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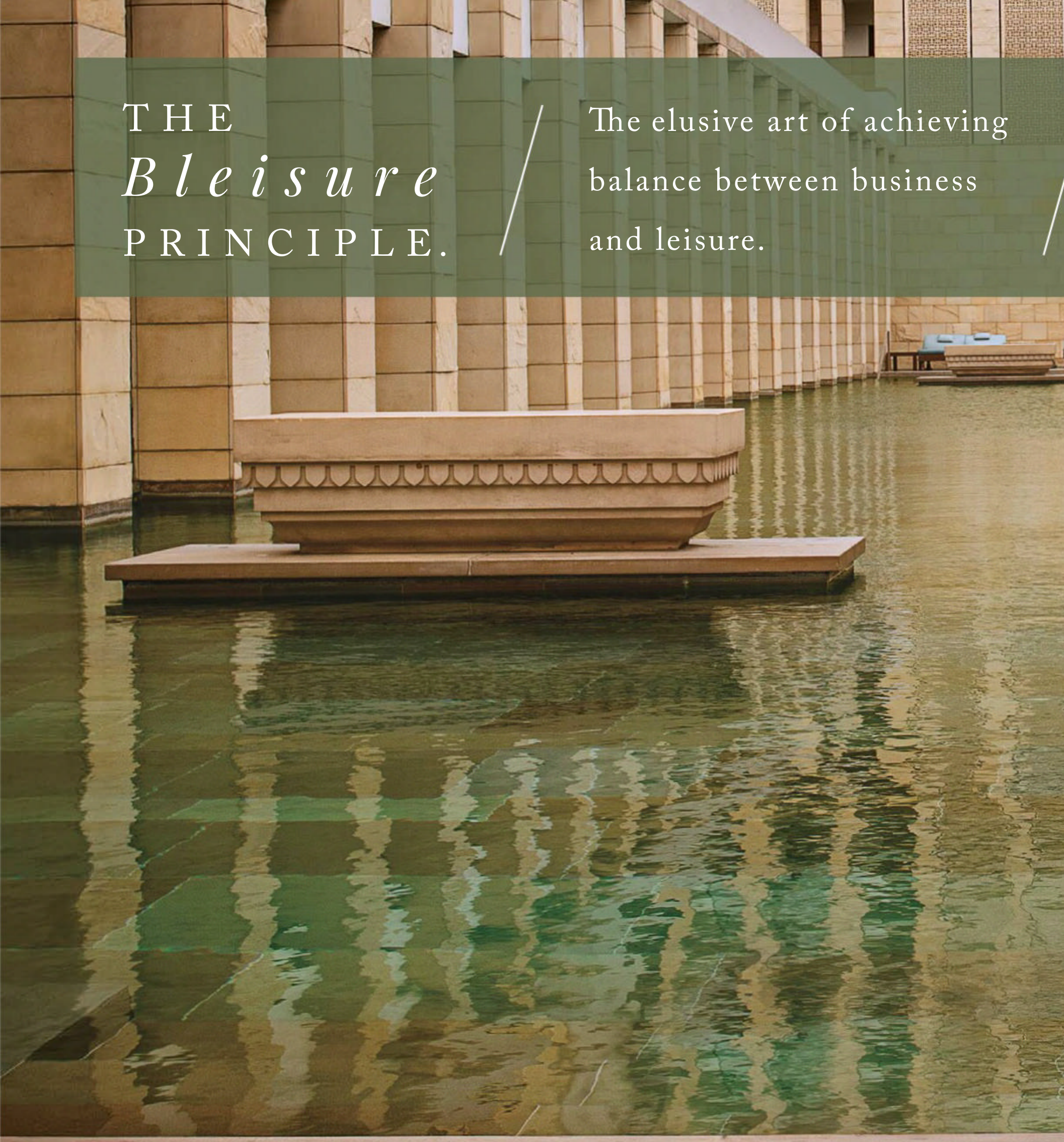
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ON THE COVER

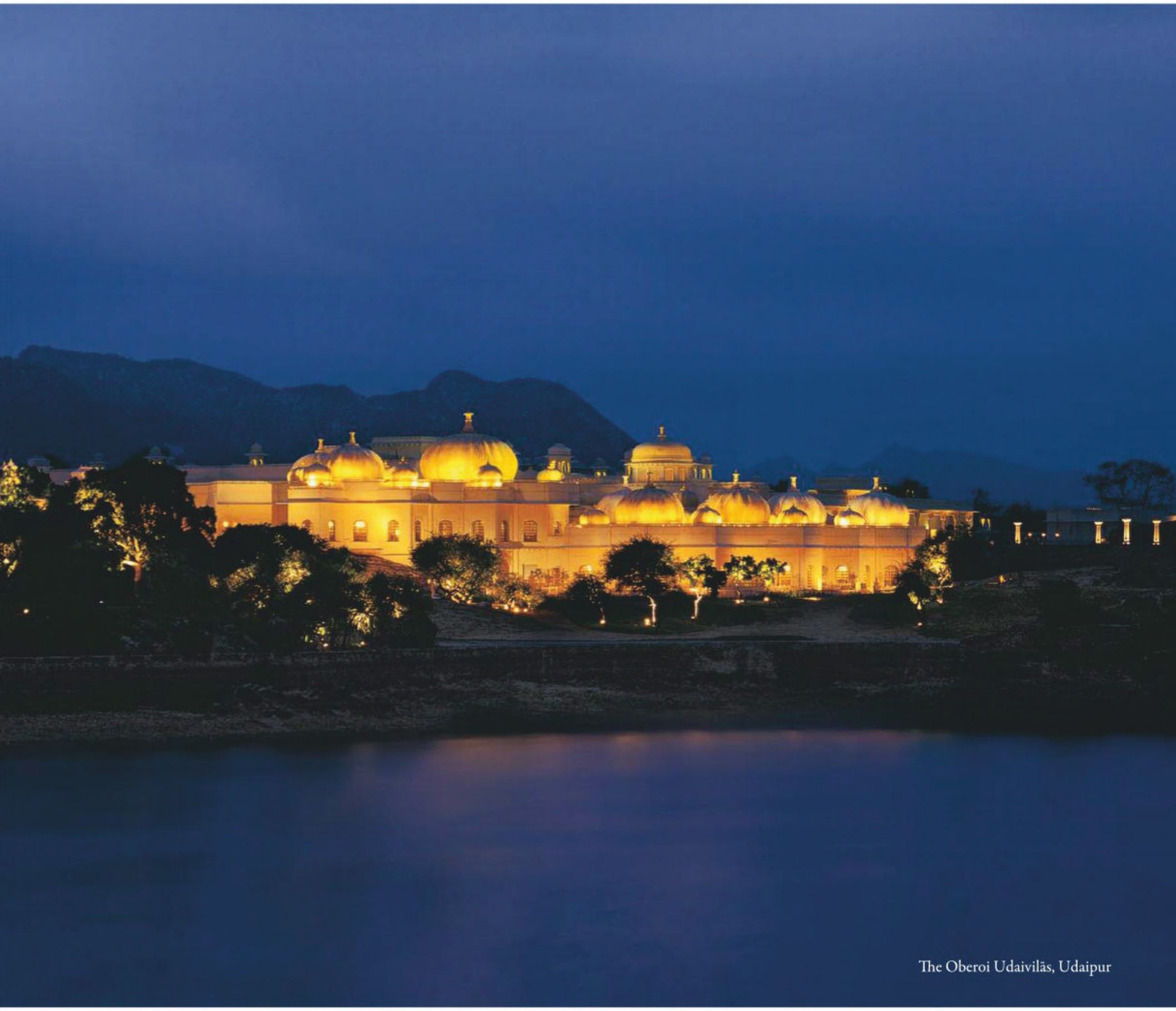
Rakul Preet Singh in front of the Far Far Away Castle at Universal Studios Singapore, Resorts World Sentosa Singapore.

Producer Vivek Pareek; Photographer Ashish Chawla; Assistant photographer Karan Takulia; Stylist Krishna Mukhi; Assistant stylist Avani Purohit; Hair & makeup Mehak Oberoi.

On Rakul: Dress, price on request, **Gauri and Nainika**; shoes, ₹1,999, **Sole Story**.

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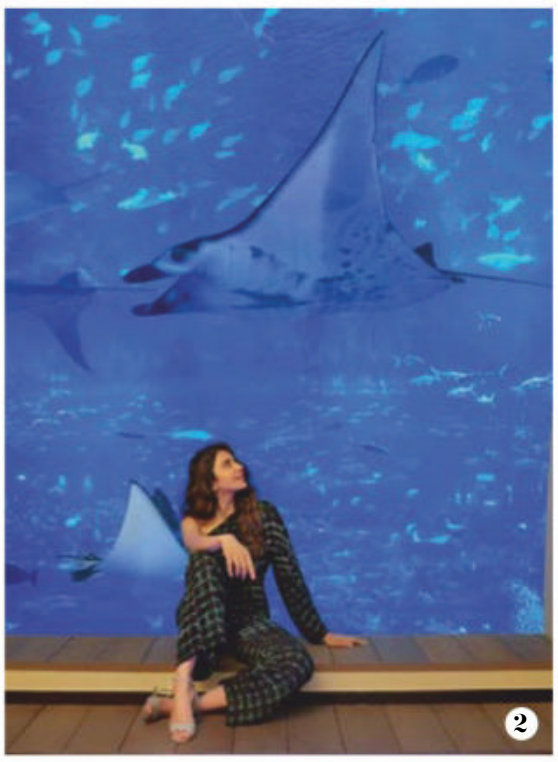
Asia may be the world's largest and most populous continent, but its real allure lies in its stark contrasts. From the lesser-known terrain of Laos to sleek countries like Singapore, this issue of *Travel + Leisure India & South Asia* lets you in on all the details you need to know when you're travelling in magical Asia.

Our cover story (*p. 86*), shot at Resorts World™ Sentosa Singapore with Bollywood actor Rakul Preet Singh, showcases the myriad ways you can make your trip to the island nation unforgettable. Meanwhile, Hong Kong presents an intriguing juxtaposition of old-world charm and revolutionary design aesthetic (*p. 134*). In Japan, we discover the wintertime delights of Hokkaido, bringing you another unique item for your bucket list (*p. 80*); in resilient Sri Lanka, we explore Asia's new design capital, Galle (*p. 54*). A very special photo essay from Uzbekistan (*p. 40*) will take you on a surreal ride through the country's cultural and architectural marvels. The Wellness section focusses on therapies and treatments that find their origins in Asia (*p. 125*); in our Spa of the Month feature (*p. 118*), celebrity chef Ranveer Brar goes for a pampering session at ESPA in The Leela Palace New Delhi.

This issue, we have a section dedicated to shopaholics—our annual International Shopping Guide (*p. 97*). From Paris (*p. 107*)—the haute couture Mecca—to the world's top shopping malls (*p. 98*), this guide will help you plan your next trip around your biggest passion. Our second guide of the issue helps corporate travellers find their bearings in five cities that are quickly emerging as important business hubs (*p. 65*).

"Asia is an entertainment, Europe is a dream, America is an imprisonment, and Rest is a nightmare," the author Santosh Kalwar has aptly stated. And what's life without a little entertainment, right?







1. The minaret of Kalta Minor in Khiva, Uzbekistan.

2. Rakul Preet in an Ocean Suite at Resorts World™ Sentosa Singapore.

3. Skiing is a popular pastime in Hokkaido, Japan.

HEMANT KHENDILWAL; RIGHT ROW, FROM TOP: AAMIR WANI; ASHISH CHAWLA; SUMEET KESWANI

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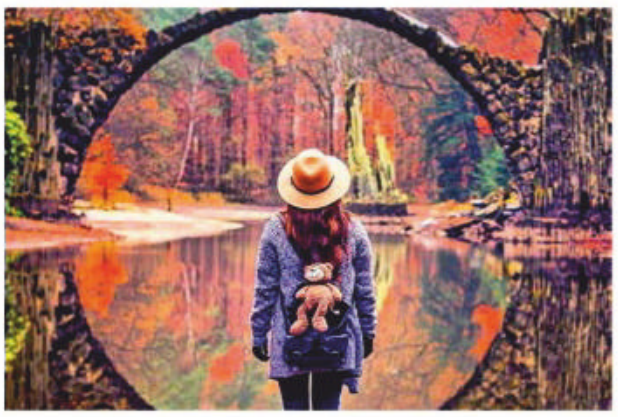
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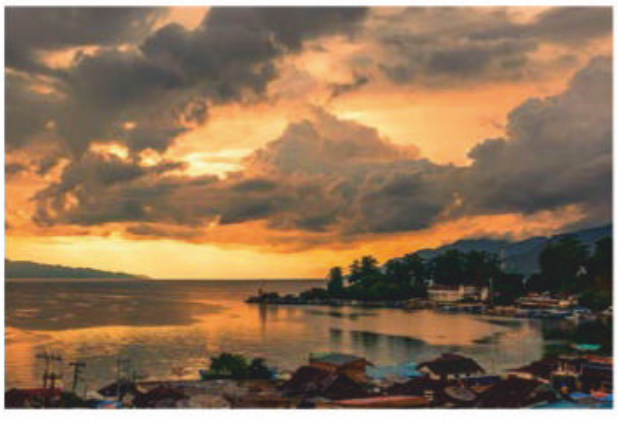
Devil's Bridge: Germany's Wonder Beckons

The Die Rakotzbrücke bridge in Germany is renowned for its architecture, which forms a perfect stone circle along with its reflection. ***travelandleisureindia.in/the-die-rakotzbrucke-bridge-in-germany***



A Peruvian Oasis is the Perfect Detox

A destination circled by palm trees, this elegant Peruvian village is built around an oasis and has served as an attraction for tourists for over 60 years. ***travelandleisureindia.in/huacachina-in-peru***



Face to Face with Nature's Wonders at Lake Toba

Perched at a height of 900 metres above sea level, Lake Toba is the largest lake in Southeast Asia and the largest volcanic lake in the world. ***travelandleisureindia.in/lake-toba-indonesia***



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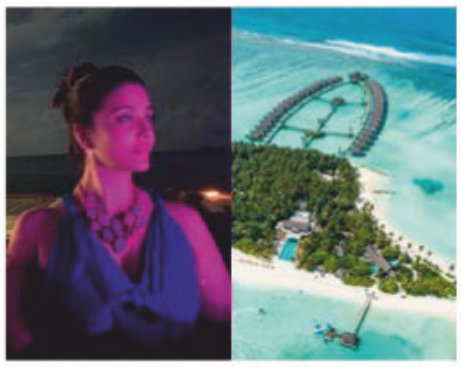
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SPOTTED

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan was recently spotted holidaying with her family in Maldives. Her Instagram feed will make you yearn for the paradise island. ***travelandleisureindia.in/bachchans-in-niyama-private-islands-maldives***



DISCOVER

With a babbling brook, gliding kayaks, jungles with birdsong, and steep limestone cliffs, Nong Khiaw has us under a spell. ***travelandleisureindia.in/nong-khiaw***



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JUNE 2019

10 NEW REASONS TO EXPLORE ASIA

FROM STAYING IN AN UNDERWATER SUITE TO LIVING THE MONOPOLY DREAM, *T+L INDIA & SOUTH ASIA* BRINGS YOU SPANKING NEW EXPERIENCES WORTH A TRIP. *BY SHRIMAYEE THAKUR & ISHANI VATS*



IAIN MASTERTON/ALAMY

NO. 1

National Museum of Qatar, Doha

This newly opened museum takes the architectural and cultural elements from Qatar's past and reflects upon its transformation into a major global destination. It narrates the story of the country's evolution with 11 galleries and three themes—the country in its initial phases, the story of its rapid evolution, and its contemporary reality. The museum's unique architecture—the work of Jean Nouvel—has been inspired by the desert rose crystal and executed using 76,000 disc panels on the roof. Apart from its modern design, the museum draws visitors for its many exhibits, including those by Qatari and Syrian artists. One of the prominent installations is the 19th-century Pearl Carpet of Baroda, which is studded with 1.5 million Gulf pearls and decorated with emeralds and sapphires. *nmoq.org.qa*



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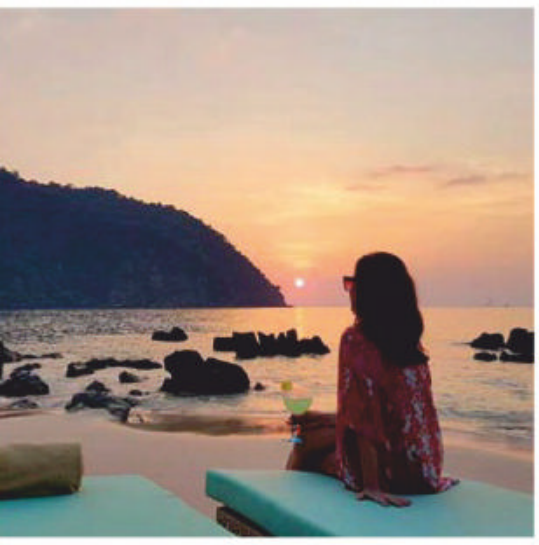
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NO. 2

Wa Ale Island Resort and Awei Pila Resort, Mergui

The Mergui archipelago is a collection of 800 islands scattered off the coast of Myanmar and Thailand. We bet you haven't even heard of it. Which brings us to the reason it's here on this list. With a string of unspoilt beaches minus any crowds, Mergui is touted to be the next big island destination, thanks mostly to the establishment of two new luxury resorts. The Wa Ale Island Resort and Awei Pila Island Resort have opened up new avenues for tourists seeking to visit the virgin archipelago. Wa Ale Island Resort offers 11 tented beach villas and two tree houses, providing its guests exclusive access to the beaches and forests of the Wa Ale island. The Awei Pila Resort on the Pila Island, the only private-island resort in Mergui, has 24 tented villas, and offers a range of experiences such as snorkelling, kayaking, trekking, and hiking. *waaleresort.com, memoriesgroup.com*







NO. 3

The Lounge, Burj Khalifa, Dubai

Ever dreamt of lounging on a couch and sipping on tea amid clouds? Well, The Lounge at Burj Khalifa—launched earlier this year—comes pretty close to that fantasy with an exquisite setting at an altitude of 585 metres. Referred to as the world's highest lounge, the space offers an outdoor terrace on the 152nd floor with glass walls and unparalleled views of the Burj Al Arab and Downtown Dubai. Plush seating and elegant interiors enrich the ambience as high tea, sundowners, and cocktails are served for an exceptional gourmet experience. The food is prepared by the chefs at Armani Hotel—located within the Burj Khalifa. Besides the wonderful food and views, live music and performances by international artists feature on the daily menu. *burjkhalifa.ae*



NO. 4

Setouchi Triennale 2019, Japan

Experience the cultural and artistic fabric of Japan on 12 islands and two ports of the Seto Inland Sea as part of the Setouchi Triennale (July 19–August 25). The fourth edition, themed 'Restoration of the Sea', aims at revitalising the indigenous island communities. Besides folklore, performing arts, and traditional craftwork, art installations, and exhibitions by global artists rank high on the festival's calendar. This decade-old carnival has served to connect the region to the world and create an opportunity to preserve the traditional lifestyle and local history of the islanders. It also serves as the perfect excuse for you to escape the city life and treat yourself to magnificent sunsets and flavoursome Japanese food. If you miss the July-August edition, the fall gathering of the festival takes place between September 28 and November 4. Triennale passports can be purchased at *setouchi-artfest.jp*.

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NO. 5

The Andhra Art & Craft Hotel, Vizag

Launched earlier this year in Visakhapatnam, The Andhra Art and Craft Hotel is among the best new art hotels in Asia. Focussed on handicrafts, it offers rooms themed on four traditional Andhra art forms: Tholu Bommalata, Budithi, Kalamkari, and Etikoppaka. The hotel is an art-lover's dream: there are over 70 historical sculptures and 50 art installations spread out across the rooms and corridors. For leisurely experiences, guests can enjoy romantic evenings on their private stretch of beach or host cocktail gatherings by the outdoor swimming pool. *andhraartandcrafthotel.com*

NO. 6

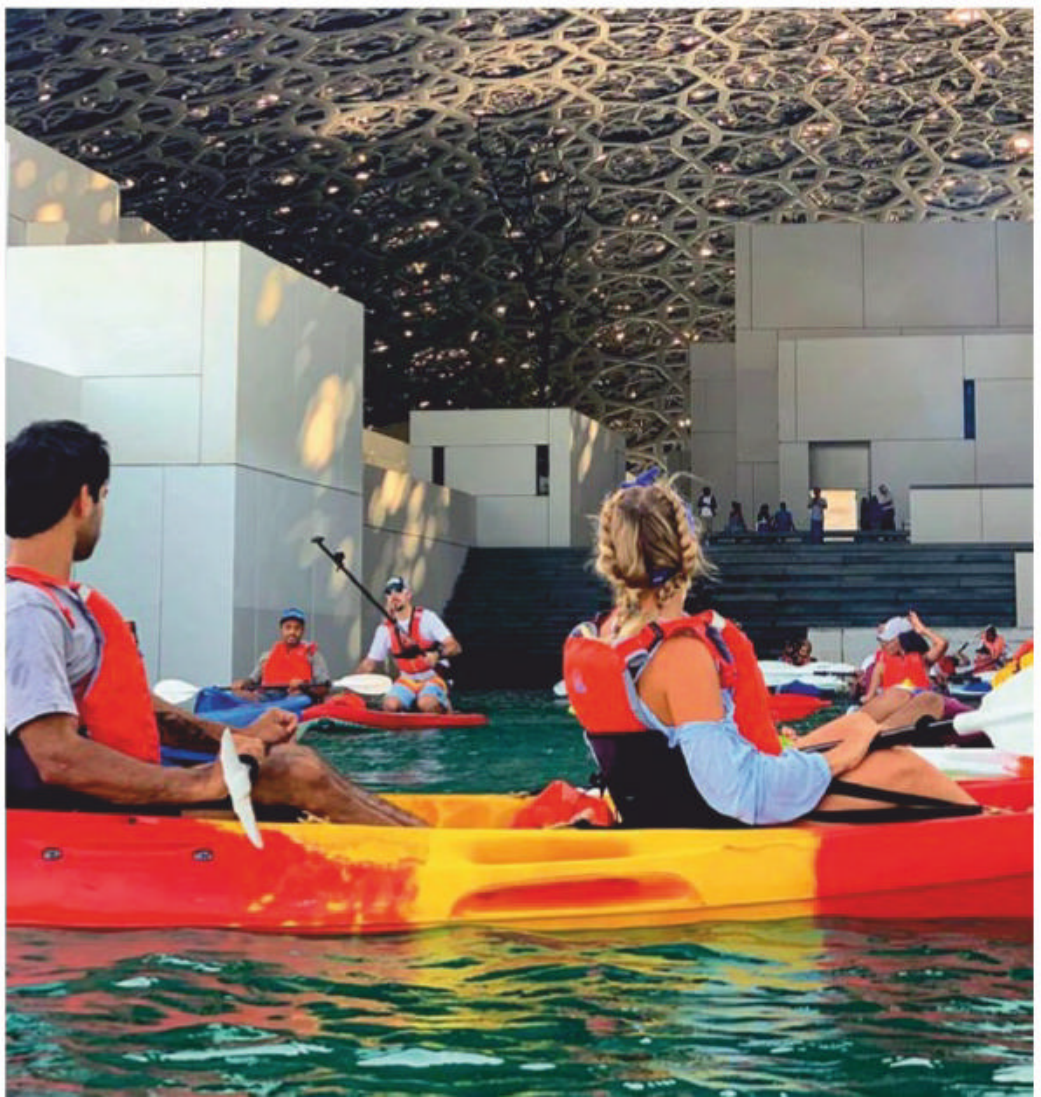
MONOPOLY DREAMS™, Hong Kong

Slated to open this year, MONOPOLY DREAMS™ is the life-sized board game of every MONOPOLY lover's dreams. The new attraction, which is the first of its kind, is located at The Peak Galleria in Hong Kong and will offer guests a unique experience of their favourite game, accompanied by high-tech features such as Augmented Reality, holograms, and 4D. It will have a Bank, Jail, Title Deeds, and Water Supply, among other memorable elements from the original game. The Peak, a huge tourist attraction, is also the most expensive title deed in the game, making it the "king of property." The 1,858-square-metre property aims to host over seven lakh visitors every year. Join Mr. MONOPOLY at his secret residence and get a sneak peek into his luxurious life. With millions of players across the globe, the first ever real life MONOPOLY game is one of the most highly anticipated tourist attractions this year. *monopolydreams.com*

NO. 7

Kayak Tour at the Louvre, Abu Dhabi

The Louvre, Abu Dhabi, is offering visitors a unique way to experience the beautiful architecture of the museum: kayak tours. Created in association with tour company Seahawk *(seahawktravels.in)*, the tour will take visitors around the fringes of the museum to give them a fresh perspective of the structure. The tours are conducted every Friday and Saturday, between 9 am and 5.30 pm. The 60-minute-long kayak tour leaves adequate time for visitors to explore the museum, which is renowned for exquisite displays such as the Rain of Light that produces ever-changing drops of sunlight after filtering through eight layers of the museum's canopy. No prior experience of kayaking is required as the tours have professional instructors guiding the visitors. Children between six and 12 must be accompanied by a guardian. *louvreabudhabi.ae*



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18+

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NO. 8

Raffles Hotel, Singapore

The iconic Raffles Hotel in Singapore is all set for a re-launch in August this year after a major overhaul. The 125-year-old heritage property was shut in December 2017 for restoration. When it opens, it will have expanded to include 115 comfortable suites equipped with state-of-the-art technology and amenities. According to the official website, the hotel will feature new restaurants and bars, keeping up with the changing times and the demands of its well-travelled patrons. The property is home to the Raffles Museum, which features a collection of photographs, silverware and china, postcards, and priceless editions of masterpieces produced by writers who have stayed there, besides its famous Long Bar, which is the home of the Singapore Sling, and a shopping arcade with over 40 speciality boutiques. *rafflessingapore.com*

NO. 9

WONDERBOX, South Korea

A new two-storeyed indoor theme park, WONDERBOX, invites visitors into its surreal interiors that follow the theme of an 'amusement park at night'. Launched in March this year, the place offers a walkway with multimedia screens, the displays of which are reflected in the ceiling. WONDERBOX offers thrilling carnival-themed rides, such as a 360° swing named the 'Mega Mix', an aerial bridge named 'Sky Trail', a ferris wheel , and a bungee drop, among others. Singaporean patissier Janice Wong, chosen as Asia's Top Patissier in 2014, also operates her first South Korean store in WONDERBOX. Spread out over 3,933 square metres, it is a part of Paradise City, an integrated casino resort complex that opened in 2017. The casino is only open to foreigners, so carry your passport along! *Tickets priced at ₹1,971 for adults and ₹1,407 for children; p-city.com*



NO. 10

InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland, China

Defying not just the limits of engineering but also conventional location wisdom for a luxury hotel, the InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland traverses 88 metres down the side of a quarry. With just two storeys above the ground level, the hotel has 15 storeys going down the side of a quarry. Of these, the last two storeys are underwater. Besides Mr Fisher, the restaurant, the underground section has suites that look out to a view of tropical fish swimming in water brought in from the South China Sea. With 336 rooms in total, rooms above water have a fantastic view of the cliff and a man-made waterfall, which is also mirrored in the cascading glass 'waterfall' built into the centre of the hotel itself. The rooms also have balconies from where you can watch customisable light shows. The hotel was launched last Novermber. *intercontinental.com*

FROM TOP: ICPIX_SINGAPORE/ALAMY; COURTESY OF INTERCONTINENTAL



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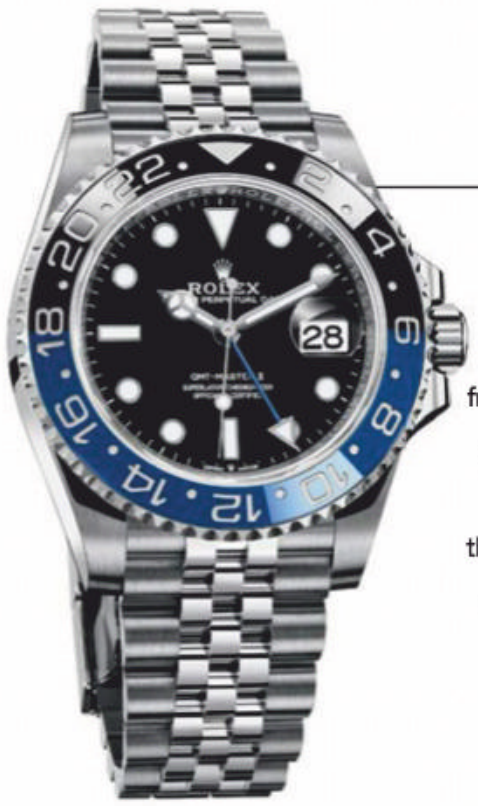
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MANERO FLYBACK
CARL F. BUCHERER

A feature popular among gentlemen is the flyback chronograph, where you can use the reset function without stopping the chronograph. The latest addition to the Carl F. Bucherer Manero Flyback collection combines the beauty of precious metal w th retro charm and fine watchmaking. The new Flyback Chronograph boasts of an 18-carat rose-gold case that houses a column-wheel mechanism. *₹12,98,000*



OYSTER PERPETUAL GMT-MASTER II
ROLEX

There are many two-timezone watches designed for the frequently travelling businessman. The most famous of these is the Rolex GMT-Master II. This year at Baselworld, Rolex unveiled the latest of the series, identified by the trademark Oyster steel, jubilee bracelet, bi-directional rotating bezel, and two-colour Cerachrom insert in blue and black ceramic in a 40mm case. *₹5,84,300*



PROMASTER FLAGSHIP SKY
CITIZEN

Celebrating its 30th anniversary, Citizen launched three models of Promaster for the Sky, Land, and Sea. Their high-end SATELLITE WAVE technology allows the business traveller to tune into any of the 39 timezones he may be travelling to. It shows the time in two different time zones simultaneously, and it switches between them in one step. *1,989 pieces only; price on request*

Time is Money

Travelling ceaselessly for work? Here are five elegant timepieces for the hard-nosed business traveller in you.
By Mitrajit Bhattacharya



TOP GUN CERATANIUM
IWC

IWC Schaffhausen unveiled early this year a new watch in the Pilot's Watches collection—the TOP GUN Ceratanium®, the perfect watch for the discerning globetrotting businessman. It is the first pilot's watch from IWC with a Ceratanium® case, a material as lightweight and robust as titanium, and as hard and scratch-resistant as ceramic. *₹9,61,000*



L.U.C XP
CHOPARD

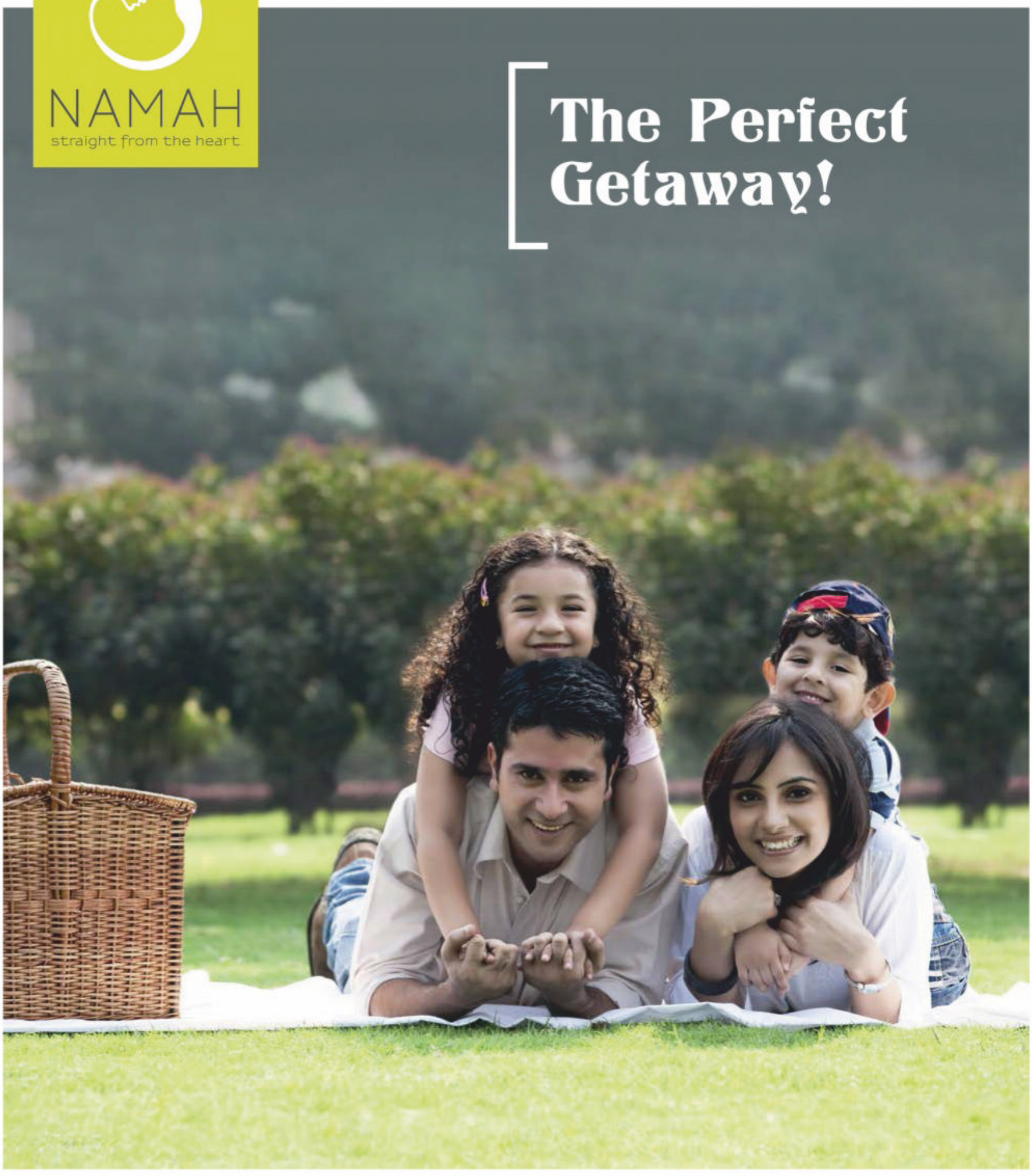
The new Chopard L.U.C's casual elegance lies in the details—the texture of the dial, the virgin wool of its strap, the brilliance of its hour markers, along with the slender shape—a reflection of the tradition of Savile Row tailors. Attired in steel and enhanced by a satin blue dial with rose gold accents, this ultra-thin classic timepiece (7.2mm) with two hands is all character. *Price on request*



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WATCH
Formula 1 Quartz, **Tag Heuer**, *₹1,08,866; tagheuer.com*



Dress your part in Guangzhou, China, the hub of technology.

