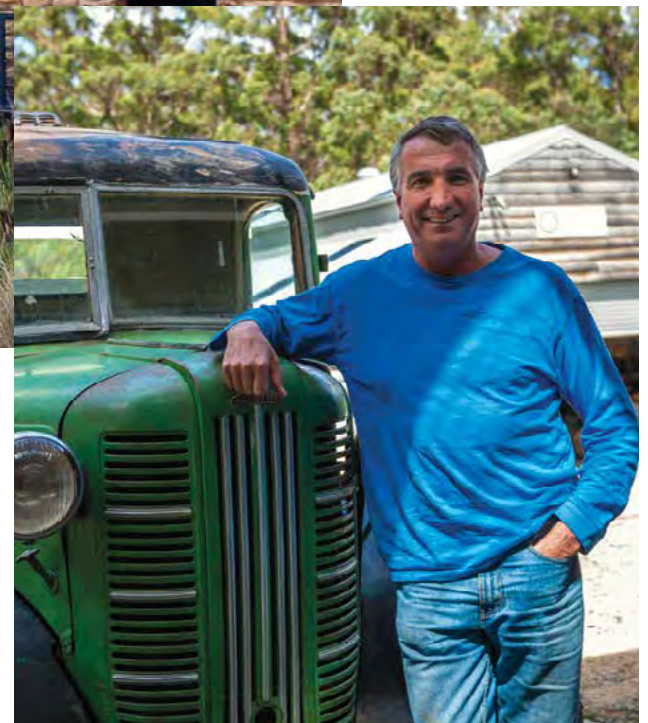
It's all about the food



BALI
SEMINYAK
RETREAT & SPA

**Toast of Tasmania**

Left: The old mill and glass-walled tasting room at Nant. Below: Bill McHenry at his distillery on the Tasman Peninsula. Opposite: Single malts from Hellyers Road Distillery.



SOUTHERN SPIRITS

Whiskey making is thriving again in Tasmania, where a clutch of boutique distillers is today producing some singular single malts. **BY LEISA TYLER**

The Details

See the **Tasmanian Whisky Trail** website (taswhiskytrail.com) for details about the island distilleries—most of which offer tours and tasting sessions—and information on how to visit them.

There were many an eyebrow raised when, in 2014, *Whisky Magazine's* annual World Whiskies Awards named little-known Tasmanian distiller Sullivans Cove as the producer of the world's best single malt. For an island that until a generation ago banned the distillation of spirits, it was nothing less than a coup.

Australia's smallest state was perhaps destined to find a place on the world whiskey map. With fertile fields that yield high-quality barley and streams fed by cold, clear water from highland lakes, Tasmania is a distiller's dream, as the first European colonists of Van Diemen's Land (as it was then known) discovered in the early 1800s. As convict-based settlements established themselves on the island, so too did distilleries, at least 16 of them; indeed, alcohol proved such a balm in those rough-and-tumble days that soon there was one bar for every 14 people. But the intemper-

ate times did not last. In 1838, Governor John Franklin, encouraged by his wife ("I would prefer barley be fed to pigs than it be used to turn men into swine," she reportedly told him), outlawed whiskey making.

Although Tasmania became somewhat more civilized over the years, the law against distilling spirits stood fast for a century and a half, until 1991, when whiskey buff Bill Lark petitioned to have it overturned. Lark had been fly-fishing in the Central Highlands' Great Lakes region when it dawned on him that Tasmania's exceptionally pure water, peat-rich wetlands, and cool climate provide ideal conditions for making whiskey. Lark set about to get Franklin's ban overturned and, with the aid of an old copper still found at a flea market, he was soon operating Tasmania's first distillery in 150 years.

There are now nine boutique distilleries



scattered across the island, including Hobart's Sullivans Cove and Lark, which produces around 16,000 proof liters a year (Scotland's The Glenlivet, in comparison, churns out nearly six million liters annually). "The industry is about producing high-quality, hand-crafted, and artisanal products with flavors ingrained in the island," says Bill McHenry of William McHenry and Sons, which, owing to its location on the Tasman Peninsula, considers itself the southernmost family-run distillery in the world. A former pharmaceuticals executive from Sydney, McHenry jokes that with a name like his, he didn't have a choice in becoming a distiller. "When we started in 2008, it was a paddle upstream to get customers interested. But craft spirits were going gangbusters in America and we knew it was just a matter of time before Australians cottoned on."

Cotton on they did. Although costing substantially more than Scottish or Japanese single malts (a 700 ml bottle of Lark will set you back about US\$128), Tasmanian whiskeys regularly sell out. And while most of that gets consumed on the island, one local distillery has its eyes on the world. Keith Batt purchased Nant, a 1,200-hectare estate in the Midlands town of Bothwell, in 2004, and set about restoring its heritage-listed stone buildings and 1823-built water mill, which today grinds the barley for Nant whiskey. Batt now has plans to expand production to 600,000 bottles a year, most of which will head to Singapore and the U.K., where he will open Nant Whisky Bars (already in operation in Hobart, Melbourne, and Brisbane) later this year.

While that may be a mere trickle by Scottish standards, it's definitely worth cheering. ©

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PUFFIN STUFF

With its penguin-like coloring and oversize beak, the Atlantic puffin is undeniably adorable. It's also famously hard to spot, living most of its life at sea. But every summer, some 6,000 pairs nest in the volcanic-rock cliffs of Skomer Island off the southwest coast of Wales for their breeding season. The two-month window of June and July when chicks are hatching and fledging is the ideal time

to follow suit and flock to the island; it's also one of the only times you can. Managed by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, Skomer is only open for day trips between the months of April and October, and even then, visitors are capped at 250 per day. But what the limitations protect is the reason worth going: the wildlife. Puffins aside, Skomer's headlands and inlets are also home to razorbills, guillemots, gray seals, and glow worms that light up summer evenings. —Gabrielle Lipton

How to Get There

From Cardiff, it's about two and a half hours by car to Martins Haven, a pebbly beach in Pembrokeshire from where 10-minute boat rides shuttle passengers to and from the island.

Where to Stay Those keen on staying on Skomer itself should book well in advance. Its sole lodging—an old converted farmhouse—only sleeps 16 guests (welshwildlife.org; from US\$46). On the mainland, **Crug Glâs** (44-1348/831-302; crug-glas.co.uk; doubles from US\$230)

is one of the top places to stay in Pembrokeshire, with five luxe rooms set in a Georgian country house and two cottages on a 242-hectare working farm.

What Else? For an up-close look at the island's fauna, the **Skomer Island Photography Workshop** (US\$146 plus ferry and island fees; andydavies.info) is run throughout the summer by Andy Davies, a professional wildlife photographer who has been based in Wales for the past 16 years.





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Field Day
The new yoga pavilion at Four Seasons' riverside resort at Sayan in Bali.

OM AWAY FROM HOME

Inspired by the structure of a lotus petal, the new Dharma Shanti Yoga Bale at the **Four Seasons Resort Bali at Sayan** is sure to enthrall any yogi or yogini. First, there's its serene setting, nestled between terraced rice fields and a swatch of tropical rain forest above the banks of the Ayung River near Ubud. Then there are its green credentials: built entirely from Balinese bamboo and held together by rope and hand-whittled pegs, the open structure is the epitome of sustainability. As for its yoga and meditation program, the *bale* (meaning "pavilion") is the first venue on the island to offer anti-gravity yoga, not to mention laughing-yoga sessions and talks by a resident wellness expert. *Namaste* to that (fourseasons.com). —David Tse



TAIWAN EASE

Following a three-year makeover that saw its 853 rooms and public spaces completely overhauled, the 25-year-old **Grand Hyatt Taipei** relaunched in April as essentially a brand-new hotel. Centrally located in the Xinyi district and adjacent to Taipei 101 (once the world's tallest building), the property now boasts au courant guest quarters with

muted tones and remodeled bathrooms, as well as a new restaurant, Yun Jin, serving a range of regional Chinese dishes (try the braised pork belly with fermented wine sauce). And while the hotel's enormous lobby remains as grand as ever, it now exudes a slightly less formal ambience, with low-slung reception desks and a shop selling treats from the new in-house bakery and confectioner (taipei.grand.hyatt.com). —DT



MAKING A MARK

Guests of Manhattan's 118-room **The Mark** can now avail themselves of a stylish pedicab service, the first to be offered by a New York hotel. The black-and-white-striped cycle-rickshaws whisk passengers from the hotel's Upper East Side address to such nearby attractions as the Guggenheim Museum, Bergdorf Goodman, or Central Park, with the first 30 minutes free of charge. Hungry for more? Request a seasonal picnic basket from chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten's on-site restaurant, whose gourmet goodies are guaranteed to put a different spin on your afternoon (themarkhotel.com). —Gabrielle Lipton

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Face Time
Weighing more than 60 tons, *Ocean Atlas* by British artist Jason deCaires Taylor was installed last year in Bahamian waters as the largest underwater sculpture to date.

WATER WORKS

From Bali to the Bahamas, these underwater sculpture attractions give divers and snorkelers a chance to immerse themselves in art.

BY GABRIELLE LIPTON

1 / Mexico MUSEO SUBACUÁTICO DE ARTE

.....
Fans of British artist Jason deCaires Taylor, who created the world's first underwater sculpture park in Grenada in 2006, will want to explore his even more expansive installation at MUSA, the subaquatic "museum" that he co-founded six years ago. Spread across two sites off the coasts of Cancún's Isla Mujeres and Punta Nizuc, it features more than 500 of his sculptural works, all cast from pH-neutral marine concrete in an effort to promote new coral growth.
musacancun.org

2 / Bahamas SIR NICHOLAS NUTTALL CORAL REEF SCULPTURE GARDEN

.....
Opened last year off the coast of New Providence, this park is now one of the Bahamas' top dive sites, and rightly so: it's home to Taylor's *Ocean Atlas*, the biggest sculpture of its kind yet. Alongside works by Bahamian artists, the statue—more than five meters tall and weighing over 60 tons—depicts a girl kneeling under the weight of the ocean, symbolizing future generations' environmental burden.
breef.org

3 / Italy CHRIST OF THE ABYSS

.....
This life-size bronze statue of Christ, arms outstretched and head tilted upward, was first submerged in 1954 in honor of the pioneering Italian scuba diver Dario Gonzatti, who drowned near this spot off the Ligurian coast eight years earlier. Sunk 17 meters deep in a cove fronting the Abbey of San Fruttuoso, *Il Cristo degli Abissi* is also the world's oldest underwater sculpture, though a 2004 restoration returned the barnacle-encrusted monument to much of its original state.
christoftheabyss.net

4 / Indonesia JEMELUK BAY UNDERWATER GALLERY

.....
Amed, Bali's popular east-coast dive destination, has been attracting more attention recently thanks to the underwater gallery at Jemeluk Bay. A collaboration between local environmental NGOs and U.K.-based "eco art" group The Marine Foundation, the project features sculptures by Indonesian artists Wayan Winten and Eddi Prabandono, including a working post box where divers can mail waterproof postcards sold in local shops.
themarinefoundation.org

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TIME TRAVEL

In Britain, Belgium, and Switzerland this summer, three major anniversaries will be affairs worth stepping out for.

BY GABRIELLE LIPTON

REMEMBERING THE MAGNA CARTA

.....
When England's King John begrudgingly signed the Magna Carta 800 years ago, little did he know it would become an enduring symbol of freedom under the law. This June, Britons will celebrate the Great Charter's octocentenary with a gamut of concerts, lectures, festivals, and a commemoration in its birthplace of Runnymede on June 15. As well, six Magna Carta Trails have been devised to guide travelers through sites and cities linked to the document, including the British Library, whose exhibition "Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy" (through September 1; bl.uk) also displays Thomas Jefferson's handwritten copy of the Declaration of Independence (magnacarta800th.com).

ALL EYES ON WATERLOO

.....
A three-day celebration of the Battle of Waterloo's bicentenary is set to be the biggest spectacle this Belgian town has seen since Napoleon was defeated here by Britain and its allies in 1815. Proceedings kick off on June 18 with *Inferno*, a theatrical interpretation of the battle complete with pyrotechnic fire artists, while historical reenactments will be staged over the following two days by 5,000 actors, 300 horses, and 100 canons. In town, the Wellington Museum—once an inn that housed the Duke of Wellington, commander-in-chief of the allied armies—is exhibiting "Napoleon Wellington: Shared Destinies," comparing the lives of the French and British leaders (waterloo2015.org).

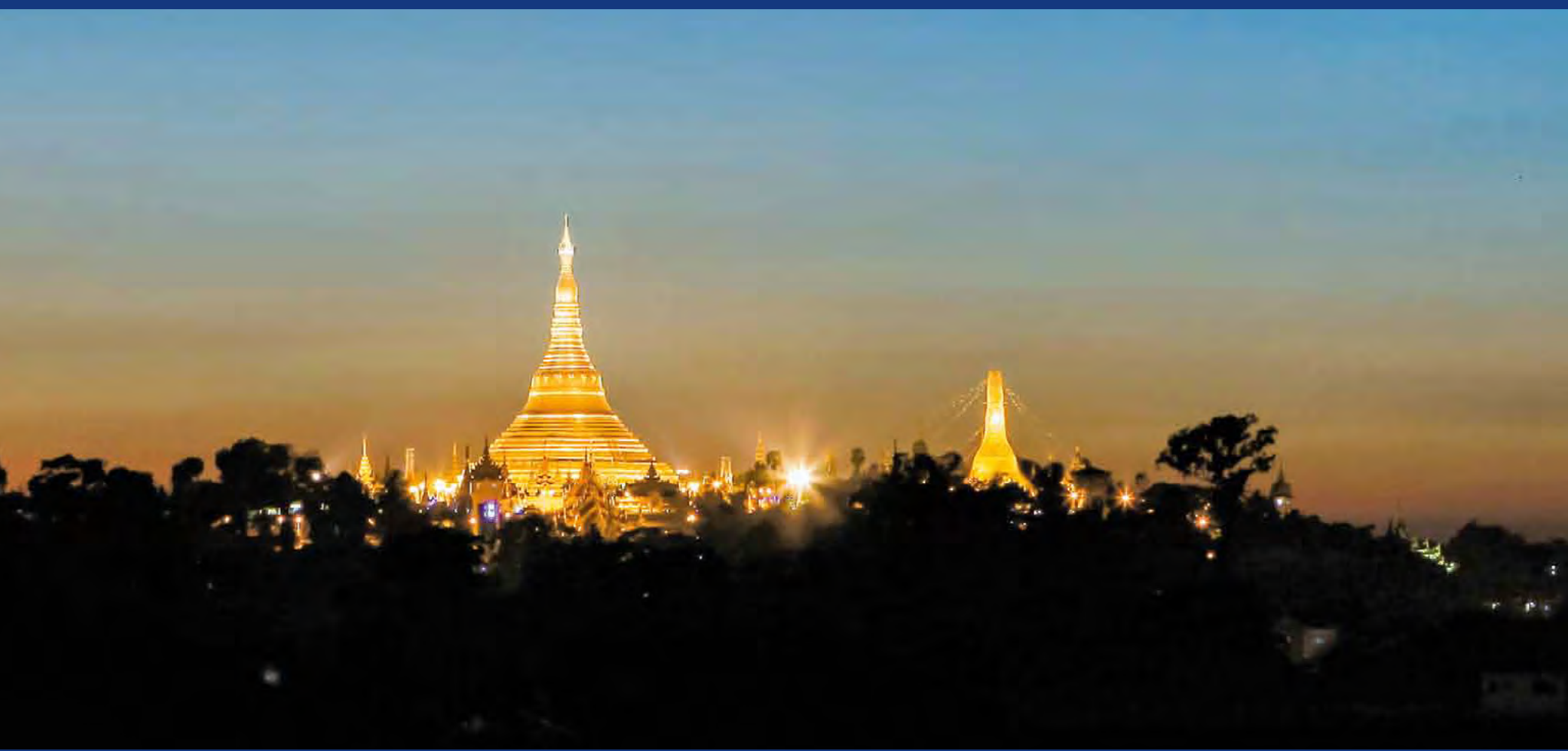
MATTERHORN MATTERS

.....
Rising nearly 4,500 meters over the Swiss-Italian border, the pyramidal peak of the Matterhorn is notoriously one of the highest, most perilous climbs in the Alps. Honoring the 150th anniversary of its first ascent by British climber Edward Whymper on July 14, the mountain's base town of Zermatt has planned a summer full of festivities. On the program are performances of *The Matterhorn Story* (July 29–August 29) in a special open-air theater; three-course sunset dinners on Europe's highest viewing platform (Saturdays, June 20–August 15); and, on the anniversary eve of Whymper's ascent, an illumination of his route up the mountain followed by parties in town (zermatt.ch).



Lock, Stock, and Barrel

A Battle of Waterloo reenactor in costume as a soldier of the British Foot Guard.



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INTRIGUING LA DIGUE

This diamond-shaped island is one of the most alluring destinations in the Seychelles. Read on to discover why. **BY KALPANA SUNDER**

Indian Ocean Idyll

Clockwise from above: Soaking up the sun on Grand Anse Beach; granite boulders line the shores of Anse Source D'Argent; a souvenir shop at L'Union Estate.

Of the 115 islands in the Seychelles, few beg to be explored more than La Digue. With its lapis lazuli waters, Creole culture, and regular ferry services that easily link it to the main islands of Praslin and Mahé, it certainly sees its fair share of visitors. Yet it's managed to stay happily laid-back nonetheless, traversed by more brightly colored ox-carts than cars. It's the fourth-largest island in the archipelago, but still small enough (at 10 square kilometers) that you can easily make your way around its



coast by bike, the preferred mode of transportation in these parts. Here's where to point your handlebars ...

STRAIGHT TO THE SHORE There's no shortage of idyllic beaches on La Digue, whose surrounding reefs are home to sea turtles, sting-rays, octopuses, and a multitude of colorful fishes. The two best snorkeling spots are **Anse Sévère** and **Anse Source d'Argent**, both on the west coast. The latter is among the most beautiful beaches in the Indian Ocean, with scalloped, palm-lined coves and sculptural granite formations that have been used as the backdrop for advertising campaigns for Bacardi rum, Campari, and Bounty chocolate bars. In the southeast, the waters of **Grand Anse** may have currents that are too dangerous for swimming, but its shores provide a perfect lunch stop with beachside restaurants serving beers and grilled fish.

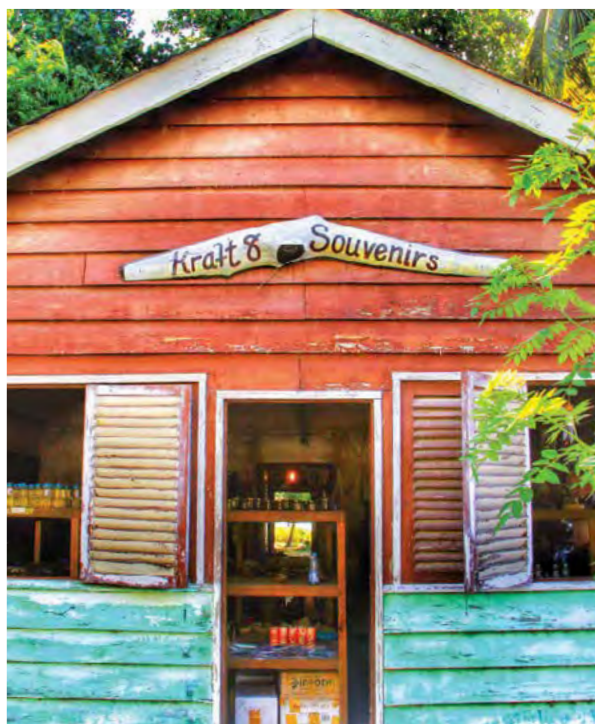
A PLANTATION TURNED PARK Spread over 300 hectares at the southern end of the island is **L'Union Estate**, a former vanilla and coconut plantation that's now a state park. These two crops were once the primary sources of income for La Digue, and here, visitors can watch how coconut oil is traditionally made, from husking the fruits to processing them

in an ox-driven mill and bottling the finished product. Also on the grounds is the original plantation house, trails for horseback riding, and a colonial-era cemetery of mossy grave-stones where some of the island's first settlers were laid to rest.

CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL The oldest denizens of the island are the Aldabra giant tortoises, most readily seen roaming in a spacious enclosure on the grounds of L'Union. Birders, meanwhile, will want to venture to the western side of the island, where the 21-hectare **La Veuve Reserve** is the world's only natural habitat of the black paradise flycatcher, known locally as *la veuve*, or "the widow." You might also spot the Seychelles bulbul or red fody flitting through the reserve's takamaka trees.