It's All Business

Travelling for a high-stakes meeting? Let your ensemble do the talking.
By Priyanka Chakrabarti



HEADPHONES
SoundSport Free Wireless Headphones, **Bose**, *₹18,990; boseindia.com*



SKINCARE
Total Revitalizer Cream, **Shiseido**, *₹4,747 (50 ml); shiseido.com*



PEN
Starwalker Red Gold Resin Ballpoint Pen, **Mont Blanc**, *₹15,000; amazon.in*



WALLET
Leather Logo-Embossed Wallet, **Boss**, *₹15,585; harrods.com*



BELT
Handmade Crocodile Belt, **Stefano Ricci**, *₹1,56,781; stefanoricci.com*



PERFUME
Lauder Pleasures For Men, **Estée Lauder**, *₹5,026 (30 ml); esteelauder.com*



CLOTHES
Fall 2019 Menswear, **Alexander McQueen**, *price on request; alexandermcqueen.com*



SHOE
Gommino Driving Shoes in Leather, **Tod's**, *price on request; tods.com*

SHUTTERSTOCK

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olivesfromspain.in

When friends come together, can good food be far behind? Make it sensational with Olives from Spain. As adaptable as they are delectable, Spanish Olives add a refreshing new twist to any dish, turning ordinary into drool-worthy. What’s more, had alone, they have a calorie count that is only a third of most processed snacks. So let the good times flow, and great food too!

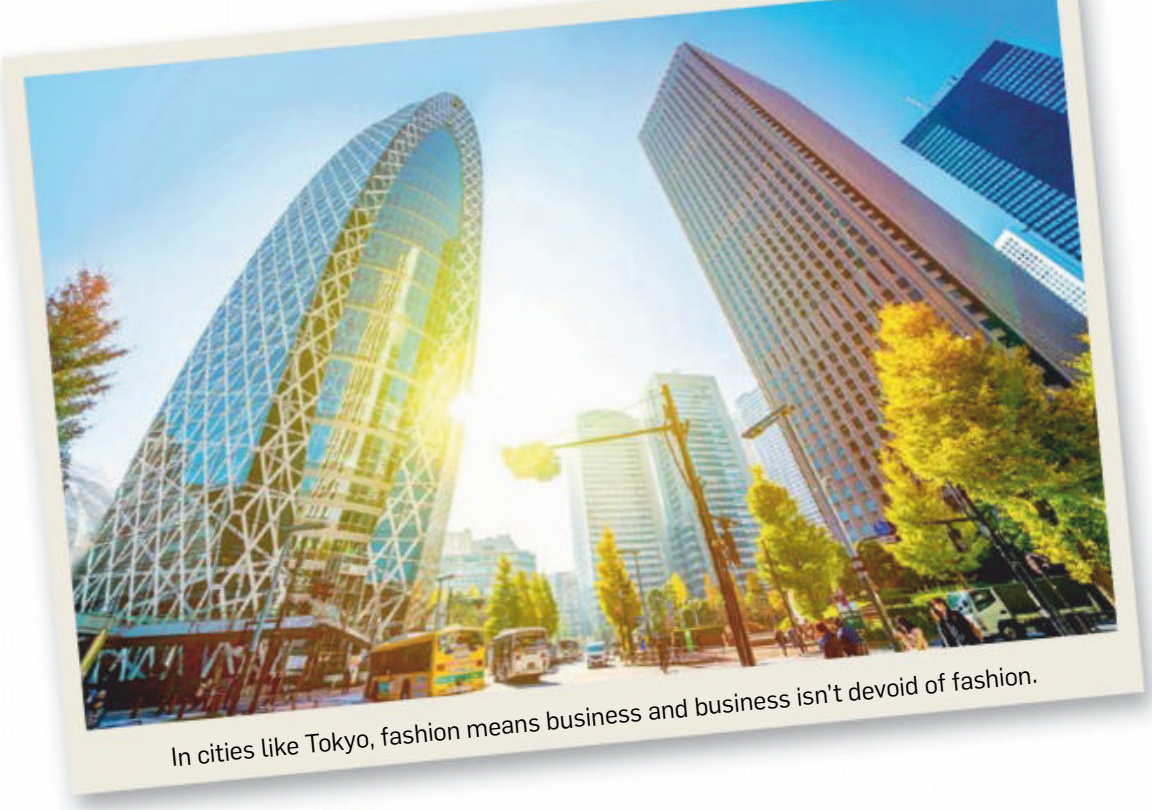


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EUROPEAN UNION



HANDBAG
Niki Medium Bag In Crinkled Vintage Leather, **Saint Laurent**, *₹1,56,858; ysl.com*



In cities like Tokyo, fashion means business and business isn't devoid of fashion.

Be the Boss

Travelling for work? It doesn't have to be boring; let these fashion essentials amplify your style statement.
By Priyanka Chakrabarti





BRACELET
Wishbone Bracelet, **Annoushka**, *₹67,046; annoushka.com*



FRAGRANCE
Baccarat Rouge 540 (Extrait de Parfum), **Maison Francis Kurkdjian**, *₹23,515; harrods.com*



LIPSTICK
Crushed Liquid Lip, **Bobbi Brown**, *₹1,800; bobbibrowncosmetics.com*

CLOTHES
Fall 2019 Ready-To-Wear, **Prada**, *price on request; prada.com*



SUNGLASSES
Rockstud Sunglasses, **Valentino**, *₹28,582; valentino.com*



CREAM
Regenerist Advanced Anti-Ageing Micro-Sculpting, **Olay**, *₹1,699; nykaa.com*



EARRINGS
Rose Gold and Diamond Paper Clip Earring, **Anita Ko**, *₹2,38,773; anitako.com*



SHOES
Freedom Shoes, **Fendi**, *price on request; fendi.com*

SHUTTERSTOCK

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Recently launched after being crowdsourced with Just Herbs' users, Just Herbs' *Sapta Jal* is not only India's first Ayurvedic Micellar Water but also a must-have for ingredient-conscious users on the go!

Micellar Water swiftly removes all traces of make-up and dirt from the skin. Just Herbs tweaked the classic French formulation, combining it with the benefits of traditional Indian herbs, to increase its potency. "We did not want to create a product that removes make-up but has zero nutritive qualities. In fact, wanted it to be purifying as well as nourishing at the same time," states Arush Chopra, co-founder and CEO, Just Herbs.

Typical Micellar Water is made of tiny oil molecules suspended in soft-water. These oil molecules or micelles get attached to the make-up debris and dirt on the skin and when you wipe it off you get clean skin without the need to rinse off the product.

Why Sapta Jal?

Just Herbs' *Sapta Jal* is made up of seven Srikamya Rasayanas or complexion-boosting Ayurvedic formulations. The base of *Sapta Jal* is a nutritive blend of nurturing vegetable oils and several plant waters. It contains plant waters of *Triphala (Amalaki, Bibhitaki* and *Haritaki), Tulsi, Shallaki, Chandan, Khus, Gulab* and *Narangi Phool*, that act as the base which holds oil droplets of Indian Frankincense, Jasmine, Myrrh and Wheatgerm that draw out impurities from the deepest layers of the skin without drying it out. Formulated to be an effective make-up remover, *Sapta Jal* also hydrates, tones and soothes pollution-stressed skin.

Shop Online: www.justherbs.in



> "I wasn't a model until late in my life, but my love for cars has been since I was young, and so is my love for art, photography, and design."

A Model Life

Yasmin Le Bon has been a leading name in fashion for 30 years. But few know that while she was growing up, she wanted to be a professional racing driver. At the Cartier Travel With Style 2019 Concours D'Elegance in Jaipur, she spoke to *Mitrajit Bhattacharya*.

Let's talk about journeys. First, your journey from the runway to the world of automobiles.
I have always been interested in motor racing, designs, and classic cars. For me, it's about being enthralled by the ingenuity of humanity, how we can design and come up with solutions, wanting to be able to travel, move from one place to another, how we have conquered those, and done it with style. It's not just function, it's also about form.

And tell us about your journey with your husband, Simon.
Gosh, the journey of marriage! We are like dinosaurs, been together for so long... Just when you think you know someone, you will be surprised by life. I think we are forever discovering more and more about ourselves. But I think the deeper journey is to understand oneself.



A Kazakh eagle hunter in Mongolia, which is on Yasmin's bucket list.

What has been your relationship's success mantra?
To begin with, spending a bit of time apart. *(Laughs)* Honestly, for the first 15 years, we were both working crazily... Though we both needed our time to be independent, we always wanted to be together. That was crucial in our journey. Now, of course, we want to be together all the time.

Let's talk about your extensive travels. Which is your favourite destination?
I am still looking for one. India is a favourite of mine. I keep coming back. I like everything about the country—the sights, sounds, people—there is just so much to see. I would happily go back to Maldives.

Destinations on your bucket list:
[There are] So many! To start with, the Arctic Circle. Also, Mongolia, Cambodia, and most of South America—Argentina, Chile, and Peru.

Where are you headed next with Simon?
Next, we are on a boat with friends in the Caribbean.

What do you like to do on holiday?
My holidays are all about lots of books. It's that one time when you can read and lose yourself.

Last book you read and liked?
Adam Kay's *This is Going to Hurt: Secret Diaries of a Junior Doctor*. Part of it is very funny, part heartbreaking as well.

Your ideal travel companion?
I love travelling on my own, actually. Also love travelling with my daughters and Simon. Simon and I are good at travelling together provided he can manage to read the correct date of the flight. When you are on holiday, sometimes your brain sort of relaxes... We have missed a couple of flights—not by hours, but by days! You land up at the airport and people at the desk look at you as if you are slightly crazy!

FROM TOP: MARK CUTHBERT/CONTRIBUTOR/GETTYIMAGES; CHESTER VOYAGE/ALAMY

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In Vogue

India-born **Diipa Khosla** is creating global trends with her travel, fashion, and beauty narratives, which have earned her around one million followers on Instagram. She tells *Priyanka Chakrabarti* how to make heads turn wherever you go.

DIIPA'S FAVOURITES

Fashion capitals
New York, Paris, London's Bond Street

Fashion icon
Audrey Hepburn

Next destination
Morocco

Travel companion
My husband, Oleg

Inspirational destination
South Africa

What's your first travel memory?
Travelling with my sister to Europe when I was 13. I thought the plane would get hijacked!

From studying law to being a fashion blogger, you've come a long way...
After completing my bachelor's, I got the opportunity to do an internship with one of the first influencer agencies in Europe. I realised that there weren't any other influencers who looked like me. In the beginning, I had no idea what I was doing, and Google was my best friend! I learned networking, had my sister help me create content, and it slowly turned into a full-time career.

Five things you never travel without?
A hot-water bottle, carry-on makeup bag, a book to read in the plane, face mask for long flights, and comfortable shoes.

You're always on the move. What's home to you?
Where my family and friends are—Amsterdam.

Any hidden gems you'd recommend in your city?
The city centre can get pretty crowded, especially during spring and summer. I think exploring neighbourhoods, a bit more out of the centre, is a fun way to see more of the local life... Vondelpark is nice for a hangout or run.

Your bucket-list destinations?
We would love to go to China. Also, many of our friends have been to Jamaica. So, we would love to go there one day. South Korea is also on my travel wishlist.

The most adventurous thing you've ever done?
Oleg (husband) and I travelled to Patagonia to hike—it was incredible.

Your favourite hotel?
The Savoy in London (*thesavoylondon.com*). It's not only iconic, but it also has the most incredible staff. I was shocked when I visited it the first time—the doorman knew my name when the staff could have had no idea what time I was coming and in what car I would arrive!

Most memorable travel experience?
When we travelled to South Africa earlier this year, we visited the Kapama Game Reserve. We slept under the stars in the middle of the game reserve.

Top five summer carry-ons?
Bikinis, denim shorts, white crop tops, sunglasses, and a selection of hats. ✕

COURTESY OF DIIPA KHOSLA (2)


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Executive Chef Praveen Shetty conducts the live cooking demo for the Masterclass participants.



L-R: Smita Rao, Shibani Chavan, Aindrila Mitra, Indu Bhardwaj, Srijan Vadhera, Sushmita Gupta, Isabelle Le Pouesarde, and Jyoti Pathania.

TRAVEL+ LEISURE INDIA Masterclass

CONRAD BENGALURU

'AN ASIAN AFFAIR' MASTERCLASS SHOWS CULINARY INVENTIONS AT MIKUSU IN CONRAD BENGALURU

Travel + Leisure India & South Asia in association with **Conrad Bengaluru** conducted an exclusive masterclass, 'An Asian Affair', at Mikusu on May 3, 2019. As the hoi polloi of the city geared up for the weekend, the city's high-fliers came together to celebrate their love for Asian cuisine. In a live cooking session, Praveen Shetty, the executive chef of Conrad Bengaluru, whipped up the Mikusu Signature Chicken and Leeks Yakitori, Cantonese Steamed Red Snapper, and the Chef's Signature Mango Pudding, and the participants replicated the complex but rewarding recipes. On the scrumptious occasion, the General Manager of Conrad Bengaluru, Srijan Vadhera, said, "This masterclass presented an exciting opportunity for our chefs to innovate, experiment, and come up with dishes that truly stand out. The participants also got to know and understand the ingredients, techniques, and intricacies involved in preparing an exclusive dish."



Pragya Bhat (*left*) and Jyoti Pathania Salwan with *T+L*'s Indu Bhardwaj (*centre*).



Shibani Chavan tries her hand at a dish with Chef Praveen Shetty.



Francois Gautier, Consul General, Consulate General of France in Bengaluru.



After the Masterclass, guests tasted the dishes.



The *T+L* team presents the certificate to the Conrad Bengaluru team.



Mikusu Signature Chicken and Leeks Yakitori and Cantonese Steamed Red Snapper.

Stay updated for news on our upcoming Masterclasses on facebook.com/tnlindia



COURTESY OF THE PARK HOTELS

The 60-room boutique hotel wears a contemporary design aesthetic.

Maid in Mumbai

Juhu gets a chic new destination in **The Park Mumbai**– the latest luxury property in the Maximum City.

WITH THE SPRAWLING Juhu Beach at a stone's throw, the dramatic charcoal-grey façade of The Park Mumbai has sweeping views of the Arabian Sea to offer through its ceiling-to-floor windows painted in fuchsia and burnt orange. Located on the Juhu Tara Road, the latest addition to the list of luxe properties in the Maximum City has already become the talk of town as it comes with the legendary design vocabulary of The Park Hotels.

Contemporary design, innovative dining, and opulent entertainment—the 60-room boutique hotel is an urban retreat. Divided into six categories, the designer rooms and studio suites are beautifully done with a monochromatic palette and state-of-the-art amenities. The Arabian Sea fringed with swaying palms, the historic Juhu Aerodrome, or the glimmering cityscape—take your pick of view.

Inspired by the Asian design and decor, Meishi plates up fusion dishes from Japanese, Thai, Chinese, and Indian cuisines all day long, while picking only the freshest, most organic ingredients. A jazzy staircase on the first floor takes you to The Saffron Room—a 232-square-metre banquet space ideal for social and corporate gatherings.

Coming soon is a dramatic whisky bar with an al fresco patio, a rooftop poolside bar, a wellness centre with a spa, and more rooms, including a luxe Presidential Suite. *theparkhotels.com*

—SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV

Resorts World Sentosa Singapore
a Genting Resort

PROMOTION

A Thrilling Ride

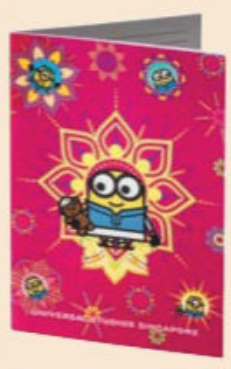
A holiday at Universal Studios Singapore™ is all you need to rekindle your spirits this summer.

No Singapore itinerary is complete without a trip to the wonderful Resorts World™ Sentosa. While the resort warrants a few days for its extensive range of attractions, Universal Studios Singapore alone makes for a whole day of unbridled fun.

As Southeast Asia's first and only Universal Studios theme park, it attracts visitors of all ages, who come here for its seven themed zones. Hollywood features a Broadway-style theatre and exciting stores such as Minion Mart and Hello Kitty Studio; The Lost World from *Jurassic Park* harks back to the age of dinosaurs; and Ancient Egypt features a thrilling Revenge of the Mummy rollercoaster. What truly makes the theme park stand out, however, is its exclusive set of attractions—the world's first Far Far Away castle from the world of *Shrek*, a *Madagascar*-themed boat ride, a *Puss In Boots* roller-coaster.

The thrilling rides and immersive shows need not stop with sundown. Now with the introduction of Universal After Hours, one can enjoy the park and its existing attractions as well as special activities until 10 pm on Fridays, Saturdays, and select public holidays. Universal Studios Singapore is your ticket to a memorable day in The Lion City.





Receive an exclusive Minion notebook with Universal Studios Singapore ticket purchase at USD 60. Book your tickets at *rwsentosa.com/IN* now!

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The plush suites at The Oberoi, Mumbai offer unhindered views of the ocean.

The Sweet Suite Life

Offering a memorable stay in the City of Dreams, **The Oberoi, Mumbai** wins you over with its unmatched hospitality and personalised service quotient. *By Sushmita Srivastav*

SITTING IN THE HEART of the business and entertainment districts of India's financial capital, The Oberoi, Mumbai is a gem that befits the Queen's Necklace. While your business meeting or conference may have nothing to do with nature, it does not hurt to stay on the crescent shoreline of Marine Drive and be treated to beautiful views of the ocean all day long. What makes the hotel stand out among its peers is its plush suites, which come packed with a refined aesthetic and tailored service.

The spacious 74-square-metre Oberoi Executive Suite features sophisticated interiors that flow through the living room into the master bedroom and large floor-to-ceiling windows that offer views of the ocean or the Mumbai skyline. Then, there's the Deluxe Suite with a walk-in wardrobe and the Premium Suite with a separate dining space. The Golconda Presidential Suite and the Kohinoor Presidential Suite soar over the Queen's Necklace in style, with private dining halls, separate entrances for butlers, well-equipped workspaces, powder rooms, stocked pantries, and interconnecting twin bedrooms.

The hotel offers a dedicated 24-hour butler service with each suite booking. This unrivalled suite experience makes sure that all your needs are personally taken care of—right from the time of your airport pickup to when you bid farewell to Mumbai. Be it packing and unpacking luggage or replenishing your preferred brand of toiletries, the private butlers go beyond the call of duty to make sure you have a comfortable stay. For solo women travellers, there's a lady butler to take care of every need.

The common spaces of the hotel are equally impressive. The 14-level atrium lobby, tiled in white Thassos marble and fitted with large French windows, oozes a contemporary charm. A red piano takes centre stage and elevates the glamour quotient. The dining destinations are an extension of the hotel's stylish ethos. Known for its sushi platters, Fenix has a wide menu featuring Japanese, Western, Thai, Indian, and Italian dishes. Vetro, the Italian fine-dining restaurant, comes adorned with multi-coloured glass panels and offers scrumptious Italian cuisine with the choicest of wines.

Whether you're in Mumbai for a business meeting or for leisure, choose the suite life at The Oberoi, Mumbai, and leave your worries behind. *oberoihotels.com*



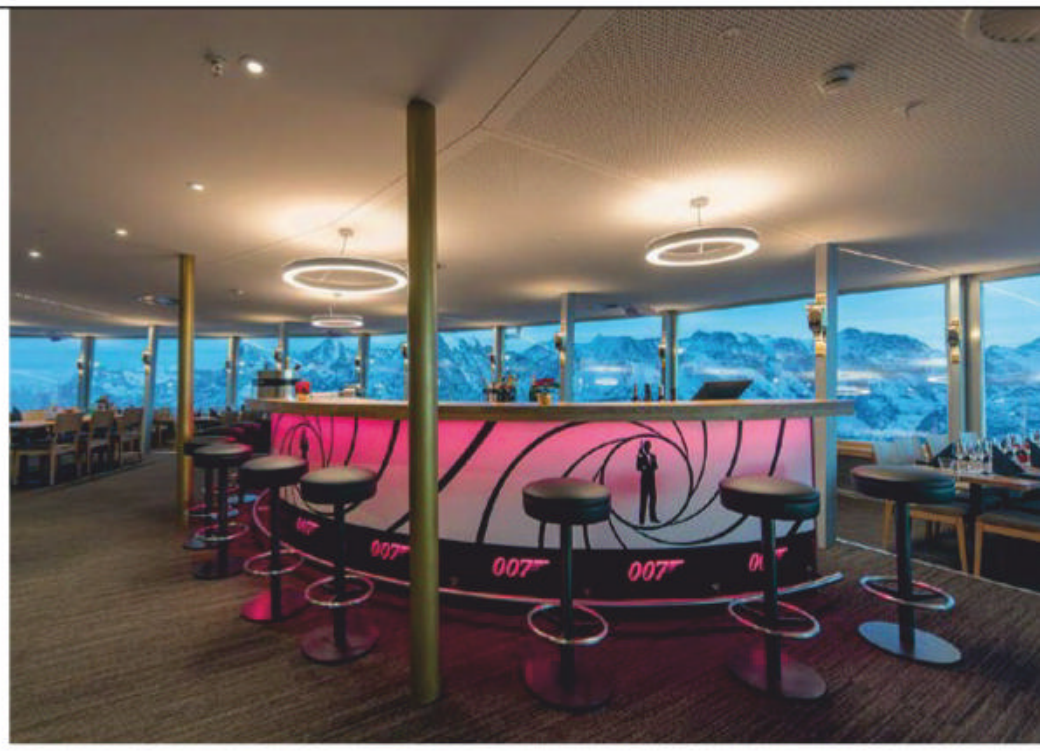
Vetro, the Italian speciality restaurant, at The Oberoi, Mumbai.



The hotel's lobby sets the tone for a glamorous stay.

COURTESY OF OBEROI HOTELS & RESORTS





Clockwise from left: **The Thrill Walk; Interior and exterior views of Piz Gloria, the rotating restaurant.**



License to Thrill

If you're a fan of James Bond or simply love the thrills that come packed into the spy's lifestyle, it's time to strap on your gadgets and head to Schilthorn.

A wonderful 360-degree view of over 200 mountain peaks establishes the Schilthorn summit as one of the most popular attractions in the Interlaken region of Switzerland. While Swiss delights like the Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau mountains are common sights from Schilthorn, days with clear skies even offer a glimpse of Mont Blanc in France and the Black Forest in Germany.

But it's not just the view that draws visitors to Schilthorn; it offers an assortment of activities and establishments for every kind of traveller. An extended glass-floored platform situated over a vertical precipice, the Skyline Walk offers a breathtaking view of the snowscape below your feet. Meanwhile, the Thrill Walk is a 200-metre-long steel-and-glass bridge under the Birg cableway station latched on to the side of a rock massif. The icing on the Swiss cake is the rotating restaurant of Piz Gloria, which makes a complete rotation in 45 minutes, allowing guests to witness the glorious Alpine panorama sliding by as they savour succulent meals.

The best way to experience Switzerland is with a Swiss Travel Pass. The Schilthorn excursion comes free with the Swiss Travel Pass.

Schilthorn is a haven for James Bond fans; the place is dotted with establishments that celebrate the iconic British spy. The region's relationship with 007 began in 1969 with the release of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, which was shot here. An interactive exhibition called The Bond World offers behind-the-scene glimpses of the movie shoot, while the 007 Walk of Fame is an ode to the film's cast and crew. The Bond Walk exhibits handprints and autographs of the cast, and a brief description of the filming experience.

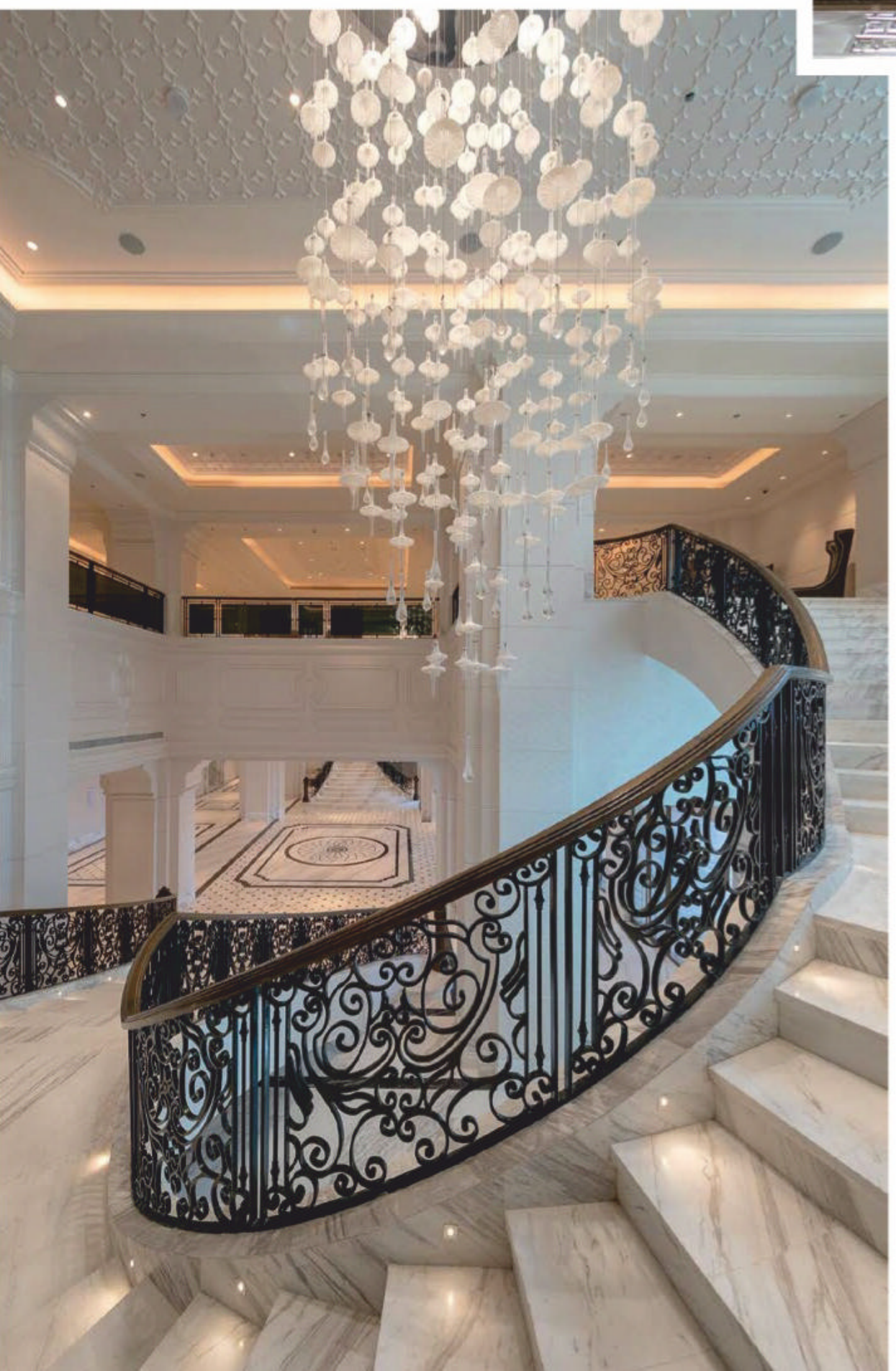
Since the year 2019 marks 50 years of the film's release, the Schilthorn summit will host numerous events to celebrate. A year-long '50 Years James Bond' package includes the best of Schilthorn—a return cable car trip from Stechelberg, a visit to the Piz Gloria with beverages and the 007-Burger, a 007 coffee or hot chocolate, and a Bond-themed giveaway, along with admission to Bond World and Bond Cinema.

For more information visit *MySwitzerland.com* and *schilthorn.ch*

Redefining Royalty

ITC Royal Bengal, Kolkata, is an ode to the city's rich culture and heritage. *Priyanka Chakrabarti* gets an exclusive, pre-launch tour of the hotel.





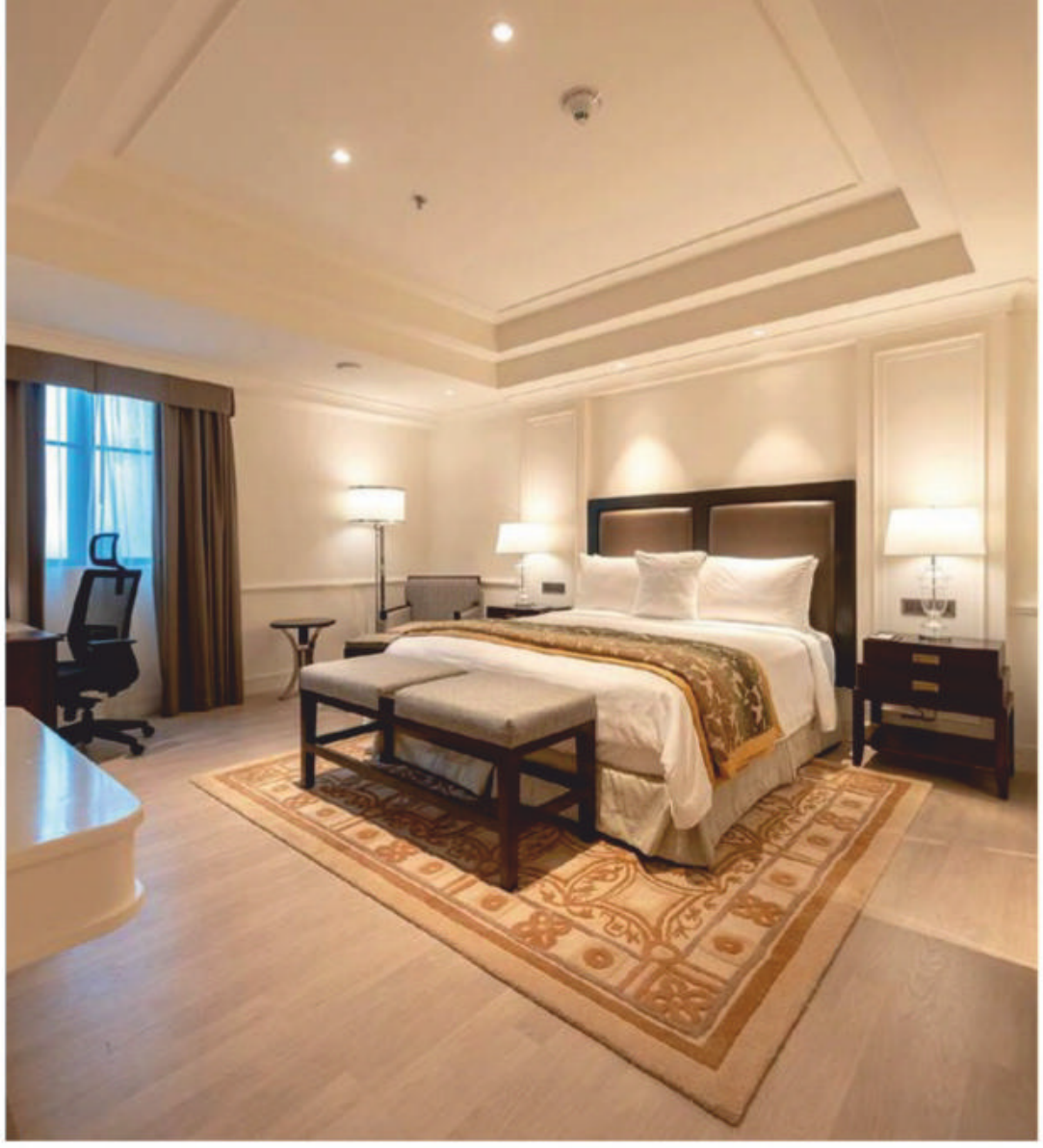
From left: Grand stairways welcome guests at ITC Royal Bengal. Chef Greco Vittorio at Ottimo Cucina Italiana.

OVERLOOKING THE CITY like a monarch, the ITC Royal Bengal in Kolkata radiates an imperial vibe. One glance and you know the property is going to be a game-changer in the realm of luxe hospitality.

The doorman ushers me into what feels like a different world from the one the hotel inhabits. The decor blends fine European aesthetic with traditional facets of Bangla. The pristine white lobby, high ceilings adorning dome-shaped crystal chandeliers, and vintage-styled stairways exude an old-world romance—a homage to Kolkata's poetic lineage. I walk along the spacious corridors and imperial hallways of the hotel, where the primary design philosophy is minimalism with strong hints of sophistication. To portray simplicity in an imperial way is a tricky affair, but ITC Royal Bengal manages to nail it.

The five-star hotel has 456 rooms and suites, 82 service apartments, six dining destinations, 5,630 square metres of banqueting space, and a luxury spa called Kaya Kalp–The Royal Spa. The rooms are lavishly appointed, and they open up to breathtaking views of East Kolkata. From where I stand, I can see a vast expanse of wetlands through a glass window. From the ITC One rooms to the Service Apartments, from the Suites to the Towers Exclusive, the entire property gleams with refined luxury, depicting the finest expressions of Bengal. However, the

COURTESY OF ITC HOTELS



most striking element about the suites is its furnishing: Italian marble, timber floors, decorative ceilings, old-fashioned bedsides, and a trunk-shaped minibar.

I move to the next phase of my tour: the dining destinations. At present, ITC Royal Bengal has five diners. I start with Ottimo Cucina Italiana, because I love a hearty Italian meal. Chef Greco Vittorio from Italy prepares a delicious tasting spread for me. My favourite is the red cabbage soup with chicken dumplings and toasted almonds. I also like the black cod with celery, capers, and Ligurian olives. Nothing is more comforting than the classic lemon meringue with strawberry gelato, pistachio sponge, and balsamic powder.

Next, I check out the Darjeeling Lounge. It's a tea bar that serves fine beverages and finger-food. This 24-hour lounge has an interesting colour palette; think muted shades of beige, brown, and gold blended with blues. The look and feel of this place is reminiscent of the colonial tea estates from the 1800s.

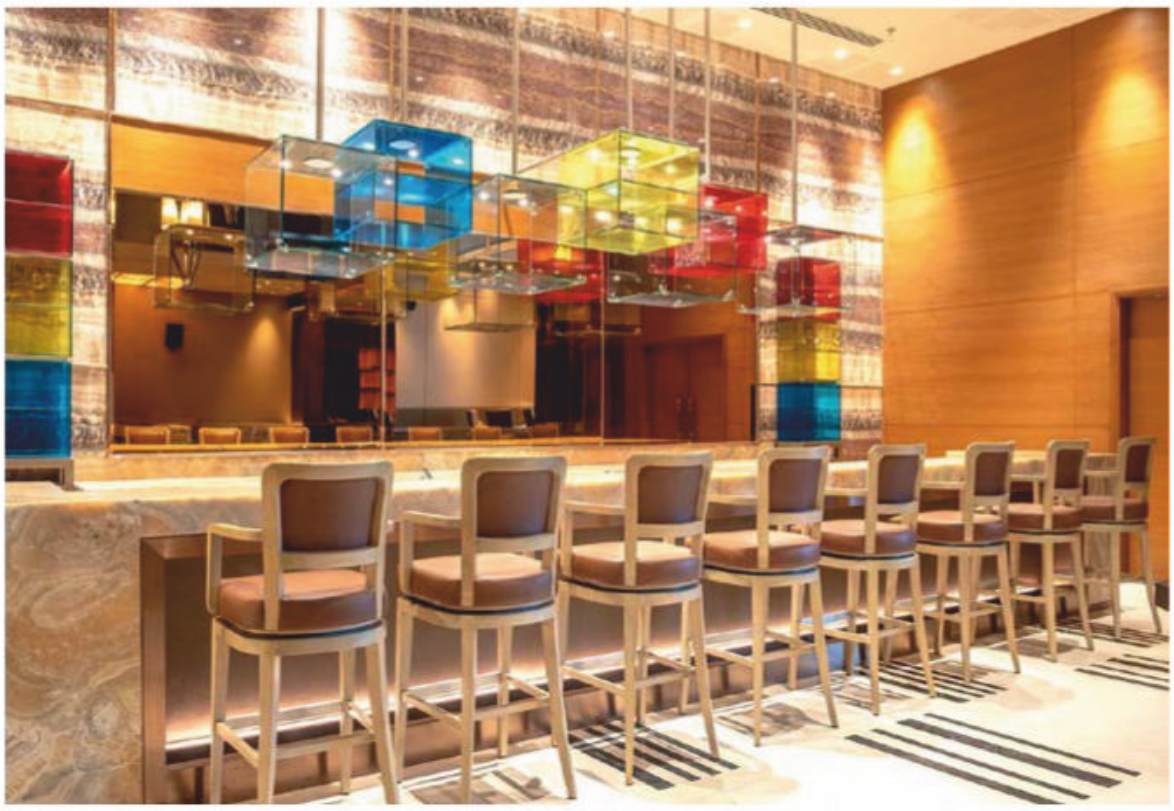
The stone-encrusted bar called Brass Room reminds me of Fitzgerald's classic *The Great Gatsby*. A statement lamp hangs from the ceiling, while nude decor elements and soft Western music evoke Bengal's cosmopolitan ethos. I like my craft cocktails with homegrown ingredients, along with a grand selection of tapas, and this place delivers. I love the classic Negroni and green apple-infused gin. The quintessential northeastern thali too is a delight!

Grand Market Pavilion is a multi-cuisine eatery that harks back to a typical day at the erstwhile Hogg Market of Calcutta. Brimming with the ingredients of a marketplace, this restaurant features an extensive spread of Indian and international delicacies prepared at live kitchen counters.

In the last leg of my tour, I visit Royal Vega, a restaurant that serves fine Indian vegetarian food. Centred on the concept of eating fresh and seasonal produce, the diner brings to Kolkata the 300-year-old Sheherwali cuisine. Chef Varun Mohan prepares a selection of vegetarian delicacies for me. Eating out of a grand silver thali, this quickly rises in my list of all-time favourite vegetarian dining experiences. I specially love the *Kashmiri dum aloo*—richly textured potatoes cooked in a thick and creamy tomato gravy.

All that food and drink demands that I take a long walk. On a stroll across the hotel, I stumble upon the banqueting area of the property. To say that it is huge would be an understatement. I am talking 5,630 square metres of space. The grand ballroom, meeting rooms, and breakout rooms make this hotel perfect for weddings, business meets, and other social events.

Destined to cast a spell of luxury on its guests, ITC Royal Bengal is an expemplary representation of the state's finest facets. As I bid adieu to its many luxuries, I can't help but feel a longing to come back. *Rooms from ₹12,250 per night; itchotels.in* ✖



From top: A well-appointed room at ITC Royal Bengal; the Brass Room is a classic destination to enjoy gin and tapas.



The Welcome Desk at W Kuala Lumpur.

Arty Appetite

Sitting with the poise of a diva next to the legendary Petronas Twin Towers, **W Kuala Lumpur** exudes luxury like no other. *By Priyanka Chakrabarti*

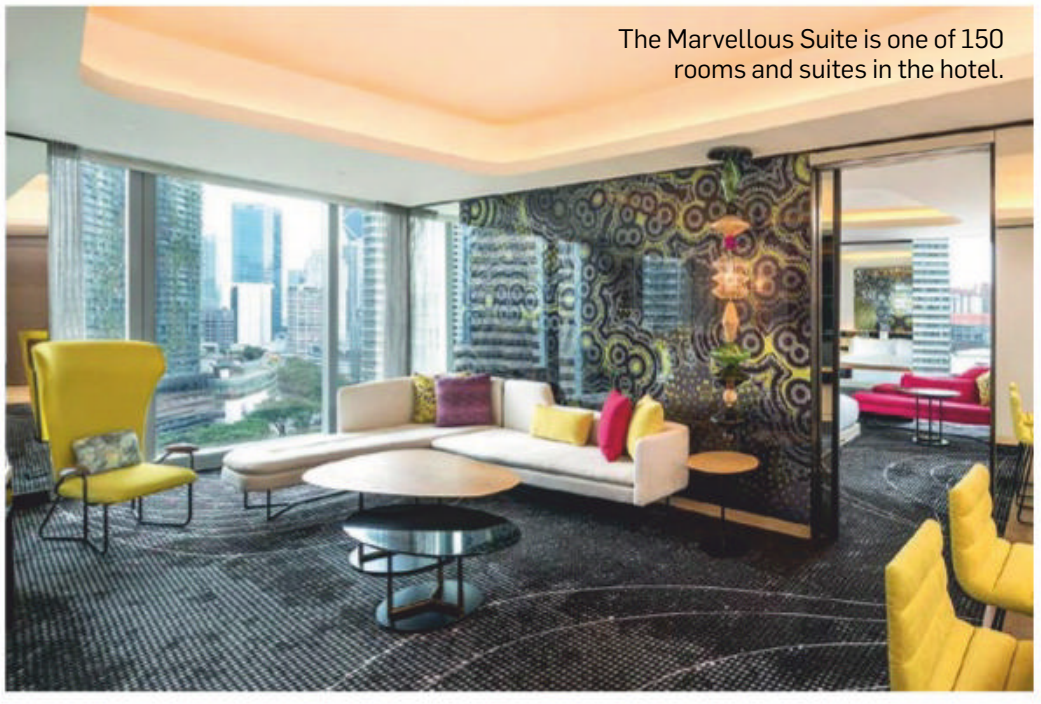
AS I ENTERED W KUALA LUMPUR, after an hour-long drive from the airport, I was enveloped by a gust of vibrant energy. Quirky colour palettes, urban decor elements, and a classy design aesthetic radiated a millennial vibe that permeated the property.

I had suffered an overnight flight, so I was glad to be shown quickly to my room by the welcoming staff. My accommodation on the 14th floor had a flirty ambience. An LED-lit fuchsia cabinet held a coffee-maker and a set of wine glasses. The pristine white bed was adorned with two large leaf-shaped pillows in psychedelic shades of green and blue. There was a large work of art right above the bed, depicting pixels (polka dots) on a glass sheet with a Batik painting in the backdrop. The lounge area flaunted a bright pink sofa with Aztec-printed cushions and a glass wall that opened up to a view of the majestic Petronas Towers.

The property has two primary design narratives—confluence and forest. On the ground floor, the ceilings portray a vision of a flowing river. Panels in stainless steel complement wooden elements, symbolising a confluence of futuristic fundamentals with age-old aesthetic. The jungle vibe is most palpable on the eighth floor. Lush foliage contours the entire hotel all the way up to the swimming pool. Think LED panels resembling waterfalls and wooden chandeliers resembling an ancient Malaysian game called 'Top'. The interiors bear the unmistakable signature of Australian designer Nic Graham.

In the culinary space, the hotel's offerings are diverse. FLOCK, an all-day diner, serves delectable local and Western specialities. It hosted my last dinner in Kuala Lumpur, where I drooled over the wild mushroom and lemon thyme *pau* and the charred cauliflower chorizo cooked with fennel pollen risotto, micro basil, and curry oil. I also polished off a grand serving of the main course, called Flock of Birds—twice cooked chicken accompanied by olive tapenade, kohlrabi fondant, heirloom kale, mushroom confit, and wood sorrel. Meanwhile, YEN, is the perfect place to indulge in hearty Cantonese fare. I particularly enjoyed the chicken dumplings, cod fillet in chilli padi cheese and spicy sauce, and the braised Szechuan hot and sour soup with snow crab meat. The pan-fried salmon bun and the wok-fried chicken in kung-pao sauce were delightful as well.

Elsewhere, WOOBAR whips up glamorous cocktails in chic ambience, while WET® Deck is the place for al fresco parties. With the Petronas Towers in the backdrop and jazzy cocktails in my hands, it dawned on me that I was in the right place at the right time for the most luxurious weekend of my life. *Rooms from ₹13,278; marriott.com*

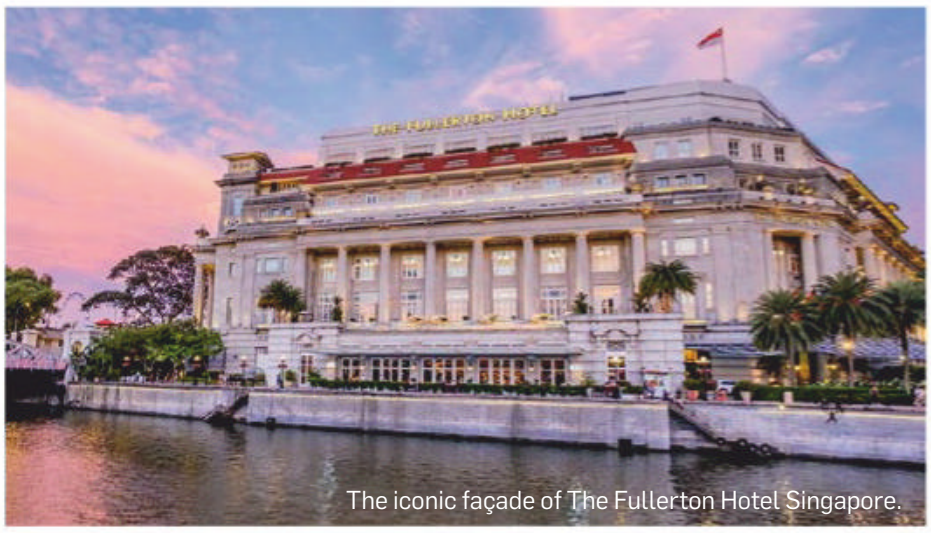


The Marvellous Suite is one of 150 rooms and suites in the hotel.

COURTESY OF MARRIOTT

Experiences Extraordinaire

The status of a national monument, among other things, puts **The Fullerton Hotel Singapore** among the most iconic properties in Southeast Asia.



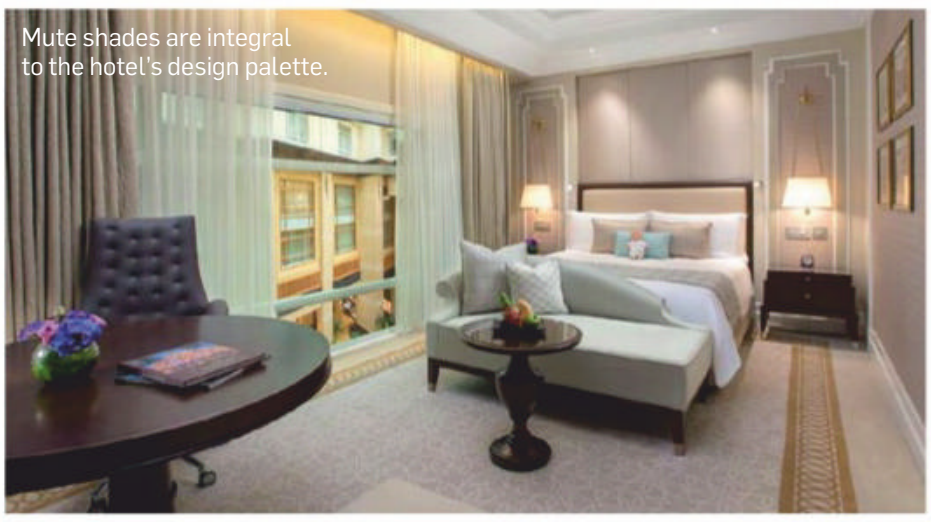
The iconic façade of The Fullerton Hotel Singapore.

A SUCCESSOR OF Fort Fullerton, which occupied the same spot, the Fullerton Building is a sight to behold, with its grand Neoclassical facade. Once the home of the General Post Office, The Singapore Club, and the Chamber of Commerce, the building has housed some of the most important institutions in Singapore's history. The present-day structure is better known as The Fullerton Hotel Singapore—a 400-room heritage hotel that launched in 2001.

The Fullerton Heritage Gallery in the lobby gives guests a virtual tour of the hotel's illustrious past. The 18 accommodation options include rooms that come with a view of the sunlit atrium lobby, the Marina Bay, and Singapore River; high-ceilinged duplexes; suites with terraces; and more. One of the features common between all the guestrooms is the e-Compendium tablet that gives you access to many of the hotel's services—such as the in-room dining menu, concierge, city guide, jogging maps, heritage trails, and major news sites from over 30 countries.

Staying at The Fullerton Hotel Singapore becomes easier with the Straits Club; members enjoy privileges such as 24-hour personalised service, in-room registration, Chandon breakfasts, afternoon tea, evening canapés and cocktails, etc. *fullertonhotels.com*

—RASHIMA NAGPAL



Mute shades are integral to the hotel's design palette.



The Mystical Jungle Pool complements its natural surrounds.



The villas exude a raw vibe.

In the Rainforest

Barefoot luxury meets untamed nature at **Nandini Jungle Resort & Spa** in Ubud.

THINK 18 VILLAS laid out on a slope of a densely forested hill. That's a bird's-eye view of Nandini Jungle Resort & Spa nestled in the Payangan rainforest in Ubud, Bali. A closer look at the property reveals a river at its feet, heart-warming interior design, and wellness options ideal for a few days of detox, far away and disconnected from the world.

The resort draws inspiration from a traditional Balinese village. There are no fancy stone or glass façades here, only natural elements incorporated beautifully into the minimalist scheme of things. Cosy, comfortable, and dreamy, each villa is surrounded by lush greenery. One can choose a Jungle View Villa, which looks out to the Ayung gorge, or a Sunrise View Villa to get the best vantage point for dawn and dusk, or the New Panorama Villa, which comes with a private terrace.

A trolley takes guests down to the dining venue, the Wild Ginger restaurant, which whips up delicious Indonesian dishes using fresh produce from the resort's gardens. To further nourish your soul, the Sangui Spa by the river offers a wide range of therapies. *nandinibali.com* —RN

LEFT ROW: COURTESY OF FULLERTON HOTELS; RIGHT ROW: COURTESY OF NANDINI JUNGLE RESORT & SPA

Gujarat Getaway

With the unveiling of the world's tallest statue, Gujarat now warrants a trip more than ever. Visit the vibrant state to gaze at the Statue of Unity and stay for its myriad offerings.

Last year, Gujarat's tourism saw a significant boost, and the reason was neither the flamingos that visit the state every winter nor the infinite salt plains of the Rann of Kutch. The entity responsible for the tourist influx was the world's tallest statue, the Statue of Unity. A grand ode to the Iron Man of India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the monument is taller than the Statue of Liberty in the US and the Spring Temple Buddha in China. Sardar Patel not only played a significant role in the freedom struggle of India, but was also the man behind the integration of the princely states into a united country post Independence. As a tribute to his immense contribution, the government of Gujarat has made a gesture as large as his stature.

On the Sadhu-Bet Island, around 3.5 kilometeres from the Sardar Sarovar Dam in Narmada district, the 182-metre-tall statue rises against the gorgeous Vindhyachal and Satpura mountain ranges. The statue has been a popular tourist attraction ever since its unveiling





Clockwise, from left: Sardar Patel is credited for the unification of India post Independence from the British: The museum offers glimpses from Patel's life; the Valley of Flowers stretches across 17 kilometres on the banks of River Narmada. *Opposite:* The Statue of Unity is a monumental tribute to Sardar Patel.

on October 31, 2018, and continues to draw crowds from around the country and foreign shores.

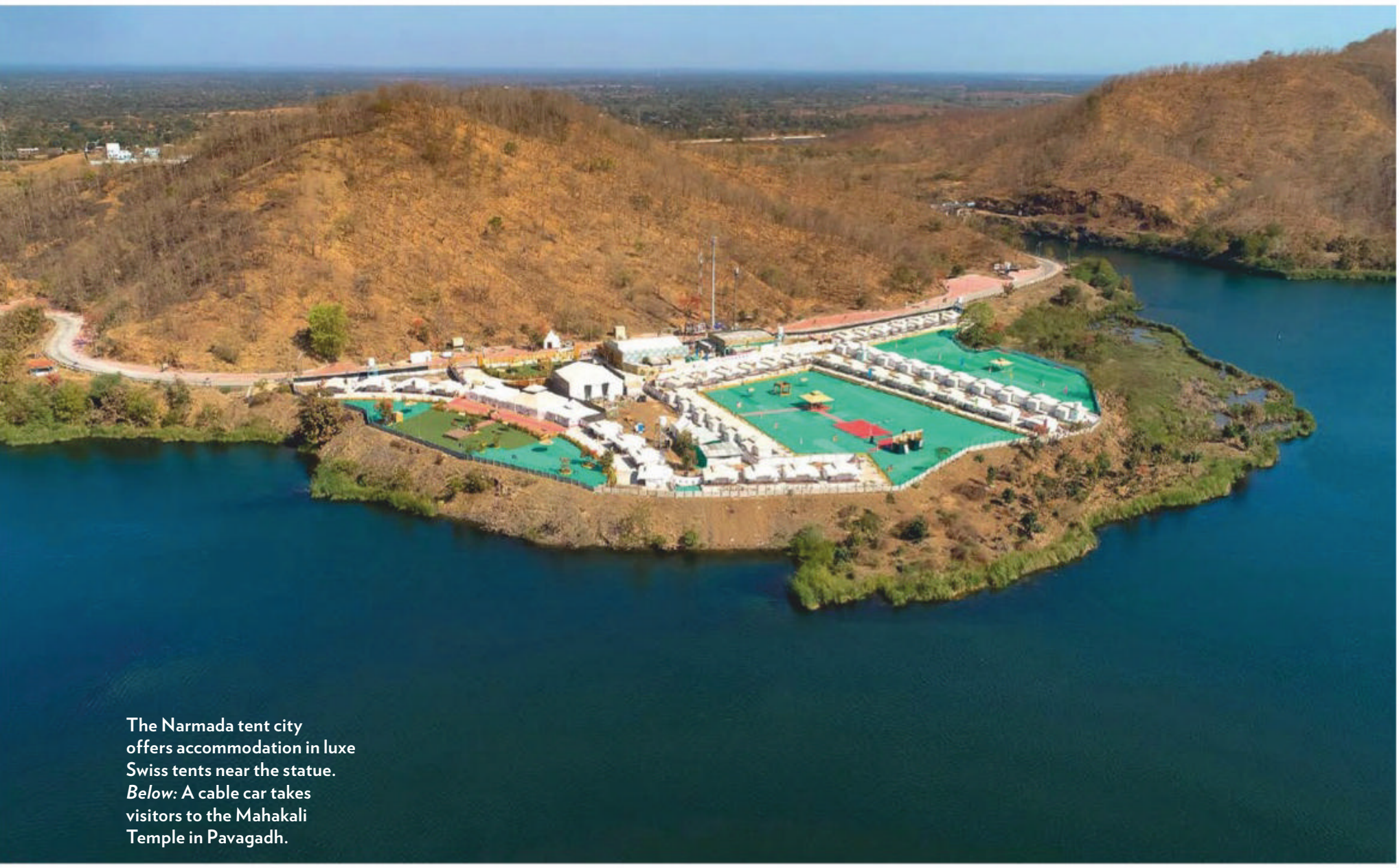
The Statue of Unity used 1,700 tonnes of bronze and 1,850 tonnes of bronze cladding, made up of 565 macro and 6,000 micro panels on the exterior. Its interiors, meanwhile, were designed using 2,10,000 cubic metres of concrete cement, 18,500 tonnes of reinforced steel, and 6,500 tonnes of structured steel. The statue offers an unhindered view of the Sardar Sarovar Dam from an observation deck at 152 metres (at the chest level of the statue). Two high-speed elevators inside the statue take visitors to this observation deck that, which fit up to 200 people at any given time. The ticket to the statue also permits entry to the Sardar Patel memorial, museum, and audio-visual gallery in the premises. Trained tour guides and audio equipment are also made available to tourists who come here for more than just the view. Every evening, except on Mondays, from 6.45 pm to 7.15 pm, a cutting-edge laser light and sound show delights spectators with colourful projections that take them through the life of the Iron Man of India. Important facilities, such as the three-star hotel **Shrestha Bharat Bhawan** and a food court allow visitors to stay the night or opt for a day-long excursion respectively.

Once you have taken in the imposing sight of the statue and a bird's-eye view of its surrounds, check out other nearby attractions. Included in the main ticket is a free entry to the **Valley Of Flowers**, a manicured

GOOD TO KNOW

- The Statue of Unity stands tall a height of 182 metres. The second-tallest statue in the world is the Spring Temple Buddha in China at 153 metres.
- The statue was designed by Noida-based sculptor Ram V. Sutar. Nearly 2,000 archived photographs were studied to get Sardar Patel's facial features right.
- There are two elevators inside the statue to take you to the observation deck at 152 metres.





The Narmada tent city offers accommodation in luxe Swiss tents near the statue. *Below:* A cable car takes visitors to the Mahakali Temple in Pavagadh.

garden featuring over 100 varieties of flowering plants. Right opposite the viewing deck of the dam is a tiny hill with a short 10-minute hike that'll take you to one of the best sunset points in Gujarat. It's worth the time and effort to travel 3.5 kilometres further to explore the second largest dam in the world, the **Sardar Sarovar Dam** on River Narmada. If you have more time on your hands, you can make a short trip to the Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Wildlife Sanctuary (120 kms) to watch sloth bears, hyenas, jackals, and antelopes in their natural habitat.

PLACES TO GO

If you are in Gujarat for a longer stay, go beyond the Statue of Unity and explore destinations that are a short drive from Vadodara. Check out the following list of destinations for experiential short trips.

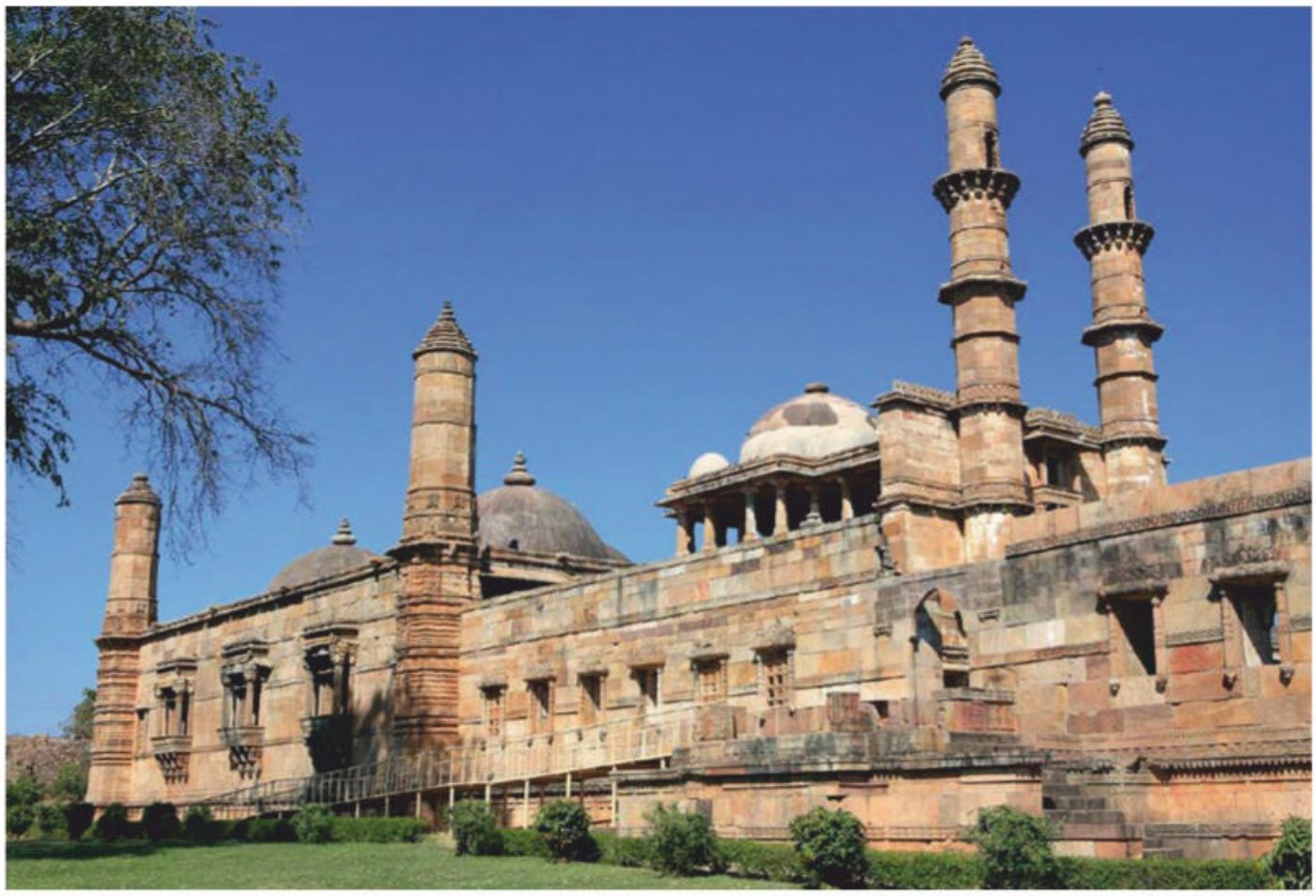
1 PAVAGADH-CHAMPANER

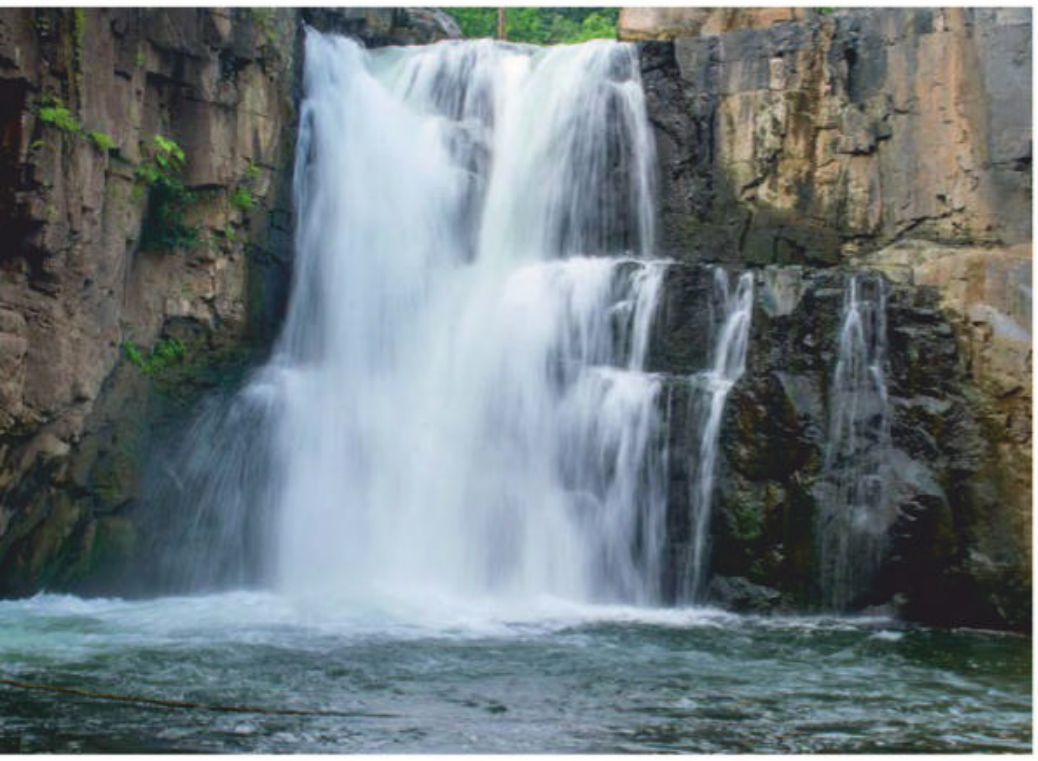
Champaner is a historical city and the erstwhile capital of the Sultanate of Gujarat. It is located 55 kilometres from Vadodara and is home to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Champaner-Pavagadh



EXCLUSIVE VIEW

Though there are bus tours that take you in and around the Statue of Unity, nothing comes close to the the views from a chopper high up in the air. A 10-minute helicopter ride gives you an unparalleled view of the statue against the Satpura range in the background. *statueofunity.in*





From top: **The Jama Mosque in Champaner; Zarwani Waterfalls are a big attraction in the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary.**

Archaeological Park and the popular Jama Mosque. The Mahakali Temple, accessible by foot or cable car, is another popular attraction.