A FEAST OF CREOLE FARE La Digue's spicy food is best sampled at the open-air restaurants of **Zerof Guesthouse** (248/423-4067; zerofguesthouses.com) and **Chateau St. Cloud Hotel** (248/423-4346; chateau-stcloud.com), where buffet tables are laden with Creole curries, grilled tuna and grouper, lentil soup, papaya and mango chutneys, and palm-hearts salad.

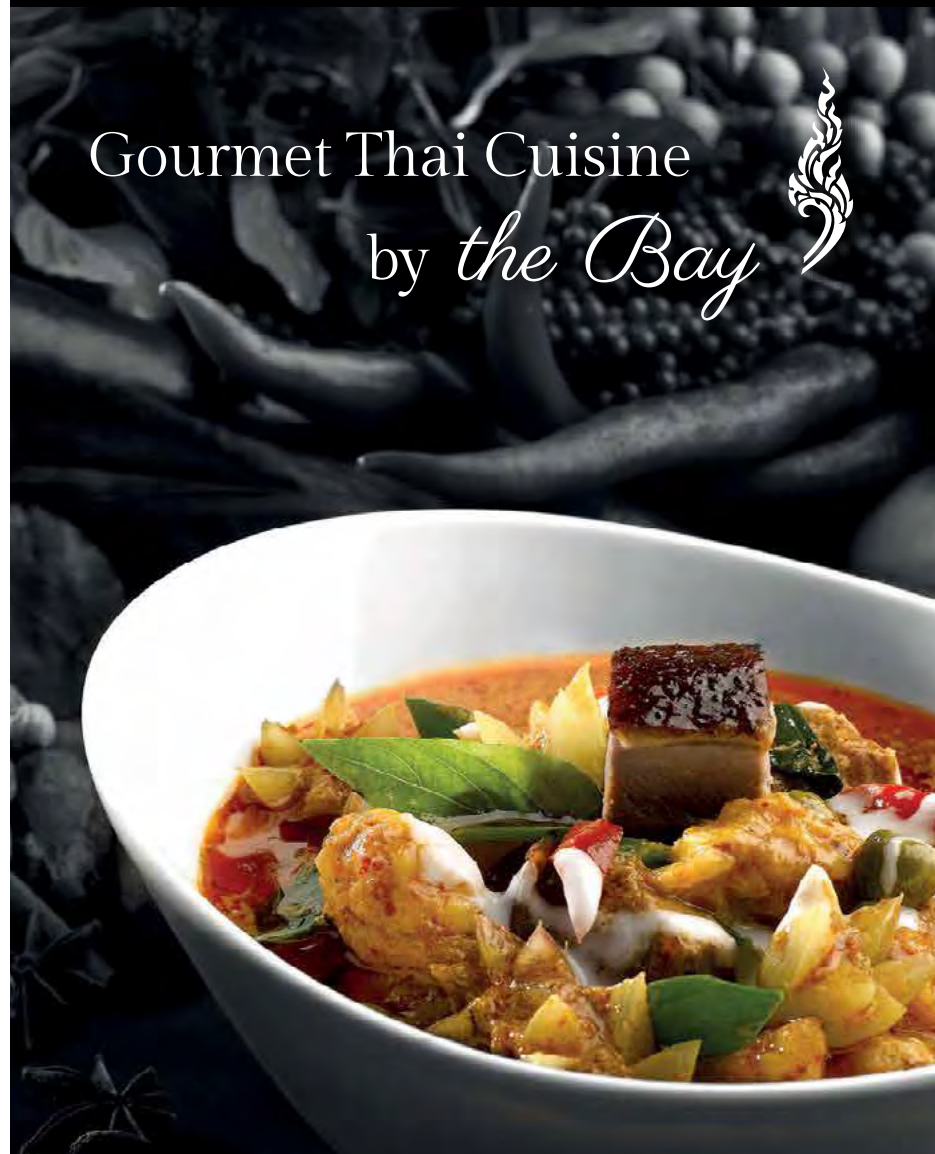
THE PERFECT SPOT FOR SUNSET Leave ample time in the late afternoon to pedal up the west coast to La Passe, the island's main village. Along the way, you'll pass through sleepy lanes of breadfruit and casuarina trees and pretty Creole homes with high sloping roofs, shuttered windows, and trellised gardens. A seat at the oceanfront **Tarosa Café** (248/423-4407) is exactly where you'll want to be when the sun sets behind the boat-filled harbor. ☉



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Model Behavior

Petra Nemcova with students at one of the seven schools in Haiti she helped rebuild following the 2010 earthquake.



LOVE AND HAITI



As an ambassador-at-large for Haiti and founder of Happy Hearts Fund, an NGO that rebuilds schools in areas hit by natural disasters, Czech supermodel **Petra Nemcova** is a busy lady. Yet she still made time to tell us how it all comes together in her line of travel-inspired candles, *Be The Light New York*.

- **SINCE YOUR FIRST TRIP TO HAITI IN 2007 HOW HAS THE COUNTRY CHANGED?** When people think of Haiti, they think of the 2010 earthquake, dictatorship, and poverty, but in the last three years, there's been a lot of growth. Hotels are opening—most recently, the Marriott Port-au-Prince—and businesses have come in to do production, such as Heineken and Toms Shoes.
- **AS AN AMBASSADOR, WHAT'S A SIDE OF HAITI YOU WISH TO SHOW PEOPLE?** It's one of those rare countries that still feels un-

discovered and authentic. Just about every fourth person in Haiti considers themselves an artist, and Jacmel, a colorful port town on the south coast, is the cultural center of the Caribbean, filled with gorgeous mosaic murals. It also hosts an elaborate carnival each February; people spend all year creating their masks and costumes.

- **WHERE IN THE COUNTRY DO YOU GO FOR AN ESCAPE?** Off the southwestern coast is an island called Île-à-Vache. It's beautiful,

full of mangroves, and from there you can also take day trips out to Lovers' Island, a small sandbar 15 minutes away by boat. It's as private as it gets with only you, whomever you go with, and the birds that land there, until the high tide comes and washes over it.

- **WHY DID YOU CHOOSE HIBISCUS AS THE SCENT FOR YOUR HAITI-INSPIRED CANDLE?** Happy Hearts Fund, which I began in 2005, has schools in four out of the six countries represented by my candles, including Haiti. We've rebuilt seven schools that were destroyed by the earthquake and have five more big schools opening there this year. Building a school makes you really get into a community, learning its unusual sides and the things it's proud of. Despite Haiti's struggles, its people have an incredible amount of joy, and hibiscus represents beauty and strength. ◎

bethelightny.com; candles from US\$98

ISLAND BEAUTY

Get swept away at The Residence Maldives, where luxury and nature come together in a remote tropical retreat



A picture-perfect resort immersed in natural beauty, The Residence Maldives is a blissful hideaway for family vacations and romantic honeymoons spent in paradise. Nestled on the private Falhumaafushi Island in the southern reaches of the archipelago, the secluded retreat is filled with ways to explore its unique setting in the Huvadhu Atoll — one of the largest, deepest atolls in the world — while relaxing and reconnecting with loved ones.

Charming yet sophisticated, 94 one- and two-bedroom villas lining the beach and staked over the water pair Maldivian-style thatched roofs and wood porches

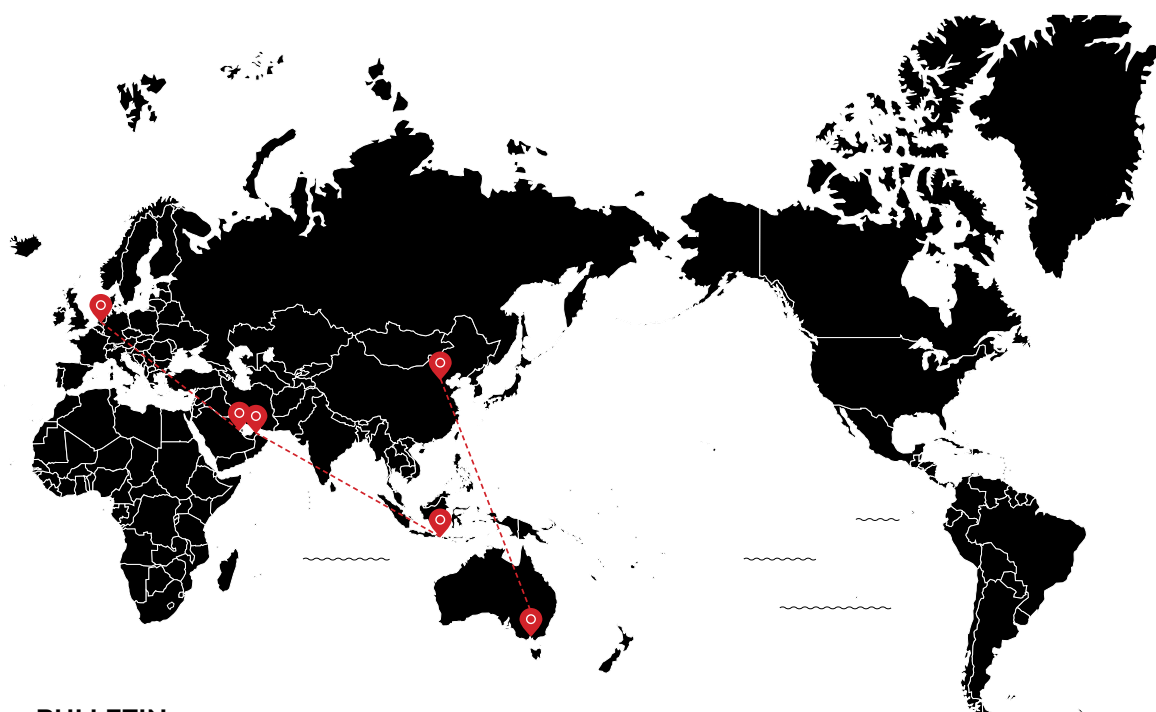
with large French windows and bright, modern interiors. Each comes with butler service upon request to ensure that guests' every need is promptly met, whether that entails arranging a diving excursion in the surrounding Falhuma Reef with the resort's PADI dive center or giving a wake-up call in time for a sunrise yoga session.

The Residence Maldives also excels when it comes to romance, with awards attesting to it being one of the world's top resorts for honeymoons. Sunset dolphin cruises, private dining, and holistic treatments at the award-winning Spa by Clarins — the first Clarins spa in the Maldives — are just a few of the

many ways couples can indulge in uninterrupted time together. And for the ultimate seclusion, day trips out to the resort's Castaway Island see guests marooned alone on a pristine white beach for afternoon picnics and sunbathing or candlelit dinners under the stars.

From water sports to island tours to four restaurants and room-service cocktails, The Residence Maldives is equipped with all the makings of unforgettable vacations for couples, families, and anyone looking to spend some time in paradise.

Falhumaafushi Island, Gaafu Alifu Atoll, Maldives; 960/682-0088; cenizaro.com



BULLETIN

Luxe Lounges
Singapore Airlines

All around the world, Singapore Airlines is investing millions of dollars in its SilverKris lounges, not to make them more futuristic but rather to render them more like home. Following on the first two unveilings in Sydney and Hong Kong, the carrier's lounge in London Heathrow's Terminal 2 is the newest addition, open to all first- and business-class fliers on SIA or other Star Alliance airlines. Designed by Singaporean design firm Ong&Ong, the lounge is divided into living and dining rooms, productivity pods and shower suites, and kitchen and bar areas serving revamped Singaporean fare and a variety of cocktails (singaporeair.com).

In-Flight Services
Qatar Airways

Adding to the classiness of its first and business classes, Qatar now offers Giorgio Armani amenity kits and Missoni sleepwear to its premium passengers. Black silky zip bags are filled with lotions and fragrances in Armani's signature Si scents for women and Acqua di Gio scents for men along with an eye mask, earplugs, socks, and lip balm by cosmetic brand Rituals. First-class passengers receive even more goods: Armani face cream for women and aftershave for men along with Missoni sleep suits and slippers on overnight flights (qatarairways.com).


Doha-Amsterdam
Qatar Airways

The flag carrier of Qatar is sending the newest addition to its fleet, the 254-passenger Boeing 787 Dreamliner, to the Netherlands this summer with its new flights to Amsterdam commencing on June 16. The flight will operate out of Doha's Hamad International Airport daily and bring the airline's European services to comprise a quarter of its total route map (qatarairways.com).



NEW LOOK

FLYING FORCES

For the next five years, Star Wars' R2-D2 will be flying the skies, and not just on the big screen. A product of a new partnership recently announced between All Nippon Airways, Japan's largest carrier, and the Walt Disney Company, the fuselage of ANA's newest 787 Dreamliner has been painted to look like the trusty robot sidekick, whom the carrier said they chose because of his reliability and competency. Although its destinations have yet to be announced, the Dreamliner is set to begin on international routes this fall (ana-sw.com).

ROUTE UPDATES

Dubai-Bali
Emirates

The new direct service run by Emirates between the Dubai and Bali international airports, which began June 3, marks two firsts: the first time the U.A.E. flag carrier has offered flights to the Indonesian island and the first time a direct route has ever been offered between the two destinations. Operated by a Boeing 777-300ER offering business and economy classes, the flight lasts just over nine hours (emirates.com).

Beijing-Melbourne
Air China

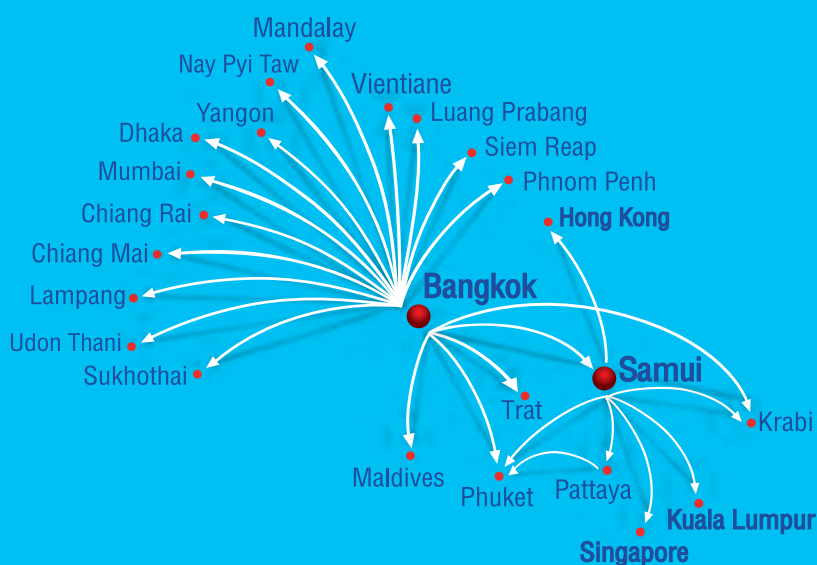
Catering to the fact that China is Australia's most popular long-haul destination, Air China has begun nonstop services between Beijing and Melbourne as of June 1. The flight runs on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays, adding to the flag carrier's continued prior service between the two cities—via a stopover in Shanghai—offered on the remaining days and Sundays as well. Both routes are serviced by an Airbus A330-200 (airchina.com).



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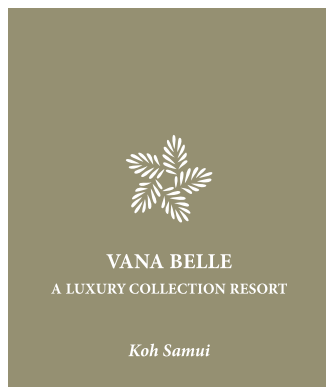
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ASIA'S BOUTIQUE AIRLINE



Vana Belle, a Luxury Collection Resort, Koh Samui

The Thai holiday isle of Koh Samui may be filled with all manner of accommodations, but Vana Belle holds a unique allure. In addition to the beachfront infinity pool, 80 spacious suites and villas each come with their own private pools along with butler service and views of the gorgeous surrounds. With its part-Sanskrit, part-French name meaning “beautiful forest,” the resort was built around ancient trees and rock formations, showcasing the beauty of its setting on a cove near Chaweng Beach.

Concierge recommends... the resort’s long list of guided excursions, which include snorkeling and diving in nearby Angthong National Marine Park, jungle elephant treks, and visits to Hin Ta and Hin Yai, also known as the island’s Grandmother and Grandfather rocks.

ISLAND IDYLLS

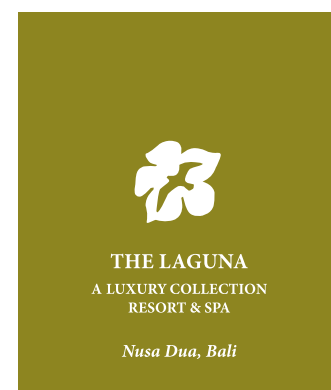
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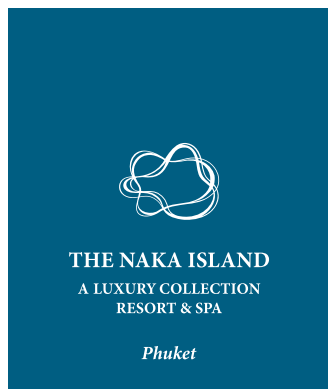
Forget island-hopping. There’s no reason to leave the shores of these four resorts, each with creature comforts galore and an appeal all its own.

The Laguna, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa, Nusa Dua, Bali

On the southern coast of Bali’s Nusa Dua Peninsula, The Laguna Bali exudes tranquility. With turquoise water at every turn, 276 rooms and suites filled with Balinese art and wood furnishings are surrounded by a vast network of seven lagoon-style pools, while 11 pool villas are serenely gathered around a fountained courtyard. Even treatment rooms in the Laguna Spa come with views of waterfalls, and of course, there’s the finest private white-sand stretch of Indian Ocean shoreline that guests have all to themselves.

Concierge recommends... a visit to Jatiluwih. Located 700 meters above sea level in the village of Penebel in Tabanan, Jatiluwih is the largest and most picturesque expanse of rice fields in Bali. It’s the ideal place to witness the *subak* irrigation system at work, a network of canals and weirs developed more than 1,000 years ago. The view is truly spectacular with a panorama of gently sloping terraces lining the lush green hills as far as the eye can see.





The Naka Island, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa, Phuket

A speedboat ride from the shores of Phuket, Naka Yai Island feels a world away with its pristine shores frequented only by guests of its sole resort: The Naka Island. Comprising 67 private villas, the Naka is a true escape where guests can fill days with water sports, bike rides around the island, napping in hammocks, and indulging in treatments at the Spa Naka, a 770-square-meter sanctuary that's one of the largest spas in the region.

Concierge recommends... cruising around Naka Island in a local long-tail boat. These relaxed expeditions take guests through wildlife-filled mangroves, pristine beaches accessible only by boat, and crystal-clear waters perfect for snorkeling and fishing. The resort's chefs will happily cook up any fresh catches.

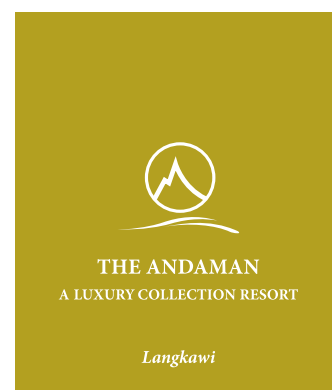


The Andaman, a Luxury Collection Resort, Langkawi

Malaysian style meets natural beauty at The Andaman, a luxurious retreat on the island of Langkawi. Sandwiched between the Mat Cincang mountains and picture-perfect Datai Bay, the resort includes four restaurants, a lounge, and an expansive spa, all designed with impressive green practices. Elegant rooms and suites—some with jacuzzis on their balconies—afford forest and ocean views, though another sighting isn't uncommon either: macaque monkeys are known to sneak onto the property from the surrounding rain forest, which dates back 10 million years.

Concierge recommends... the Coral Nursery that The Andaman created to offset the damage done to the surrounding reefs by the 2004 tsunami. Billed as the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, the nursery teaches guests how to cultivate coral growth and offers guided snorkeling sessions.

Discover more at theluxurycollection.com

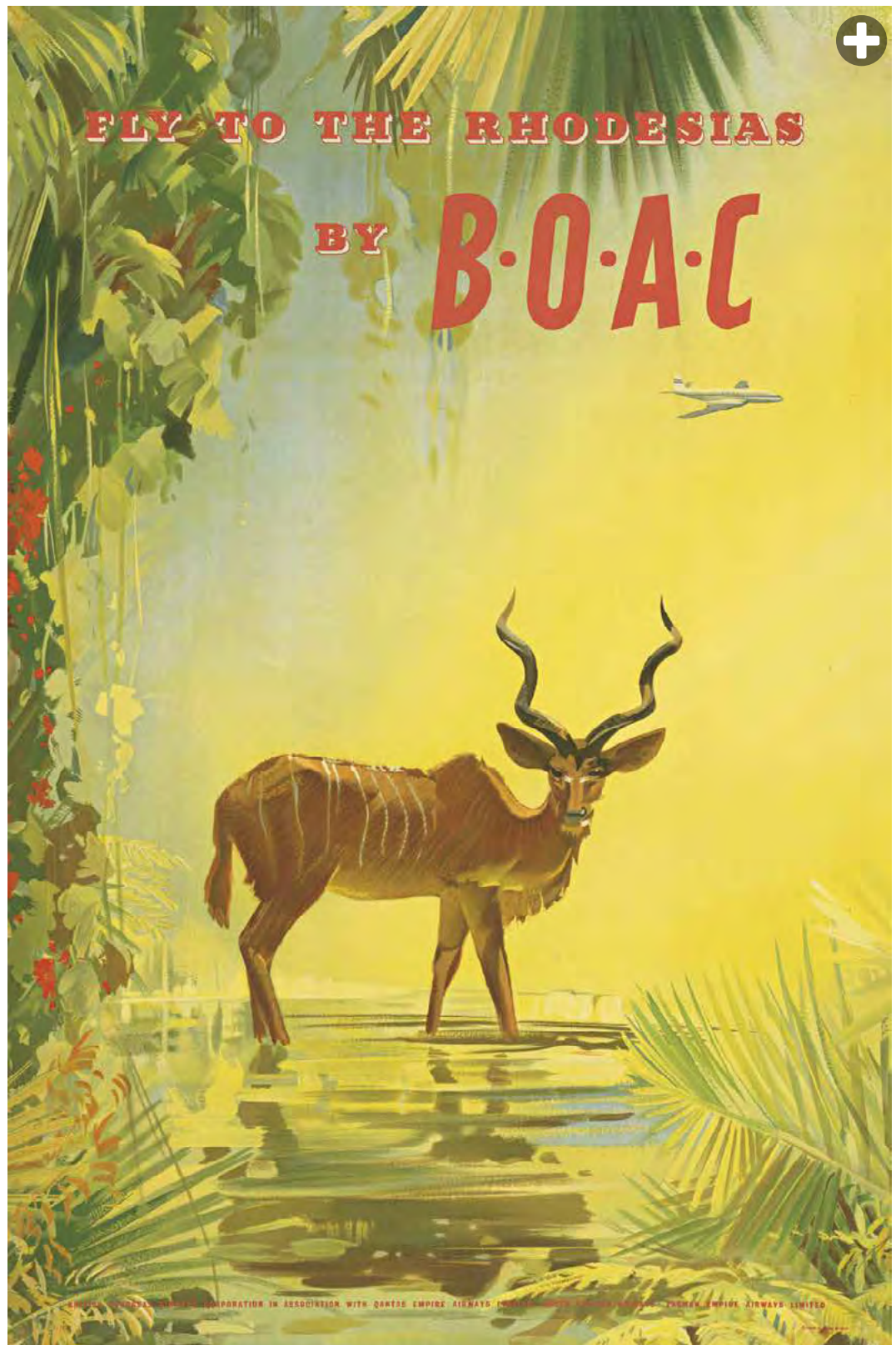




/ Bookshelf /

IN PLANE SIGHT

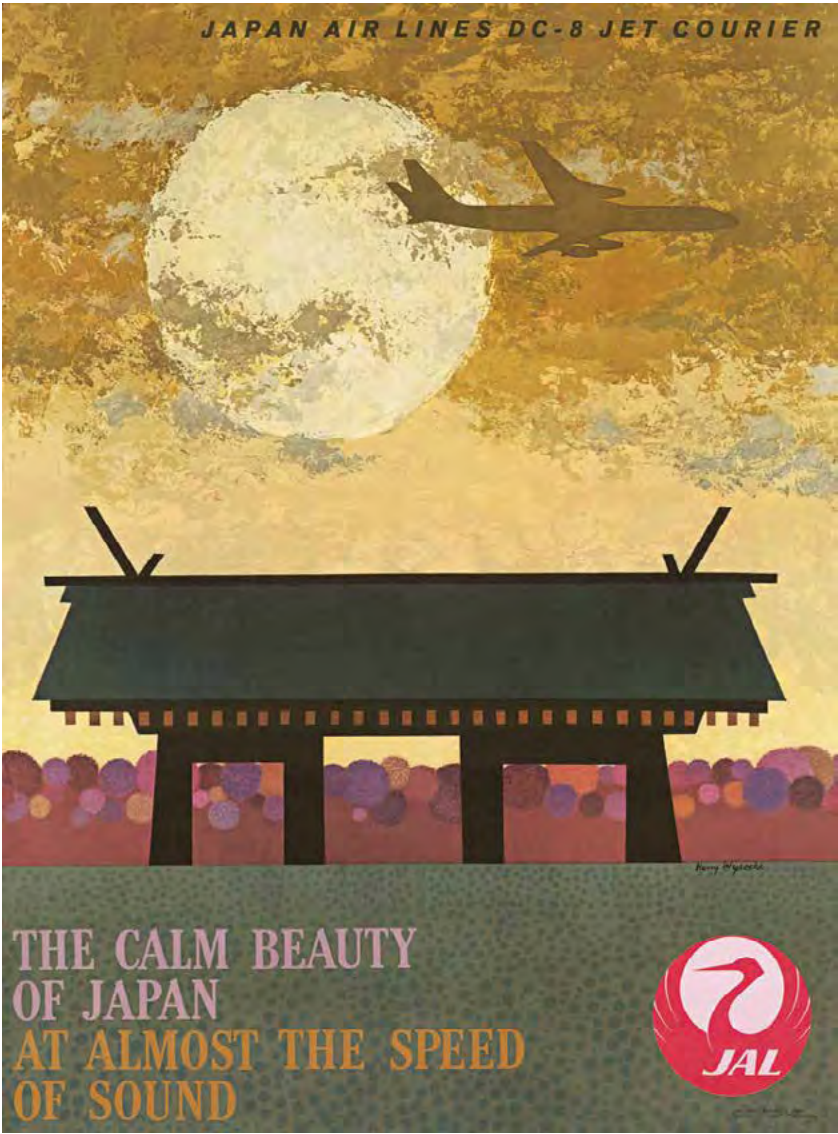
In the golden age of air travel, when passengers dressed to the nines and planes were sleek vessels of modernity, it was all about looking the part. As Matthias C. Hühne explores in *Airline Visual Identity: 1945–1975* (Callisto), this was largely a product of the glamorous images created by the airline industry and the booming success of its collective advertising. At 436 pages, this hefty coffee-table book is the most encyclopedic work of its kind yet, using everything from archived boarding cards to case studies to analyze the branding of the top 13 commercial airlines of the period. Most visually stunning, of course, is the art: the iconic campaign graphics and posters impeccably reprinted using 17 colors, five varnishes, foil, and embossing, making the book no less glittering than the era it captures. —**Gabrielle Lipton**





Selling the Skies

Behind the ad campaigns and logos of major airlines were some of the most seminal artists, photographers, graphic designers, and advertising minds of the mid-20th century. Mary Wells Lawrence—creator of the I Heart NY campaign—rose to stardom thanks to her work for Braniff Airways; Ivan Chermayeff's photographic ads for Pan Am are now housed in the permanent collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art. Often, campaign imagery focused on the exoticism of destinations and aircraft livery, as seen in the posters and ads here, which include works by artists Jean Colin (Air France, top right) and Victor Asseriants (Aeroflot, previous page).



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With 360-degree sea views and spectacular style, Point Yamu by COMO embodies a Phuket getaway at its finest. Luxurious guest rooms and villas afford dazzling vistas of Phang Nga Bay's limestone outcrops and the turquoise waters of the Andaman Sea, as do the 100-meter infinity pool, two restaurants, and the award-winning COMO Shambhala Retreat.

DISPATCHES

AUSTRALIA
Among the
dunes and
dingoes of
Fraser Island

p. 52

FIJI
A South Seas
sojourn to
Yasawa Island

p. 58

TREASURE ISLAND

A seven-hectare dot in the remote Raa Atoll, Maamigili appears at first glance to be a quintessential Maldivian resort island, complete with all the trappings of barefoot luxury. But beyond its sybaritic pleasures lies a broader purpose: to provide a rare showcase for Maldivian artifacts and artistry.

BY CHRISTOPHER P. HILL



Pretty as a Picture
Stilted above
Maamigili's lagoon,
the Loama Art
Gallery is the only
space of its kind in
the Maldives.



A hole in the ground is not the sort of thing you'd expect to be a point of pride at a five-star Maldivian resort, but then, this is no ordinary hole. Carved out of the sandy soil of Maamigili eight or more centuries ago, it's an ancient bathing tank, presumably part of a Buddhist temple compound that once stood at the heart of a prosperous island community. The temple is long gone, as are most traces of Maamigili's erstwhile residences. But the sunken bath remains, recently excavated to reveal a circular, sandstone-lined cavity maybe four meters across and now half-filled with brackish water that a man is busy siphoning with a pool pump.

"This is an important historical site," says Umair Badheeu, the culture and heritage manager at Loama Resort, which opened earlier this year as the seven-hectare island's sole occupant. "It is in such good condition because it was filled with sand for a very long time, so everything inside was unharmed. When we are done cleaning it and removing the silt, it will be one of our chief exhibits."

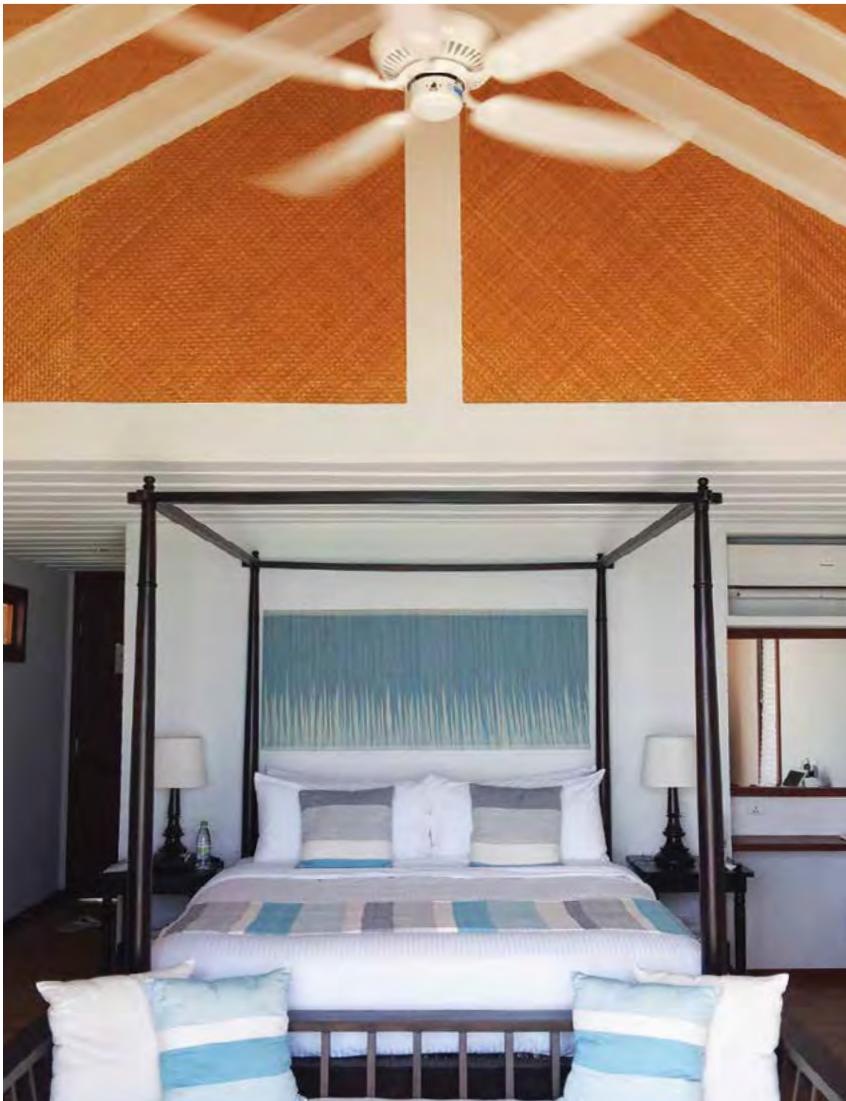
Maldivian Magic

Above: A view of Maamigili from the window of an approaching seaplane. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Prawn with a local salad of grated coconut, *copy faih* lettuce, and chili at Loama's poolside Marha Bar; the resort's Beach Club; a lacquered *malaafai*—round boxes traditionally used to serve food—on display in the lobby museum; inside an overwater villa.

The Buddhist era in the Maldives came to an end in the 12th century with the coming of Islam, and precious few relics from those times have survived. This is true even in the National Museum in Male, the capital, where, in February 2012, vandals destroyed an irreplaceable collection of Buddhist coral-stone carvings—some 30 pieces dating back a millennium or more. It was a major loss to the archipelago's cultural patrimony, one that Loama hopes to partially redress by preserving and collecting relics of its own, keeping what Umair calls "our connection with our ancestors" alive.

The bathing tank (and in fact there are two on the island; the other has yet to be excavated) is by far the oldest artifact discovered on Maamigili during the construction of the resort, but there were plenty of other treasures found buried in the sand. These include caches of cowrie shells—prized as currency in centuries past—and dozens of unglazed terra-cotta pots, antique Chinese porcelain bowls, and 400-year-old Dutch onion bottles, all of which suggest that this tiny, teardrop-shaped island in the remote Raa Atoll once served as a hub for traders plying the ancient sea routes across the Indian Ocean. Umair, a genial 33-year-old with a background in fine arts, was hired a year before the resort opened to begin assembling these finds into a collection that has since grown to more than 300 pieces, a good many of which he purchased from households and collectors elsewhere in the far-flung archipelago. A fraction of these are now displayed in Loama's open-air lobby museum, which Umair tells me is one of only two licensed museums outside of Male and the only one operated by a resort. Carefully arranged in glass cases and vitrines, the objects range from the aforementioned ceramics to lacquered boxes, lacemaking bobbins, and a copper medicine kettle, alongside such sturdy wooden implements as grain measures, coconut scrapers, and *idiyappam* pressers. "Even these items that were used by regular people a generation or two ago are precious, because they are no longer in use, lifestyles are changing in the Maldives very much. They represent traditions we are losing."

The museum at Loama is very much a work in progress. At the behest of the resort's owner, Umair has already acquired far more items than the existing display cases can possibly hold, and for now, the bulk of the collection fills the shelves of his office, an air-conditioned hut tucked in a thicket of mangrove trees. There, he shows me more relics: an inscribed coral-stone tablet plucked from the remains of an old mosque on some other island; a small terra-cotta oil lamp decorated with a Buddhist tortoise motif; a child's limewashed writing tablet, once used

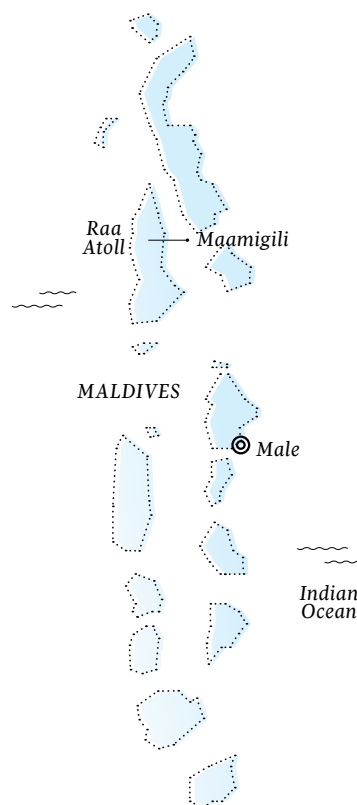




for studying the Koran; five-liter buckets brimming with cowrie shells. And a short walk from the clearing where the bathing tank was unearthed is another of Umair's projects: a low, wood-paneled Maldivian house that he brought over from a neighboring island and is now reassembling here as an exhibit of traditional domesticity, complete with hand-fashioned furnishings and a rope bed.

Loama's admirable cultural agenda—a rarity in a country whose 100 or so resort islands tend to focus exclusively on hedonistic pursuits—goes well beyond history lessons, though. Guests wishing to immerse themselves in village life can join a tour to the nearby island of Maakurathu, home to 1,200 people. With Umair as our guide, we stroll its sandy, sun-blasted streets visiting households where elderly women are busy weaving palm leaves into roof thatching or making rope from coir, a coconut-husk fiber. Under the shade of a breadfruit tree on one street corner, a trio of matrons in black headscarves sits next to a wheelbarrow splitting open beach almonds with a rusty adze. Without being asked, they proffer a handful of the hard-won nuts, bantering away in Dhivehi—the islands' Sanskrit-derived language—all the while.

Back at the resort, Umair also curates a contemporary art gallery, the first of its kind in the Maldives. Occupying a thatched overwater villa just off the main pier, the space serves as a showcase for a rotating roster of local artists such as Aminath Hilmy, Ahmed Anil, and Eagan Badeeu, Umair's brother. In a country of fewer than 400,000 people, Umair admits that he has a limited pool of creative talent to draw on. Nonetheless, he's thrilled by the



Paradise with a Purpose

Above, from left: Umair Badheeu, Loama's culture and heritage manager; the resort's 55 overwater villas and suites are connected by a jetty to the northern end of the island, with golf buggies on hand to shuttle guests to and fro.

prospect of providing a platform for the islands' unsung artistic community.

Of course, Loama caters amply to hedonists too. The food is excellent, from the exquisitely fresh sashimi at Meyzu restaurant to the Thai dishes at beachside Thundi and even to the breakfast buffet at Fazaa, a sand-floored dining pavilion where I discover my favorite new morning snack, *mashuni*—flaked tuna with grated coconut, shallots, and chili that you eat with *roti*-style flatbread. There's a jasmine-scented spa with overwater treatment rooms whose glass floor panels allow you to gaze down at colorful fishes as you lie prone on the massage table. And there are watersports galore, as well as a pair of motorized *dhoni* boats that you can take out for a spot of line fishing or a sunset cruise.

As for the accommodations, guests have their choice of 105 beachfront or overwater villas, the latter perched on timber pilings with steps leading down to the lagoon. They're tastefully decorated, perfectly comfortable, and individually named with Dhivehi words like Ufaa ("happy") and Saafu ("pure"), offering one last lesson in Maldivian culture. My villa is called Jazbee, meaning "beauty," which seems as apt a description of the place as any. Now, if only Loama would let guests pay with cowrie shells, paradise would be complete. ☺

Loama Resort Maldives at Maamigili, Raat Atoll; 960/658-8100; loamahotelsandresorts.com; doubles from US\$1,521, including breakfast. Seaplane transfers from Male take at least 45 minutes.

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Trunk Call

Dense rain forest punctuated by freshwater dune lakes covers most of Fraser Island's interior.



SHIFTING SANDS

Australia's Fraser Island is known to its traditional aboriginal owners as paradise, and it's easy to see why: centuries-old forests, crystal-clear lakes, and wildlife galore make this overgrown sandbar a nirvana for nature lovers.

BY KALPANA SUNDER

LANGKAWI ALLURE

Experience Malaysian island luxury at its finest at
The Danna Langkawi



On the island of Langkawi off of Malaysia's northwest coast, The Danna Langkawi sits as one of the country's premier holiday escapes. Combining colonial style with a gorgeous tropical beach setting bordering the picturesque Telaga Harbour, The Danna Langkawi never fails to sweep guests off their feet.

From its airy, pillared lobby to its tranquil gardened courtyard overlooking the pool and beach, the hotel's design exudes the relaxed feeling of old-world glamour. Its 125 rooms, furnished with four-poster beds and colored with warm hues, begin at 60 square meters and size all the way up to the 600-square-meter Royal Imperial Suite, complete with its own private steam room and gym. All rooms boast private balconies, which serve as perfect places to enjoy a drink or a book with views of the harbor or the backdrop of rolling green hills.