2 JAMBUGHODA

The Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary is about 70 kilometres from Vadodara and makes for a verdant getaway for wildlife enthusiasts. Besides the leopard, one can spot wild boar, jackals, barking deer, nilgai, and *chausingha* on a safari here.

3 NILKANTH DHAM & RAJPIPLA

A popular spiritual destination, Nilkanth Dham in the village of Poicha is dedicated to Lord Swaminarayan. Situated about an hour southeast of Vadodara, the place boasts a pristine view of the River Narmada. The city of Rajpipla, surrounded by rivers Narmada and Karjan and the Satpura mountains, is close and can be included on a day trip.

4 SHOOLPANESHWAR & ZARWANI

A two-hour drive from Vadodara brings you to the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary. Home to the mighty Zarwani Waterfalls, the place is a popular tourist destination for its wildlife, such as rhesus macaque, leopard, tortoise, etc.

5 DEDIAPADA

With a sizeable population of tribals, the Dediapada village sits amidst thick forests and is a two-hour drive from Vadodara. The tiny village is an offbeat destination for trekking, camping, and other adventurous activities. Home to the picturesque Ninai Waterfall, the village is being developed into an ecotourism site.

THE DETAILS

GETTING THERE

From Vadodara, a daily bus plies from the central bus stand and takes about two hours to reach the Statue of Unity, which is at a distance of around 90 kilometres. From Ahmedabad, the same bus takes about four hours.

STAY

In Kevadia, the government has established the Narmada tent city, which features luxurious Swiss tents with all modern amenities in two arenas. Packages include a tour of the Statue of Unity, which is a 10-minute drive from the premises. Inside the tent city, you'll find a dining hall, a play area, and an open ground for cultural shows. The food served is vegetarian, and includes local delicacies such as *sev tamatar saag*, *besan gatte ki sabzi*, *methi gatiya*, and so on.

BEST TIME

Since summers tend to get piping hot in Gujarat, the best time to visit and enjoy the hospitality of the state would be from October to January. The Statue of Unity can be visited between 8 am to 6pm, Tuesday to Sunday. The monument is closed on Mondays for maintenance.

For more information, visit *statueofunity.in*, *gujarattourism.com*; book tickets at *soutickets.in*

through the lens

Uzbekistan

SHADES *of* FAITH

A Silk Road-inspired journey through three cities of **Uzbekistan** reveals a treasure trove of mesmerising art, architecture, and cultural heritage, along with hints of modernisation.

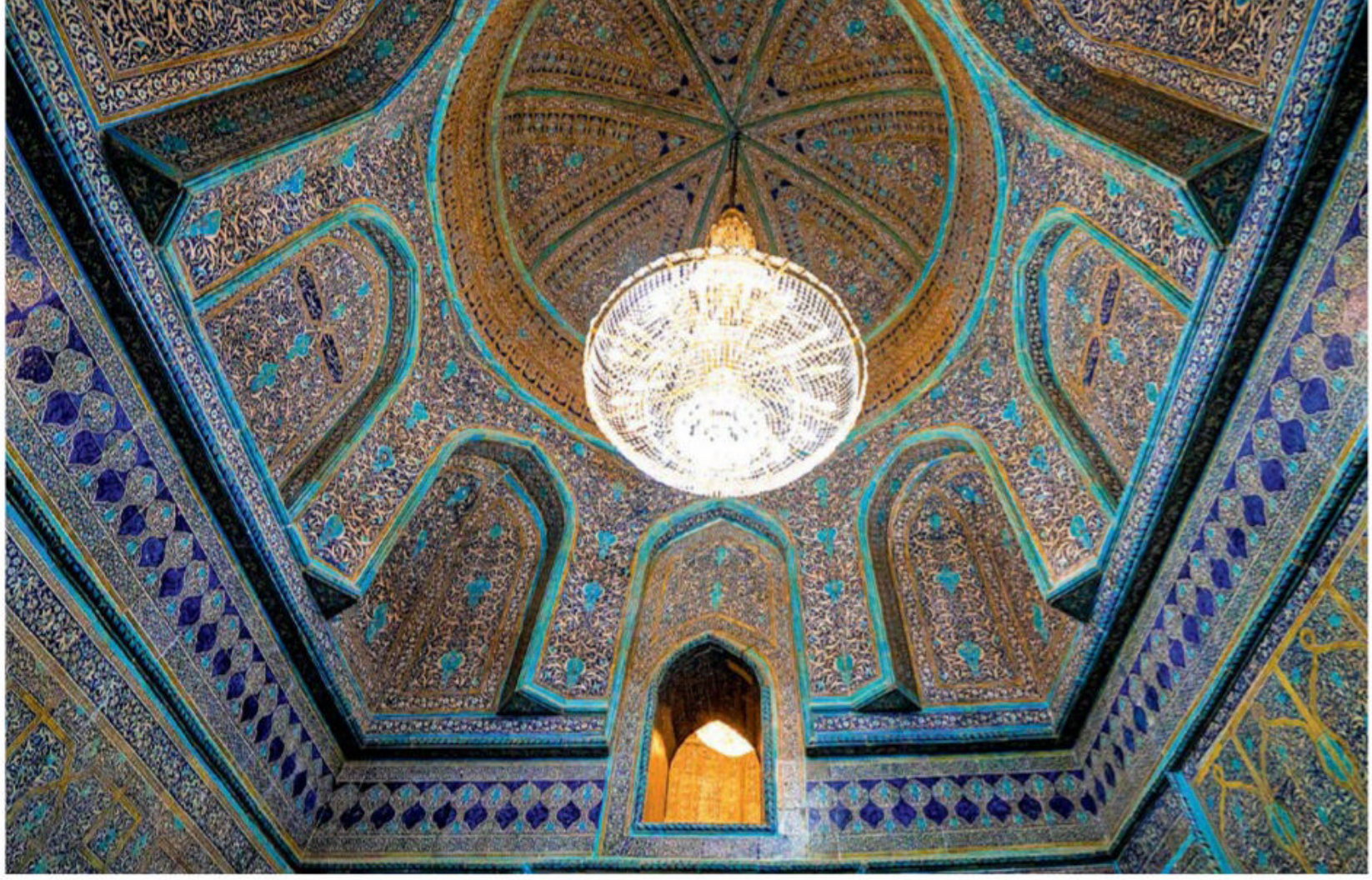
Text & Photographs by Aamir Wani

The Islam-Khodja minaret is the tallest one in Uzbekistan, and in my opinion, the most beautiful. You can expect the view from up here to be really special.
Opposite: The minaret of Kalta-Minor has become emblematic of Khiva. With a diameter of 15 metres at the foundation, the structure is 29 metres high. The tower was originally supposed to rise 70 metres above the ground, but its construction was stopped when the ruler of Khiva was killed in 1855.

Clockwise from left: Shah-i-Zinda is a shrine complex in the ancient city of Samarkand where faithful hearts remain in communion with God. It is a place for everyone with a sense of calm and openness; the beautiful patterns and details inside a tomb at the necropolis; Shah-i-Zinda consists of 11 mausoleums, which were built one after another in the 14th–15th centuries. The site exhibits rows of sparkling blue tombs harmoniously juxtaposed in a lively and moving composition.











Khiva's Islam-Khodja Complex is the first of Uzbekistan's UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It is home to a towering minaret and a madrasa. *Opposite:* The Abdulaziz Khan Madrasah is a little gem in the town of gems, Bukhara. Its mostly unrestored 16th-century interior exhibits beautifully intricate detailing.







Clockwise from left: Small bazaars, like this one in Khiva, transport you to an era gone by; the mosque of Imam al Bukhari in Samarkand is a highly regarded religious centre built in 1998; situated in front of the Ark of Bukhara is the Bolo Hauz, which is the only monument of medieval architecture in Bukhara. It includes a Friday mosque, a minaret, and a water reservoir. The winter building was built in 1712, and the summer terrace with its decorated ceiling and wooden pillars in the 20th century.



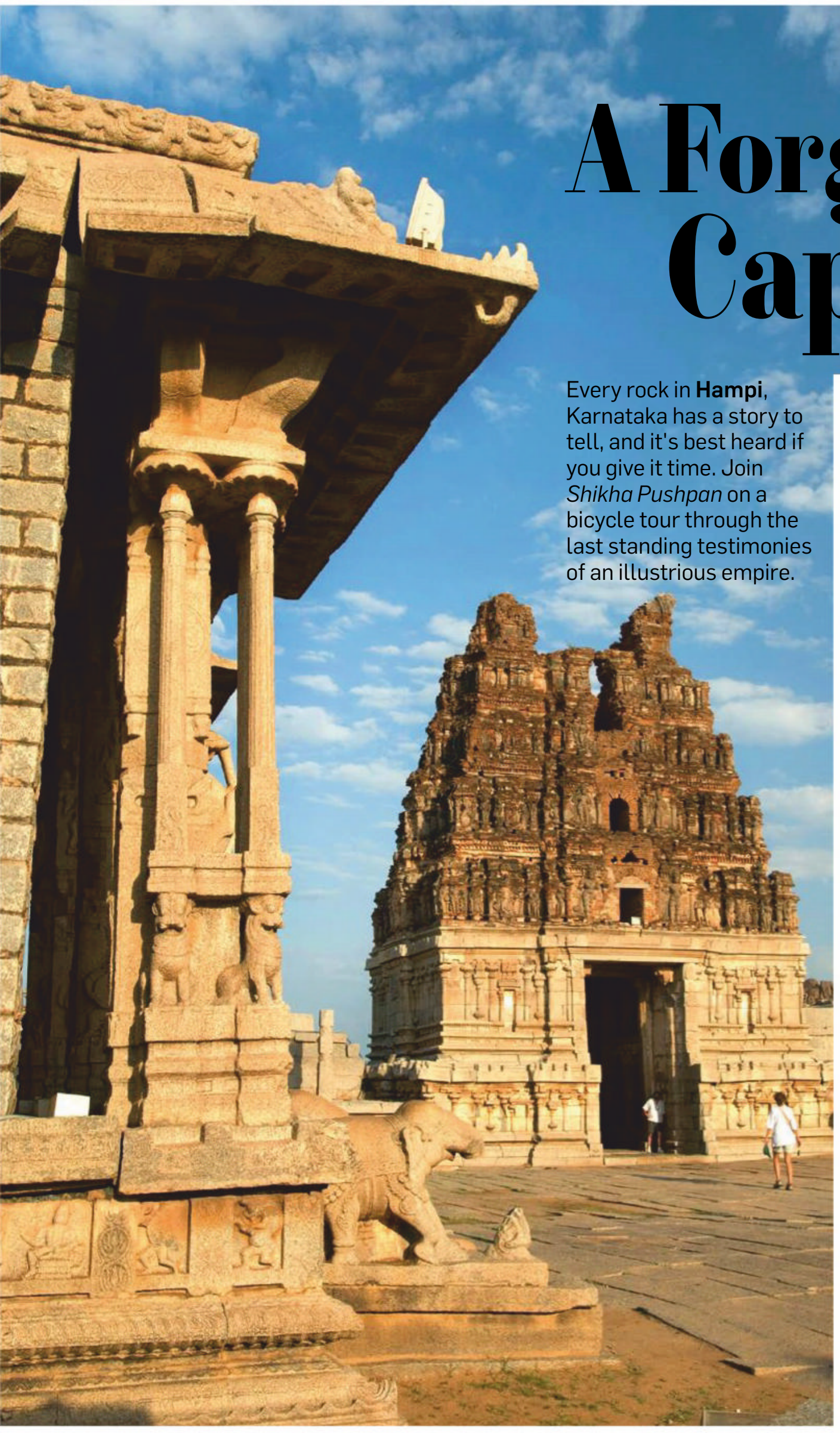
THE SILK ROAD PLAYED a significant role in not just the commerce of the old world, but also in shaping the future of the countries that lay on it. Today, it is mostly relegated to history books and travel pamphlets. Many destinations market themselves to tourists as important stops along the legendary trade route between China and the Mediterranean. In Uzbekistan, the charm of a Silk Road-inspired journey lies in its simplicity. The Central Asian country has only recently opened its doors wide to tourism. But I recommend you visit it sooner than later, before this path too is trodden by throngs of selfie-obsessed tourists.

People often talk about the Chinese stretch of the Silk Road. Perhaps, this is why the Central Asian section of the route is far less travelled, but it certainly has no less to see. From the beautiful blue-tiled city of Samarkand to the unspoilt Bukhara and the ancient fortress city of Khiva, Uzbekistan has an abundance of charm.

The cities I visited present thousands of years of history, art, architecture, and cultural heritage —restored after repeated ransacking of the cities over time. Many of the mosques and madrasas in the old towns have been turned into museums and offices, but the focus now seems to be on preservation. Just like any country influenced heavily by modernisation, Uzbekistan's camels have been replaced by bikes and cars, caravans of traders have been substituted by tourists, and old mansion-style homes have become guesthouses. But don't let this transformation detract you. With its intimate back alleys, bazaars, and mesmerising domes, Uzbekistan is one of the few places in the world that makes you feel as if you have barged into another era, experiencing something wonderfully timeless. ✖

A Forgotten Capital

Every rock in **Hampi**, Karnataka has a story to tell, and it's best heard if you give it time. Join *Shikha Pushpan* on a bicycle tour through the last standing testimonies of an illustrious empire.



WHAT IS TODAY earmarked as an ancient village in Karnataka was once twice the size of Paris and the second largest city in the world after Beijing. Hampi was the celebrated capital of the Vijayanagara empire—the traces of which can be followed across its boulder-strewn landscape. A few miles away from these ruins sits the **Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace, Hampi**, our base for the trip and an extension of the Vijayanagara architecture. With a gearless cycle, a jumbo tumbler, SPF50 sunscreen, and a sunshade hat, I set out to navigate the arid landscape of Hampi and unravel its many secrets, one stop at a time.

DAY 1 7 AM

STORIES IN STONES

Start your day early to enjoy exclusive access to the **Vijaya Vittala Temple** in the Vithalapura suburb. Considered the most ornate example of Vijayanagara architecture, the 16th-century temple is housed in a sprawling complex, alongside several other smaller temples, pavillions, enclosures, and halls. The temple is located 10 kilometres from the main town. Therefore, it is advisable to start riding early to avoid the harsh sun and be among the first few visitors. The intricate, multi-storeyed gate rises at the end of a two kilometre-long path, which earlier served as the Vittala Bazaar, a popular site for trading

DINODIA PHOTOS/ALAMY



Right, top to bottom: The private pool at one of the suites at Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace, Hampi; bicycle tours are popular among intrepid travellers. *Opposite:* The Vijaya Vittala Temple is considered the prime example of Vijayanagara architecture.

horses among locals and foreign traders. What used to be pavillions selling diamonds and other gems lie in a dilapidated state today, parallel to the nearby River Tungabhadra. Park your bike at the dedicated parking lot, and either walk or take an e-rickshaw to reach the temple complex. Inside, the iconic stone chariot—built out of giant granite blocks and carved with mythical battle scenes and floral motifs—welcomes visitors. The Maha Mantapa or the elevated main hall lies in the inner courtyard and comprises four smaller halls—each supported by decorated pillars featuring intricate carvings that depict scenes from everyday life in Vijayanagara. However, the most amusing section is the Ranga Mantapa, where 56 pillars produce different musical notes, giving them the popular moniker, 'musical pillars.' *Open 8.30 am-5.30 pm; tickets priced at* ₹10

12 PM

RELAX & REJUVENATE

The ride back to the hotel can get a little overwhelming if you're visiting in summer. Take a small detour and ask locals for directions to Hampi's most popular restaurant, **Mango Tree** *(opp. police station, near bus stand, Kamalapur)* and stretch your legs on the low-seating couch. The place serves delicious local delicacies and other offerings, such as paneer sizzler and tomato cheese spaghetti. Slurp down a glass of mango lassi before you venture out again. The road to the hotel passes through small villages and hamlets; expect a bumpy ride crossing tiny bridges, streams, and huts of workers employed with the nearby Jindal Steel plant in Bellary. Back at the hotel, recharge your batteries with a leisurely Ayurveda treatment by two experienced masseuses at **Vaidyasala**.

5 PM

BY THE RIVER

Hampi is located on the south bank of **River Tungabhadra**, which once, along with the boulder-strewn hills, formed the northern barrier of the Vijayanagara empire. The river flows down the eastern slope of the Western Ghats into Karnataka, and is best explored via a trek or a ride on a traditional coracle. While locals still use these bowl-shaped country boats as a mode of transport, boatmen offer short trips to and from Kodandarama Temple for travellers (along with their bicycles or motorbikes). The 10-kilometre bicycle ride to the temple takes about 40-50 minutes. Book a coracle ride just in time for the sunset and watch the saffron sun set against a landscape dominated by granite in varying shades of grey, ochre, and pink. *Coracle ride starts from* ₹10

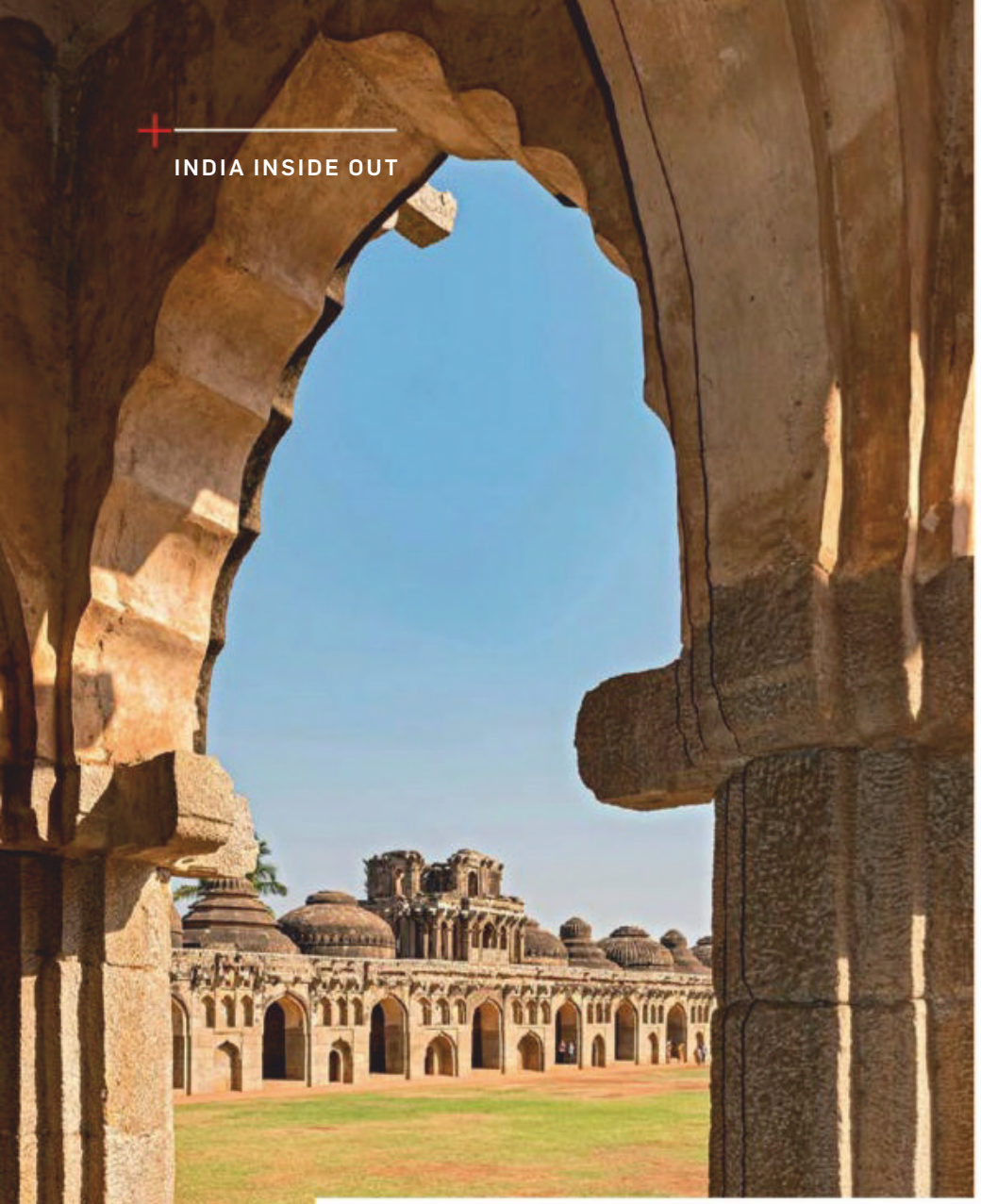
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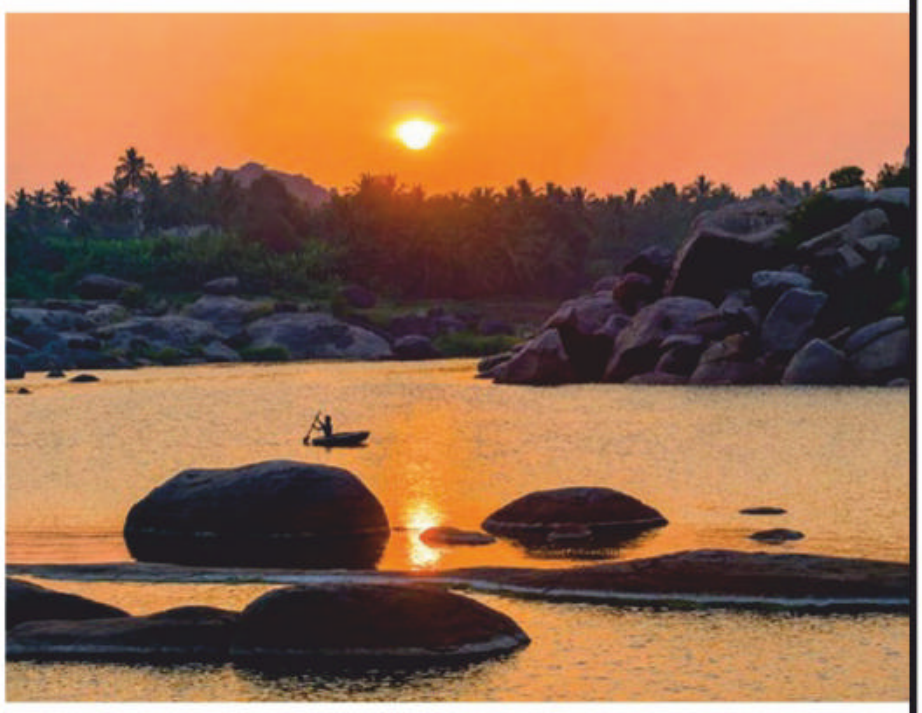
DINE UNDER THE STARS

Arrive back at the hotel to be welcomed by the soothing sounds of flute and aroma of fresh sandalwood during the *sandhya* (evening) ceremony. Ask the concierge to arrange a private dinner in a *mandapa*, inspired by the Rayas of Vijayanagara, near the bigger swimming pool and let the night sky cast a spell as you enjoy a decadent four-course meal of local favourites, such as *korri gassi* and *kane rava* fry.



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF EVOLVE BACK LUXURY RESORTS; SHUTTERSTOCK





From left: The Elephant Stable housed royal elephants in its large chambers; a coracle ride is the best way to explore River Tungabhadra.

DAY 2

8 AM

HISTORIC TRAIL

While the Vijaya Vittala Temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the **Virupaksha Temple** worships Lord Shiva and has been a functioning shrine ever since its inception in the seventh century. The shrines and halls here feature colourful murals and stucco work on the walls and ceilings. It takes about 45 minutes on an early morning trip to reach the site. Park your bike and opt for a heritage walk with an experienced guide to know the stories behind the numerous shrines, pillared halls, towered gateways, and the large temple kitchen. Start exploring from the nine-storeyed east-facing giant tower, which leads to the first courtyard, and further on to sanctums, royal corridors, and *mantapas* featuring large halls with 100 pillars.

11 AM

MYSTICAL HAREM

The Vijayanagara kings were believed to have secular views—a fact evident from the Indo-Islamic style of architecture at the **Zenana Enclosure**. Situated four kilometres from the Virupaksha Temple, getting here requires a ride through the city corridors to reach the fortified complex, which earlier housed the royal ladies, including the Queen, and eunuchs. The Zenana Enclosure comprises Lotus Mahal, Queen's Bath, Water Pavillion, and Watch Towers. Just outside the Zenana Enclosure lies the **Elephant Stable**, which once housed the royal elephants in its 11 chambers with domes designed in a variety of shapes, such as octagonal, circular, ribbed, drum-shaped, and fluted.

2 PM

OF KINGS & QUEENS

A little farther from the Zenana Enclosure and the Elephant Stable is the **Royal Enclosure**. Accessible by bike or foot, this is where kings were coronated and ornate festivities held in public view centuries ago. In its prime, it housed as many as 45 buildings including the durbar halls, platform, tanks, underground chambers, and temples. The Mahanavami Dibba or the Great Platform is the tallest structure in the area. It was used by kings to watch the Dussehra, and Navratri festivities and hundreds of years later, by locals to watch magical sunsets. Also in the compound is the Pushkarini stepwell (also referred to as Stepped Tank for its five-tiered layout).

5 PM

SOUVENIR SHOPPING

Take a break from sightseeing at the **Akash Art Gallery & Book Stall** (*+91-8394241609*) in the Main Bazaar. The place specialises in precious and semi-precious stones and books on Hampi and India. The owner gives away free city maps, along with gorgeous postcards. The Vittala Temple and Virupaksha Temple have small stalls in their vicinity selling souvenirs, such as Lambini products and small leather bags.

THE DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Jindal Vijaynagar Airport is the closest air terminal. **Trujet** (*trujet.com*) operates direct flights from Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

STAY

Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace, Hampi is among the top resorts in Hampi. Inspired by the Vijayanagara architecture, the place offers well-appointed suites with private pool and jacuzzi. *Starts from ₹16,999; evolveback.com*

EXPERIENCES

Bicycles and motorbikes are available on rent at local operators, like Travel MaaYa (*starts from ₹250; travelmaaya.com*). The resort also offers guided tours, such as The Raya Trail, Tungabhadra Trek, and Vitthalapura Walk in private vehicles at additional cost.

FROM LEFT: PETR SVARC/ALAMY; FRANK BIENEWALD/ALAMY

Tunnels of War

Travel teaches some important lessons, as does history. *Arundhati Hazra* visits the Cu Chi tunnels in **Vietnam** and revisits the horrors of war. Lest we forget.





The Cu Chi Tunnels served as an important supply network for Viet Cong during the Vietnam War. *Top:* Camouflaged trap doors helped the soldiers evade American forces.

FROM TOP: STEVE VIDLER/ALAMY; ISMAIL ATALAR/ALAMY

IN THE BENGAL OF EARLY 1970S, students protesting against the institutions they perceived as bourgeois had a curious chant, "*Tomar naam, aamaar naam, tomar aamaar mayer naam* Vietnam," meaning 'your name, my name, our mother's name is Vietnam'. They felt a kinship with the Vietnamese, who, thousands of miles away, were fighting a powerful and technologically more advanced country. Key to that fight were the Cu Chi Tunnels, a network of underground pathways criss-crossing Vietnam that helped the guerrilla fighters of Viet Cong evade American forces and maintain supply networks.

We gather on a chilly morning at the Saigon Opera House in Ho Chi Minh City for a tour of the tunnels. We are a myriad group—Americans, French, Australians—visiting the Ben Duoc tunnel network, about 80 kilometres from Ho Chi Minh City. As our bus speeds through the pastoral countryside, our guide gives us a brief history of the tunnels.

Vietnam was a patchwork of fiefdoms in the Red River delta until it was united in 1802 by Emperor Gia Long, with French support. French influence grew, and they soon annexed Vietnam into French Indochina. During World War II, Japan invaded





From top: An American tank displayed at a museum near the Ben Duoc tunnel network; ordnance from both sides on exhibit.

Vietnam, which led Ho Chi Minh, a charismatic Communist leader, to create the Viet Minh coalition in 1941 to drive off Japanese occupiers and cast off the yoke of French colonialism. After the Japanese withdrew in 1945, Ho captured Hanoi in the north and declared Independence. France supported the reigning Emperor Bao in Saigon, in southern Vietnam. The French defeat in 1954 led to their withdrawal, and establishment of two separate states, though the war did not end there.

As the Cold War between the US and the USSR intensified in the late 1950s, America became worried about Ho's Communist inclinations and sent troops to augment the struggling South Vietnamese army. The Vietnam War, between the American army and Ho's forces—Viet Cong—went on for nearly 20 years. Both sides suffered heavy casualties, but the Vietnamese held the upper hand, deploying guerrilla warfare tactics aided by the Cu Chi Tunnels.

Standing at the entrance of the tunnel complex, I am weighed down by its history. The tunnels were originally supply tunnels, dug by hand during French occupation and expanded to cover nearly 250 kilometres during the Vietnam War with just pickaxes and shovels.

We start our grim tour with a glimpse of war relics at an open-air museum—arms and ammunition, and shells of unexploded bombs. Some of the shells are as tall as me, and originally weighed over 250 tons. Viet Cong fighters retrieved unexploded bombs to use their gunpowder for ammunition and fragments of bomb shells to make axes and spears.