Conveniently situated just 11 kilometers from the airport, The Danna Langkawi is nearby myriad natural and cultural attractions, which the hotel's Experience Planner services help guests explore. From trekking through the island's monkey-filled jungles to boating to other Langkawi islets and diving coral reefs, there are options galore for filling vacation days, made all the better by the hotel's experienced staff



that happily takes care of all the arranging, transportation, and guides.

There's also no shortage of reasons to stay and kick back at the hotel. Its three-tiered infinity pool is the largest in Langkawi, complete with a jacuzzi and flanked by the Pool Café. Relaxation also awaits on the hotel's top floor, where The Danna Spa offers treatment rooms overlooking the gorgeous surrounds and yoga and fitness classes outside. Next to the spa, the fitness center features state-of-the-art equipment. And as for dining, three restaurants offer everything from afternoon tea to fine-dining Mediterranean and evening cocktails with live music.

With its luxurious rooms, impressive facilities and guest services, and stunning location, it comes as no surprise that The Danna Langkawi has received numerous awards since it opened in 2010. Most recently, the hotel received the 2015 TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice awards for both Top Hotel and Top Luxury Hotel in Malaysia in addition to ranking as one of the top 25 hotels in Asia.



Telaga Harbour Park, Pantai Kok,
Langkawi, Malaysia; 60-4/959-3288;
thedanna.com



I am surrounded by the world's only rain forest planted in sand. All around me are ancient ferns and towering vine-draped trees that rise up to a thick green canopy 40 meters above our heads. Craning my neck toward the morning sun's filtered light, I can't help but think how amazing it is that all this grows here—or that anything grows here at all.

"Here" is Fraser Island, set just off the Queensland coast north of Brisbane. A World Heritage Site encompassing 1,840 square kilometers—roughly two and a half times the size of Singapore—it is the largest sand island in the world, formed over the past 800,000 years by sand traveling from the tablelands of New South Wales through a network of inland rivers and ocean currents until being deposited here atop a base of volcanic bedrock. Thanks to mycorrhizal fungi that help feed nutrients to plants, the island has grown into a biological wonder, an exotic ecosystem of wildlife and wetlands, rain forests and mangroves, colossal dunes and freshwater lakes. "Think of it as a large sand pit, mate, or as a big piece of blotting paper," says Glen, my enthusiastic tour guide. "Fraser Island is like a sponge. The rain soaks into the ground and it doesn't come out for anywhere from five to 200 years."

First charted in 1770, the island is named for shipwreck survivor Eliza Fraser, who was traveling with her husband, a Scottish sea captain, aboard his Singapore-bound brig when it ran aground on a nearby reef in 1836. But the island's traditional owners, the Butchalla people, call their home K'gari—"paradise"—after the legend of a goddess who, having helped



Taking the Waters

Apart from being a good place to cool off after a hike through the rain forest, the mildly acidic waters of picturesque Lake McKenzie are said to be good for the skin and hair, above. Top left: One of Fraser Island's resident kookaburras.

to create the earth, decided it was so beautiful that she never wanted to leave, and so was transformed into an island on its surface.

My own adventure to get here begins at Rainbow Beach, the tiny mainland town from where Fraser Island Discovery, the tour company I'm traveling with, starts its trips. Backing the white shore, its rainbow-colored cliffs look as if painted from the palette of a crazy artist, their bright hues—formed by mineral oxides and leached vegetable dyes—stacked atop one another in bands of rusty orange, vermillion, and tangerine. We quickly pose in front for some pictures before catching the barge that takes us across a thin estuary called the Great Sandy Strait and lands us on the island 10 minutes later.

From the minute we roll off the barge, it's a rollercoaster ride. Equipped with special

tires, our giant gray bus jerks and jolts as it makes its way over tree roots and steep sand banks, and I feel as shook up as a cocktail by the time we get to 75 Mile Beach on the east coast. I'm surprised to learn that this 120-kilometer stretch of sand is registered as a national highway, with an 80 kmh speed limit; it also doubles as a runway for small sightseeing planes. I keep my eyes peeled for one of the island's iconic wild dingoes but only manage to spot little red-capped plovers, some intrepid beachgoers, and more than a few cars stuck in the deep sand, with people on all fours trying to dig them out under a clear blue sky.

The bus finally comes to a stop and we all clamber out, happy to have our feet back on solid ground. The first thing Glen points out is the muddy-brown stones scattered around the beach. These, he tells us, are coffee rocks, a kind of sedimentary rock made of sand grains cemented together by the detritus of decomposed plants. It doesn't take long to see that everything on Fraser Island revolves around the sand. As we set out across the dunes behind the beach, Glen tells us not to be fooled



The Details
Fraser Island Discovery
(fraserislanddiscovery.com.au; one-day tours from US\$140 per person) packs daytrips to the island with rain-forest walks and freshwater swims, as well as a visit to the 1935 shipwreck of the S.S. *Maheno* and, on its two-day itineraries, a night's stay at a timber-cabin retreat.

by their size; despite reaching heights of upward of 200 meters, they're constantly shifting. Some, known as sandblows, creep inland over time as they're pushed along by strong winds off the Pacific, burying vegetation along the way and stopping only once they reach the shelter of the deep forest. Even the creeks we pass, flowing with the purest water, have beds of white sand.

Shortly after stopping for a light creek-side snack of coffee and lamingtons (a classic Australian dessert of sponge cakes coated in chocolate and coconut) we reach Eurong, Fraser Island's main village. Comprising a few cabins, campgrounds, and a handful of small stores, it's not much more than a place for overnight visitors to stay. We do, however, spot numerous signs cautioning us to be "dingo smart"—Fraser's wild dogs are considered to be one of the purest strains of dingo in Australia, but get too close, and the fox-faced animals are likely to attack.

With nothing much to see in Eurong, we continue into the forest, so dense and enveloping that the beach seems suddenly far

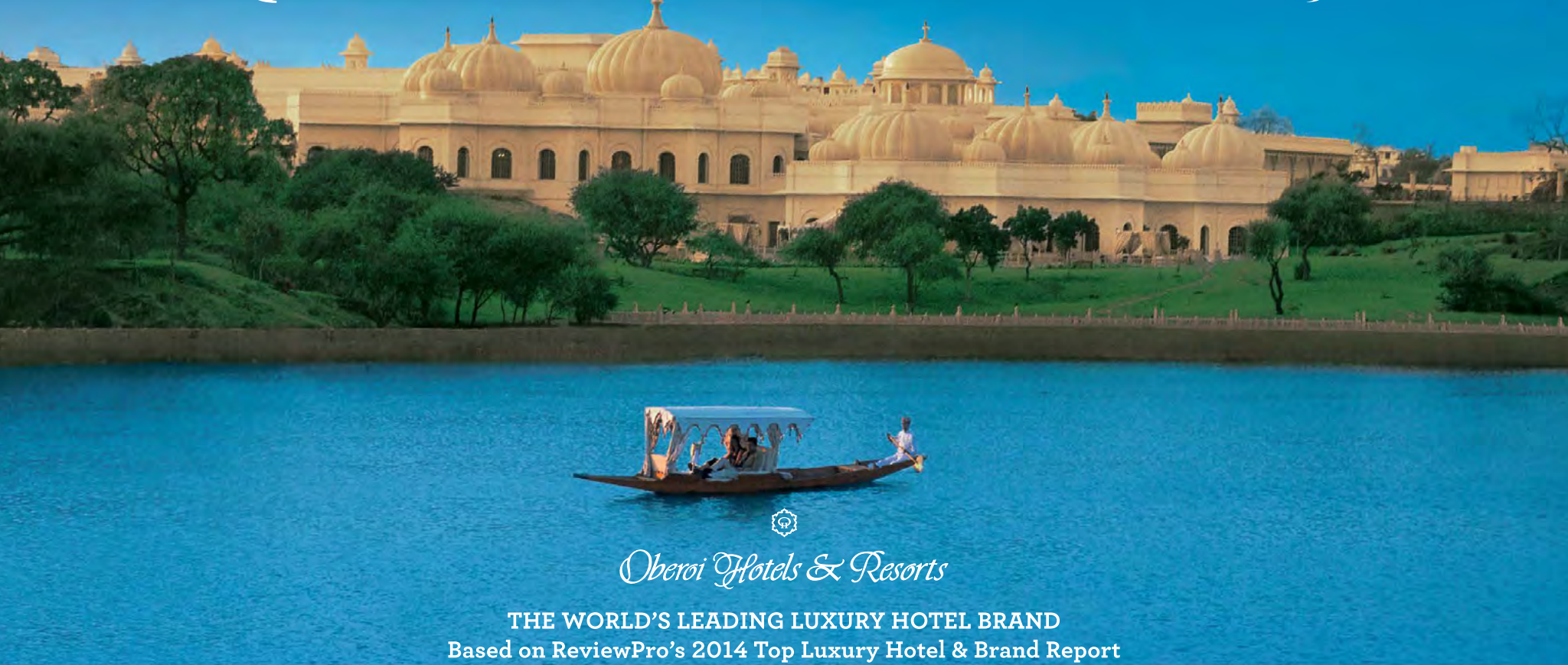
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away. We meander through stands of scribbly gums—so-called because their creamy bark is etched with scribble-like furrows created by moth larvae—and under satinay trees that rise high as cathedrals. Known for their extremely hard and termite-resistant timber, these trees along with bushy kauri pines and brush boxes were logged on the island for roughly a century until deforestation activity was put to a stop in 1991. “This was the heart of a lucrative logging industry,” Glen tells us, pointing out the ax marks still visible on some of the trunks. “The wood of these trees was used in the building of the Suez Canal and the rebuilding of the London docks.” Our path leads right up to the old logging station, which has since been converted into a campground and restaurant where we stop for an alfresco lunch. As we eat, an audience of big yellow-and-black

Making Tracks

Below: Tourist traffic on 75 Mile Beach, the island’s main “highway,” which provides a unique setting for some off-road driving as well as an occasional landing strip for small airplanes.



goannas lurks expectantly around us waiting for a scrap of food to fall. Kookaburras cackle in the branches above.

Sated, we’re urged back on our feet by Glen and set off along a snaking boardwalk to Pile Valley, where the forest thickens with satinay trees that have been growing there for a millennia or more. Our route follows a creek that harbors fish, turtles, and eels, while the impossibly long fronds of rare king ferns growing along its banks dip into the translucent waters. “The water is so pure that indigenous women used to give birth here,” Glen tells us. “And did you notice that it’s silent? There are no rocks and no bubbling noises, as the water just flows on sand.”

It’s an eerie, primordial world of orange fungi sprouting from rotting tree trunks and rocks, strangler figs draped in vines, and gossamer spider webs spun into architectural masterpieces. Orchids entwine gigantic tree trunks that have twisted at strange angles to reach whatever light penetrates the canopy. We spot swamp wallabies, tree frogs, and occasionally glimpse the flash of a yellow-tailed black cockatoo—one of more than 350 bird species on the island—high in the trees.

For more than 11 kilometers we weave our way through this mystical forest until finally it clears, and we arrive at Lake McKenzie, a popular postcard image. Fringed by sugar-white silica sand and craggy trees, this sapphire expanse of crystal-clear water is one of the 40 “perched” lakes on the island. According to Butchalla lore, they are the eyes of the goddess K’gari, but Glen explains them prosaically as rainwater catchments that form in sand dunes above the water table. Sediment and decaying debris at the bottom keep the water from seeping out but also make it too acidic for most aquatic life. For people, though, the waters are said to have beautifying effects. “You’ll look 10 years younger after a swim here,” Glen says with a smile. That’s all the encouragement I need to plunge in, immediately feeling reenergized and almost weightless in the lake’s cool waters.

With the tide rising along 75 Mile Beach, Glen tells us it’s time to go. As we head back to the coast and begin driving down that great sandy highway, I finally spot a pair of furry dingoes sunning themselves on the sand beside a dead turtle. Glen stops the bus a reasonable distance away to give us the chance to take photos. It’s our last still moment witnessing the improbable beauty of this place before we continue on our way back to the mainland, our tire tracks in the sand vanishing with the breeze. ●

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Out of the Blue
The approach to
Yasawa Island
by air provides a
bird's-eye view of
the surrounding
archipelago.



FAR-FLUNG IN FIJI

A small island in the seas beyond Viti Levu offers not just scenery and solitude, but also a glimpse at a proud culture and a taste of curry-scented Fijian cuisine.

BY PENNY WATSON

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Given the legacy of shipwreck tales that this part of the world has inspired, it feels a tad out of keeping to arrive by plane. Or maybe it's just sensible. In any case, my 747 flight has landed in the Fijian transport hub of Nadi and now, in the spirit of getting away from it all—quickly—I'm bumping along on thermals in a nine-seat turboprop surrounded by brilliant blue sky.

As if Fiji's main island, 3,000-plus kilometers northeast of Sydney, wasn't remote enough, I'm heading farther still from mainstream civilization to the eponymous main island of the Yasawa Group, an archipelago of pristine reefs and turquoise seas. The flight takes all of 25 minutes, but the views from my window seat are mesmeric: beyond the yacht-dotted bays of Viti Levu's coastline, myriad tiny islands—some of them low and sandy, others volcanic and mountainous—pass under the wing of the plane. Reefs gleam effulgently green like big opals just below the surface of the water. Speedboats, drawing chalky white wake lines across the ocean, look lost in the vastness. Up ahead, the horizon is indistinguishable between the blues of the sky and sea.

This dreamy tableau has given the Yasawas their reputation as an archetypal South Seas destination. When the wanderlusting mind defaults to sipping cocktails from coconuts on perfect white beaches, it likely ends up here, in a place that seems plucked from *Robinson Crusoe* or *Treasure Island* or, quite accurately, *The Blue Lagoon*, parts of which were filmed here in the late 1970s. At the very least it provokes an atavistic yearning to feel sand between our toes.



Images From a Small Island

Above, from left: The beachside spa *bure* at Yasawa Island Resort & Spa; the resort's head chef Talala Tupou preparing a ceviche-like dish of *kokoda*.

As we edge toward Yasawa, pockets of civilization—flat-roofed houses surrounding cross-topped churches—appear on its outlying islands. I spot a swimming pool and beach umbrellas. Soon after, the plane tilts its wings and lines itself up with a grassy and worryingly short runway. We descend, rocking briefly as the hills appear to rise on either side. Touching down, the plane roars its engine and dust billows behind us. Welcome to paradise.

Twenty kilometers long and rarely more than two kilometers wide, Yasawa is the farthest island in the group from Nadi and so attracts fewer visitors than its southern neighbors. It has six villages, approximately 1,200 residents, and just one resort, the Yasawa Island Resort & Spa, from whence floral-shirted resort staff greet me at the airstrip with a sweet-smelling frangipani garland and a fresh coconut, smiling all the while.

After a short jeep ride I'm settled into my thatched-roof beachfront *bure*. It's big enough for a family and equipped with two of life's great luxuries—an outdoor shower and a low-slung hammock. On the balcony I look out to oversized orange hibiscus flowers, coconut trees, and a

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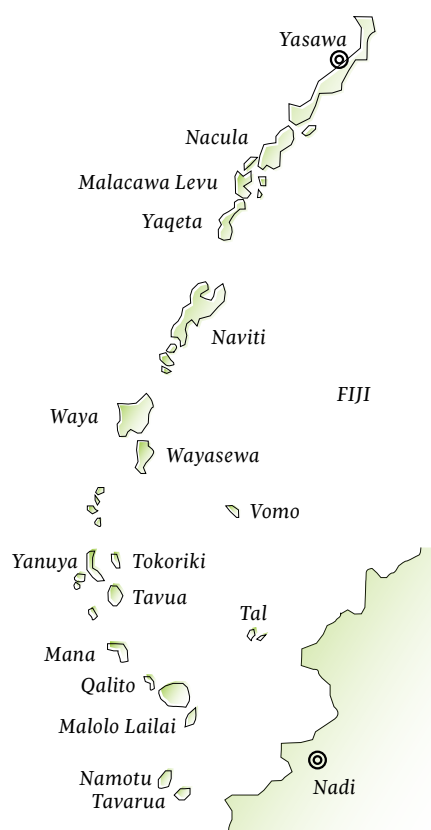
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lounge pavilion built for two, just beyond which lies a kilometer-long stretch of white sand.

Despite their abounding beauty, the Yasawas weren't always a tourist destination. Cruise ships have long visited these waters, but it wasn't until the 1950s that passengers were allowed to step off the boat. Land-based tourism didn't catch on until the late '80s when the Fijian government launched the *Yasawa Flyer*, a daily fast-cat service that arrives from the mainland via the Mamanuca Islands. Resorts and backpacker accommodation followed. But for the most part, the archipelago retains a castaway-island atmosphere that I find instantly seductive.

My resort offers romantic boat trips to a number of secluded beaches with names like Paradise and Lovers. Guests—couples, mostly—are dropped off armed with a picnic hamper and beach towels and picked up at the end of the day bronzed and beatific. No doubt it's honeymoon heaven. But as I'm traveling solo, I opt instead for a 30-minute boat ride to Sawa-i-Lau, situated off the southern end of Yasawa. This magical limestone island is home to the enchanting underwater caves that featured in *The Blue Lagoon*. As we zip across the waves, I muse that this is much the same view Captain William Bligh would have had when he became the first European to sight the Yasawas in May 1789, little more than a week after mutineers on the HMS *Bounty* cast him and 18 loyalists adrift in



Fijian Fantasy

Above: Sawa-i-Lau Island, located off the southern tip of Yasawa proper, is home to the sea caves that featured in *The Blue Lagoon*.

the ship's launch. The mariners didn't make it ashore, however; having been recently attacked on the Tongan island of Tofua, and mindful of Fiji's reputation for cannibalism, Bligh and his men rowed away ("with some anxiety," he noted coolly in his log) after spotting a pair of Fijian war canoes.

Thankfully, I have no such reservations and enter the first cave in wide-eyed wonder. The beautiful turquoise water in this yawning space is lit by sunlight streaming down from an opening above, sending rippling shadows over limestone walls that have been worn smooth and shiny by years of running water. A second cave, accessed by diving underwater and following the beam of my guide's flashlight, is similarly lit through a long chute. This cave is known locally as the Caretaker because it provides fresh water from above and food from below—namely eels and red snapper.