We step out to a forested area, reminiscent of the dense jungles that played an important part in the war. Our guide shows us hidden tunnel entrances, covered with wooden planks and camouflaged by fallen leaves. These entrances, about three feet in length and breadth, were used by the guerrillas to take cover from bombs and hide from the Americans. Some tourists from our group battle claustrophobia and lower themselves into the tunnel, and the cover is laid over the hole with the leaves strewn over. We can barely make out the trap door once it's covered.

Our guide shows us replicas of booby traps planted by Viet Cong, ground traps that swung

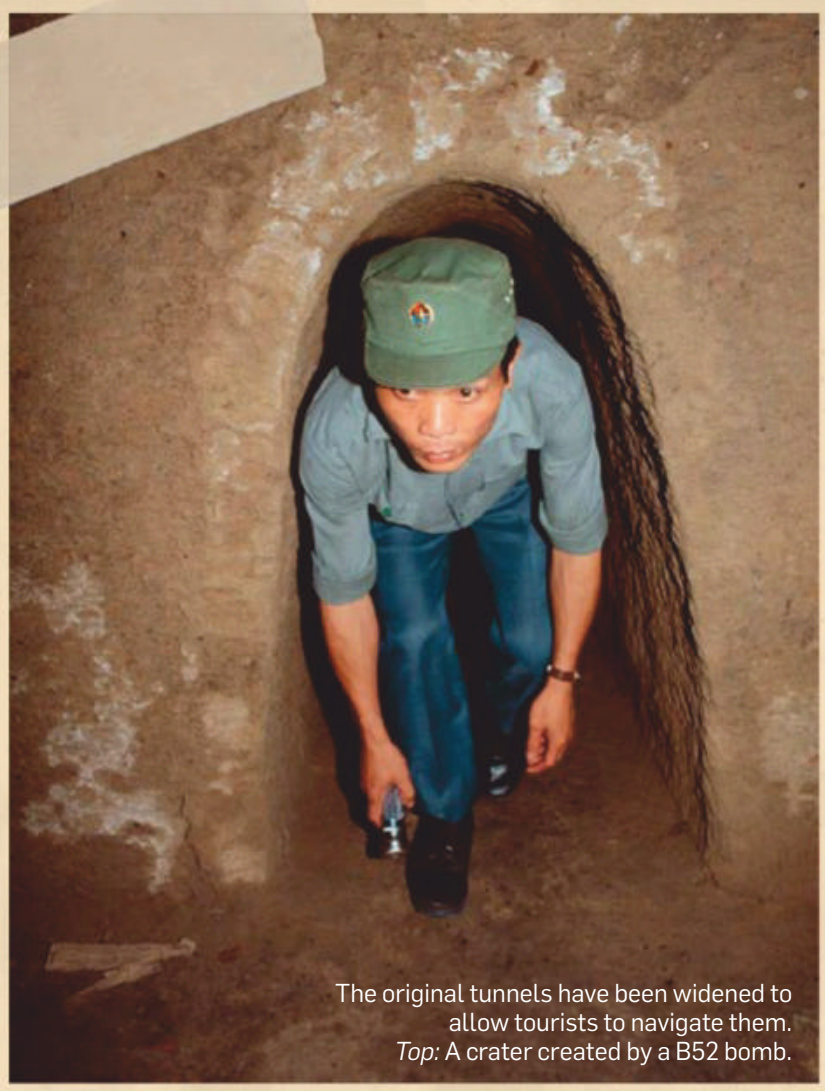
FROM TOP: PHOTICON/ALAMY; DAVID PARKER/ALAMY



open like see-saws when one walked over them, dropping one into pits of spikes, made of sharpened bamboo sticks. The Americans began deploying sniffer dogs to detect such traps, but the Vietnamese countered the move by using American soap and uniforms of captured soldiers around the traps, hoodwinking the dogs to believing they were safe zones. Some of the traps are ingenious works of engineering—armpit traps with rotating spikes, ones that function like folding chairs, even a hanging trap behind a door that swung at the enemy when the door was opened.

The tunnels aren't all traps and hidey-holes, though. They were organised into four levels, the lowest layer near the water table connected to the River Saigon. There were schools, hospitals, and kitchens, all within the network. Smoke from the kitchens was funnelled to smoke holes 20-50 metres away, in mounds resembling anthills, and food was cooked only during the mist of dawn.

When our guide brings us to a crater left by a B52 bomb, we all fall silent. It is an area the size of a tractor, now covered with vegetation. He tells us about Agent Orange, a chemical whose primary purpose was destroying forest cover and food resources vital for the Vietnamese guerrillas, but which caused cancer and genetic deformities in large sections of the populace. The grisly sight is supplemented with chilling statistics—nearly two million civilians from North and South Vietnam died in the war, in addition to 1.1 million Viet Cong fighters, 2,50,000 South Vietnamese soldiers, and about 58,000 American soldiers.



The original tunnels have been widened to allow tourists to navigate them. *Top:* A crater created by a B52 bomb.

FROM TOP: GRAHAM PRENTICE/ALAMY; AGE FOTOSTOCK/ALAMY

THE DETAILS

GETTING THERE
You can take a one-stop flight to Ho Chi Minh City from Delhi or Mumbai on **Cathay Pacific** (*cathaypacific.com*), **Singapore Airlines** (*singaporeair.com*), etc. The Ben Duoc portion of the tunnels is about two hours away by road. Tours of the Cu Chi Tunnels can be booked online on Viator (*viator.com*).

STAY
Experience colonial grandeur at **Hotel Majestic Saigon**, the first five-star hotel in Ho Chi Minh City (*from ₹12,000; majesticsaigon.com*); get unbeatable views at the city's highest hotel, **The Reverie Saigon** (*from ₹21,000; thereveriesaigon.com*); or take in panoramic views of the Saigon River at **Renaissance Riverside Saigon** (*from ₹10,500; renaissance-hotels.marriott.com*)

SEASON
Ho Chi Minh City experiences tropical monsoon weather most of the year. The drier months of December to March make up the best time to visit.

In a sombre mood, we enter one of the tunnels, descending a few steps down into a dark abyss—a hole in which one person can barely stand. The tunnel is dimly lit with small lamps every three metres, the air grows hotter, and the walls close in. A few steps in, the tunnel roof slopes downwards and I am shuffling, stooping as I walk. At the first exit, about 20 metres away, I am already sweating profusely and short of breath. The more claustrophobic ones in our group exit here. I continue, and it gets only worse; halfway down, I am forced to crawl, with my shoulders scraping the tunnel walls. I emerge at the next exit, another 20 metres ahead, drenched in sweat and gasping for breath. When we emerge, our guide tells us that the original tunnels were even narrower; they were widened later to allow all types of tourists to pass through.

Our final stop is the shooting range, where you can try your hand at an AK-47. The sound of the shots only adds to the atmosphere of war around, and I cannot help but shudder at life in the tunnels—dark, damp, choking, with the sounds of death all around. When one of the Americans asks the guide what he thinks of America, he replies, "We don't hate you; we just want to live in peace. But we wonder why America wreaked such havoc on us." The Cu Chi Tunnels serve as a symbol of Vietnamese ingenuity and resilience, and also a reminder that no rationale can justify the horrors of war. ×

Ceylon Secrets

Galle, on the southern coast of the island nation of Sri Lanka, is the epitome of an ocean paradise. *Aindrila Mitra* discovers the gem on a 'secret itinerary'.

WHILE THE WORLD IS STILL coming to terms with the Easter blasts that killed over 250 people in Colombo, there's nothing that can beat a true-blue traveller's spirit to explore. This piece on Sri Lanka shows why the destination needs to be on every travel aficionado's bucket list, now more than ever. I undertook this trip to the island nation two weeks before the tragedy, and I'm on my way to planning the next one.

I'm a traveller who likes her routines. I spend a substantial amount of time figuring out an itinerary, then operate as per plan. So, when I'm thrown into a situation where I do not know what I'm supposed to do, where to go or dine, I'm in a fix. But as a firm believer of the adage that change is the only constant, I finally give in to my friend's request to embark on my maiden trip to Sri Lanka sans a plan. He calls it #CeylonSecrets, a curated experiential trip that I agree to take on blindfolded.

I arrive in Colombo on a rather balmy morning. I'm sleep-deprived, thanks to a red-eye flight, but I can't control my curiosity. The Sinhalese driver who greets me at the arrivals gate is affable. He reveals that we're headed to the southern coast of Lanka, specifically Galle. It's a smooth two-hour drive (116 kilometres) from Colombo, unless you get entangled in city traffic. We drive on coastal roads, crossing small beach towns, and arrive at what looks like a secret hideout in the port town. #CeylonSecrets is finally unveiled.

I check into Cantaloupe House Ahangama—a beautifully restored *walauwa* (a colonial-style Sri Lankan manor traditionally occupied by the head of the village)—situated right off the Galle-Matara Road. It's a slice of peace and privacy wrapped in a six-room villa that launched last November. Nadeem Rajabdeen, the co-founder and director of Cantaloupe Hotels, is a first-generation hospitality veteran who is an authority on experience-led luxe journeys in Galle. "Ahangama is minutes away from Weligama and Mirissa, which are top surfing spots," Rajabdeen states. He knows how to woo guests with service, taste (the local breakfast spread with string hoppers can put you in a food-induced coma), and an impeccable aesthetic sense that reflects in the decor.

Our afternoon is planned at the Galle Fort, a half-hour drive from Ahangama. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is one of the rare living forts in the world, and a must-visit if you want to discover South Asia's new design capital. I could well be in a quaint Dutch town sans the tropical sun and sand. After a Moorish home meal, comprising jackfruit curry, brinjal and ash plantain, wild chicken, sambal—thanks to Fawaz Fouz, the owner of Galley 52 (*galley52.com*)—and a dessert binge at the artisanal gelataria called Isle of Gelato *(facebook.com/isleofgelato)*—owned by ex-financiers Suranjan and Shalini from Colombo, it boasts of 100 per cent natural ingredients and promotes local flavours—a walk around Galle Fort is inevitable. And the shedding of calories much needed.

ABHISHEK KUMAR/ALAMY

Galle Lighthouse may be 171 years old, but it serves as a selfie backdrop for most modern tourists today.



Pedlar's Inn Cafe in Galle Fort takes you back in time with its vintage setting. *Below:* The airy Suite Room at Cantaloupe House Ahangama.



Shanjei Malraj Perumal (*gallefortwalks.com*) is more a storyteller than a guide. And his six-month-old Labrador dog, Panthro, steals my heart. "The fort is the only area that was unaffected by the tsunami [of 2004]," Perumal says. It houses some of the most eclectic design studios, cafes, eateries, and luxury villas. "It's boho chic," Perumal adds. "In 1988, the Galle Fort became a World Heritage Site; today, it's the fanciest part of Galle." Notwithstanding its 171 years, the Galle Lighthouse stands tall and is popular among Instagrammers.

Galle Fort reveals itself as a design haven. From quaint little fashion studios like KK by George *(facebook.com/kkcfort)*, the Raux Brothers *(rauxbrothers.com)*, Exotic Roots *(exoticroots.com)*, the unmissable postcards shop called Stick No Bills *(sticknobillsonline.com)*, and Embark *(otarafoundation.com/embarkgalle)*, which works with an NGO for the protection of strays, to homegrown brands like Barefoot, Odel *(odel.lk/odel-galle)*, and the popular Spa Ceylon, it is a Mecca for shoppers. And a

FROM TOP: KIM PETERSEN/ALAMY; COURTESY OF CANTALOUPE HOTELS

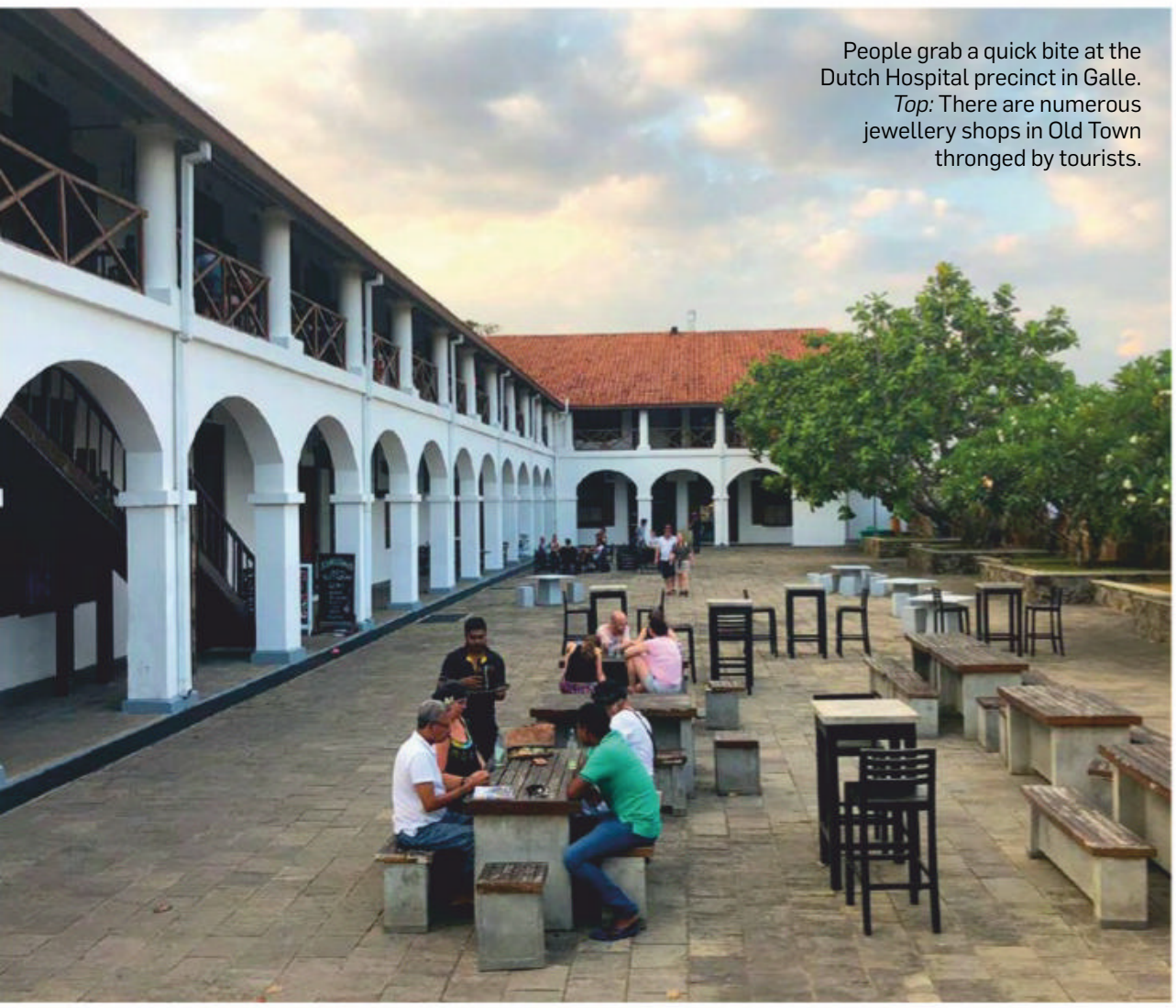
Medina for gourmet travellers looking to experience local plates. I try the black pork curry at A Minute by Tuk Tuk (*facebook.com/aminutebytuktuk*) at the Dutch Hospital precinct, and it's done to perfection. Head to the Galle Fort Hotel (*galleforthotel.com*) for some upmarket Ceylonese tea, and if you're looking to chill at a cute bar or bistro, there are many options, including Sugar Bistro & Wine Bar (*sugarcolombo.com*), The Fort Printers (*thefortprinters.com*), Pedlar's Inn Cafe (*pedlarsinn.com*), and Hoppa (*facebook.com/hoppagallefort*).

Sri Lanka's south coast is a dream destination if you're looking for unique experiences. Whether it's whale watching at Mirissa, surfing at Weligama, or an elephant safari at Yala, there's something here for every kind of traveller. My next stop at Cantaloupe Levels in Rumassala gives me a chance to feel one with nature. The rooms overlook the jungles of the famous Jungle Beach, and as you while away your morning on the breakfast deck, time comes to a standstill.

I head to the Sugar Beach cafe in Talpe (*facebook.com/sugarbeachtalpe*) for a sundowner and to catch up with the suave Gehan Fernando, who also happens to be the founder of Colombo Jazz Festival (*colombojazzfestival.com*). Fernando introduces me to the novel concept of a pool in the sea. Taking a dip in the tiny stretch of the ocean called the Natural Rock



A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Galle Fort is one of the rare living forts in the world, and a must-visit if you want to discover South Asia's new design capital.



People grab a quick bite at the Dutch Hospital precinct in Galle. *Top:* There are numerous jewellery shops in Old Town thronged by tourists.

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; AINDRILA MITRA

Pool on a starlit night is surreal. Known for its seafood platter (the crab *kottu* and the crab curry are highly recommended!), Sugar Beach also hosts sundown parties once a month. It's the perfect spot if you're looking for some sea, sand, and seafood, with signature cocktails to round off a heady evening.

The coastline of Galle stretches from the Galle Fort to Weligama. I check in at Sielen Diva, a seven-room luxe villa on the Galle-Matara Road, in the last leg of my trip. Owned by an Indian-origin Malaysia-based family, the Kumars, who turned their beach house into a luxury resort that opened in August last year, Sielen Diva is the perfect island getaway. My deluxe room, Yanai, overlooks the Indian Ocean. Vivekananda Kumar, a fan of India (even the plunge pool granite has been brought in from Jaipur), considers this property his passion project. "The architecture maximises sea view from each room," villa manager Amila Senarath points out. Twelve Sri Lankan staff members provide immaculate service to its year-round guests, which comprise—



Mirissa Beach is a popular destination for surfers. *Below:* Sielen Diva offers uninterrupted views of the ocean from the comfort of your bed.



for the most part—British and French tourists, and a few Russians. I'm stumped by the uninterrupted sea view from the comfort of my bed and by the seafood platter (try the fresh lobsters) put together by Head Chef Lalith. The property practises sustainable living, using no plastic and employing environment-friendly waste management. Managed by the Cantaloupe Group, it's the ideal getaway for honeymooners visiting the region.

If you're looking for the island way of life on your vacation, Galle is hard to beat. Good food, great ocean views, and gorgeous design sensibilities—there's a slice of paradise waiting for you in southern Sri Lanka.

THE DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Sri Lanka is well connected with major Indian cities. **SriLankan Airlines** *(srilankan.com)* operates flights to Colombo from Mumbai and Delhi. Galle is a two-hour drive from Colombo.

STAY

Sielen Diva: This is a seven-bedroom modern villa situated in Talpe, a 15-minute drive from Galle Fort. You can request for an airport pick-up and drop. *From ₹14,000; sielendiva.com*

Cantaloupe House Ahangama: This restored six-bedroom *walauwa* offers wellness-focussed experiences like yoga, meditation, and Ayurvedic treatments. The F&B menu here allows guests to try local and seasonal specialities. The location is perfect for surfers. *From ₹10,500; cantaloupehotels.com/ahangama*

Cantaloupe Levels: It is situated in Rumassala and offers panoramic views of the palm-fringed coastline. This three-storeyed property has Deluxe and Suite rooms, and a rooftop for yoga and meditation classes. *From ₹8,500; cantaloupehotels.com/cantaloupe-levels*

Cantaloupe Aqua: This affordable 13-room boutique hotel stretches along the beach and comes recommended for young couples and families who want to enjoy the sea with great food and a sea-facing pool. *From ₹5,500; cantaloupehotels.com/cantaloupe-aqua*

BUY

Spa Ceylon: This is the ultimate destination if you're looking for a luxury Ayurveda range—from treatment oils to massage balms, cleansing bars, scrubs, and body lotions. *spaceylon.com*

Lovi: For any fashion enthusiast, a Lovi sarong is a must-buy when in Sri Lanka. Sport it with a tee for a style statement. *lovisarongs.com*

Ceylon Coconut Company: From organic coconut honey to coconut virgin oil and coconut milk, the richness of Ceylon's produce is all here. *ceyloncoconutcompany.com*

Pigeon Island Tropical Wear: Inspired by one of the most exciting diving destinations in the country, this hip swimwear range is something to try. *facebook.com/pigeonislandtropicalwear*

Barefoot: Under Barbara Soni's guidance, Barefoot has become an institution when it comes to textiles and weaves. Their store in Galle Fort is a must-visit if you're looking for souvenirs and fabrics. *barefootceylon.com*

FROM TOP: JOHN CRUX PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTYIMAGES; COURTESY OF SIELEN DIVA

Bangkok: The Second *Affair*

A romantic gesture made a decade ago takes *Simon Clays* and his better half back to an Asian metropolis he thought he might be done with. He thought wrong.



A river boat cruise at sunset affords fabulous views of Wat Arun –The Temple of the Dawn.



On Sunday, the outside deck area of Shangri-La is bustling as it is transformed into one of the largest brunch areas in the city.

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF SHANGRI-LA

THE SINGLE BIGGEST MISTAKE I've made in recent times is to ask my wife where she wants to celebrate our wedding anniversary.

"Bangkok," she said. "It's where you took me when we first met. Remember?"

I nodded and remembered that we had done everything conceivable to do in the city, over the space of five days. From above, on the river, markets, shopping malls, street food, fine dining, clubbing. You name it, we did it. Yes, even the girly bars.

So, how to crack this particular nut in two fewer nights, ten years on? Without repetition, and possibly, with some romance. Bangkok is notorious for its hectic traffic. Getting about can be arduous or just damn confusing, however efficient the BRT metro. So, I decided to split the trip in two.

We began our trip down memory lane at the Oriental Residence Bangkok on Wireless Road. It's a relatively new property overlooking the picturesque Lumphini Park and within spitting distance of the biggest shopping malls.

It's a shopaholic's paradise. Or so it appears from the number of bags and boxes I'm carrying, after just two hours. Central



Just about every luxury brand is available to shoppers in Bangkok's Ratchadamri district.

World, Gaysorn Village, Siam Square One, MBK, Siam Discovery—we've covered them all without wheels of any sort.

I'll concede my legs feel a little jaded on the walk back, but so is my credit card. Mrs Clays is starting to froth, her eyeballs overdosed on designer brands and neon. Even she is happy to retire, ensconced around the Oriental's pool area. Cool cabanas and ice-white sunbeds are crowned by a horizon of stainless steel towers. This is Central Business District, prime postcode Bangkok. We are surrounded by next-gen Thailand, but cocooned in luxury. The afternoon slips by with drinks at the pool bar. It's easy: graze on Thai snacks. Drink. Read. Swim. Snooze. Repeat.

The recipe for the evening and dinner, not quite so. It's an anniversary dinner. We want fine dining, not China town or cantina style. We want bespoke standalone, not a hotel or a multi-cuisine restaurant. And, it has to be Thai. Not asking much, then? Again, we walk. Not always a good idea with my wife, especially as she's guaranteed to wear the most inappropriate footwear possible. She does. Heels, six inches. Fortunately, I get lucky, and not 400 metres from the hotel, we stumble (literally) upon a magnificent looking Thai fine diner called Osha *(oshabangkok.com)*. The god of Jimmy Choo is on my side, but is it worth the shoe leather? Quite simply, yes. It's Thai fusion with a subtle twist. It's slight; the squid sits with a duck egg garlic mayo. The chicken satay is accompanied by a curried peanut sauce. The red curry is laden with Hungarian goose breast. It's that good, I'd recommend it to anyone visiting the city. Whatever side of the river you are.

The next morning, we check out and take our first cab across town to the Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok. It's one of the grand old dames of the city. It also does an impressive Sunday brunch, al fresco and on the river. If the wife drools over shopping, the husband loves to watch the River Chao Phraya drift by with a glass of wine. Gaze at the impossibly huge barges, surrounded by the world's biggest buffet. It's a global cuisine overload. Lobster. Traditional English roast dinner. Yorkshire pudding, even. We forget it's an anniversary as the afternoon turns into a festival of indulgence. And boats.

A second, and now timely, reason for booking the Shangri-La is its spa. Like the Sunday brunch, they are vast and very well prepared. We take a couples' treatment room, and two skilled masseurs attempt to pull and push at around 15,000 stubborn calories. I drift, like the river.

An hour floats by, and by the time we're done, it's time to head to the executive floor for cocktails, and yes, more food—Executive Club rooms come with access to a lounge that offers complimentary cocktails, hors d'oeuvres,

The Bangkok Oriental Residence sits on prime turf between the hustle of Wireless Road and the tranquility of Lumphini Park.



THE DETAILS

STAY

Oriental Residence Bangkok
A member of the Amari group of hotels, it's part hotel, part private apartment-cum-residences, and has its own Savelberg restaurant, which serves French cuisine with a little Dutch inspiration. *Starts from ₹9,000; oriental-residence.com*

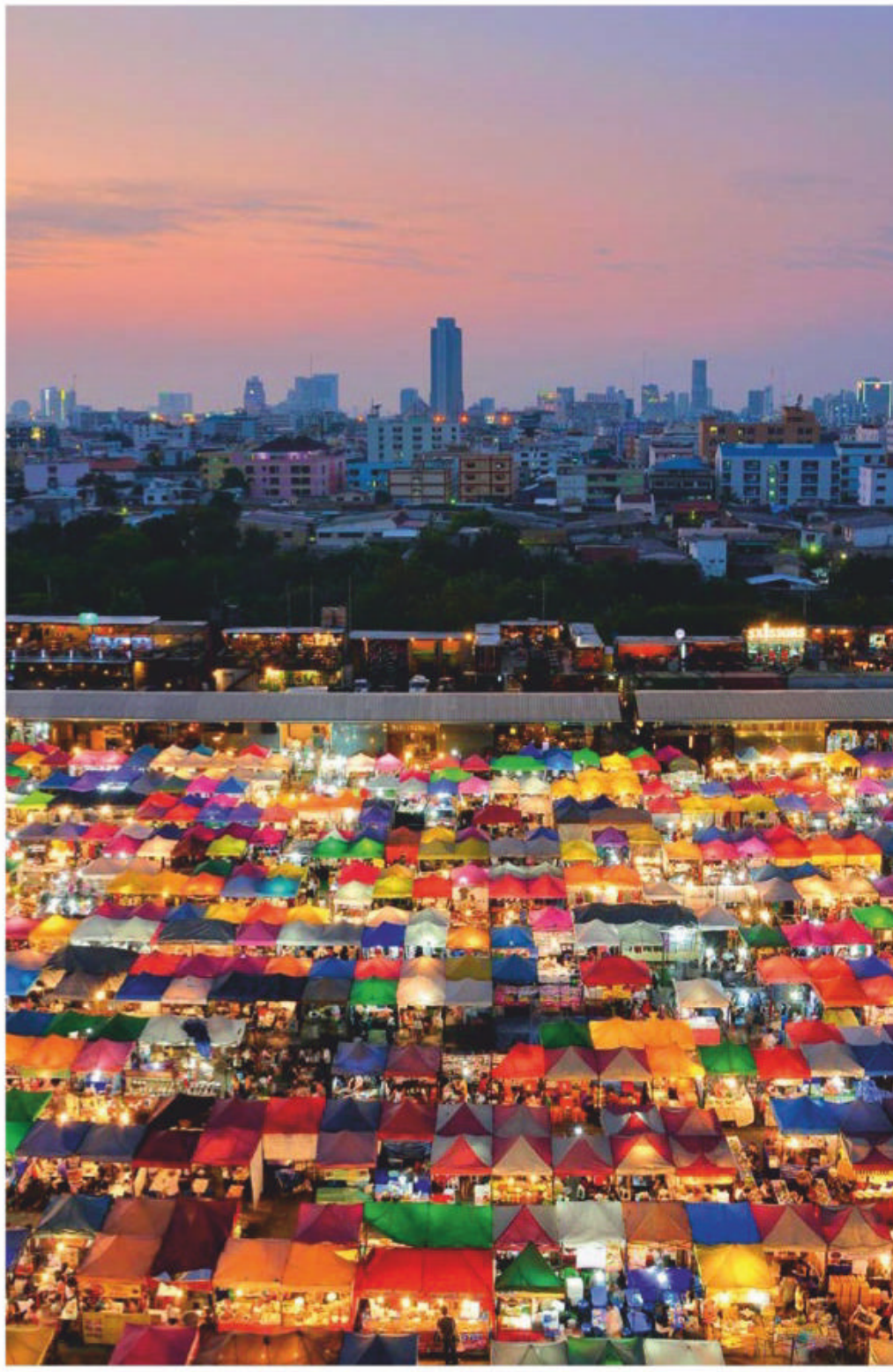
Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok
Straddling the river and the Saphan Taksin BTS station, Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok boasts an impressive array of world-standard facilities. The pool area is mighty, and there's a whopping nine different places to dine. *A Club Horizon twin costs around ₹20,000; shangri-la.com*

LOCAL FLAVOURS

The Queen of Curry, Bangrak Market
Wedged behind the Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok is the lively Bangrak Bazaar—a haven for well-priced women's fashion. Opposite it is a string of restaurants, the best of which is Queen of Curry. The food is first-class local, the prices almost a joke. Best of all, they sell their curry pastes by the jar. *₹1,200 for two*

FROM LEFT: HEMIS/ALAMY; COURTESY OF ORIENTAL RESIDENCE





and a breakfast area. I confess that it's pure greed, but way up here in the clouds, it's a beautiful way to watch the Bangkok sunset.

The next day is another 'hers' mission: operation jewellery. Except we fail miserably. All the shops we find behind Shangri-La's 'jewellery quarter' don't quite cut it for her—not the sapphire she's got her heart set on. We stop dead at the entrance to Robinson Department Store *(store.robinson.co.th)*. She's frustrated; I am out of ideas. Silence. Suddenly, a Thai man's parroting at us.

He asks my wife if she's Indian. He has a son working in Chandigarh. We get talking, and before we know it, he's packed us off in a tuk-tuk in search of Peter Nang. I try to figure out how it might be a scam, but it's impossible. It's no rip-off; he was just nice in the good, old-fashioned way of 'nice'. Not so nice for my wallet. But the stone is exceptional and the price set by government. All above board, kosher, and certificated.

Again, time has defeated us, and we're running late for a date on the river. Fortunately, the Shangri-La is smack bang next to the river ferries that operate between the major hotels. One hop on the hotel's taxi and we just make it to the Manohra *(manohracruises.com)* river boat dinner cruise. It's recommended as the best. It's an old, converted rice barge, and feels the part. The four-course traditional Thai dinner—more food—is an exceptional way to see the city's most famous landmarks illuminated by night. The Grand Palace, The Temple of the Dawn, and the rest pass us effortlessly to the sound of cutlery and soothing Thai music.

It's been 10 years since we last did all this. Much has changed about the city. Much has changed about us (my waistline is probably 10 inches wider). But we do everything, and more than we set out to do. I just don't think we'll wait another 10 years to do it again. ✖

Clockwise from left: If you can't find it at Bangkok's Night Market, it doesn't exist; classic Thai red curry served at the delightful Queen of Curry at Bangrak Bazaar; for truly magnificent views of the River of Kings, the Shangri-La's Presidential Suite is hard to beat.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: NATTHAPHAN RUASRICHAN/ALAMY; COURTESY OF QUEEN OF CURRY; COURTESY OF SHANGRI-LA



Rising on the River

Visitors have long been drawn to China's **Li River valley** for its spectacular landscapes, but a fresh wave of preservation means they can now experience the region's compelling architectural and cultural history, too. *By Scott Wallace*

AS I STEPPED OFF A TOUR boat in Yangshuo, China, an elderly man stood on the pier, balancing a pair of beady-eyed cormorants on a long bamboo pole. My guide, Jay Zhao, explained that for centuries, people here have used cormorants to dive for fish in the river. The birds do the hunting; the fishermen slip collars around their necks to keep them from swallowing their prey.

Jay turned to me and lowered his voice. "Cormorant fishing is disappearing," he said. "Same with the buffalo farming we saw upriver. Ten years from now, you won't see it anymore."

I'd come to southern China's Guangxi province to explore the Li River's unique mist-cloaked karst promontories—steep, jagged peaks that have inspired generations of Chinese landscape painters. Just a few decades ago, the area's main town, Yangshuo—which lies about 563 kilometres west of Hong Kong and the same distance east of the Vietnamese border—was a sleepy place popular with backpackers. Now it's a busy tourism hub, and the rice fields and cormorant fishermen feel like relics of a vanishing past.

I wanted to take a firsthand look at how this region is fighting to preserve its cultural and historical treasures—and the Alila Yangshou, a hotel housed in a refurbished sugar mill on a bend in the Li River, seemed like an ideal base. Since it opened in 2017, the property has drawn accolades for a design that tastefully balances old and new while blending seamlessly with the surrounding landscape.

"This is about how to take an old factory and give it a new lease on life,"

The pool at Alila Yangshuo, a hotel housed in a former sugar factory on the banks of China's Li River.

said Simon Kong, then the hotel's General Manager, as he poured me a cup of coffee in the Sugar House Restaurant. "We wanted to make it a place future generations can appreciate," Kong said. As we talked, sunlight poured in through floor-to-ceiling windows set into one of the factory's original brick walls. The roof, supported by exposed wooden beams, peaked nearly 15 metres overhead. Waitstaff hurried around in tunics and pants inspired by Maoist uniforms. "It's harder to convert an old building and give it fresh purpose than to just build something new," Kong said.

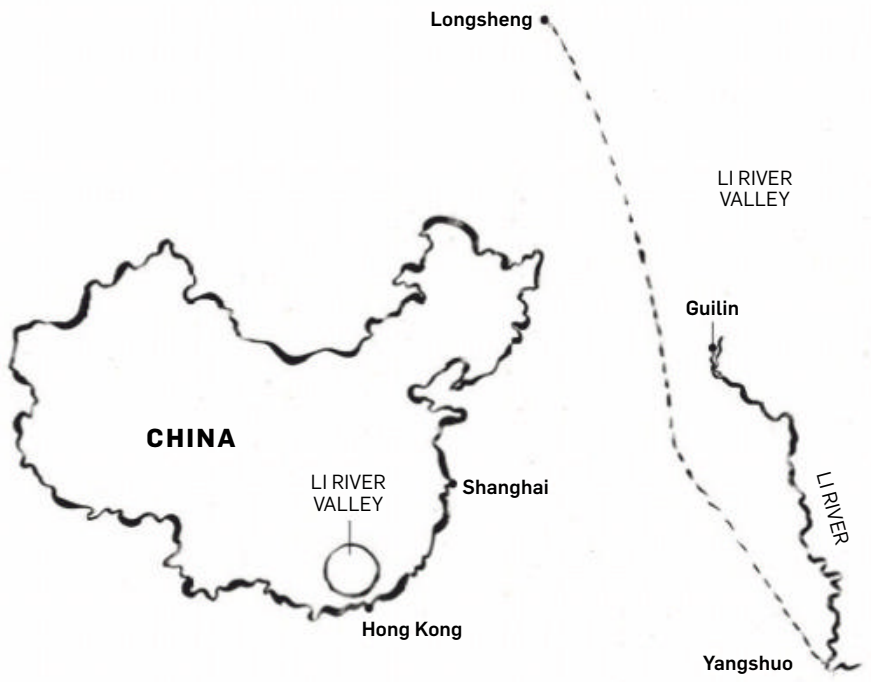
As we strolled the grounds, I began to appreciate how challenging the project must have been. The original mill, parts of which date back to the 1950s, was arranged around a coal-fired boiler room. That ground-floor space, which has retained its original blackened smokestack, now houses a chic boutique, presided over by a sculpture of a learned monk looking down from the library, which is in an overhead loft.

Most of the resort's 117 guest rooms occupy a newly built low-rise wing of concrete and sandstone covered with a latticework of custom-made bricks. "The challenge was to design new buildings that do not overpower the old," Kong said. My spacious, airy room, with its private balcony, minimalist furniture, and recessed lighting, was proof of that project's success.

Over the two days I spent at the hotel, I kept returning to the old loading dock for its mesmerising view of the karst mountains, reflected in an expansive swimming pool flanked by a pair of nine-metre-long industrial trusses. I watched a photographer coax a young woman

KINGWU/GETTYIMAGES





EXPLORING THE LI RIVER VALLEY

Visitors to Hong Kong and Shanghai should consider adding a three- or four-day side trip to this picturesque part of southeastern China.

THE DETAILS

GETTING THERE
There are daily direct flights from all major cities in eastern China to Guangxi's provincial hub, Guilin. From there, many companies offer scenic half-day boat trips down the Li River to Yangshuo. A new highway means you can reach Yangshuo by bus or private car in two hours (recommended for the return trip to Guilin). The rice terraces of Longsheng are also about two hours from Guilin by road, in the opposite direction from Yangshuo.

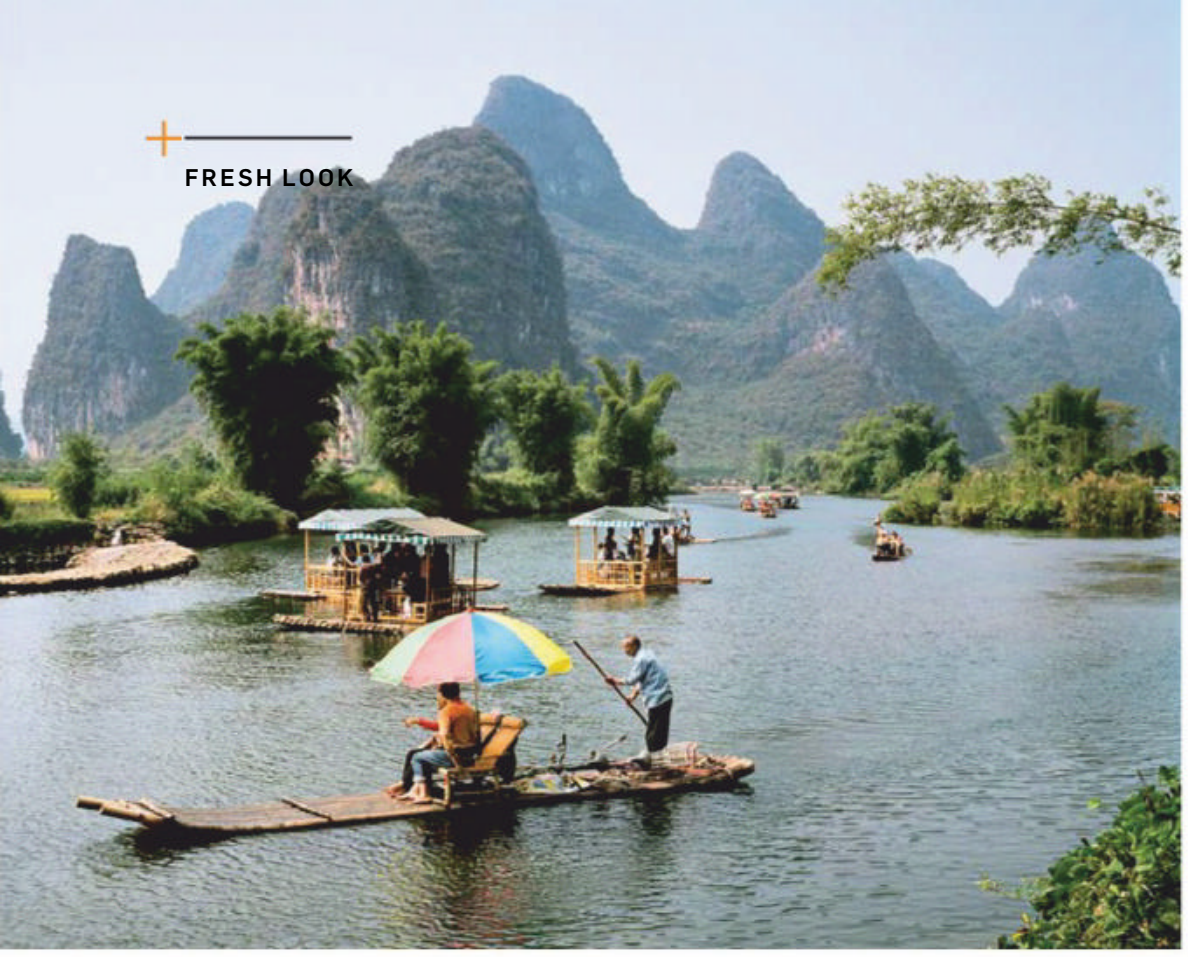
STAY

Shangri-La Hotel, Guilin
This riverside hotel has 439 spacious guest rooms, tastefully accented with traditional watercolours. Book on an upper floor on the river-facing side to see the sun set over the mountains. *Doubles from ₹11,314; shangri-la.com*

Alila Yangshuo
A masterpiece of architecture and design, the newly opened Alila features a magnificent swimming pool and spa as well as a library, art gallery, and boutique. On the grounds is a climbing wall that runs along the face of a limestone cliff. *Doubles from ₹17,074; alilahotels.com*

Li-An Lodge
A 16-room boutique hotel perched on a ridgeline overlooking a spectacular maze of terraced slopes in Longsheng. Guests need to walk 45 minutes uphill to reach the lodge, though they can hire porters and a sedan chair to help them make the climb. The team can provide trail maps for self-guided hikes around the Longsheng rice terraces. *Doubles from ₹13,326; lianlodge.com*

TOUR OPERATOR
China specialists Remote Lands can arrange a tour of the Li River valley, including expert guides and excursions such as a river cruise and bike tours. *From ₹3,60,962 per person for a four-night trip; remotelands.com*





From top: Bamboo rafts cruising on the Li River, with the distinctive karst mountains in the background; a guest room at Alila Yangshuo. *Opposite:* Terraced rice paddies in Longsheng, in Guangxi province.

into seductive poses, framing his subject in the pool's reflection. "It's a one-of-a-kind, very Instagram hotel," Kong told me. "Guests bring all kinds of props and costumes to take photos for their posts." He added with a smile, "It's free promotion for us."

In a way, the entire Li River valley, which extends 80 kilometres upriver to the provincial capital of Guilin, is benefiting from the preservationist impulse that's currently finding a foothold in China after decades of determined modernisation. The area has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, both for its stunning topography and its rich cultural history (primitive societies dwelled in the caves and among the crags here as far back as the sixth millennium B.C.). Time-pressed travellers can now drive to Yangshuo from Guilin in less than two hours via a brand-new highway. But the alternative route— a half-day cruise down the Li River—is time well spent, according to my guide Jay, who had booked us seats on a plush passenger boat.

As we departed from Guilin amid swirls of morning mist, Jay led me to the boat's upper deck, where the banner of the People's Republic of China flapped in the breeze. Traditional villages and vivid green orchards dotted the passing landscape. Fishermen balanced on rickety wooden rafts, casting nets into our wake.

"Look," Jay exclaimed, pointing beyond the bow as we rounded a bend in the river. Laid out before us was a Chinese scroll painting come to life: a succession of jagged, jade-green peaks rising up through diaphanous clouds. "It's like an 80-kilometres-long art gallery," Jay said. I obliged a few fellow passengers who asked me to take their photos; by the time we arrived in Yangshuo, we were smiling and waving like old friends.

On the journey's last leg, we drove north to Longsheng, a picturesque county renowned for its diverse traditional cultures and mountain tribes. After an hour or so, we parked and set off on foot. For 45 minutes we followed a narrow path steadily uphill, crossing rushing brooks via footbridges and passing small hamlets carved into the mountainsides. At the top, we came to a magnificent, four-storey wooden structure with a peaked tile roof, looking out on a spectacular view of terraced rice paddies that stretched in all directions. This was Li-An Lodge.

A young innkeeper named Tony Zhao offered to show me around. Each of the guesthouse's 16 rooms is furnished according to a theme, he explained, and showcases objets d'art and antiques collected by his boss—a US-based photographer named Keren Su, who originally hails from Hangzhou. In the Double Happiness room, he pointed to a wood relief depicting a traditional village wedding ceremony. "This survived the Cultural Revolution," Tony said, referring to Mao Zedong's movement of the 1960s and 70s, in which artworks that seemed to idealise pre-Communist life were destroyed.

That night, I was startled awake by a loud crack of thunder. Wind and rain were blowing through the window, whipping the white chiffon curtains into an eerie, spectral dance. Each flash of lightning illuminated the rice terraces, their contours fading away into darkness. I reflected on all the change I'd witnessed down in the valley. Longsheng's swirling paddy fields felt like a counterpoint, somehow: a way of life etched into the landscape over centuries. The thought was reassuring, and with it in my mind, I closed the windows and went back to sleep.

THE Guide

NEW IN BUSINESS

The world of business never stays still. A fresh perspective to work travel has led to the rise of cities and hotels that offer more than just banquet space. *By Rashima Nagpal & Sushmita Srivastav*



When attending an event at Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay, you will find yourself on a private island with top-notch service.

COURTESY OF FOURSEASONS

Manama BAHRAIN

Look out over the Arabian Gulf or indulge in an exotic dining scene—a business trip to the capital city of Bahrain can never be a dull affair.

At Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay, diners enjoy their food with a view of the city's skyline.

ADDRESS

The Ritz-Carlton, Bahrain

Set in the commercial district of Manama, The Ritz-Carlton, Bahrain offers its guests a total event space of 2,322 square metres including villas for intimate meetings, grand ballrooms, exhibition centres, and four outdoor spaces. After all, who wouldn't love to seal a deal by the beach? A host of other facilities, such as private lagoon and island, sea-inspired spa with hammam and plunge pools, a golf club, and 11 dining venues complement the stay here. You will want to stay back just a little longer to enjoy the unmatched Arabian hospitality. *Starts from ₹23,311; ritzcarlton.com*

Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay

You arrive in the heart of the capital on an exclusive island at the Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay. The hotel is a 10 minutes' drive from the airport, and is a popular venue for hosting automobile launch events. With two large ballrooms, outdoor space at The Terrace and The Lawn, and four Sky Bridge meeting rooms, the total function space of 3,272 square metres can host up to 900 guests. The seven dining destinations, some offering 180° views of the city, will please any intrepid business traveller. *Starts from ₹21,272; fourseasons.com*



CITY SIGHTS

Once done with work, head out to witness Bahrain's glorious heritage and architecture with a visit to Al Fateh Mosque, Qal'at al-Bahrain Fort, and Bahrain National Museum. The Bahrain International Circuit is a must-visit for F1 fans. *bahraingp.com*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF FOURSEASONS; SHUTTERSTOCK

DINE

CUT BY WOLFGANG PUCK

Counted among the world's best steak restaurants, CUT by Wolfgang Puck at Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay serves the choicest selection of beef, premium shellfish, wholesale fish, and an extensive menu curated by the celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck himself. What's more? The place offers unhindred views of the city from its glamorous seating areas. *wolfgangpuck.com*

CAFE LILOU

Reminiscent of a 19th-century Parisian brasserie, this place charms its diners with an elegant balconied venue, velvet upholstery, polished wooden flooring, and expansive French fare. The classic grilled skewers brunch, open-faced steak sandwich of Champs-Élysées, and prawn pasta, are the place's star performers. Local delicacies, such as shakshuka, are also sought-after. *alghalia.com*

Abu Dhabi

UAE

Modern facilities, coupled with unmatched venues and event spaces—the UAE capital ticks all the boxes for your next conference.

ADDRESS

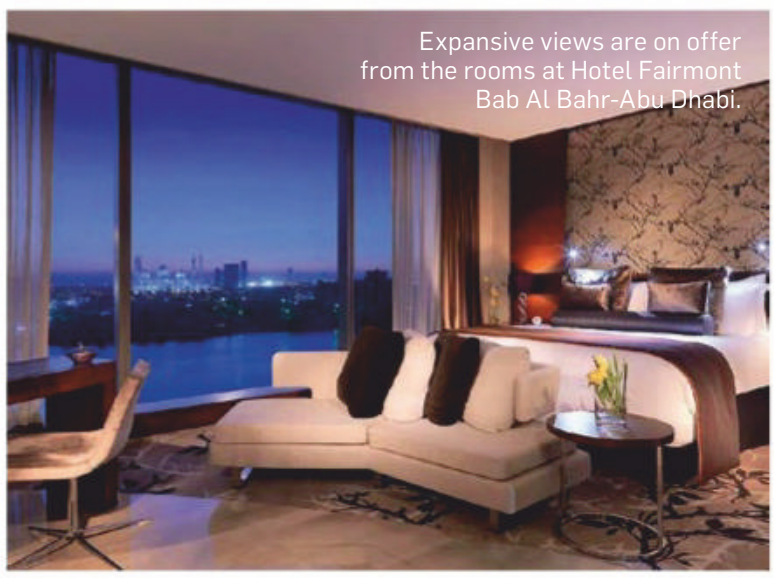
Jumeirah at Etihad Towers

Five dramatically sculpted towers come together to stand as the iconic complex of Jumeriah at Etihad Towers. Overlooking the Arabian Gulf and Corniche, the modern hotel takes pride in offering the best of exclusive residential services in all of its 382 rooms and suites. Soak in the sun at the beach, indulge in a relaxing treatment at the Talise Spa, and admire the illuminated cityscape from The Observation Deck at 300—there's room for more even when you fly down to discuss work. The Club Executive Lounge, Mezzon Ballroom, 13 well-appointed meeting rooms fitted with HD projectors, touchscreen media controllers for large gatherings, high-speed internet access and state-of-the-art Chairman Suites for intimate events are popular facilities available at the hotel. *Starts from ₹12,420; jumeirah.com*



The exquisite dining destinations of Jumeirah at Etihad Towers are its star attractions.

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF JUMEIRAH; COURTESY OF FAIRMONT



Expansive views are on offer from the rooms at Hotel Fairmont Bab Al Bahr-Abu Dhabi.

Hotel Fairmont Bab Al Bahr – Abu Dhabi

Offering unrivalled views of Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, this beachfront five-star property by Fairmont in Abu Dhabi offers easy access to top city attractions, such as the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC). The hotel's 945-square-metre conference hall hosts corporate guests in style, while the other six meeting rooms are conveniently located on level one. The hotel spoils you with its timeless hospitality and world-class amenities, including nine stylish diners, an Olympic-sized pool, private beach, and renowned conference facilities. *fairmont.com*



UNIQUE SAFARIS

You must try a desert safari or a dune-bashing experience in the Al Gharbia region when you visit Abu Dhabi. Shopaholics can visit the Yas Mall and the Marina Mall to take home souvenirs or products from high-end labels.

DINE

HAKKASAN

One of the oldest and finest dining spaces in the region, Hakkasan is a Michelin-star restaurant with a gleaming bar and an intimate setting.

The extraordinary decor, infinity pools, and soaring archways of the dreamy Emirates Palace demand a visit to its restaurant. Known for its Cantonese offerings, the place is the one-stop destination for dim sums and Peking duck. *hakkasan.com*

SHAKESPEARE AND CO.

Think pretty Victorian furniture, gorgeous floral patterns on walls, and sumptuous breakfast spreads, Shakespeare and Co. is a homegrown brand with 36 outlets across the Emirates. The cafe-restaurant specialises in a variety of pastries, sausages, salads, sandwiches, and sliders. The place takes pride in its decor, which is often a conversation starter. *shakespeare-and-co.com*



From top: The Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa offers 280 rooms and suites; the warm interiors of Amiana Resort Nha Trang are a refreshing change of setting.

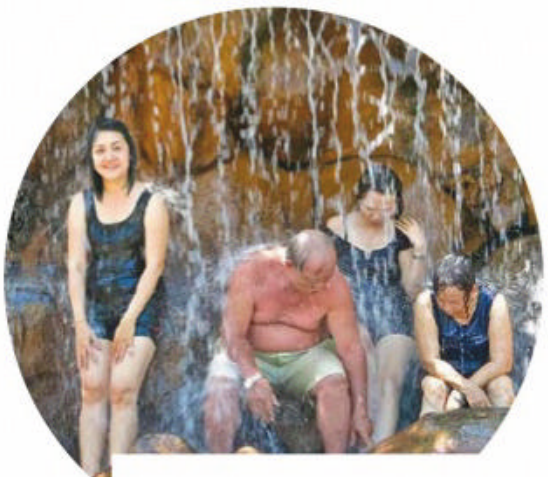
Nha Trang
VIETNAM

The exotic locales of this Vietnamese city are transforming into fully functional and efficient business hubs.

ADDRESS

Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa
A dedicated convention services team and eight flexible event spaces, including two colossal ballrooms, draw business travellers to this modern hotel. The Altitude Rooftop Bar, which doubles as a multipurpose event hall, is another major highlight of a business trip here. Traditional Vietnamese hospitality, coupled with facilities such as a private white-sand beach and well-appointed spa allow guests to unwind after a long day of work. The hotel offers 280 rooms and suites, and is an emerging favourite among local business organisations. *Starts from ₹11,912; marriott.com*

Amiana Resort Nha Trang
This luxury resort sits along the Nha Trang Bay with 153 spacious rooms and villas. The Amiana Conference Centre is a great choice to host conferences, training programmes, and illustrious dinner nights—think open-air meeting foyers offering sublime ocean vista, soft breeze, and catered services. A dedicated team is willing to customise your events in five well-equipped meeting rooms. A business trip here often extends beyond work to include wellness and leisure activities. The private mud bath rooms are a big draw among guests. *Starts from ₹27,883; amianaresort.com*



REFINED WELLNESS

Coming to this part of the world and heading back without experiencing a therapeutic mud bath is akin to sin. Try Thap Ba Hot Springs Centre, the oldest facility in town, for its mud sessions and hot mineral pool. *thapbahotspring.com.vn*



DINE

LANTERNS VIETNAMESE RESTAURANT
A real find for those craving a traditional Vietnamese spread, Lanterns was long established as a local favourite, serving classics cooked to perfection. Their hotpots, seafood, barbecued beef, baked shrimps, and lemongrass chicken are bestsellers. The place provides food supplies to the less fortunate and also offers a student scholarship programme. *lanternsvietnam.com*

DINING BY THE BAY
At Dining By The Bay at Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, lip-smacking international fusion cuisines marry breathtaking views. Pick your spot from comfy daybeds, bar stools, or an outdoor seating spread over two levels, and indulge in dishes, such as Vietnamese crispy pancakes with seafood and nuoc mam sauce, Luong Son seafood in clay pot, and wok-fried beef tenderloin. *sixsenses.com*

CLOCKWISE: COURTESY OF MARRIOTT; COURTESY OF AMIANA RESORT; ANNETTE LOZINSKI/ALAMY



The Brussels Marriott Hotel Grand Place features an iconic facade.

Brussels BELGIUM

The historic city of Brussels is back in the spotlight for its business offerings.

BUSINESS ADDRESS

Brussels Marriott Hotel Grand Place

This quintessential business hotel comes packed with seven sophisticated meeting and event venues with a capacity of 500 guests, 221 rooms and suites, and an American-style steakhouse behind a traditional façade. Its central location and proximity to international organisations and corporations are some other highlights of the hotel, which believes in mixing work and fun. *From ₹27,387; marriott.com*

Steigenberger Wiltcher's

The property enjoys an enviable location on the plush Avenue Louise in the heart of Brussels, giving easy access to important city institutions. Its stylish decor, coupled with exemplary service, has earned Steigenberger Wiltcher's a distinct identity in the market over the years. Luxury-driven business travellers ought to find delight in its array of event spaces, 23 to be precise! *Doubles from ₹11,932; steigenberger.* com

DINE

VINCENT

In the historic Rue des Dominicains of the Belgian capital, Vincent holds an iconic position ever since it opened in 1905. While the food here lives up to its reputation of being traditional and exceptional (think authentic waterzooi of chicken, among other dishes), the setting of the restaurant is outstanding, too. Imagine ceramic walls painted with coastal images in cool colours. *restaurantvincent.be*

SEA GRILL

A working lunch at a Michelin-star restaurant? Consider Sea Grill. Helmed by Belgian Chef Yves Mattagne, this upscale restaurant comes with a mix of dining spaces for different moods. An exclusive business lunch can be hosted at its Salon Grande Profondeur with a capacity of up to 20 guests. Opt for their Marée du Jour lunch menu to feast on fine contemporary dishes. *seagrill.be*



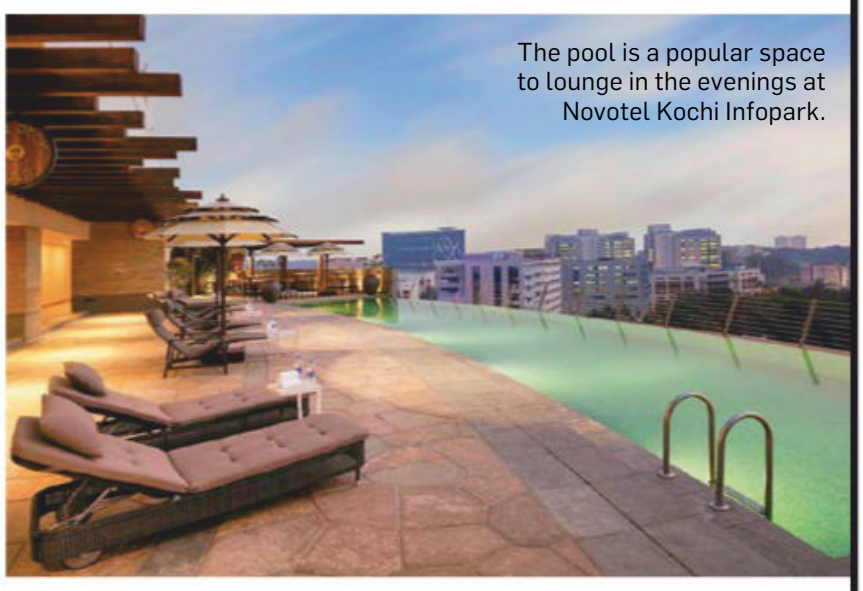
YOGA IS THE WAY

A favourite among locals, the Serendip Spa & Yoga Centre located in Place Stéphanie can easily be your go-to spot after an eventful day. It comes in a bright Oriental setting and offers a range of age-old therapies as well as intriguing variations of yoga, like Candlelight Yoga, that make for enriching experiences. *serendipspa.com*

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF SERENDIP SPA & YOGA CENTRE



The Club Lounge at Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty.



The pool is a popular space to lounge in the evenings at Novotel Kochi Infopark.

Kochi INDIA

There's more to 'God's Own Country' than languid beaches and Ayurveda treatment. Kochi means business.

ADDRESS

Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty

Launched last year, the hotel is home to the country's largest convention centre, the Lulu Bolgatty International Conventional Centre. Among the hotel's distinct offerings are three helipads for the fast-paced traveller. Its pristine location along Lake Vembanad, along with 264 villas, rooms, and suites, has quickly made it a sought-after destination for business and leisure. The tropical setting is a good break from the conventional business hotel setting. *Doubles from ₹7,040; hyatt.com*

Novotel Kochi Infopark

Conveniently located in Kochi's IT hub, Novotel Kochi Infopark is a preferred choice among business travellers visiting the city. The in-house meeting venues—Burgandy, Champagne, and Alsace—are well-equipped to meet the needs of discerning guests. The Square, its global buffet-style dining venue, caters to all tastes, and the bar features an extensive menu of wines that proves useful at the end of a long day. *Doubles from ₹4,799; accorhotels.com*

DINE

MALABAR CAFÉ

This traditional all-day diner at Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty comes with a delicious reputation of its own. Options range from dates chutney and curd rice, to the *vazhapoo* cutlet and a variety of stews. Traditional Kerala dishes, such as *kozhi pathiri* and *meen pollichathu* are popular, too. *hyatt.com*

HISTORY RESTAURANT

Another much-talked about venue is the fine-dining History Restaurant at Brunton Boatyard. While its unique menu featuring 32 cuisines intrinsic to Fort Kochi is impressive as a whole, the railway mutton curry particularly comes highly recommended by patrons. *cghearth.com*



ROOM FOR MORE

Go scuba diving with South India's first PADI-authorised dive centre, Scuba Cochin (*scubacochin.com*), or catch a local dance performance at the Kerala Kathakali Centre (*kathakalicentre.com*), or buy artefacts on Princess Street.

CLOCKWISE: COURTESY OF HYATT; COURTESY OF ACCOR HOTELS; COURTESY OF SCUBA COCHIN

LOST IN LAOS

On a whirlwind tour of **Laos**, *Devanshi Mody* dissects its heritage and local culture, gets introduced to the austere ways of monks, and indulges, albeit guiltily, in some luxurious retreats.

"LAO PDR OFFICIALLY STANDS for Lao People's Democratic Republic," says Michael Roehrig of Trails of Indochina, "but really, it stands for Please Don't Rush." Languorous like the stately River Mekong that traverses it, this is a destination where two cars on the street counts as a traffic jam. Unless, luxury cars from China are whizzing through Luang Prabang's quaint, slender streets, their broad, burnished bodies almost grazing the UNESCO-protected town's heritage edifices. These French-colonial structures are fast becoming hotels, restaurants, bars, and boutiques for tourists, whose numbers near Laos' seven-million population. And yet, an imperturbable tranquillity pervades Laos. In three weeks, I won't hear a horn bleat. Nor see a McDonald's, Starbucks, or smug white Apple store!

My hotel—the latest ultra-luxe abode in the region—the Rosewood Luang Prabang is 15 minutes out of town, and that's considered far. Michael awaits me at Rosewood's colonial Great House, which pulsates with elephant motifs evoking Laos' former name 'Land of a Million Elephants' almost in tragic irony. Just 400 elephants survive.

As a traditional merit-making practice, the monks of Luang Prabang collect alms every morning; the façade of Wat Xieng Thong temple.

FROM TOP: MATTHEW WAKEM/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK

Poaching has exterminated rhinos and crocodiles. Apparently, rhino horns (the Chinese love them) sell at Luang Prabang's famous Night Market.

Michael has been in Laos for 15 years and is phlegmatic, even about Laos' corruption sensations. However, my displeasure at much-vaunted erstwhile-royal capital Luang Prabang provokes him. Why is it UNESCO-stamped when Puducherry and Chettinad's architectural splendour surpasses the charming but unstaggering French-colonial buildings here? Michael calls these the best-preserved vestiges of Indochina architecture. I have seen finer specimens in Vietnam and Cambodia. Michael claims that UNESCO's presence checks China. *Really?*

Destiny contrives to dispel my disappointment with Laung Prabang. Legendary hotelier Adrian Zeccha is in town, and Michael engineers a rendezvous at Zeccha's villa. The little beaming man, white-clad and sharp-witted, usually spends his birthday in Luang Prabang. "But I don't know why I celebrate these things any more. I am 86," he notes. Zeccha looks 20 years younger and recalls distinctly his doings at 20, including being clandestinely engaged as a debutant journalist to approach "*Panditji*," mandated by the Americans to persuade Nehru not to invade and expropriate Goa from the Portuguese. The architect-turned-hotelier could be





The Night Market is famous for its variety of colourful handicrafts. *Below:* The hallway of the exuberant Rosewood Luang Prabang hotel.

anywhere on his birthday. Why Luang Prabang? Perhaps I must see Laos through Zeccha's eyes.

Rosewood's 'Sunset Cruise' is encouraging. French Riesling in hand, propped on a luxury daybed, I peruse books on colonial Asia, chuckling over portrayals of the British with their tight suits, stiff ways, and mercantile minds, contrasting the French, who drank and danced, their arms crooked round a pretty local damsel. Incidentally, Laos was called a French 'protectorate', not 'colony', in chic euphemism.

Next morning, at 5.30 am, the phone jangles in my room. Apparently, I am required to embark on an expedition to dispense alms to monks. I am in yoga; besides, I don't do touristy things. I venture, however, a heritage walk of the protected town abundant with ornate Buddhist temples. The royal Wat Xieng Thong temple exhibits the Emperor's regal hearse in an enclave with stunning depictions from the *Ramayana*. Discussing meditation with my guide Somai, formerly a monk, I aver that four hours of yoga and meditation every day—over 15 years—hasn't tamed my mind. Somai confesses that eight years of monk-hood hasn't alleviated his mindset either. He suggests hearing the monks' becalming evening chant, but it's hot and I'd rather lie face-down on a heated bed over a glass panel set over a streaming cascade under the deft hands of Ly at Rosewood's spa, and then explore Royal Laotian cuisine crafted by Executive French Chef Sebastien Rubis, UN-endorsed GI Ambassador for Laos.