Back at the resort, there's more to learn about Fijian food. I get talking to head chef Talala Tupou, who is busy preparing *kokoda*—a ceviche-like dish made from raw snapper marinated in lime juice and combined with fresh coconut, capsicum, and red onion. Traditional Fijian cuisine, he explains, was a diet mainly of fresh seafood and coconut cooked *lovo* style, that is, wrapped in banana leaves and cooked with root vegetables on hot rocks buried in the sand. Then, with the start of British colonial rule

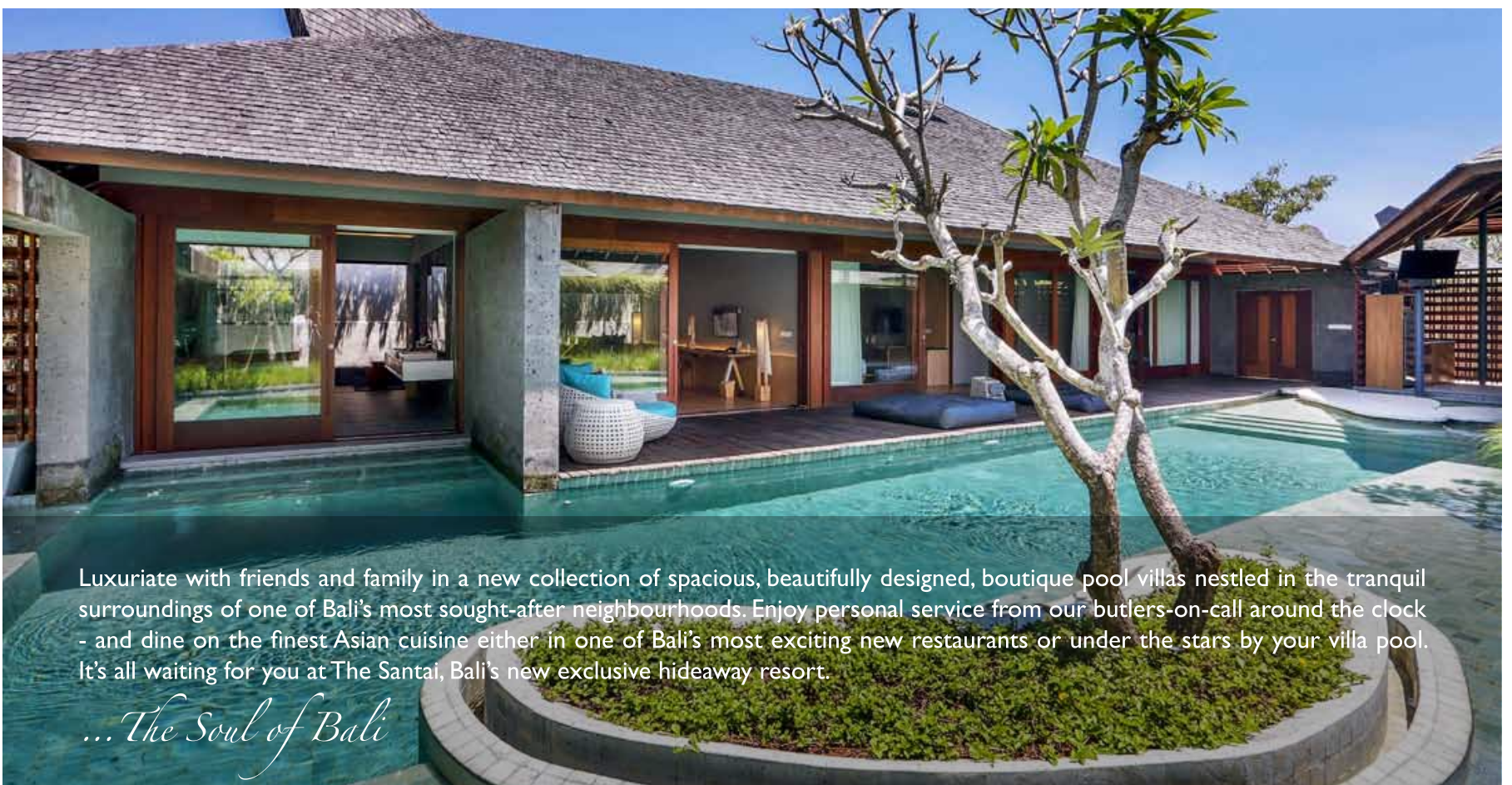
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in the late 1870s, an influx of indentured Indians arrived in Fiji to work the sugarcane plantations. “Fijian food culture hasn’t been the same since, and that’s a good thing,” Tupou says. “The Indian population brought with it herbs and spices and oils and changed our cuisine forever.” Sure enough, my favorite Fijian meal becomes seafood curry, a tantalizing mix of fresh fish, coconut, and lime mixed with the familiar flavors of tikka, korma, or masala.

At the poolside bar, I get chatting to another staff member, Manasa, a tall and lean older man with a big camera-ready smile. He’s introduced to me as “basically the reason there is tourism in the Yasawas,” having tempted the resort’s original owner to invest in Fiji and, after establishing a business plan, going from village to village seeking permission to allow tourism on the island. The resort opened in 1991 and the relationship with the closest village, Bukama, where Manasa was born, has prospered largely by retaining village customs and traditions while giving local families an income.

A visit to Bukama gives an insight into the local culture you won’t get from a book. Yasawa’s remoteness makes the residents more traditional than Fijians from other parts of

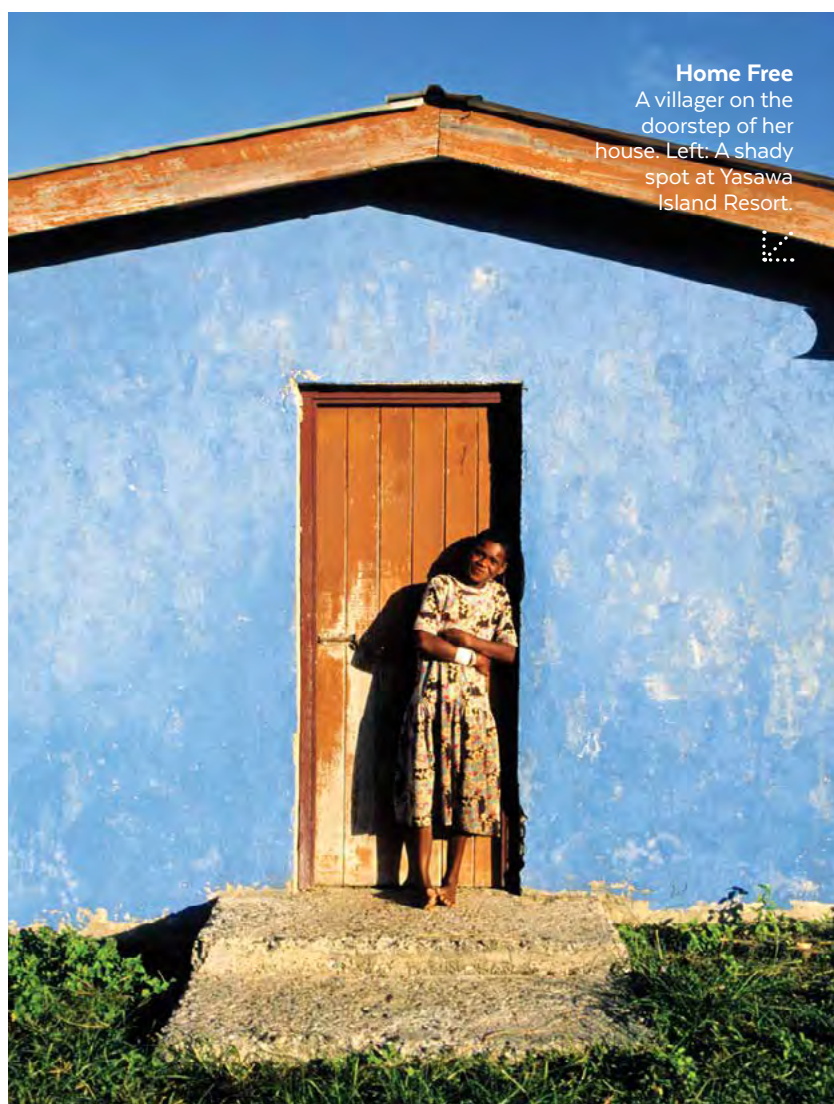
The Details

From Hong Kong, **Fiji Airways** (fiji Airways.com) flies directly to Nadi on the main island of Viti Levu three times a week. For travelers from Singapore, the fastest route is with **Singapore Airlines** (singaporeair.com), which offers a daily code-share flight with Virgin Australia via Brisbane. From Nadi, the daily air transfer operated by **Yasawa Island Resort & Spa** (yasawa.com; doubles from US\$825, including all meals and various activities) whisks guests to Yasawa Island in 25 minutes, at the cost of US\$235 per person one way.

the country. We dress conservatively in long skirts and sleeves and take gifts of newspaper-wrapped kava roots to the village chief, who welcomes us into his house. Sitting on a woven grass mat surrounded by walls adorned in straw hats, shell beads, and faded photographs, Manasa translates facts about the village.

We learn that about 200 people live here, mostly farming families with four to five children. Villagers trade lobster, fish, and fruit from other villages in return for their produce. There are two religions, Methodist and Assembly of God, and Bukama is proudly the only village on the island to have a combined service, on Sundays at 10 a.m. The village’s only outside income is rent from the resort, which the chief says “pays for good houses that withstand cyclones and storms.”

At the nearby primary school, we are treated as special guests to a heart-warming rendition of local songs accompanied by clapping and foot stomping. The school’s simple breezeblock classrooms overlook a palm-lined rugby pitch with spectacular ocean views—prime real estate anywhere else in the world. But on Yasawa, it’s the perfect spot to be cast away, regardless of how you got here. ☉



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

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1878

As grand ladies often do, Liberty Enlightening the World—or the Statue of Liberty, as she's better known—took a while to get ready. When French historian Édouard de Laboulaye proposed a statue commemorating the alliance of France and the United States during the American Revolution, the two countries partnered to complete the project in 1876 for the Declaration of Independence's centennial. Sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi and architect Gustave Eiffel designed the 46-meter-tall, copper-sheathed monument on one side of the Atlantic, while Richard Morris Hunt built her massive pedestal on the other. Yet despite each country's best efforts—France displaying her head in the Champ de Mars at the 1878 Paris World Fair to garner support, pictured above; American newsman Joseph Pulitzer using his paper's pages to hound the wealthy for donations—difficulties raising funds pushed the due date back nearly a decade. By the time the statue was completed, shipped to New York, and reassembled on Bedloe Island (later renamed Liberty Island), it was fall of 1885. But it was worth the wait. Lady Liberty became a beacon of hope for generations of immigrants to the U.S., and today, more than four million people visit annually to climb the 377 steps to her crown. A 1984 restoration that covered the flame of her torch in 24-karat gold is further testament to Liberty's enduring worth. —Gabrielle Lipton



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In the 50 years since its independence, Southeast Asia's smallest country has been transformed from a struggling city-state into one of the richest nations in the world. Here, an occasional resident looks back on the decades of change, and on the man who shaped Singapore's course, chewing-gum ban and all.

BY **DAVEN WU**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
TODD BELTZ

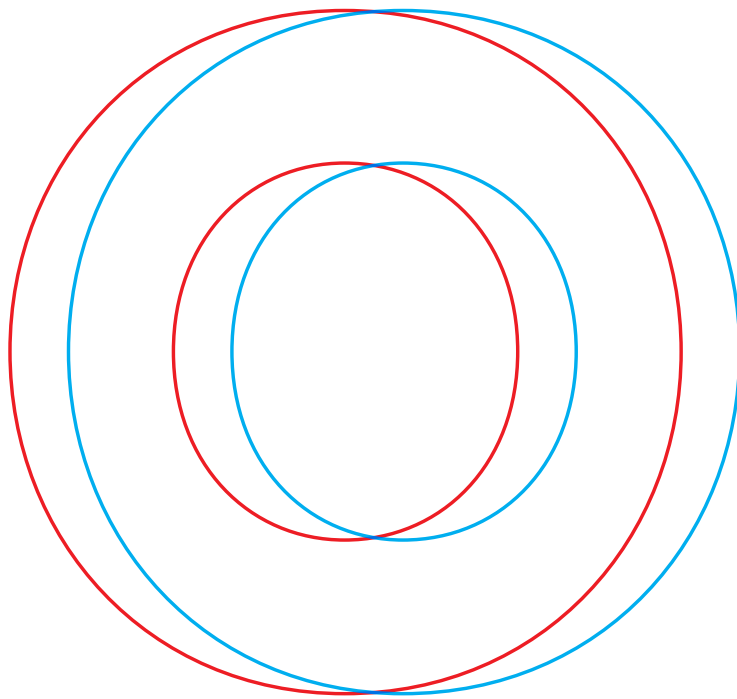
SINGAPORE,

Singapore Modern

The entrance to Marina Bay, with the ArtScience Museum at Marina Bay Sands on the left and the office towers of Raffles Place in the background.



NOW AND THEN



On September 12, 1965, shortly after Singapore was cast out of the recently formed Malaysian federation and subsequently declared its own independence, Lee Kuan Yew, the fledgling city-state's prime minister, stood before a crowd of town hall supporters and said, "We made this country from nothing, from mudflats. ... Ten years from now, this will be a metropolis. Never fear!" By any yardstick, it was a bold pronouncement. Even Lee's most enthusiastic loyalists must have blinked.

Granted, 150 years of British colonial rule had created a thriving entrepôt, a solid civil service, and a rather picturesque skyline of Neoclassical and Palladian piles clustered around the southern tip of the island. But outside of the central business district were mudflats, swamps, and dirt-poor kampong villages. Most of the population lived in squalid, crowded tenements. There was no reliable water supply. In real terms, the average Singaporean in 1959 was no richer than his American counterpart of a century earlier.

Against this sobering background, who would dare dream of building a metropolis in a decade? More to the point, just who was this Lee to make such a prediction?

Born in 1923 into an upper-middle class Straits Chinese family, Lee, a Cambridge-trained lawyer, had lived through both the Japanese occupation of the island and its ensuing political struggle toward independence. He was well aware that Singapore had none of the natural resources of its much larger neighbors, Malaysia and Indonesia. His greatest challenge was that he had inherited a nation with no shared culture or language among its diverse population of Chinese (themselves splintered by multiple dialects), Malays, Indians, and Eurasians. The race riots of 1964 were a potentially dire portent.

A canny geostrategist, Lee was undaunted. He knew in his bones that Singapore would pull through. It had to. The alternative was unthinkable. "Here we make the model multicultural society," he insisted in September 1965. "This is not a country that belongs to any single community. It belongs to all of us."

In 1975, almost a decade later, I started primary school in Singapore.

It's a curious thing, but I seem to remember that time in sepia tones. My family lived in a two-story colonial-era terrace house on Emerald Hill Road, just off Orchard Road. Day and night, there was always the pounding noise of construction. Nobody had air-conditioning, not unless you worked in an office or lived in one of those fancy new condos that were sprouting up all over the island. Almost all my friends—tellingly, a diverse mix of Chinese, Malays, and Indians—lived in flats subsidized by the Housing Development Board, or HDB as everyone called it.

In the evenings, we sat down in front of our new color television sets and watched *Mash*, *Happy Days*, *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Disco played on the radio. At school, we dutifully lined up in rows each morning and sang the national anthem, *Majulah Singapura*. I took my first exam when I was six years old and, thanks to Lee's emphasis on a meritocratic educational system, spent the next five years obsessing over my grades.

On the weekends, my mother would take me to the German delicatessen at the Goodwood Park Hotel to pick up honey-smoked ham and pastries. I also always looked forward to visiting my uncle in his office in Raffles Place, with its charming mix of gleaming new high-rises and rundown shophouses along Boat Quay. To celebrate special occasions, he entertained the family at the revolving restaurant atop the Mandarin hotel on Orchard Road and maybe afterward treated us to a movie at the Art Deco-style Cathay cinema. If there were any mudflats or swamps, I don't remember seeing any.

Quite without anyone noticing, Lee and his team of technocrats had actually achieved a metropolis. He was bang on schedule. Admittedly, no one pretended that Singapore was anything like New York or London, but still, for the expatriates starting to flow in from New York and London, it certainly wasn't a hardship posting either. What not many of us realized or appreciated at the time was just how fast the wheels were turning behind the scenes, and how much harder Lee was pressing his foot to the accelerator.

Almost immediately after that 1965 speech, Lee had set about rehousing the population. The surest way to create a sense of community and to enable families to accumulate wealth, he felt, was to give them a home of their own. Property ownership grounded people. It was a philosophy informed by pragmatism and a great deal of chutzpah, but Lee was convinced it would work. And so, armed with sweeping new zoning laws, the HDB razed entire quarters and built in their place the regimented rows of utilitarian tower blocks that have become such a familiar part of Singapore's skyline. By 1970, the housing problem was, in the HDB's own memorable parlance, "licked."

Man with a Plan
Opposite: A youthful portrait of the city-state's founding prime minister on display at the National Museum of Singapore during "In Memoriam: Lee Kuan Yew," a wildly popular exhibition that attracted tens of thousands of visitors during its recent two-month run.



The Formative Years
1923-1950



Those were also the years that set the tone for the West's subsequent perception of Singapore as—to borrow the title of a 1993 article by American novelist William Gibson—"Disneyland with the death penalty." Shoulder-length hair for men was banned and drug importation carried with it a mandatory death penalty. Spitting and littering were punishable with fines. A compulsory two-year national army service for 18-year-old men was introduced. At the same time, the streets and the filthy Singapore River were cleaned up. Orchard Road began its transformation into the Asian version of Fifth Avenue even as, every November, Lee planted a tree as part of his push to transform the island into a garden city.

One day, in the midst of this dizzying transformation, my mother announced that we were moving to Australia. "For a while," she said. We were away 18 years.

I returned to Singapore in 1997, just in time for the Asian financial crisis.

Yes, there was still a distinct whiff of Gibson's Disneyland in the air. Several prominent Western magazines and newspapers had been banned or successfully sued for defamatory articles about Lee, the government, and his family. The United States was still furious over the caning of its teenage expat citizen Michael Fay for vandalizing cars. Also banned was the sale of chewing gum—an exasperated response after mischief-makers began sticking wads of the stuff on the door sensors of subway trains.

But you got the sense that Singaporeans, while happy to gossip and indulge in a bit of *schadenfreude* at the government's expense, were pragmatic to the last. An average growth of nearly 7 percent a year for three straight decades can be a soothing balm for many social injustices, especially if they are happening to someone else.

Superficially—to me at least—the country looked, sounded, smelled, and felt the same. The landmarks from my childhood were all still there, but this was like one of those *Men's Health* cover stories of a slob who underwent a strict diet and hellish daily stints in the gym and emerged absurdly six-packed and ripped. Orchard Road now featured gleaming, marbled emporia that sparkled with a stellar cast of brands led by Gucci, Prada, and Chanel. Marina Bay and Raffles Place bristled with skyscrapers. In the years I had been away, starchitects such as Paul Rudolph, Richard Meier, I. M. Pei, Kenzo Tange, and a young Zaha Hadid had all imprinted the sky-

line with distinctive silhouettes.

The dining scene sizzled as a generation of young foreign chefs like Emmanuel Stroobant, Susur Lee, and Paolo Scarpa arrived and put their foie gras, *ragù*, and nouvelle fusion up against the traditional menu of shark's fin, beef *rendang*, and Peking duck. Nightclubs were booming, putting paid to the tired old trope that Singaporeans were a buttoned-up people who didn't know how to have fun. Zouk ruled the roost, but my friends and I haunted Elvis, a windowless basement boîte where we all danced on the bar top like a bad take from *Coyote Ugly*.

Gay activism was also starting to gather pace. Fridae, an out-and-proud gay social and lifestyle website, debuted in 2001. The campaign to decriminalize gay sex was conducted alongside heartfelt pronouncements by Lee—now an elderly statesman who had stepped down from his prime ministership in 1990—that gays were "born this way" and that, notwithstanding the lagging pace of conservative Singaporeans, the whole thing was a moot point anyway since the government had no intention of enforcing the Victorian-era legislation. My mother, a long-time Lee fan, marveled, "I can't believe the Old Man is still going so strong!"

At the same time, drag queen Kumar's cabaret and comedy act was a sensation for its merciless pillorying of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and the government. Within a few years, his act had become so mainstream that he had his own show on national TV.

None of this felt the least bit like the Singapore portrayed in the Western press, which continued to snipe about the perceived lack of civil liberties. But that was an issue that didn't seem to bother too many Singaporeans.

In the years since, the pace has not let up. Everywhere I turn, the Singapore I grew up in as a child and returned to as an adult morphs at a dizzying rate. Blink, and almost overnight a new building by Ole Scheeren, Zaha Hadid, or Daniel Libeskind has sprung up—though, true to Lee's vision of a city in a garden, the island remains vividly green and lush with virgin rain forests, roads lined with angasana and flame trees, and regenerated green spaces like the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve and Admiralty Park, which give lie to the common misperception among outsiders that Singapore is dominated by antiseptic shopping malls.

In a decade, Marina Bay, once a mirror-flat wa-

**WHAT NOT
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ACCELERATOR**

State of Change
Opposite, clockwise from top left: Chanida Nickie Sangngampal at the bar of her Longtail Asian Brasserie, one of many restaurants that have opened on Marina Bay alongside the area's ambitious urban transformation; Studio Milou's design for the soon-to-open National Gallery Singapore links the former Supreme Court building and City Hall with a metal-and-glass canopy; walking past the 1930s-built MICA building, a former police station and barracks that now houses ministerial offices; the banquette-lined dining room of Longtail Asian Brasserie.



Lush Life
Lee Kuan Yew's vision for a garden city reaches its zenith at Gardens by the Bay, a waterfront park that is home to domed conservatories and, pictured here, a grove of so-called Supertrees planted with bromeliads, orchids, ferns, and flowering climbers.





Where to Eat

Restaurant André

High-concept French food with an Asian twist (41 Bukit Pasoh Rd.; 65/6534-8880; restaurantandre.com).

Wild Rocket

Homegrown chef Willin Low's temple to "Mod Sin"—contemporary takes on Singapore's myriad hawker dishes (10A Upper Wilkie Rd.; 65/6339-9448; wildrocket.com.sg).

Long Chim

Hungry for a celeb-chef experience? Head to Marina Bay Sands, where such top toques as Wolfgang Puck, Daniel Boulud, Mario Batali, and Tetsuya Wakuda all have outlets. The latest addition to the lineup is Long Chim by chef David Thompson of Nahm fame, serving full-flavored and well-priced Thai street fare (#02-02, Atrium 2, The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands, 10 Bayfront Ave.; 65/6688-7299; longchim.com.sg).

Longtail Asian Brasserie & Bar

Next door to sister restaurant Saba Fine Thai in the 1960s-built Customs House on Marina Bay, Longtail dishes up Laotian, Thai, and Vietnamese bites—think massaman lamb-shank curry and betel-wrapped beef—alongside handcrafted cocktails (70 Collyer Quay, #01-03 Customs House; 65/6532-1319; longtail.sg).

Clifford Pier

Hawker-inspired fare served in a 1930s covered pier transformed by Hong Kong-based designer André Fu (80 Collyer Quay, Fullerton Bay Hotel; 65/6597-5266; fullertonbayhotel.com).

Sin Huat Eating House

Despite its dingy setting and non-existent service, this hole-in-the-wall in Singapore's red-light district remains a perennial favorite, especially for its legendary crab bee hoon (659 Geylang Rd.; 65/6744-9755).

Izy

Shophouse-lined Club Street in Chinatown has emerged as one of the city's hottest dining and entertainment hubs, not the least because it's closed to traffic on Friday and Saturday nights. Of the many good restaurants and bars on the strip, Izy is a must-try, an ultra-hip *izakaya* helmed by chef Kazumasa Yazawa, formerly of Tetsuya Wakuda's Waku Ghin (27 Club St.; 65/6220-3327; izy.com.sg).

Where to Stay

St. Regis Singapore

29 Tanglin Rd.; 65/6506-6888; starwoodhotels.com; doubles from US\$672.

Pan Pacific Orchard

10 Claymore Rd.; 65/6737-0811; panpacific.com; doubles from US\$396.

Capella Singapore

The Knolls, Sentosa Island; 65/6377-8888; capellahotels.com; doubles from US\$545.

What to See

National Day Parade

Expect the annual celebration to be bigger than ever for Singapore's golden jubilee on August 9. Various locations; ndp.org.sg.

National Gallery Singapore

St. Andrew's Rd.; 65/6690-9400; nationalgallery.sg. Opening in October.

Gardens by the Bay

18 Marina Gardens Dr.; 65/6420-6848; gardensbythebay.com.sg.





City Scenes

Above: Outside the Ion Orchard shopping mall on Orchard Road. Opposite: Old meets new at The Clifford Pier, a colonial-era boat pier that now serves as a hawker fare-inspired dining room at the Fullerton Bay Hotel.

terway that opened to the sea, has been transformed into a hive of skyscrapers. A new CBD rises on its southern flank—a glittering, if soulless, counterpart to the futuristic twin biodomes of Gardens by the Bay, right next to Moshe Safdie’s towering triptych, the Marina Bay Sands casino and resort.

One night, emerging from the newly refurbished Victoria Concert Hall, I lingered around the corner to marvel at the Palladian glory of the former Supreme Court and City Hall buildings that are being made over by Paris-based Studio Milou into the gorgeous new National Gallery Singapore, slated to open this October. Nearby, a 654-room hotel designed by Norman Foster and with interiors by Philippe Starck rises across the road from the fabled Raffles Hotel.

Meanwhile, I look at my diary and see that it is filled with upcoming events: the Singapore Biennale, a fashion show by Victoria Beckham, a performance at the Singapore Dance Theatre, Schubert at the Espanade-Theatres by the Bay, drinks at the fabulous rooftop bar at Potato Head Folk.

For a greedy foodie like me, the dining scene is

also a real treat. Mario Batali, Daniel Boulud, Tetsuya Wakuda, Wolfgang Puck, and Luke Mangan all have outposts on the island. And as I tuck into a revelatory Peranakan lunch of lamb *rendang* at homegrown chef Malcolm Lee’s Candlenut, and later at a dinner at André Chiang’s mod pan-Asian Restaurant André, I remember a food-savvy friend Aun Koh’s observation that Singapore’s culinary bonanza “is being fueled by the number of our own chefs that are now well-traveled as well as by the ever-increasing number of foreign chefs who have decided to call Singapore home.”

Of course, there has been a pushback. Even though the economy remains robust—Singapore’s GDP per head is among the world’s highest—there is growing discontent over the rising cost of living, an aging population, low social spending, overcrowded streets, a widening income gap, and a chafing against the government’s traditional assumption—inherited from Lee Kuan Yew and maintained by his eldest son Lee Hsien Loong, Singapore’s prime minister for more than a decade now—that it knows best. This has been accompanied by troubling racial antagonism toward foreign workers who are perceived to be taking away jobs from locals.

On the flip side are Singaporeans like Tham Khai Meng, the worldwide chief creative officer and chairman of advertising giant Ogilvy and Mather, who feels that Singapore needs, more than ever, to lure in diverse and eccentric talents from outside in order to develop the city as an international creative hub. “There is only so much you can do by growing your own talent,” he says. “Singapore now needs a massive infusion of talent from elsewhere, and the stimuli to get them here. Creative people will go to where creative people are.”

Lee Kuan Yew died on March 23. He was 91.

For a week, the country surprised even its most hardened cynics and critics with an outpouring of grief and introspection that I suspect the Old Man would have disapproved of. Almost half a million people lined up in the searing heat and into the night to pay their respects to the body lying in state in Parliament House, framed against the distinctive skyline of this 21st-century metropolis, almost 50 years to the day that Lee threw down his challenge to doubters.

Even more astonishing sights were to come. On the day of Lee’s funeral, 100,000 mourners jammed the route of the cortege, soaked to their skins in the heavy tropical rain. As the cortege passed—surely that tiny coffin could not possibly contain all of the man, I thought—the crowd shouted his name. It seemed to me then as if a politically apathetic nation—coddled (or muzzled, depending on which camp you belonged to) for two generations by a firmly patrician government—had suddenly found a united voice. Disneyland had grown up. ©

Shore Enough
Beachside at
Soneva Kiri, the
most luxurious and
environmentally
responsible resort
on Koh Kood.



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Despite being one of Thailand's biggest islands—not to mention stunningly beautiful—Koh Kood remains a refuge from the crowds, thanks to local and government forces determined to preserve its natural, quiet charm.

BY GABRIELLE LIPTON PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTOPHER WISE



ICE CREAM

and nature. Everyone has their idea of paradise, and this is mine: kicking off my shoes somewhere isolated and beautiful and tucking into some sweet, cold dairy. On a mountaintop in southern Alaska, it required an inventive mix of snow, dried milk, and brown sugar. On a rainy motorcycle trip in central Java, a lunch stop at a tiny roadside *warung* vending fried grasshoppers and milkshakes turned out to be the highlight of the weekend. Although simple, it's a surprisingly rare combination, which is why, when I was planning a short getaway to Thailand, Soneva Kiri caught my eye—a luxurious eco-resort on Thailand's least populated island with a no-shoes policy and a “wall” of 60 flavors of homemade ice cream.

The latter factor is of course not what attracts most travelers to the resort. First, there's its locale on Koh Kood, one of 52 sun-kissed islands in Thailand's easternmost province of Trat, dotted about the reef-filled Gulf of Thailand directly west of Cambodia. And second, it's exceptionally friendly to the environment. The United Nations World Tourism Organization has reported that ecotourism is the fastest growing sector in the tourism industry, and numerous surveys run by travel websites and agencies worldwide have found that roughly a fifth of travelers will pay more for a holiday with a company that has socially and environmentally friendly practices. My own prior experience with green hospitality had come at both ends of the spectrum: a cabin on an off-the-grid, self-sustaining coffee plantation in the Nicaraguan highlands—entirely impressive but entirely barebones—and the little notes littered around big-brand hotel rooms reminding me that linen changes are upon request and to please turn

out the lights. With its “Slow Life” sustainability ethos and myriad awards attesting to its green initiatives both here and at its other location in the Maldives, Soneva Fushi, I was curious where the Soneva brand would fit in.

So it was that I found myself being whisked through Bangkok's Don Mueang airport to where the resort's eight-seat white Cessna waited on the runway. And after about an hour and a half spent staring out the window at islands passing like clouds in the water below, I was walking barefoot up the resort's dock jutting out from the end of a pearly crescent beach, the jungle rising gradually behind, spotted here and there with graceful pitches of tented villa roofs. It was early evening, and everything was absolutely still, bathed in a peachy glow. “Turn back your watch one hour,” a staff member instructed me. “We run on Soneva time here.”

Creating its own time zone turned out to be one of the least of the measures Soneva Kiri has taken to set itself apart from the rest of the world, many of which, like the hours that drift by, are quite inconspicuous. As I situated myself in Beach Villa Nine, something felt different. Everything about it was lovely—the big white bed under a canopy hung from the vaulted bamboo ceiling, the open-air bathroom with a sunken jacuzzi and vanities built into large old trunks stood upright, the pool, the thick borders of trees that made the neighboring villas disappear. I couldn't put my finger on what was missing, perhaps because I didn't miss whatever it was. A nightcap of Thai tea ice cream, very sweet and roasty as the good kind often is, wooed me into not worrying about it.

The next morning, I spotted a barefoot couple make their way directly from breakfast to the ice cream wall, which was all the impetus I needed to follow suit before hopping in my villa's golf cart to rove around and explore where I was. It didn't take long to notice that everything here, from the 36 villas to the six restaurants, kid's club, and spa, were built purely of bamboo and wood; with the exception of the staff quarters, the only concrete on the 41-hectare grounds was the road I was driving on, which was sided with wooden signs inscribed with the words GO SLOW! (perhaps less a reminder about speed than mindset) while passing through palm groves and hills of untouched forest so scenic that I began devising the most inefficient way to get from point A to point B. Often, one of those points was the long stretch of perfect, private beach, where a bunch of middle-aged Englishmen had taken to playing soccer on a field they redrew every day in the sand.

Questioning my Friday—Soneva's *Robinson Crusoe*-inspired moniker for its butlers—about the resort's green practices (Did they grow their own food? Where did they get the water to irrigate this massive place?), she told me to check out the Eco-Centro, a plot of land tucked on a corner of the grounds by the tennis courts. I followed her advice, and was

Island Escape

Opposite, clockwise from top: On the jetty at Soneva Kiri; the resort's 36 eco-friendly villas feature sustainably sourced wood and organic cotton linens; overlooking the pool area.

A Kood as It Gets
Island visitors roam Koh Kood's beaches at sunset. Opposite: A speedboat readies for an excursion out to the surrounding reef where Soneva Kiri runs a coral restoration project.



Getting There

Guests at Soneva Kiri are taken to Koh Kood via a 90-minute flight on the resort's private plane from Bangkok's Don Mueang International Airport and a 10-minute speedboat ride from the landing strip on a nearby island. Otherwise, the island is accessed via speedboat and ferry rides from Laem Sok pier in Trat, the nearest city on the mainland.

quickly taken under the wing of its manager, Khem, a former farmer who in his two years working at Soneva has devised a whole range of ways to keep it green and getting greener. Leftover cooking oil from the restaurants' kitchens is processed into bio-diesel in one part, which goes to fuel a tractor that makes wood chips in another, which are spread atop the 4,500 square meters of gardens that provide half of the produce cooked back in the kitchens—everything from cabbages and apples to holy basil and lemongrass, which he told me to rub on my arms as bug repellent. As he picked some extra-ripe passion fruits for me to eat later, he assured me that everything is organic, sprayed with a mix of galangal and microorganisms as a natural insecticide.

Linked between the gardens is a system of four ponds covered in Monet-like lily pads that filter enough rain and gray water to irrigate the entire resort, while four underwater wells provide all the potable water. And four rooms for plastic, glass and bottles, metal, and paper house all the sorted recyclables Khem brings to Bangkok once a month to cash in. Looking inside, the piles were astoundingly

small, and it was then that I realized what I hadn't been missing: trash. Aside from toilet paper and the wrapper of a toothbrush kit I'd requested, I hadn't seen a single disposable thing since I'd arrived.

The thing about paradise, especially in Thailand, is that it needs caretakers who are adamant about keeping it as such. And impressively, Koh Kood's has come largely as the Thai government, which seemingly prefers to contain the beach crowds to existing hot spots like Phuket, Koh Samui, and Koh Chang. The latter, also in Trat, was hit with a wave of terrible mudslides in 2010, which were attributed to soil erosion caused by resort construction. As at Soneva Kiri, strict restrictions have been placed on Koh Kood regarding deforestation, building with concrete, recycling, and infrastructure.

The first and only time I put my shoes on all trip was when I went out to explore the rest of the island. Although it's the fourth largest island in the country—an hour's drive from north to south—most of Koh Kood is quite empty. Its 2,500 residents mostly reside in a few small fishing villages, there are some



Where to Stay

While committed to making every effort to preserving its surrounds, **Soneva Kiri** (66-82/208-8888; soneva.com; doubles from US\$905) doesn't sacrifice an ounce of luxury, and its 36 one- to five-bedroom villas overlooking vast stretches of private beach are undoubtedly the nicest on the island. **Away Koh Kood** (66-8/7136-4036; awayresorts.com; doubles from US\$290), with breezy bungalows and a spa set on Klong Chao Bay, is another good option.

30 lodgings for tourists that primarily come as low-key bungalows, and little else. There are no banks or ATMs on the island, and its first power line from the mainland is set to come online later this year; for years, solar and generator power have sustained the entire island.

My guide, Kae, grew up on Koh Kood before going to study and live in Bangkok, only coming back when his parents were older and needed caretaking. He first took me to the temple in Ao Salat, the island's main fishing village about a 30-minute drive from the resort. "I was so unhappy when I had to leave Bangkok," he told me as we stood at the top of the temple's bell tower, looking out over the top of an enormous golden Buddha toward the ocean, where five blue fishing boats were making their way back to shore like ducklings in a row. "There's nothing really to do here—no nightlife, no attractions, you know everyone. But now I'm so happy, I'll never leave. It's such a natural way of life."

Down at the dock, an old ferry boat had just come in with a cargo of goods from the mainland—Coca-Cola-branded refrigerators, beach furniture, pack-

aged foods. We made our way past the assembly line of men doing the unloading, passing long stretches of metal mesh with millions of teensy pink shrimp laid out to dry, others with spiky black sea urchins. Fishing is still a substantial source of income for the island, and the villagers in Ao Salat refuse to secede to the growing tourism economy, or "sell out" as Kae put it. Small fishing boats painted in bright turquoise, pink, blue, and red bobbed in the water with ribbons and garlands laced around their prows for blessings. Some were piled with traps for crabs and squid, others with nets and long lines to drag underwater and hook grouper, barracuda, and mackerel. Kids hopped from stern to stern in a game of tag.

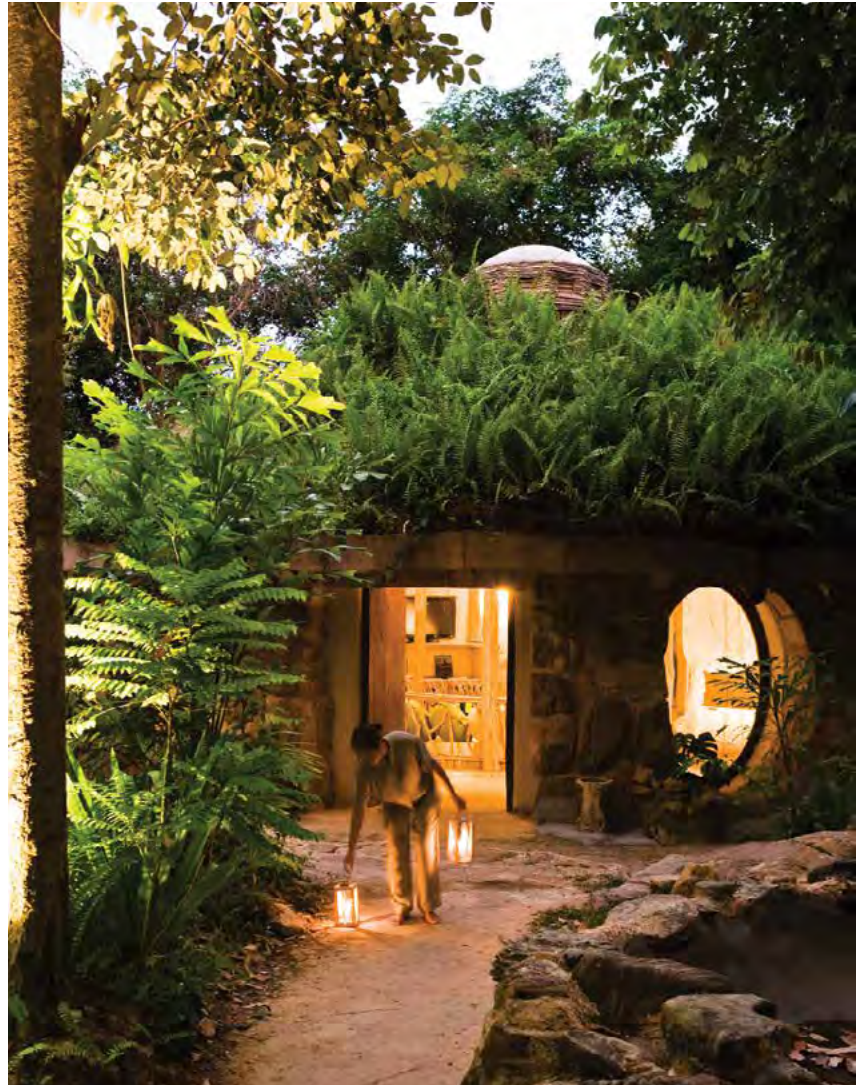
It was lunchtime, and everyone was sitting out by the boardwalk, sipping coffee and smoking. Kae was often called over by someone for a word about the intra-island soccer league game happening that night, in which he was apparently a key player. "The most beautiful soccer field in the world!" he said proudly, pointing at a patchy green plot on our way back to the car. I kept my mouth shut about the Englishmen's pitch.

Like the resort, the island has one main, paved road sided with dense foliage that only occasionally breaks for a field of palm or rubber trees, Koh Kood's other primary sources of income. Kae says islanders didn't even begin using motorized vehicles until 30 years ago; his grandparents transported their farmed coconuts to the port at the bottom of the island by foot or with the help of oxen. Driving up to what Kae called the Eco House, he admitted he misses the days when there were no cars or motorcycles. He used to have to hike three hours through the forest to visit the House; now, curious tourists can pull right up.

Nevertheless, when we arrived, we were the only ones there aside from the owner, a shirtless old man with oily skin and deep smile lines who was presently working in the kitchen of his open-air, stilted wooden house. He turned off the stove and came to greet us, introducing himself to me as Khun Wien.







He set up camp here 40 years ago, and now his land is a hodge-podge of rubber trees, pineapples, fish pools, greenhouses, coconut and banana trees, and pot after pot of herbs. We sat and chatted with Wien for a while, occasionally one of his roaming cats or dogs coming up for a pet. Despite Kae's grievances, I couldn't help but be charmed with the thought that hanging out with an old farmer is a main attraction on the island.

To get to our last stop, we bounced up a rocky dirt road deeper into the forest to see two ancient macca trees—one 300 years old named Sai Yai and the other, 500, named Makayuk—both believed to have magical powers. Islanders come and pray to them, and offerings of candles, incense, snacks, and clothing were nestled among their sprawling mazes of old roots. Another banyan that for a couple hundred years tried to take over Makayuk was in the last decade cut back; its hacked roots now hang like a curtain around the back of Makayuk's base. Craning my neck, I could see why the tree is so revered, standing strong in the grasp of its consumer, which it had nevertheless supported for so long. Save for the sound of our footsteps, the forest was absolutely silent as we left under a darkening sky.

Early on my last morning, I hopped on a

speedboat for a group snorkeling expedition in the nearby Mu Ko Chang National Marine Park. The boat anchored by Koh Rang, a small rocky teardrop of an island, which we took our time floating around. The water was a bit murky, but the healthy coral's colors shone through, and traffic was heavy with schools of fish racing by in all directions—undoubtedly the most bustling life I'd seen all trip. On the way back to the resort, sunned and relaxed, I got to talking with a Polish couple, the husband of which had chosen stay aboard rather than snorkel. "I've very much bought into the Slow Life thing here," he chuckled. "You know, we live fast 90 percent of the time so that we can afford to go slow the other 10 percent."