In Champasak, South Laos, Michael has arranged a visit to Vat Phou, precursor to Angkor Wat's Khmer architecture, in 38° Celsius. Michael must be mad! I decide to locate our hotel. I know La Folie Lodge across the Mekong is accessible only by boat. What I

FROM TOP: CRAIG LOVELL/EAGLE VISIONS PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY; COURTESY OF ROSEWOOD LUANG PRABANG



An early-morning view of the Nam Song River.

don't know is that the 'boat' is a broad wooden floating platform with a scatter of chairs and umbrellas to hold in feeble defence against the sun's vicious mid-afternoon sorties. The boat-ride seems eternal (the Mekong is wide-girthed down south). And it's unimaginable that we'd have to disembark into the water, tight-rope-walk on planks, and then be hoisted onto a tractor to trudge up to Champasak's poshest accommodation. 'La Folie' in French means 'madness', and this is madness!

By the time I reach, I want to dismantle the place brick-by-brick. Except, there are no bricks at the all-wood eco lodge, where the winsome young Lao manager beams like the benign sun at dawn. River-facing log cabins dot the resort. But I have picked La Résidence, the private villa, and that's down a pot-holed, little-shaded cow road. My mother, with an injured leg, is not impressed. But La Résidence is an oasis of cool, with quirky France-meets-Laos exoticism and outdoor terraces overlooking crisp white sands descending to the Mekong. Landlocked by China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, Laos has no sea, but La Folie seems set on a beach, except that babes in bikinis are replaced by buxom buffalo basking on the sands in wild abandon.

At 3.30 pm, the sun has intensified its aggressions, but we must return to Vat Phou, where the museum shuts when it pleases. Past massive lotus pools, we reach the two immense principal temples segregating male and female pilgrims. The original Hindu structures dated from the sixth century, but the existing Buddhist enhancements are from the 11th-13th century.

Stone steps climb to a Buddhist shrine. On the way down, frangipani trees with their kissing clusters of yellow flowers fragrant in the evening breeze are like golden aureoles encircling each step. Through the blaze of gold in the ponds below appear lotuses with pink cheeks ablush in the lilac skies at

Laos has no sea, but La Folie seems set on a beach, except bikini babes are replaced by buxom buffalo.

dusk. Crimson and carnation smear fading skies like trailing silken scarves, above which a hilltop Shiva Lingam presides. Back at the boat-stop, there's no sun, mercifully. Except, there's no light either. With the light of the boatman's dinky mobile screen, we descend to the shadowy boat. Mum is incensed. Until, mid-water, there suddenly appears an enchantingly lamp-lit pathway like a golden serpent flickering through the dark sands rising to the lodge.

Next morning, after waiting long for the tractor and then the boat, we are finally on water. The boat flounders, the boatman has no fuel and no mobile to summon help; we are stranded mid-stream, and we stamp and stomp in idiotic impatience effecting zero impact in these somnolent, timeless parts. Eventually, we're speeding past expanses of vivacious paddy and rural splendour towards the Cambodian border where Khone Phapheng waterfall holds out her effusive white lace skirts across a tremendous breath of 10 kilometres. This bounteous beauty remains the sole impediment in the Mekong's navigable channels.

In Si Phan Don (literally '4,000 islands'), on a local boat, past tufted mounds—the 'islands'—we reach the Don Khone island with the Liphi Falls, a natural demarcation between Laos and Cambodia. Another boat-ride through islet-splotched waterways more

SHUTTERSTOCK



The ruins of the Khmer Hindu temple, Vat Phou, at the base of Phou Khao mountain.

captivating than perhaps even the Amazon, and we are where Irrawaddy dolphins arc in and out of water.

Back on land, we're assailed by scooters bearing up to five school-children and driven by kids barely 12 years of age. Have they licenses? Stupid question met fittingly with guffaws. Schoolgirls blare red-lipstick-smeared lips, gleaming sensually in the sultry afternoon sun.

That evening, La Folie's owner Antoine de Noailles manifests. He charms, being the French aristocrat he is. China is supplying Laos bullet trains, he says, explaining his qualms: China furnishes roads and bridges and trains and dams, and slaps you with bills you can't settle, and then hijacks your country. Laos has already ceded sovereign territory now called "China Town."

Forest covers 70 per cent of Laos, and this is intensely so in Vang Vieng, with its bald-headed mountains. We stumble on some caves. An uphill trek leads to the first one. Unswayed by the Buddha statue standing sentinel at the cave's entrance, I decide against the second cave but the guide is insistent. It's a long swirl up. The cave is hot, dark, and pointless. And then, the guide's torch illumines interiors bedazzled as if with a billion diamonds. There are stupendous formations, some like champagne-pink rosaces, others like cunning pieces of modern art, a hoary, frosted tree stump, and even a terrific sacrificial altar. Here, the cave conjures a snow-covered forest, there it becomes the Snow Queen's Palace of my childhood.

Back in Luang Prabang, at the beautiful all-suite Belmond La Résidence Phou Vao, Michael visits and drops a bomb shell: that Laos is the world's most-bombed nation. America dropped a mind-blowing 270 million cluster bombs on Laos. Of these, 80 million remain unexploded, lying merrily around fields and forests. After bombing the Communists for nine years, America couldn't prevent Laos from turning Communist, instead leaving a country so bomb-ridden that 300 reported casualties occur annually. The UXO (unexploded ordinances) Centre shows films of children who scooped something they thought was a stone or a fruit and it exploded, taking off an ear, an arm, a leg, when not a life. How come nobody knows of this outrage, I ask. "Oh, everyone knows about it—except the Americans," Michael says.

The Belmond persuades me into alms-giving to the monks at dawn. This 'great living tradition' of Laos elevates: monks walk fast, in single-file, barefoot, a receptacle strapped across their shoulders into which the charitable deposit little balls of sticky rice. Novitiates, sometimes as young as 10, rub their sleepy eyes from having to wake at 4 am. The young monks are usually poor boys, compelled to monkhood for free education unavailable in remote villages. They can only eat alms offerings and only twice a day between 6 am and 12 pm. They supposedly soon get accustomed to these austerities. However, hotel waiters, frequently former monks, admit they were homesick and

COURTESY OF TRAILS OF INDOCHINA

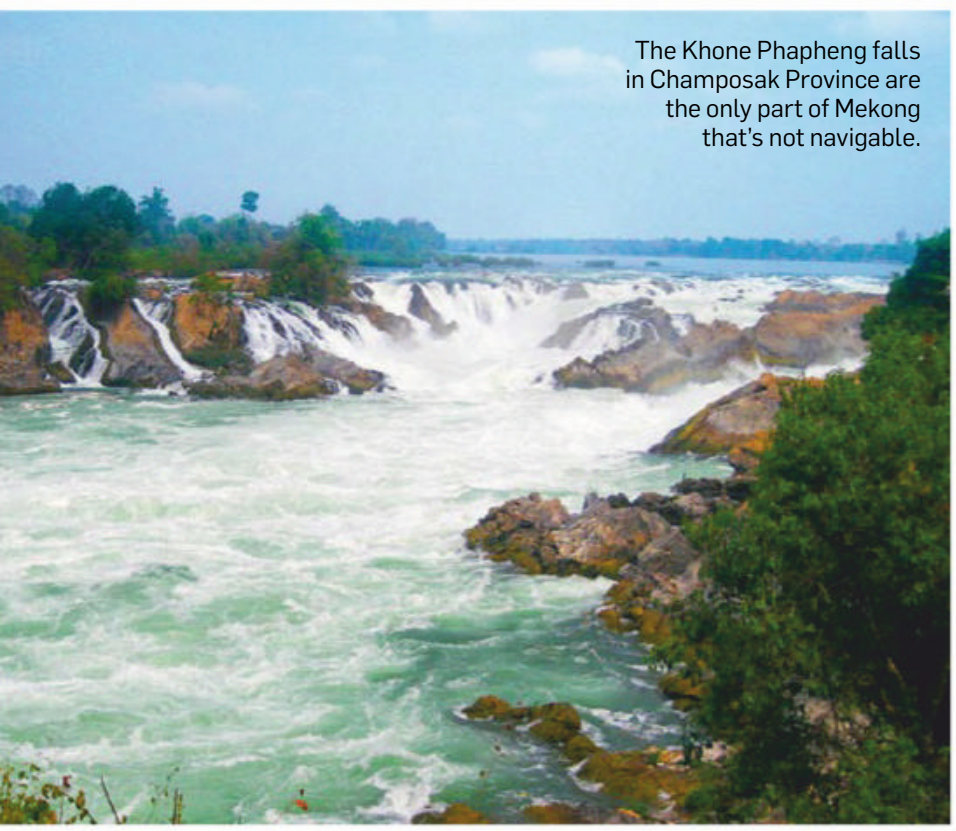
hungry as kids. Some would stock noodles to boil after midnight, which they claim is permissible. I am embarrassed at the extravagant breakfast onboard Belmond's new 'Sunrise Cruise' after the alms-giving, especially when my butler, an ex-monk, reveals he had 11 brothers and sisters but only six survive. The downstream scenery, delightful though, brings little joy. The realities of existence strike, and life's hideousness will impress upon me on my final dawn in Laos when I shall emerge from the befittingly-named 'Alms Giving' suite at 3 Nagas, which stands on the street the monks walk on for alms. Few alms-givers will dot the pavement, doling out alms, while tourists will streak the other side, frenziedly clicking away as the monks slide past like an obscene parody of fashion photographers snapping away at models on a ramp.

Buddha had the wisdom to turn away from life. But destiny hasn't wisdom prescribed for me. Instead, copious glasses of Luang Prabang's best rosé to be had on the Avani+'s ingenious al fresco lounge set out on the street overlooking the heritage town. I discern that my waiter Chan—attentive, intuitive, reticent—was once a monk. The discipline bristles, and suddenly, I feel appalled at my excesses. Relinquishing the rosé, I decide finally to experience the monks' evening chanting. I'm directed to Wat Xieng Mouane temple, nestled at the end of the slimmest alley.

In a red and gold precinct, upon which a smiling Buddha presides, teenage monks chant. I remark their lean bodies tautened from the stringent diet, I remark their discipline, I remark their eventual fidgeting, I remark their distraction and the dissipation of my own mind, I remark the Buddha watching, his lip curled in an almost-ironic smile. I resolve I shall return tomorrow, but then how to extricate myself from the overwhelming arrangements—a three-hour spa at the Pullman, an Avani+ sunset cruise, cocktails at the Pullman, dinner at the 3 Nagas...? I reflect on what it is to resolve when the mind is scattered in a million directions. The Buddha smiles on. The chanting attains its apotheosis. I listen to the monotone of the chant. I hear the chaos of my own mind. ✖



The French introduced European architecture in Laos around the onset of the 20th century.



The Khone Phapheng falls in Champosak Province are the only part of Mekong that's not navigable.

FROM TOP: GÁBOR KOVÁCS/ALAMY; COURTESY OF TRAILS OF INDOCHINA

THE DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Thai Airways (*thaiairways.com*) and **Air India** (*airindia.in*) are among the airlines that operate flights to Luang Prabang from Delhi and Mumbai.

STAY

Rosewood Luang Prabang: It boasts hill-top tents *(₹1,05,350 per night)* recalling Laos' ethnic groups through famous designer Bill Bensley's tastefully integrated tribal artefacts in a contemporary setting where lanterns hang above your bed. *Doubles from ₹46,000; rosewoodhotels.com*

Belmond Résidence Phou Vao: You won't leave your colonial suite, except for hot bamboo massages at the spa village with its own pool and secluded gardened pavillion set on a lotus pond. *Doubles from ₹11,940; belmond.com*

Avani+ Luang Prabang: Fringing Luang Prabang's main street yet elegantly apart, this is a fortress of affordable exclusivity with the best all-day dining to go. *Doubles from ₹14,047; avanihotels.com*

Sofitel Luang Prabang: The heritage hotel's long groomed lawns, fountains, blinding-blue pool, gardened pool villas, spa in heritage wooden Lao houses, pop-up dinners, and in-house gambolling bunnies don't betray this was a former prison. *Doubles from ₹14,890; accorhotels.com*

La Folie Lodge: This accommodation is eco-elegant and boundlessly quirky, addictively so. *Doubles from ₹14,047; lafolie-laos.com*

TOUR OPERATOR

Trails of Indochina (*trailsofindochina.com*) crafts bespoke itineraries in Laos. *Six-day packages from ₹2,25,800 per person.*

A Spin in Spain

A certain Bollywood movie may have pushed Spanish road trips to the cusp of cliche, but that did not stop *Siddhartth Mahajan* from making his annual ritualistic journey with designers *Shivan* and *Narresh*. The trio give us their recommendations from **southern Spain**.



Antoni Gaudí originally designed the Güell Park for entrepreneur Eusebi Güell.

HEMIS/ALAMY



A HECTIC FASHION WEEK followed by a draining financial-year closing and some serious solar storms affecting our cosmic balances—we had never craved for March 31 more. The only silver lining along this year-long cloud was a Spanish holiday that awaited us at the end of it. With no time whatsoever to plan the holiday, we booked return tickets and winged the itinerary—an MO we will never repeat. While three friends on a road trip in Spain is a bit corny now, given the frenzy *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* sparked, this holiday was about discovering southern Spain in a simpler and easier, albeit chaotic, way. And there were definitely no bulls running behind us.

Party Starter

Landing at Barcelona meant that we had to follow the rituals: experiencing Antoni Gaudí's glorious architecture and the (in)famous party scenes synonymous with the city. Barcelona was a bit sleepy because it was the Easter weekend, but that did not deter our spirits—the average party here starts at 2 am and ends at 7 am, on a weeknight! While we painted the town red in the night, we managed some slightly hungover experiences during the day.

Gaudi's Parc Güell, La Sagrada Familia, Casa Milà, and Casa Batlló tend to be on everyone's list, but Shivan recommends that you experience the Modernist movement of the 1920s with the German Pavilion by the legendary Mies Van Der Rohe. It's remarkable how simple it is, how ahead of its time, and how it continues to inspire modern architecture till date.

Having lost our way in the streets of Barcelona, we stumbled upon the Plaça De Tetuan—a historical square with a stone sculpture that's a feast for the eyes. But the real joy here was the adorable resident Wire Fox Terrier and his ball. It's not every day that a dog urges you to play catch with him in a public square!

The view of Alhambara from Mirador Plaza. *Top:* Designer duo Shivan and Narresh start their road trip in Barcelona.



SHIVAN, NARRESH AND SIDDHARTTH (2)



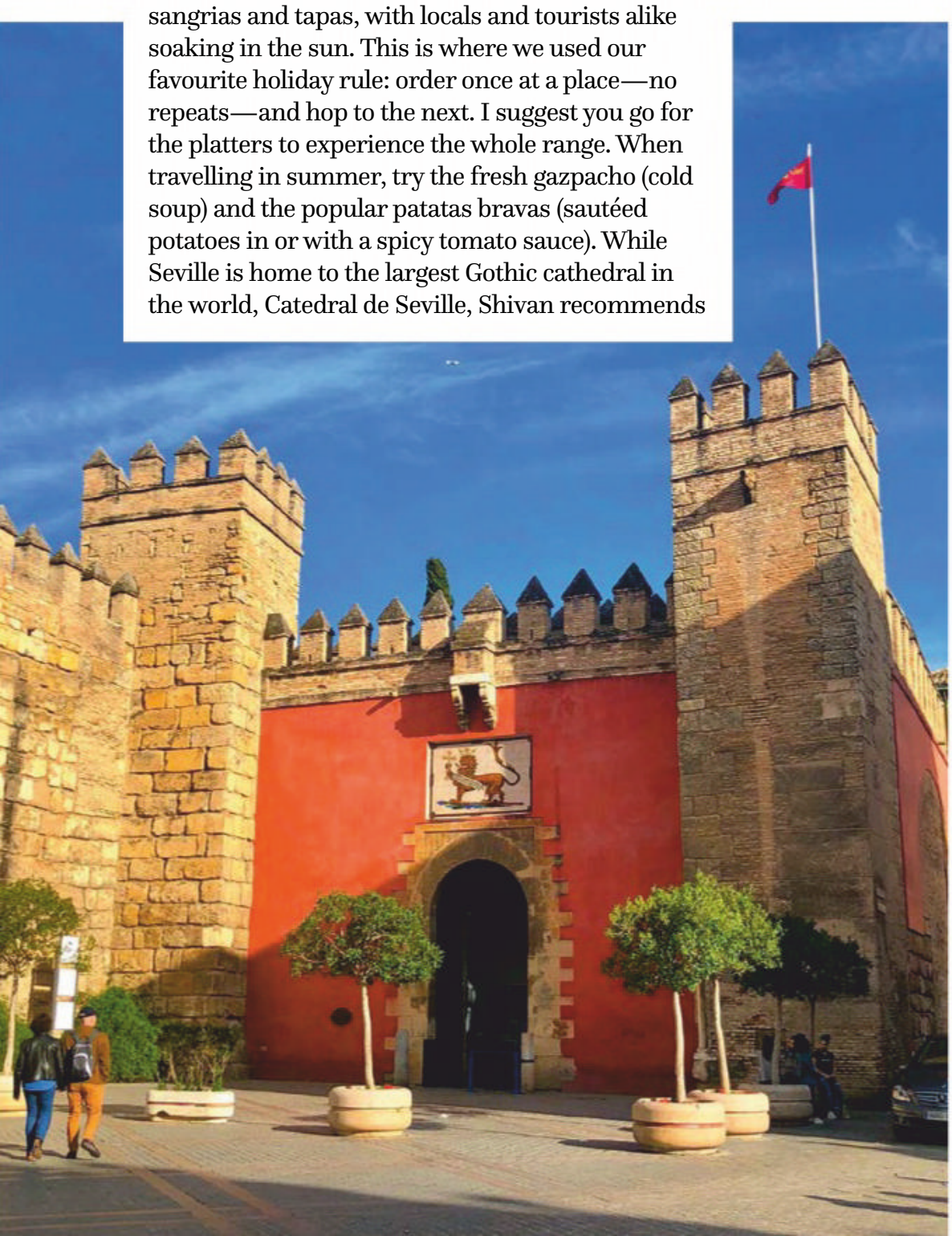
From top: A tapas spread is common in Spanish restaurants; Real Alcázar was declared as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987.

Simply Seville

After spending an eventful weekend in Barcelona, we decided to begin our road trip across southern Spain. The first stop was Seville, a charming town with a long history. From cobbled streets to live Flamenco dances at random street corners, the old town holds magic in store for those who visit it.

Narresh signed us up for a free walking tour of the city that started from Puerta De Jerez; it spared us hours of research. He recommends you do the same. The guides were super friendly and walked us through the streets, dispersing abundant trivia along the way. From life in the medieval times to Gothic architecture to the tobacco factory that was at the centre of the famous opera *Carmen*, and finally, the development of the city's iconic structures like Plaça d'Espanya for the 1929 World Expo, the walk teemed with the kind of history lessons that we wished we had got while growing up.

Tapas is huge in Spain, which explains why the streets of Seville are lined with bars serving sangrias and tapas, with locals and tourists alike soaking in the sun. This is where we used our favourite holiday rule: order once at a place—no repeats—and hop to the next. I suggest you go for the platters to experience the whole range. When travelling in summer, try the fresh gazpacho (cold soup) and the popular patatas bravas (sautéed potatoes in or with a spicy tomato sauce). While Seville is home to the largest Gothic cathedral in the world, Catedral de Seville, Shivan recommends that you must also visit the Real Alcázar—the royal palace that features the most striking Moorish influences. Notably, this is also the setting for the kingdom of Dorne in *Game of Thrones*.



However, there was one experience that we missed out on: an authentic Flamenco performance in the fabled Triana district, where Indian gypsies brought the dance form in the 15th century. We recommend you do not!

Ronda-bout

The road trip saw us drive through breathtaking Andalusian plains and meadows and make a brief stopover at Ronda, home to the Puente Nuevo bridge. While its name ('new bridge') suggests it is a recent addition, the bridge was completed in 1793 and split Ronda into old and new towns. Although we had set aside half a day for this town, we exited it under 90 minutes. Earmark it as a stopover for tapas in the streets or a lunch by the bridge with a roughly 30-minute hike to a cliff for the most amazing pictures of the bridge.

Granada Gains

A quick Google search on it might paint a picture of a sleepy town. But Granada is much more! With a vibe that is more Milanese than Florentine and history that permeates its streets, Granada was a special milestone on our route. The town exudes a distinct newness with its hip shopping districts, but every now and then, a grand cathedral peeks out from amidst closely-packed buildings and takes your breath away.

Since our itinerary was unplanned, we missed out on tickets for Alhambara (it's booked out for over three months; blame it on the 300-visitors-per-day rule). However, we did manage another insightful tour that Narresh recommends—a walking tour that started from the Plaza de Isabel

SHIVAN, NARRESH AND SIDDHARTTH (2)





From left: The trio of Shivan, Narresh, and Siddhartth in Granada; the quaint streets of Marbella.

la Católica. It went through the Royal Chapel of Granada to the Renaissance-style Granada Cathedral, and finally, the winding streets of Albaicín, the Moorish settlement where every turn showed a moment from the city's past. Head to the plaza right outside Mirador de San Nicolás for a panoramic view of Granada and Alhambra.

Granada is one of the few places in Spain that serves tapas *gratis* or on-the-house tapas. Bar-hop through Calle Navas, and experience a gamut of appetisers, ranging from olives and grilled chicken to cured Iberian ham and chorizo. The best part of Granada's streets for Shivan was their abundance of musical talent. Don't be surprised if a violinist or Spanish guitarist serenades you on a stroll through the town.

Marbella-cious

Bidding a rather sad adieu to Granada, we headed further south to our last destination—the posh coast of Marbella and Puerto José Banús. Being in the fashion business, we often get customers looking for bathing suits for their "Marbella summers." So we were excited to be at the scene of the crime. Our enthusiasm was greeted with a rather dull vibe—it was slow and sleepy, and the season would pick up in June, we were told.

Our walking explorations continued here. Its quaint Mediterranean streets lined with fashion boutiques and bars, Marbella flaunts the easy glamorous life. No wonder so many Europeans decide to retire here. Marbella has two major areas to explore—the old city and the beach promenade. The old city features buzzing streets culminating into the orange umbrella-lined Plaza de los Naranjos (literally 'Plaza of Oranges') where one can while away hours people-watching. The oranges on the trees look deceivingly luscious, but they are extremely bitter—they are shipped to the UK for marmalades.

Thanks to Shivan, we knew the beachfront had the Avenida Duque de Ahumada, a walkway lined with tapas bars, lounges, and also an open-air gallery featuring 11 Dali sculptures. This is where we discovered the Spanish Pink Gin. As Shivan is a major gin maniac, it was the highlight of the trip for him, with almost every meal featuring this local beverage with soda and fresh berries. A 10-minute drive from Marbella, Puerto José Banús is easily the Spanish equivalent of St. Tropez—glitzy cars, luxury shopping, and glam-worthy lounges along a yacht-lined marina. Narresh's pro-tip: visit during the season, starting from mid-June, to experience the real vibe of both the towns.

With the gin-soaked beach towns ended our Spanish road trip that covered five memorable sites in eight days. We did not skydive or scuba-dive, but we came back with ample memories and travel lessons—the biggest being planning a road trip in advance. But, as the saying goes, life begins at the end of your comfort zone.

THE DETAILS

GETTING THERE
Barcelona can be reached easily with **Alitalia** (*alitalia.com*), **Qatar Airways** (*qatarairways.com*), and **Turkish Airlines** (*turkishairlines.com*).

STAY
Barcelona: Hotel Arts is a modern property at the Barcelona Beach promenade. *From ₹39,000; hotelartsbarcelona.com*
Seville: Hotel Alfonso XIII *(from ₹43,000; marriott.com)* is a stunning heritage property. For a more modern stay, **Hotel Mercer Sevilla** *(from ₹47,000; mercersevilla.com)* and **Grand Melia Colon** *(from ₹29,000; melia.com)* are great options.
Granada: Choose between the **Eurostars Washington Irving** for a contemporary stay (*from ₹24,000; eurostarshotels.com*) and the Moorish charm-laden **Parador de Granada** (*from ₹27,000; paradorgranada.com*).
Marbella: Puente Romano is a Spanish-style property located in the Golden Mile area (*from ₹53,000; puenteromano.com*).

SHIVAN, NARRESH AND SIDDHARTTH (2)

KINGDOM *of* COLD



Japan is best known for its springtime blooms. But if you can defy sub-zero temperatures and mounds of snow, you must explore the wintry delights of **Hokkaido**.

Text & photographs by Sumeet Keswani



It snows for four months out of 12 in Sapporo. So the locals love to ski and snowboard their winter blues away.

I'D ALWAYS WANTED TO VISIT JAPAN. And as a consumer of popular itineraries and Instagram posturing, I had pictured myself in the country during its famous spring moods. Who wouldn't want a sprinkle of cherry blossom on their canvas of memory (and album of holiday pictures), after all? So when I got invited to Japan during its chilly winter, it felt bittersweet. Add to that the realisation that I was heading to the northernmost of Japan's main islands, Hokkaido, and dread quickly sunk in. What followed was a spurt of extreme-winter shopping, the likes of which I had never undertaken before.

People come to Hokkaido for its natural attractions, which include everything from icy landscapes to natural hot springs, from primaeval forests to floral fields. We are headed to Sapporo, the largest city on the island and the capital city of Hokkaido Prefecture. A city of two million residents, Sapporo gets five metres of snow on average each year. This is no ordinary snow. Finer than your usual 'powder snow', this phenomenon is called 'aspirin snow', I'm told by my guides—Ikuko from Nagasaki, and Sapporo resident Toshie. The unique form of snow means that it does not lend itself to building snowmen (Olaf would be disappointed!) or snowballs for a good old winter battle. On the other hand, it is excellent for skiing, a fact that draws plenty of skiers from Australia and other parts of the world. These tourists are joined by Japanese from other islands of the country that are not endowed with the slopes of Hokkaido. Japan's land mass may be nine times smaller than India's, but the weather across its islands varies so much that Sapporo feels akin to Europe for Ikuko.

The downside of the snow in Sapporo is the temperature. With a maximum of 0° Celsius and the minimum dipping 10° below, I feel well and truly like a popsicle the moment I step out of the New Chitose Airport. On our drive to the hotel, it's evident that the houses of the city are designed to bear the burden of snow. Unlike other parts of Japan, where homes don terracotta hats, the houses in Sapporo are squatting cubes and gather snow on their roofs until it's ploughed out. It might seem counter-intuitive for the residents, but Ikuko points out the arrangement is essential to ensure safety of pedestrians. A sloped roof would mean frequent, unpredictable mini-avalanches on the pavements. Heaps of white, gathering dirt,

abound and coalesce into carbuncles on the roadside, some of the mounds growing taller than seven feet. The pavements, however, are impossibly clean; on enquiry, I'm told they are heated to ensure melting of snow. It's the perfect example of Japanese efficiency.

On our way to Kiroro Resort, the first stop in our Sapporo itinerary, I spy the Ishiya Chocolate Factory (*ishiya.co.jp*), with snowmen perched on its window sills, dry poplar trees in white garbs, and a couple of graveyards. It's –4° Celsius; the wind lifts the powder snow deposited last night, carries it on its feathery back, and deposits it in a different part of the city. The horizontal snowfall drapes everything in an eerie veil. It's almost as if I'm in a Murakami story. I wait for a cat to manifest and speak to me, but all I get is more snow and solitude.

The graveyards linger on in my consciousness, so I ask my guides what their after-life beliefs are. Ikuko tells me that the Japanese are born Shintoists—newborns are taken to a *jinja*, but they die Buddhists—the dead are taken to temples. Shintoism believes in *kami*, the spirits that occupy everything, including inanimate objects. If you've read about or follow the KonMari method of tidying up, you will know the kind of respect that the Japanese grant their possessions. "But the *kami* like purity and cleanliness. And death is impure in this belief system," says Ikuko. So when Buddhism touched these shores in the sixth century and proclaimed that there was life after death, the locals embraced the religion. Shintoism doesn't suffer from the insecurities common in some other religions, and hence, the locals remain free to practise both faiths in a single lifetime. While they largely practise Shintoism, in death they turn to Buddhism for the promise of rebirth. This brings us to the graveyards.

The Japanese originally used to bury their dead, and the practice of cremation for purification was brought in by Buddhism. But it served a practical purpose too—full-body burials took up too much real estate. Today, post cremation, important bones from the throat and thigh are picked from the ashes and placed in urns, which are buried underneath gravestones in these cemeteries.

As we go higher and higher up to Kiroro, we're flanked by creaking birches, their joints clogged by snow, and lively green Japanese larches, whose flatter branches avert accretion. The ski resort itself, with a peak altitude of 1,180 metres, has seen three metres of snow on the day of our visit. Compared to its record of 20 metres, however,



it's a slow day. The mercury plays tricks with us. In the 'higher' range of zero to –1° Celsius, the ice is turning on the roads, which have lost traction. Struggling and swerving, but never swearing, our chauffeur laments the "warm day." I feel torn between the desire for warmth and the hope of avoiding a crash down the cliffside.

At Kiroro Resort, brave kids practise balancing on little skis in a cordoned-off 'Snow Lab', while adept adults glide down a steep slope towards us at Samurai speeds. We try the snow raft

Japanese schools teach skills relevant to the region—inland kids learn to ski while coastal kids learn swimming.









Clockwise from top left: The port town of Otaru attracts visitors with its galleries, museums, and shopping avenues; the Kiroro Resort is an alpine-style skiing resort with plenty of attractions for snow enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels; the Ice Bar at Kiroro; a *jingisukan* meal of meat and vegetables being prepared at Sapporo Beer Garden alongside a serving of Sapporo draft beer.


握









Clockwise from extreme left: Vegetable sushi at Otaru Nihonbashi; people gather by Otaru Canal, once the lifeline of trade; a red panda snacks at the Asahiyama Zoo; the march of penguins happens twice a day at the zoo.

experience, one of the many activities on offer. After a snowmobile has hauled our raft through a snow circuit with the wildest drifts possible, I inspect my glove to make sure none of my fingers have fallen to hypothermia. With enough chill in my bones I give the resort's Ice Bar a skip and take to the Snow Park, where kids struggle to fashion snowballs out of the powder snow. Following the lead of a five-year-old, I haul a snow tube to the top of a small hill and channel my inner Calvin (and Hobbes) on the ride down.

Given the region's weather patterns, skiing is an accepted pastime for locals. Sapporo has 10 avenues within an hour's radius. People ski and snowboard to while away their evenings. In fact, kids strap on their first skis when they're as young as three or four. I took longer to ride my four-wheeled bike! Our local guide, Toshie, recalls that she learnt the art on a small hill on her school's playground. While the inland children learn to ski, the coastal kids learn to swim, chips in Ikuko, suggesting that she isn't bereft of special skills. It's a refreshing policy—schools teaching kids skills pertaining to their geography.

Our second stop in Hokkaido is Otaru, a port town that lies nearly an hour northwest of Sapporo on Ishikari Bay. What was once a bustling centre of trade with Russia and China is now a tourist town. The central canal area flanked by stone and brick buildings, which were built for business in the early 20th century, now serves as a cornucopia of selfie spots for tourists—domestic and international. Cafes, museums, and souvenir shops are generously scattered on both sides of smaller canals that once aided last-mile transport of goods from the harbour. After a hearty meal of sushi at the three-decade-old Otaru Nihonbashi, which uses locally caught fish, I take a stroll on what was once called the "Wall Street of Hokkaido." A tourist favourite, the street is filled with shops selling miniature glass models, jewellery, music boxes, and matcha sweets—just a few of the things Otaru is famous for. The walk ends at the Le TAO bakery (*letao.jp/global/en*), with its many sweet temptations. Hokkaido is famous for producing some of the best milk in the world, resulting in unparalleled dairy products. This inevitably leads to delicious cream-based desserts at shops like Le TAO. Through my tour, I will lose count of the numerous cream buns, cheesecakes, cream puffs, and white chocolate-filled *langue de chat* (baked white cookie) picked up off departmental-store shelves.