As I ended my trip with a self-induced dairy coma brought on by a three-scoop bowl of mascarpone, strawberry, and dark-chocolate ice cream, I thought about what he'd said. Paradise wouldn't be paradise if it was our reality all of the time. But in this brief blip of enjoying it, it was made infinitely better by seeing efforts preserving it. I was pulled out of my thoughts by my Friday, who came to collect me for the trip back to Bangkok. Glancing at my almost-finished bowl, she laughed. "If you'd tried 15 flavors a day, you could have made your way through all of them!" Putting on my shoes and adjusting my watch forward an hour, I was altogether pleased nonetheless. ☉

Going Green

Above, from left: More than half of the 500 wines in Soneva Kiri's clay-walled cellar are organic or biodynamic; at the kids' club, the Eco Den teaches younger guests about sustainability. Opposite: The resort's Tree Pod restaurant sees diners seated in a basket-like pod hoisted into the forest canopy and served by zip-lining waiters.



Bay Watch
Luxury apartments
rise behind the
beach of southern
Hong Kong's
Repulse Bay.

South Side Story

Across the hills from Victoria Harbour, industrial spaces on Hong Kong Island's southern shores are being repurposed as restaurants, galleries, and guest rooms. But could a new MTR line put the brakes on what's emerging as the city's unofficial artistic and cultural center?

BY **JONATHAN HOPFNER**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
CALLAGHAN WALSH

Hong Kong



Art on the Agenda

Opposite, clockwise from top left: A sculpture by Korean artist Young-Deok Seo at the Ovolo Southside hotel; a rooftop terrace at the same property; Calvin Hui at 3812 Contemporary Art Projects; this photo wall is part of an urban-farming residency at Spring Workshop.

may be relatively small, but it also proves that distance is relative. Commutes that would barely faze tired professionals in other financial centers—40 minutes from home to office, say—are viewed here as intolerably long. People are reluctant to contemplate a journey that involves a bus transfer. And Kowloon, a mere 10-minute ferry (or even faster subway) ride from the bustling Central district, is acerbically referred to as the “dark side” by those living across the harbor.

And then there is the side that nobody talks about—the south side of Hong Kong Island itself, separated by a spine of steep green hills from the iconic skyline of Central and the hurly-burly of Wan Chai. This is one of the few areas in Hong Kong that the top-notch MTR train system has yet to penetrate. It isn’t exactly uncharted territory, of course, being home to some of the city’s most desirable neighborhoods and even a few big-ticket tourist attractions, including Ocean Park, the open-air Stanley Market, and the floating seafood restaurants of Aberdeen. But overall, these destinations tend to be experienced in isolation, with visitors dropping in from more popular parts of the city and promptly bussing back out. The south side is seen as laid-back, a nice place to live perhaps,

but also slightly inaccessible, not somewhere things are “happening” or that warrants exploration.

But that is changing. One sunny winter morning I ride a massive, creaking elevator to the third floor of the Harbour Industrial Centre on Ap Lei Chau, a small island lapped by the boat-filled waters of Aberdeen Harbour. On exiting, I make my way through a cavernous hallway that echoes with the sound of metal on metal, dodging shirtless men pushing carts piled high with bundles of plastic. Toward the end of the corridor, a signboard points the way to the incongruously placed Artichoke Canteen. I enter and am confronted with what is an alien sensation in Hong Kong—space.

The café is warm and inviting with high ceilings, an open kitchen, and an expansive terrace with views of the sparkling water beyond. Colorful artwork adorns the walls and a stereo pumps out acid jazz. Wooden tables and plush chairs are set a reasonable distance apart, making this one of the few restaurants in Hong Kong where there’s no need to worry about elbowing—or even being overheard by—neighboring diners. There are no queues or time limits here; Italian co-owner Birgit Vagani says people are encouraged to hang out as long as they like. “It’s not like Central, where too much is going on. It’s more relaxing.” In addition to sampling Artichoke’s mostly vegetarian fare—risotto with sautéed forest mushrooms, quinoa-stuffed artichoke hearts—patrons can check out adjoining art space Toof Contemporary, which on my visit is exhibiting a series of aluminum-printed photographs by an obscure Estonian artist. The café and gallery are known collectively as Airspace, which Vagani and partner Riccardo Bardallini are positioning as a multifunctional venue that lends itself equally well to performances, installations, parties, or just a lazy afternoon of reading. “The industrial setting gives you the possibility to do a lot of things around art and creativity that, because of space constraints, you’re not able to do elsewhere in Hong Kong,” Vagani says.

Among the beverages on offer at Artichoke are ales from Young Master Ales, a craft brewery founded by former financier Rohit Dugar in a neighboring building two years ago. Focused on quality ingredients and limited production, it’s created a compelling and constantly changing range of beers—from a light soba ale to a complex, hoppy IPA—that have made it to the taps of select venues like the Mandarin Oriental hotel’s storied Captain’s Bar. Dugar also runs tours and tastings every Saturday afternoon in his plain but charming brewery, where sunlight streaming in through large windows and worn surfaces piled high with beer-making equipment give the air of a country workshop. Like Vagani and Bardallini, he was initially attracted to the area not only for the amount of space available but also because of whom he’d be sharing it with. “There are a number of other small, creative businesses here. It’s a bit of a community,” he says.





EAT**Artichoke Canteen**

3/F, Harbour Industrial Center, 10 Lee Hing St., Ap Lei Chau; 852/9684-9964; artichokecanteen.com.

Butcher's Club

16/F, 18 Wong Chuk Hang Rd., Aberdeen; 852/2884-0768; butchersclub.com.hk.

Limewood

The Pulse, 28 Beach Rd., Repulse Bay; 852/2866-8668; limewood.hk.

Mum

One Island South, 2 Heung Yip Rd., Wong Chuk Hang; 852/2115-3348; mum-hk.com.

ART**3812 Contemporary Art Projects**

10/F, 12 Wong Chuk Hang Rd.; 852/2153-3812; 3812cap.com.

Art Statements

8/F, Gee Chang Hong Centre, 65 Wong Chuk Hang Rd., Aberdeen; 852/2696-2300; artstatements.com.

Feast Projects

3/F, Harbour Industrial Center, 10 Lee Hing St., Ap Lei Chau; 852/2553-9238; feastprojects.com.

Spring Workshop

3/F, Remex Centre, 42 Wong Chuk Hang Rd., Aberdeen; 852/2110-4370; springworkshop.org.

Toof

3/F, Harbour Industrial Center, 10 Lee Hing St., Ap Lei Chau; 852/2580-0393; toofcontemporary.com.

SHOP**Editus**

16/F, 18 Wong Chuk Hang Rd., Aberdeen; 852/9760-0437.

The Pulse

28 Beach Rd., Repulse Bay; 852/2835-6536; thepulse.com.hk.

STAY**Ovolo Southside**

64 Wong Chuk Hang Rd., Aberdeen; 852/2165-1000; ovolohotels.com; doubles from US\$180.

Dynamic Duo

Opposite: Birgit Vagani and partner Riccardo Bardallini at Toof Contemporary, which adjoins their Artichoke Canteen in an industrial space on the small island of Ap Lei Chau.

“Community” is a word that comes up often in conversations with south-side business owners, and indeed, there’s no doubt that something is collectively taking shape. Just next door to Airspace is Feast Projects, another gallery and event venue with a focus on contemporary, mixed-media works. Vagani and Bardallini talk about getting morning pastries from the bakery downstairs and high-quality Greek olive oil from a distributor on another floor. Dugar, meanwhile, found a photographer in his building who’s helped him with Young Master’s promotional material. “A lot of people here seem to share a similar mindset,” the brewer says.

At the Art Statements gallery in nearby Wong Chuk Hang, watched over by a couple of hyper-Technicolor creations by Japanese painter and animator Yoshitaka Amano, owner Dominique Perregaux tells me the number of galleries in the area has shot up from five to over 20 in the last few years as people flee the high rents and tighter confines of Central and SoHo. Perregaux should know; he’s the chairman of the South Island Cultural District (SICD), an alliance of galleries and artists that works to promote the area through tours and special events such as an annual Art Night, where working studios open their doors to visitors, and venues like Airspace throw bashes that stretch into the early hours. In some respects the SICD has its work cut out for it; in addition to the perceived distance from Central, Wong Chuk Hang, as Perregaux notes, “looks kind of hostile.” Superficially it is a canyon of roaring traffic flanked by mammoth, aging warehouses, with no indications at street level of the creativity contained within. Destinations are spaced out, and going from one to the next can require a long walk or even a cab ride. Nonetheless, more people are visiting. “We have reached a critical mass in terms of the number of galleries in the neighborhood, so it’s really catching on,” he says.

With the galleries have come all sorts of restaurants and private kitchens, ranging from the Butcher’s Club, renowned for its belt-busting multicourse feasts that center on choice cuts of dry-aged beef, to the far less carnivorous Mum, which offers vegetarian lunches preceded by yoga sessions. Retailers, too, are arriving in force; Aberdeen is now home to Editus, a 650-square-meter showroom devoted entirely to men’s fashion and lifestyle goods, while posher Repulse Bay has The Pulse, a trendy new beachside mall stacked with high-end homeware shops, toy stores, and outlets of Hong Kong’s popular Classified café chain and liquid-nitrogen ice cream “laboratory” Lab Made. There’s even appropriately edgy accommodation thanks to last summer’s opening of Ovolo Southside, a warehouse-turned-hotel in Wong Chuk Hang that claims to be the city’s first such conversion. Its 162 guest rooms are dominated by raw concrete surfaces and exposed pipes, while a former parking and loading area has been repurposed as an event space that’s hosted everything from an exhibition

WITH THE EXTENSION OF MTR TRAIN SERVICES TO THE AREA NEXT YEAR, THE LOOMING QUESTION IS WHETHER THE SOUTH SIDE WILL BECOME A VICTIM OF ITS EMERGING SUCCESS

of bondage-themed photography to American jazz great Roy Ayers.

With Ovolo and The Pulse, the south side has also attained something approaching nightlife. The former’s rooftop is given over to the spectacular Above bar, which offers specialty cocktails and vertigo-inducing views. Maximal Concepts, the creative force behind such hot spots as Central’s salon-like whisky bar Stockton, took advantage of The Pulse’s beachfront location for its latest venture, Limewood. “Everyone said we were crazy to go to the south side,” says Maximal’s managing director, Malcolm Wood. “But we felt it was time to create a real beach restaurant and bar for Hong Kong.” Limewood’s bright, breezy decor and tropics-inspired menu and cocktail list—think toasted-coconut piña coladas, margaritas, and grilled seafood garnished with touches of Asian citrus and spice—make it feel like a genuine escape.

The looming question is whether the area will eventually become a victim of its emerging success—not least because the ever-industrious MTR Corporation will extend train services to the area late next year. As is typical for Hong Kong, news of the metro line’s arrival has sparked a real estate frenzy. According to some local media reports, average prices for industrial space in Wong Chuk Hang have jumped around 650 percent over the past six years, frothy even by local standards. Developers are said to be eyeing old industrial properties that can be snatched up and converted to commercial use.

Needless to say, some members of the artistic community are concerned. “Sadly, my prediction is this area will become more and more commercialized,” says Calvin Hui, co-founder and artistic director of 3812 Contemporary Art Projects, which was a relative forerunner when it took over a sprawling industrial space in Wong Chuk Hang five years ago. With 3812 Hui has created an essential blank slate; the stark white walls can be reconfigured any number of ways to house broad murals or large sculptural installations, allowing artists “the flexibility to really showcase works of different sizes or mediums.” 3812 champions Chinese contemporary art (a recent exhibition was devoted to the restless canvases of master calligrapher Zhang Dawo), and Hui is a

Ripple Effect
Looking across
the boat-filled
waters of Aberdeen
Harbour from
Ap Lei Chau.







Southern Comfort

An industrial-chic guest room at Ovolo Southside. Opposite, from top: The bar at Limewood; quinoa-and-avocado salad at Artichoke Canteen.



prominent figure in the community. Even so, he is not sure how long 3812 will be here, with costs “going up nonstop.” Perregaux, too, says that while the area’s rents have risen off a low base and may be offset somewhat for galleries by increased visibility or traffic, “for artists, the increase will be more damaging.”

My next stop is Spring Workshop, a nonprofit space in a gritty Wong Chuk Hang building that runs exhibitions and artist-in-residency programs. Visitors are not only welcome, but also frequently plied with drinks, given impromptu tours, and encouraged to linger. Program manager Athena Wu guides me through flickering video installations, a room where local artists squeeze into school desks to record their thoughts longhand in open diaries, and an outdoor terrace that’s home to a small urban farming operation. High above, an elevated section of the new train line is taking shape, the MTR’s red oval logo glaring down like an angry eye. Wu sees the imminent arrival of the MTR as a double-edged sword. Running along seven kilometers of track between Admiralty and Ap Lei Chau, the trains will bring more visitors, but also more rapid change to an area that, with its old printers and food processors, markets and temples, retains “an essence of Hong Kong history.” As we talk, the rows of tomato plants tremble in the wind, and it all suddenly feels very fragile.

Still, there are reasons to believe the south coast’s cultural cachet will endure. The lack of residential space, especially outside Ap Lei Chau and Aberdeen, makes gentrification of the variety seen in other formerly down-at-heel Hong Kong neighborhoods difficult. Many buildings are owned by large corporations, which are less prone to introducing whopping rent increases than private landlords. The government is also stepping in, with the Arts Development Council recently taking over an entire floor of a commercial building in Wong Chuk Hang and converting it into studios that are leased to artists at below-market rates. Painter and photographer Caroline Chiu, who had the foresight to buy a studio space nearby years ago, rates the changes in the area as “fantastic.”

Whether or not southern Hong Kong Island continues to offer something different from the rest of the city—and many of those in the community are determined that it will—it has demonstrated conclusively that the rise of an art zone can be, as Hui puts it, something “raw and organic.” This also stands in marked contrast to the government’s lengthy, confused, and scandal-prone effort to create an arts hub in the West Kowloon Cultural District, which is due to take shape in the next couple of years. While West Kowloon may get the grand museums, Perregaux says the SCID will continue to work to “really establish the neighborhood as the Chelsea [Manhattan] of Hong Kong”—with or without official endorsements.

“It’s a very Hong Kong thing not to expect too much from the government,” he says. “And surprisingly, it usually works.” ●

An ultra-luxurious resort lapped by the translucent waters of the Maldives' Noonu Atoll, Velaa Private Island sets a sumptuous stage for the season's chicest seaside looks.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **NURULITA** STYLED BY **PETER ZEWET**

V
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SKIN

**Water, Water
Everywhere**
Taking a dip in the
Jacuzzi at Velaa
Private Island's
overwater spa.
Swimsuit by Agua
De Alma.





With more than 100 resorts across 26 atolls, the Maldives is not short of extreme luxury. Yet **Velaa Private Island** (960/656-5000; velaaprivateisland.com, doubles from US\$1,900) still manages to take the island retreat experience up a notch thanks to an impressive list of “archipelago firsts.” In addition to being home to the only snow room in the Maldives, the turtle-shaped drop of land (*velaa* means “turtle” in Dhivehi) in the Noonu Atoll has the nation’s only shaded tennis courts and the sole My Blend Spa by Clarins in Asia. It also claims the largest wine and champagne collection, carefully ensconced in an 11-meter-high ivory-canvased tower, the top of which has been transformed into a Teppanyaki

restaurant offering views over Velaa’s lush landscape and 43 spacious villas, many of which are stilted over the Indian Ocean—one, the Romantic Pool Residence, is only accessible by boat. As well as the expected cache of Maldivian water pursuits—diving, sunset cruises, kayaking—Velaa offers guests Seabob and mini-sub excursions; on land there are also squash courts, a yoga pavilion, and a golf academy designed by Spanish pro José María Olazábal. Yet despite the lavish offerings, the resort’s design is pared-back and earthy with plenty of stone, wood, and bamboo. According to Czech owner Jirí Smejck, it all adds up to “polite luxury.” We’ll tip our hat to that. —**Natasha Dragun**



Above and Beyond

At the base of the resort's 11-meter-high tower, which houses Tavaru restaurant and a well-stocked wine cellar. Dress by Halston Heritage; silver bangle by John Hardy. Opposite: Poolside at Avi bar. Sequin dress by Farah Khan; silver bangle by John Hardy.



**Walking the
Boards**

On the pier
connecting Velaa
Private Island's
Water Pool Villas.
Dress by Etro; silver
necklace by John
Hardy; heels by
Michael Kors.





**Sweet Solitude**

Heading to the beach. Dress by Etro; silver cuffs and ring by John Hardy. Opposite: On the deck of a Sunrise Water Pool Villa. Dress by Diane von Furstenberg; swimsuit by Agua De Alma; wedges by Michael Kors; silver bangle by John Hardy.

MODEL: LAURA KULLADY/JIM MODELS. HAIR & MAKEUP: KWEE SANDY.
FASHION TEAM: KOKO NATARA & NINA HIDAYAT.



A Place in the Sun

Looking down on the Marbella, a five-star resort on the island's pebbly east coast.



Greek Expectations

A long-deferred sojourn to Corfu proves well worth the wait, with pleasures aplenty to be sought out beyond the summertime crush of the island's main beaches.

BY **DAVEN WU**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
VLASIS TSONOS



This is the story of a five-year sojourn that I and my family made on the Greek island of Corfu.”

And so begins, somewhat innocuously, Gerald Durrell’s *My Family and Other Animals*, his memoir of a brief sunlit period between 1935 and 1939 that would shape the rest of his life as one of the world’s most eminent animal conservationists. I was 14 when, as part of my grade-nine English syllabus, I read that line for the first time. By the end of the first term, I had consumed the other two volumes in the trilogy, *Birds*, *Beasts and Relatives* and *The Garden of the Gods*.

To say I was transfixed is to understate things. Durrell’s loving homage to his sun-warmed past was as far removed as one could get from my stunningly dull life growing up in ’80s Perth, Western Australia, then still very much a sleepy provincial city.

There are two hearts to the books. One is the Durrell family, a motley crew comprising Durrell’s indulgent, slightly scattered but always well-meaning mother; his siblings—a book-mad eldest brother (the great English novelist Lawrence Durrell), a gun-mad older brother, Leslie, and a boy-mad sister, Margo; and a menagerie of rescued reptiles and birds. The second heart is Corfu itself.

Shaped like a scimitar that hangs off the west coast of Albania and Greece, the island is an Eden of colors and textures. The stony mountains of the north, haunted in Durrell’s days by blue rock thrushes and peregrine falcons, undulate gently southward through dense swathes of almond and walnut trees, forests of sweet-scented myrtle, and silver-trunked fig trees with leaves as large as salvers, before dropping down to a narrow tip edged with sand dunes and great salt marshes.

Durrell’s memoirs still haunt me three decades later. In that time, I have reread the books so often it sometimes feels as if his memories of growing up on the island are mine.

“I must go one day.” Every few years, I told myself the same thing but never did anything about it. The desire to see Corfu battled with the very real fear that the reality would not live up to the weight of so much expectation. How could it? The past, after all, is a foreign country, as L.P. Hartley insists; they do things differently there.

But then one day came an invitation to stay at the Marbella Corfu, a five-star pleasure dome on the island’s east coast. There were promises of panoramas of the Ionian Sea under skies the color of crushed sapphires; of sandy bays and warm, fish-filled waters; of hills cloaked in cypress and heather. We booked a flight, packed our bags, and, like Durrell and his family 80 years ago, fled the gray, damp English summer.

“If you want to see the real Corfu, go inland,” advised my friend Esther Fitzgerald, an artist who lived on the island in the 1970s. And she was right. Corfu’s coast, on the east side especially, is blighted by long uninterrupted stretches of tacky souvenir

shops and gaudily decorated restaurants with menus in four languages. The serpentine road from Corfu Town to the Marbella is dotted with supermarkets, souvenir booths, and a string of cheap clothing stores improbably named China Town, China Style, Ni Hao, and China World. And in high summer, the beaches are jammed with European sunbathers splayed seal-like on deck chairs, slowly broiling to a dark shade of mahogany. Russian, Essex, French, and Spanish accents float through the pearly heat haze.

In his later years, Gerald Durrell came to regret that his books had brought so much attention to Corfu. Its ruin, as he saw it, disturbed him so much that on trips in the 1980s he would keep his head turned toward the sea whenever his car passed through one of the countless towns and villages, refusing to acknowledge the tourist hordes and sprawling hotels that bristled along the water’s edge.

Somehow, I have the feeling that this too will pass. Over its history, Corfu has absorbed the influences of successive waves of visitors. The Peloponnesians dropped anchor in the vicinity in 800 B.C. The island then allied itself with Athens against Sparta around 400 B.C., yielded to Rome’s rule in 229 B.C., and was part of the Byzantine Empire until the 11th century, after which it was governed by Venice and briefly Napoleonic France before becoming a British protectorate in 1815. Five decades later Corfu was united with Greece, only to be occupied by Italy and Germany during World War II.

“What’s a handful of badly sunburned Russian and English tourists by comparison?” I thought as we wandered about Corfu Town, its narrow, shadowed alleys so reminiscent of the twisting bends that bedevil Venice. We emerged eventually into the sunshine to a cacophony of cicadas in the cricket ground and the old town square, or *platia*, whose marbled promenade lined by cool arcades, outdoor cafés, and dense trees was modeled after the rue de Rivoli in Paris.

The unreality of being in Corfu—so unexpectedly lush and bathed in extravagant sunshine—never left me. Not as I joined the line of devoted pilgrims in the jeweled Church of St. Spyridon to kiss the mummified feet of Corfu’s patron saint, just as Margo Durrell did all those years ago (remembering that she’d promptly fallen sick with the flu, I was careful to kiss only the air above the red tasseled slippers). Not as I watched the sun rise over the mirror-flat sea from the balcony of my spacious room at the Marbella. Not as we drove past the shadowed groves of ancient olive trees, their endless rows of massive trunks resembling the interior columns of cathedrals and pitted like pumice stones; or watched a great swirl of swallows wheel overhead in a chorus of high-pitched chatter.

And certainly not as we ate at Spiros, a tiny roadside taverna in a one-street town a few kilometers over the hill from the Marbella. I will always remember their Greek salad for the wondrous snap of the cucumbers and capsicums that had been plucked that morning

Making Waves

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Overlooking Corfu Town, with the bulk of its Venetian-built Palaio Frourio (Old Fortress) rising in the distance; catch of the day at a local market; one of Corfu Town’s color-washed houses; a Corfiot cook.



Ionian Eye Candy

The 17th-century monastery of Vlacherna occupies its own islet just south of Corfu Town. Opposite: A local craftsman.





Island Life

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Olive groves swath the island's craggy interior; Kalami Bay and its White House (center right), where the writer Lawrence Durrell lived in the late 1930s; a Corfu Town laneway; cooling off at Alekos Beach.

from the taverna's back garden. A crispy slab of fried *haloumi* cheese was followed by fragrantly charred lamb chops and a hefty sea bream, which arrived at the table perfectly grilled and seasoned with nothing more than oregano harvested in the mountains. The cook, Spiro's buxomy wife, sent us on our way with a bunch of wild chamomile flowers, two bottles of homemade wine, some dried bay leaves, and a fragrant packet of the oregano we had so admired.

Every day, Corfu's sunlit pleasures were an unalloyed joy. On the west coast, we explored quiet beaches like Prasoudi and Myrtiotissa, both sheltered by thick green groves and rocky coves. Unlike the pebbly strands on the other side of the island, these were covered in fine sand that was much easier on the feet, and, because access was via twisting dirt tracks, they also attracted fewer people. Another day we drove up to Achilleion, the summer palace built for Empress Elisabeth of Austria in 1890. Set on a hill above the village of Gastouri, it was styled after a Pompeian mansion and lined with what Durrell described unkindly in *The Garden of the Gods* as "repulsive statuary," including a towering statue of Achilles added by the villa's second owner, Kaiser Wilhem II. Achilleion later housed a casino before settling into its current incarnation as a museum dedicated to Elisabeth's tchotchkes.

Between sporadic rain showers, the sun would burst out from behind thick bruised puffs of cloud, its warm rays cascading off the craggy limestone hills like a benediction. Accompanied by entourages of tiny fish, we swam in the shallow, butterfly-blue sea; and lulled by the distant shrill chorus of cicadas, we took long siestas, rising in time for a milky ouzo on the Marbella's rooftop patio while watching the sun set in a blazing gasp over the darkening sea.

Driving up and down the east coast, I went searching for the houses Durrell had lived in with his family, named in the books as the Strawberry-Pink Villa, the Daffodil-Yellow Villa, and the Snow-White Villa. I was astonished to find that no one knew where they were. "If you find them, write to me and tell me," said the elderly curator at the local historical society.

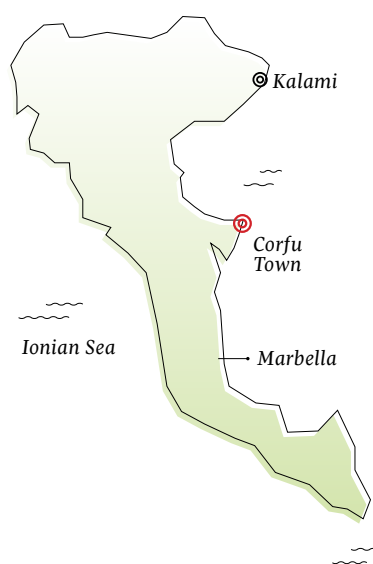
Esther directed me to the White House in Kalami on the northeast tip of the island, a picturesque bay somewhat marred by the indifferent facades of badly designed rental apartments. "The family lived there," she texted with great confidence. She was half correct. This was the house to which Lawrence Durrell moved with his first wife, Nancy, in 1936 and which he'd so memorably described in *Prospero's Cell* as being "set like a dice on a rock already venerable with the scars of wind and water." A restaurant now abuts the house, trading on the fame of its former resident by way of a little stand selling books by the brothers, DVDs of the BBC adaptation of *My Family and Other Animals*, and even a dusty collection of writings by Theodore Stephanides, Durrell's beloved friend and mentor.

There were rumors that the Strawberry-Pink Villa was in Perama and that it was now called Villa Agazini; that the Daffodil-Yellow Villa in Kontokali was, in fact, Villa Anemmoyanni near Gouvia Bay; and that the Snow-White Villa in Criseda had long since been demolished. But no one could verify this. All I had to go on were blurred family photographs from biographies and various websites—sepia-tinted images of the Durrells on patios, their palimpsest memories refusing to give up their secrets.

Toward the end of his life, when he was wracked with the cancer that would eventually claim him in 1995, Gerald Durrell recalled those brilliant days in Corfu with great happiness. "It was like being allowed back in paradise. Our arrival in Corfu was like being born for the first time."

I remembered those words on our last evening. We had just returned to the Marbella from Tsipouradiko, a family-run taverna by the old port in Corfu Town where we'd dined on crisply battered slivers of zucchini, beef stewed with tomatoes, and deep-fried onion patties laced with mint. A surprisingly good amateur band was playing at the hotel, and we were just in time to catch the last tune—"What a Wonderful World."

Under a star-speckled sky, the horn section blew a melancholic refrain as everyone whispered the lyrics under their breath. "I see skies of blue, and clouds of white ..." And as Corfu settled gently around us, clinging like dew-wet pollen, I remembered Durrell and the boys we once were. ●



Getting There

Olympic Air (olympicair.com) and **Aegean Airlines** (aegeanair.com) fly into Corfu throughout the year from Athens, with regular domestic flights connecting through the Ionian Islands.

Where to Stay

The ideal itinerary is to stay a few days in Corfu Town for its beguiling mix of culture, architecture, and gastronomy before hightailing it to a coastal resort for scenery, sun, and sea. For the former, the **Siorra Vittoria** (30-26610/36300, siorravittoria.com; doubles from US\$168) is a charming nine-bedroom property set in a renovated mid-19th-century mansion.

A leisurely half-hour drive south of Corfu Town, the 384-room **Marbella** (30-26610/71183; marbella.gr; doubles from US\$308) is a sprawling all-in-one resort with three swimming pools, a bijou spa, and a generous stretch of private beach.

Where to Eat

In the village of Stroggili, **Spiros Taverna** (30-26610/75894) serves homespun, cooked-to-order Greek classics with ingredients sourced from the garden, while in Corfu Town, the superb specials at **Tsipouradiko** (Prosalandou St.; 30-26610/82240) change daily and seasonally.



connections

UPDATES AND OFFERS FROM DESTINASIAN PARTNERS



CELEBRATING SINGAPORE

It's without a doubt that the Fullerton Hotel Singapore and the Fullerton Bay Hotel Singapore are two of the Lion City's poshest accommodations, the first a landmark dating back to 1928 and the latter opened in 2010 as the only hotel directly on the Marina Bay waterfront. There's no better time to experience either than this year as they celebrate the city's 50th anniversary. Beginning at nightly rates of S\$500 and S\$650 respectively, the Fullerton Celebrates SG50 and Fullerton Bay Celebrates SG50 packages running through December 30 both include accommodation, breakfast, two Merlion mocktails, a one-way limousine airport transfer, a S\$50 dining credit at any of the hotels' restaurants, heritage tours, and a limited-edition Fullerton Merlion Plush Bear.

For more information, call 65/6733-8388 or visit fullertonhotel.com; or call 65/6222-8088 or visit fullertonbayhotel.com

LET THE CREDITS ROLL

The thing about heading somewhere far-flung is that it requires ample vacation time to make the hassle to get there worthwhile. Helping travelers extend their stays is the Get More offer running at the four luxurious locations of The Residence by

Cenizaro—Mauritius, Tunis, Zanzibar, and the Maldives—through December 21. The deal gives guests staying four or more nights credits that start from US\$225 and vary depending on the resort, redeemable for food and beverages, activities, and spa treatments. Stays of seven or more nights receive even greater rewards, ranging up to US\$2,100 at The Residence Maldives.

For more information, visit cenizaro.com/offers



WINNING CHANCES AT CHANGI

Celebrating Singapore's 50th anniversary, Changi Airport's fifth annual Be A Changi Millionaire contest is running this year with special twists. From now until October 31, shoppers who spend S\$30 or more at Changi's shops and restaurants or online at iShopChangi.com will receive a gift from a collection of travel bags and umbrellas featuring illustrations by Singaporean designers Wang Shijia and Jo Soh. Additionally, shoppers will be

entered into the monthly drawings to become one of six finalists—each of whom will be awarded S\$5,000 and a three-night hotel stay—or the grand winner, who will receive a prize of S\$1 million.

For more information, visit changiairport.com




HILTON HAVENS

Adding to the allure of traveling in Southeast Asia is the new Discover Asia promotion from the Hilton Portfolio of hotels and resorts. On bookings made before June 30 for stays between now and the end of October, the group is offering up to 30 percent off rooms across participating hotels in Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia. From sprawling resorts on the tropical beaches of Phuket to high-rise hotels in the hearts of Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, there couldn't be a wider variety of accommodations and destinations from which to choose, ensuring there's a savings awaiting every traveler and every trip.

For more information, visit hiltonhoteldeals.com/southeastasia



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A NEW LOOK IN JUNE 2015





MOZAIC BEACH CLUB

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

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



seating, and views of Batu Belig Beach.

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

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

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

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

AMADEA RESORT AND VILLAS



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

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



METIS RESTAURANT, LOUNGE & GALLERY



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

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

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

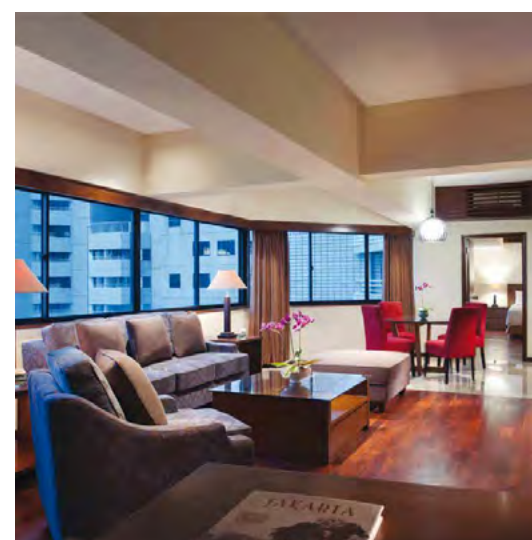


THE SULTAN HOTEL & RESIDENCE JAKARTA



There's little guests won't find at The Sultan Hotel & Residence Jakarta, a city hotel with everything travelers could want for an exceptional visit to the Indonesian capital. Sprawled over nearly 13 gardened hectares are 707 guest rooms and apartment-style residences, swimming pools and restaurants, tennis and multipurpose courts, and even a 500-meter jogging track. And in a city where location is of upmost importance, the Sultan's setting is ideal, in easy reach of the Sudirman Central Business District, Pacific Place, Senayan City, Plaza Senayan, and the Senayan golf club.

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



X2 RIVER KWAI



Positioned on the Kwai Noi River, X2 River Kwai is easily the most eye-catching place to stay in Thailand's Kanchanaburi province. Part of the design-driven X2 brand, the resort based its architecture on a green ethos, and sustainable and abandoned materials were fashioned into the eight cabins and main restaurant area, resulting in an ultra-cool industrial look. An additional feature is the Journey to the Past package. With rates from US\$159, it includes accommodation, daily champagne breakfast, and a day of guided touring of the area's main attractions including the Thai-Burma Railway Museum.

138 Moo 4, Muang District, Kanchanaburi, Thailand; 66-34/552-124; x2resorts.com

THE HILL VILLAS



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

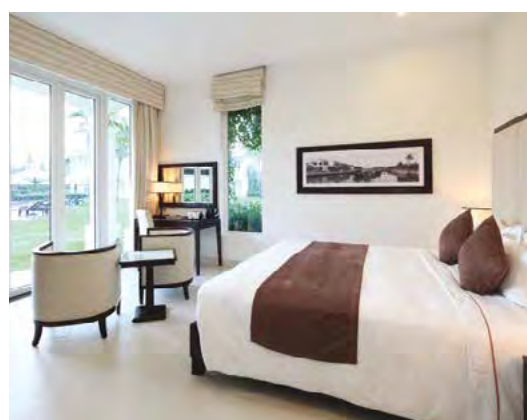
Jl. Taman Giri, Banjar Mumbul, Nusa Dua, Bali; 62-361/847-8888; thehillvillas.com

BOUTIQUE HOI AN RESORT



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

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

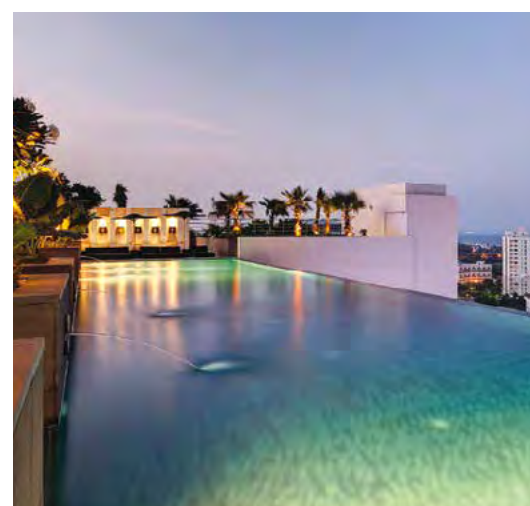
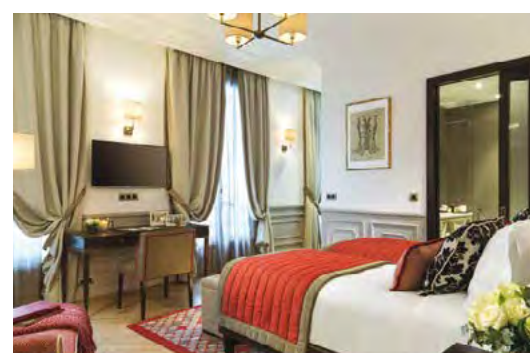


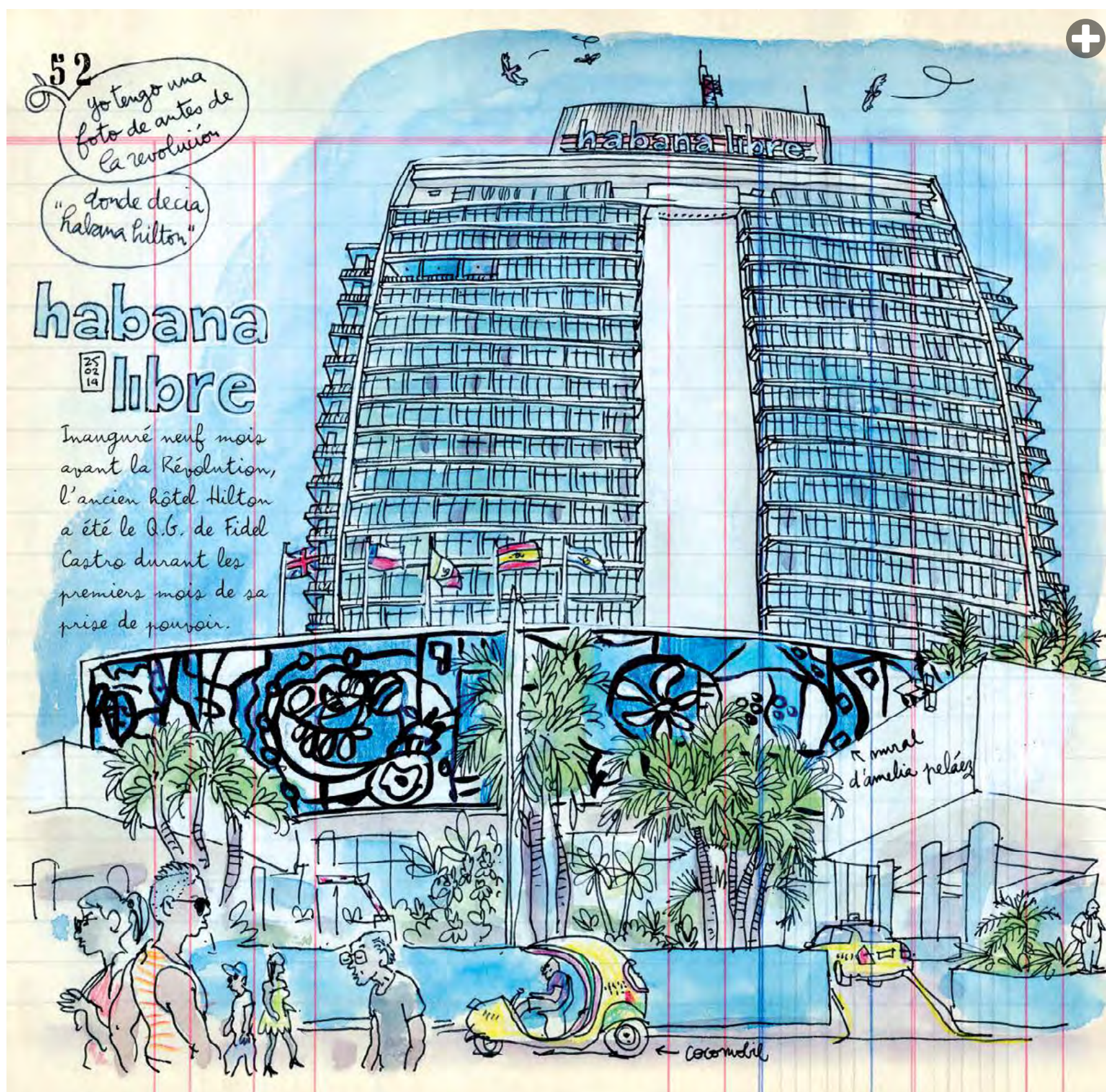
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CUBAN ENCOUNTERS

of revolution, mojitos, cigars, and old cars,” says the artist, who spent three weeks in the Cuban capital and Trinidad early last year. “I tried to discover Havana in my usual way, without any guide, walking through the city, meeting with locals and having long conversations with them. It was listening to their stories that shaped my perceptions of the place.” Apart from the city’s admittedly impressive trove of vintage American cars, one thing that caught his eye was the 30-story Habana Libre, once Latin America’s tallest and largest hotel. Originally opened as the Habana Hilton in 1958—less than a year before it was taken over as the temporary headquarters of Fidel Castro, who chose suite 2324 as his main office—it features an enormous mural by the pioneering Cuban modernist Amelia Peláez above its main entrance that, thanks to a 1990s renovation, looks as amazing today as it did almost six decades ago. ●

This drawing of Havana’s Habana Libre hotel is just one of dozens that fill the pages of *Cuba, an 56 de la Révolution*, a sketchbook-cum-travelogue by Barcelona-based French illustrator Lapin. “Cuba, a country frozen in a different time, offers much more than the standard clichés

6:47 AM

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