Our final stop in Hokkaido is the Asahiyama Zoo (*city.asahikawa.hokkaido.jp/asahiyamazoo*), where a pre-scheduled penguin march steals the show for most visitors, age no bar. The zoo offers rare glimpses of winter creatures like the Arctic fox, polar bear, snowy owl, wolf, red fox, snow monkey, Japanese crane, Pallas's cat, and the Hokkaido sika deer that forms one half of Kyun Chan (the island's tourism mascot). Somewhere, a weather marker casually displays −9.8° Celsius. Each creature in the zoo has its own way of adapting to the freezing conditions. The snow monkeys huddle together in twos and threes. The Pallas's cat has grown its hair longer to become a rotund ball of fur. And I tremble beneath three layers of wool and down feathers.

While I started my Hokkaido tour with cold feet, figuratively and literally, the region sprang surprises that a tropical paradise could never have. I came back with lessons in woollen-layering, postcards of a Narnia-*esque* winterscape, and a renewed love for cream and cheese goodies. ×

OTHER DETAILS

GETTING THERE
Many airlines, including **Air India** (*airindia.in*) and **Cathay Pacific** (*cathaypacific.com*), operate flights to Sapporo's New Chitose Airport. Otaru is around 45 minutes away, while Asahiyama Zoo is a three-hour drive.

STAY
Keio Plaza Hotel Sapporo: Five minutes away from Sapporo station, this four-star property is located in the heart of town and offers a variety of rooms and suites across its 21 floors, the topmost being the most luxurious. *Standard Single Room from ₹17,384 per night; keioplaza-sapporo.co.jp*

Kiroro Resort: There are two Marriott International branded hotels here, **The Kiroro, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel, Hokkaido**, and **Sheraton Hokkaido Kiroro Resort**. Both the properties are endowed with great views, with the latter being closer to all the skiing action. *kiroro.co.jp*

THE *Perfect* HOLIDAY

WITH THE AWARD-WINNING **RESORTS WORLD™ SENTOSA SINGAPORE** AS OUR PLAYGROUND AND ACTOR **RAKUL PREET SINGH** LOOKING LIKE THE PROVERBIAL DREAM GIRL, *TRAVEL+LEISURE INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA'S* JUNE COVER SHOOT TURNED OUT TO BE A LA-LA LAND LARK.

BY RASHIMA NAGPAL

PHOTOGRAPHER
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PRODUCER
VIVEK PAREEK

LOCATION
RESORTS WORLD™ SENTOSA SINGAPORE

The S.E.A. Aquarium is one of the world's largest and home to over 1,00,000 marine animals of over 1,000 species.

On her: Top, ₹2,290, and skirt, ₹2,790, **Zara**.

One can easily spend half a day soaking in the delights of Adventure Cove Waterpark.

On her: Swimsuit, ₹7,190, **KAI Resortwear.**

Over the last one year,

we have shot our covers at a wide range of locations—from exotic lands like Israel to iconic cities like New York and Paris.

But when I learnt that the cover for our annual Asia issue would be shot at the glorious **Resorts World™ Sentosa Singapore**, I knew this time would involve an entirely different kind of fun.

At India's Best Awards 2018 organised by this publication, Resorts World Sentosa won the title of Best Integrated Resort, the same year Singapore was voted the Best Family Destination. Meanwhile, at the TTG Travel Awards which recognise the best in Asia Pacific's travel industry, the resort has been winning top honours in the category of Best Integrated Resort for eight consecutive years since 2011. Be it couples on honeymoon or families of any size, a variety of visitors can be found having truckloads of fun at any given time of the year here. That is the best thing about an integrated resort, and specifically, about Resorts World Sentosa—it comes with dozens of different experiences for all moods and ages. Located on Sentosa Island, this iconic family destination is home to **Universal Studios Singapore™** (winner of the Best Amusement Park at India's Best Awards 2018), the larger-than-life **S.E.A. Aquarium™**, plenty of elegant hotels and restaurants, a fun waterpark, quaint promenades, a wellness sanctuary, world-class entertainment, and much more. What gives Resorts World Sentosa brownie points among foreign tourists is the fact that it follows English as its primary language as opposed to its counterparts elsewhere in the continent.

On the day of the shoot, after snoozing through most of the flight, I was happy to be driving to my destination with a fresh mind. I had just begun to make sense of the Singapore cityscape when the car took a sharp left onto a bridge that seemed to lead to a different world altogether. I slid the window down to listen to the sound of water gushing beneath us, gaze at the European street lamps flanking the road, and squint at what looked like a castle craning its neck in the distance. The air smelled of dreams and cotton candy.

As soon as I entered the world of Resorts World Sentosa, I knew that picking a few spots on this massive dreamland and capturing its essence was going to be a challenging task.

EXPERIENCES

After witnessing the kind of energy the theme park hosts, it's safe to say that Universal Studios Singapore is the beating heart of the integrated resort. No matter how young or old you are, walking through its gates gives you an adrenaline rush. It houses seven zones with themes like **Hollywood**, **New York**, **Sci Fi City**, **Ancient Egypt**, **The Lost World**, **Madagascar**, and **Far Far Away** spread over 20 hectares. In this spectacular setting, you can experience a riot of thrilling rides, entertainment shows, and a host of other attractions.

If Universal Studios Singapore triggers an adrenaline rush, then the S.E.A. Aquarium offers a surreal sense of calm. One of the world's largest aquariums with over 1,00,000 marine animals representing 1,000 species, it serves as an insightful lesson for any underwater enthusiast and a wonderland for the uninitiated. While a guided tour of its 50 habitats—from the **Open Ocean Habitat** to the **Coral Garden**—is bewitching on its own, interactive conservation programmes and close-up encounters with the fish are also on offer for those keen on immersive experiences.

Water babies will want to spend a generous amount of time at the **Adventure Cove Waterpark™**. Its exciting offerings include the **Adventure River**, which takes you through a tropical jungle and a mystical grotto. The waterpark also offers an opportunity to engage closely and carefully with marine life—imagine snorkelling with 20,000 fish in **Rainbow Reef**.

With its engaging exhibits, shipwreck artefacts, life-size ship replicas, and a wide range of educational programmes, **The Maritime Experiential Museum™** is a walk back in time. It takes you through Asia's rich maritime history, with tales of seafarers and the trade route between Asia and the Middle East. The museum houses a total of 15 unique galleries that feature state-of-the-art visual projections, multimedia shows, interactive exhibits, and plenty of informative displays.

Meanwhile, at the **Dolphin Island™**, one can rendezvous with the friendliest creatures of the sea, while also learning about their behaviour and conservation. The attraction is home to more than 20 Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins. The dolphin interaction programmes range from edge-of-the-lagoon and shallow water interactions, suitable for kids, to



The seven themed zones at Universal Studios Singapore surround a lagoon.

On her: Outfit, ₹9,000, **G-Star Raw**.



Universal Studios Singapore gives you the chance to meet and greet your favourite Transformers.

On her: Blazer, price on request, **Shift by Nimish Shah**; jeans, ₹4,000, **Mango**; bustier, price on request, **Esse**; fanny pack, ₹2,000, **ASOS**; shoes, stylist's own.



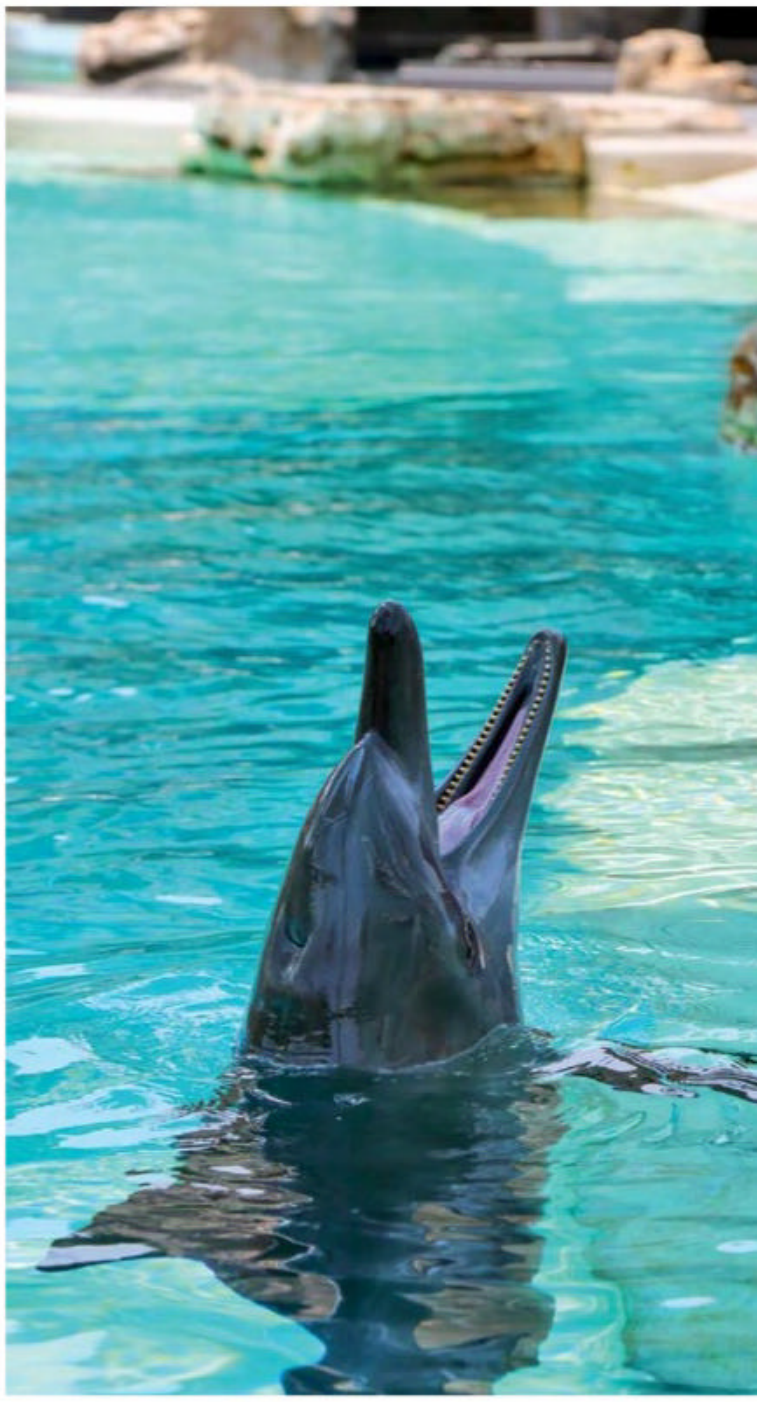
The Universal Studios globe at the entry of the theme park is an iconic spot for photographs.

On her: Outfit, price on request, **Siddhartha Bansal**; shoes, stylist's own.

The Maritime Experiential Museum takes you on a journey of the legendary maritime silk route.

On her: Outfit, price on request, **House of Sohn**.



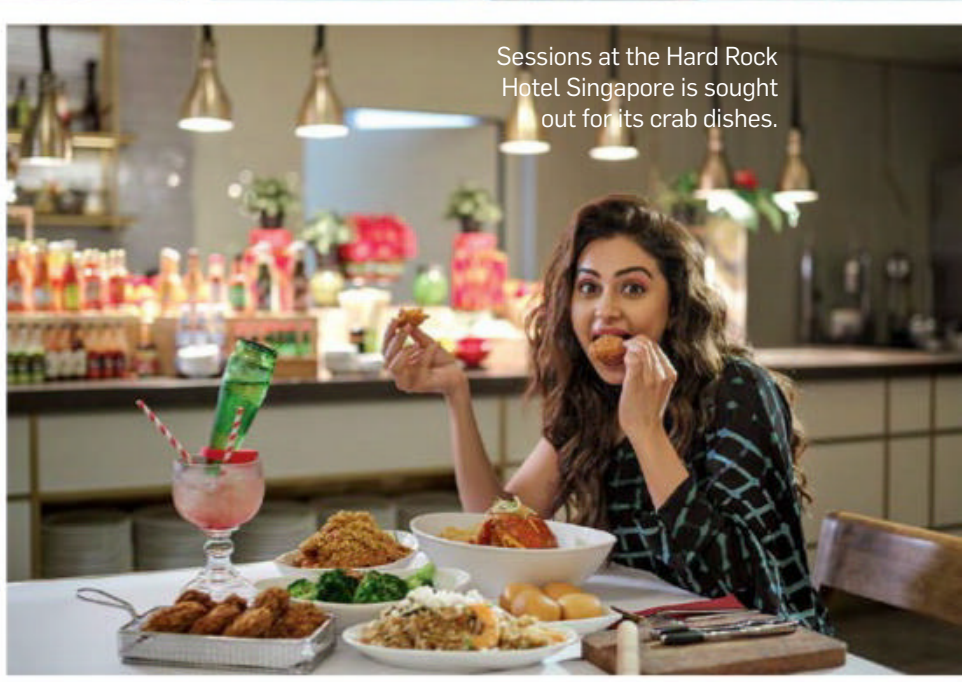


The Ocean Suites give guests a private window into the Open Ocean Habitat of the S.E.A. Aquarium.

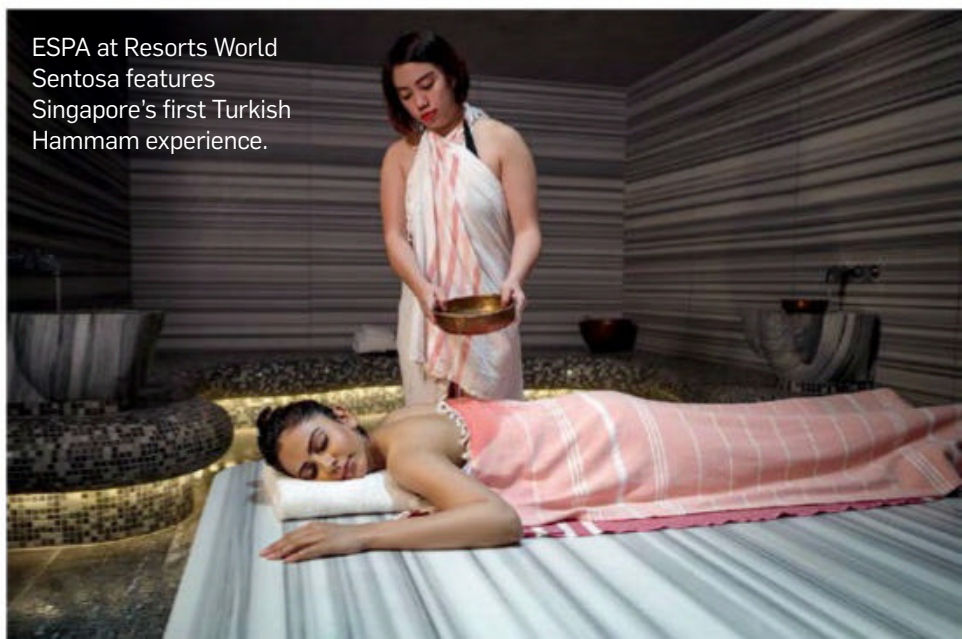
On her: Outfit, price on request, **Vedika M**; shoes, ₹2,595, **New Look**.

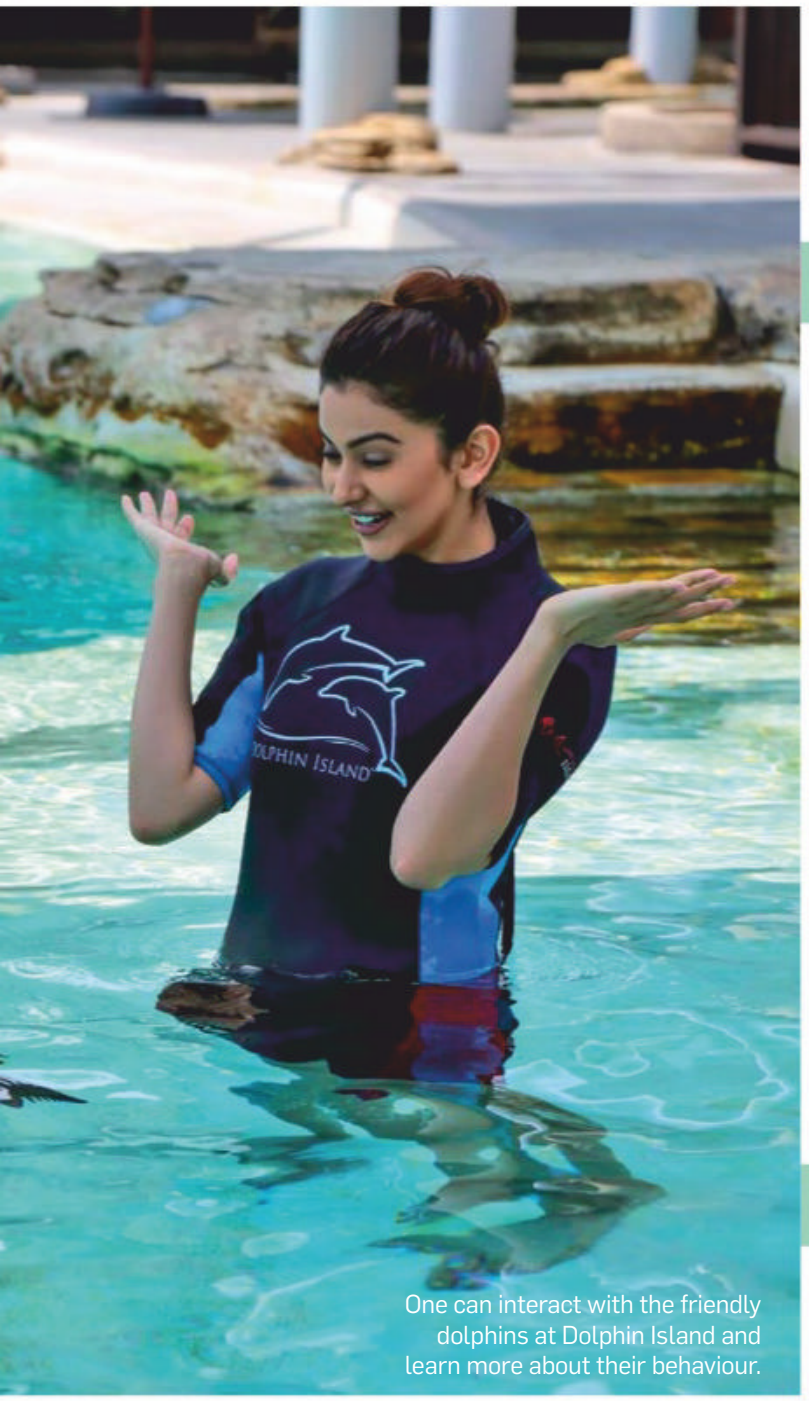


Sessions at the Hard Rock Hotel Singapore is sought out for its crab dishes.



ESPA at Resorts World Sentosa features Singapore's first Turkish Hammam experience.





One can interact with the friendly dolphins at Dolphin Island and learn more about their behaviour.

adventurous sessions in deeper water. During all these interactions, you also learn intriguing facts about dolphin behaviour from the trainers, who provide round-the-clock care and stimulation for these mammals.

STAYS

To get the most out of your visit to Resorts World Sentosa, it is recommended that you stay at one of the six hotels within its premises. The exceptional monorail and shuttle services here make moving around a breeze.

As we checked in at **Hotel Michael™**, its American design aesthetic was instantly evident. But the hotel's most attractive feature is its convenient location. In between location recces and shoot personnel co-ordination, I found the hotel's strategic location—close to most of the resort's offerings—to be a blessing. Another great option in terms of accessibility is the **Festive Hotel™**, perched adjacent to Hotel Michael. Always home to a vibrant mood, it impresses with its variety of rooms with options for loft beds and availability of cribs, making it ideal for families with kids.

Seekers of luxury and extraordinary experiences will find delight in the **Ocean Suites** of Resorts World Sentosa. With 11 of these two-storey townhouses, the resort offers a personalised window into the Open Ocean Habitat at the S.E.A. Aquarium. Imagine a 24-hour live display of marine life from the comfort of your bed—that's what makes the Ocean Suites so hard to get or forget. Further in the realm of exclusivity, the resort offers two **TreeTop Lofts™**, Angsana and Tembusu. Perched high in the middle of the woods, with minimal and elegant furnishing, these are renditions of the modern-day treehouse.

DINING

Sprinkled all across the resort are dining venues that cater to your hunger pangs as you sprint from one attraction to another. From round-the-clock budget eateries and cuisine-oriented restaurants to fine-casual dining venues where the food is curated by Michelin-star chefs, there's something here for every mood and pocket. Head to **Oasis Spice Café** at Universal Studios Singapore, if it's home-style Indian food that you yearn for. **Sessions** at the **Hard Rock® Hotel Singapore** is popular for its flavourful Singapore-style crabs and other local delicacies, and serves as a great place to grab a nice cuppa and cake. The **Malaysian Food Street** offers a taste of nostalgia with an array of local, traditional flavours from Southeast Asia in a rustic setup, done up with wooden benches and tables. The **Ocean Restaurant**, as the name suggests, features a huge floor-to-ceiling glass wall that acts a window to the marine life at S.E.A. Aquarium. Then there is **Syun**, which impresses with its take on modern Japanese cuisine; **Fratelli Trattoria**, which is a dinner-service-only trattoria featuring fine Lombardy-inspired specialities; and **Osia Steak and Seafood Grill**, which serves the best of Australian barbeque grilled to smoky perfection in a stone hearth oven, among others.

WELLNESS

The perfect thing to do after an eventful day is a rejuvenating spa treatment. Enter **ESPA at Resorts World Sentosa**. Think landscaped gardens, 24 multi-functional treatment rooms—all of which come with a balcony view of the reflection pool or the forest—a Turkish hammam, private male and female gardens featuring vitality pools, air and water massage jets, plunge pools, tropical gardens featuring traditional Japanese-style onsen, 18 sleeping pods with integrated music, suspended relaxation swing chairs, plenty of loungers, a state-of-the-art gym, a chic, hexagonal Zen Studio, and more. This is no ordinary spa.

A few days at Resorts World Sentosa, spent mostly working to capture its many attractions and our cover girl's effortless charm, made me want to stay forever. But then, reality beckoned. As it always does.

DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Air India *(airindia.in)* and **Singapore Airlines** *(singaporeair.com)* operate direct flights from major Indian metro cities to Singapore. Resorts World Sentosa Singapore is a 25-kilometre drive from the award-winning Singapore Changi Airport.

STAY

The integrated resort's six accommodation options cater to different requirements and preferences. You could book yourself the one-bedroom **Beach Villa** *(doubles from ₹66,312)* for a lavish tropical-themed stay, or a room at the **Festive Hotel** *(doubles from ₹20,413)* to be in the heart of activity, or one of the **Ocean Suites** *(doubles from ₹1,21,249)* for a truly exquisite experience.

ATTRACTIONS

The resort offers world-class attractions, including **Universal Studios Singapore**, **S.E.A. Aquarium**, **Adventure Cove Waterpark**, and a variety of shows. Check out the official website for the schedule of non-ticketed public attractions such as the **Crane Dance** and **Lake of Dreams**, and special deals and offers, when planning your visit. *rwsentosa.com/IN*

“There’s a timetable in my head”

WITH HER HEAD IN THE CLOUDS AND FEET ON THE GROUND, ACTOR **RAKUL PREET SINGH** HAS CARVED A NICHE FOR HERSELF IN THE INDIAN FILM INDUSTRY—AND IT’S JUST THE BEGINNING. *RASHIMA NAGPAL* GETS TO KNOW HER WHILE SHE FROLICS AROUND AT **RESORTS WORLD™ SENTOSA SINGAPORE**.

What comes to your mind when I say ‘first travel memory’?
Being an army kid, moving from one place to another, constantly packing and unpacking suitcases throughout my childhood is all I can think of.

What kind of a traveller are you?
I’m an extremely well-planned kind of traveller. I consider all kinds of possibilities and prepare myself accordingly.

Your all-time favourite destination?
I’m generally a people-over-place kind of person, so any destination with the right set of people works for me. But London is a city that I make sure I visit at least once a year. Being a healthy eater, I love the variety of clean food there, other than the shopping options, of course.

A destination on your bucket-list?
Ibiza has been on my mind for the last two years. It seems like one of the coolest party places, and I want to explore that. It will probably happen this year.

Three things you never travel without?
I am not a light traveller. Among a hoard of things, my must-haves are a pair of workout clothes and shoes (even if it’s a two-day trip), my make-up kit, and a portable speaker.

How was your experience at Resorts World™ Sentosa Singapore?
I think it’s a very fulfilling destination, especially for a family. There’s enough to do for everybody.

RAKUL’S FAVOURITES

City
London

Book
Power of Now

Travel Companion
Her mother

What is your idea of a perfect holiday?
Trying different kinds of food, and just chilling without a worry—with some very good company.

Your favourite travel companion?
While travelling for shoots, my mom is my favourite companion, because that’s really when we get to spend some quality time.

Which was the character you most enjoyed playing?
It has to be the one from my latest release, the one that I’m getting most appreciation for at the moment: Aisha from *De De Pyaar De*.

How do you like to spend your day when you’re not shooting?
It rarely happens, but when it does, I like to play golf, followed by a big brunch with my friends, then a movie, and ultimately, just hanging out with them in the evening.

Words that describe you best?
Hyperactive—like [there’s] a timetable in my head—and disciplined.

Somebody you look up to for inspiration?
There are many, but my dad is the most knowledgeable person I know and my biggest source of inspiration.

If you could be transported somewhere in the blink of an eye, where would you want to be?
I would want my Ibiza holiday to happen right away.

The sea jellies exhibit at S.E.A. Aquarium is not just insightful, but also an otherworldly backdrop for pictures.

On her: Top, ₹2,290, and skirt, ₹2,790, **Zara**; earrings, ₹2,950, **Aquamarine**.

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INTERNATIONAL SHOPPING GUIDE

GERMANY | USA | **THAILAND** | ABU DHABI | **UK** | FRANCE | **ITALY**
JAPAN | **DUBAI** | CHINA | **MALAYSIA** | AIRPORT DUTY FREE **& MORE...**





A WORLD OF SHOPPING

From the ginormous malls of Dubai and USA to the best duty-free shopping at some of the largest airports in the world, we give you a definitive guide to the most frenzying shopping experiences around the globe.

By Ishani Singh





From top: An assortment of rings from Macy's jewellery department; a clothing display at Macy's; the impressive façade of Mall of America.

WHERE TO SHOP

DESTINATIONS

Innumerable designer and high-street brands, huge discounts, dining options, and entertainment galore define these shoppers' delights.

MACY'S INC, USA

One of USA's top-ranking retailers, Macy's plays host to a myriad stores, events, interesting experiences, lavish restaurants, special savings opportunities, and visitor services. With over 870 stores, Macy's has outlets in 43 states, and has three widely recognised retail brands—Macy's, Bloomingdale's, and Bluemercury—besides its online portals. Find the latest fashion trends at Bloomingdale's, enjoy a glass of wine at The Wine Bar, or grab your favourite dessert at Boudin Sourdough Bakery & Café. Adding to its customer-friendly approach are the live music in several stores, surprise treats for customers to relish, sketches and chronicles that serve as an inspiration. *visitmacysusa.com*

MALL OF AMERICA, USA

Located in the suburbs of Minnesota, this 25-year-old destination is a hotspot for shopping, adventure, entertainment, and dining. The largest mall in USA, it is home to over 520 stores and 60 restaurants, and accommodates a seven-acre indoor theme park along with a 300-foot-long aquarium. Nickelodeon Universe features roller coasters, a tower-drop-ride in the centre of the park, and numerous other rides and attractions. Visitors can catch sight of exotic marine life at Sea Life Minnesota Aquarium, which has over 4,500 sea creatures and offers scuba diving and snorkelling. Family attractions also include the Crayola Experience and FlyOver America. From tax-free high-end brands to well-known stores like Macy's, Nordstrom, Swarovski, Vera Bradly, and Michael Kors, food options like Cedar + Stone, and Cantina Laredo and Rick Bronson's House of Comedy for guaranteed laughs, the mall is

FROM TOP: MACY'S; SHUTTERSTOCK; DOUGLAS SACHA/GETTYIMAGES

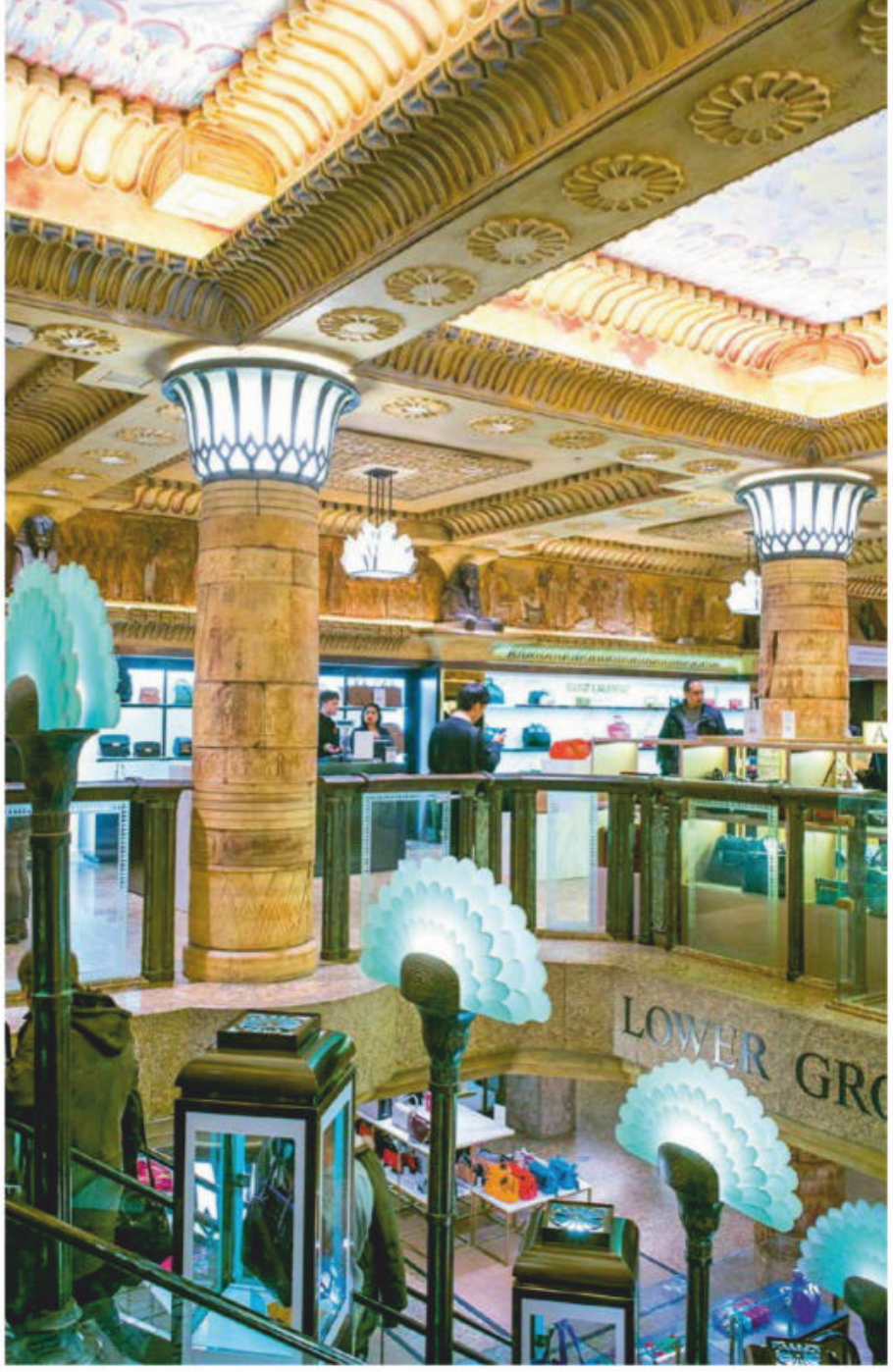
an absolute treat for a weekend outing. *mallofamerica.com*

HARRODS, UK

Offering a wide range that includes luxury apparel, stuffed toys, homeware, shoes, souvenirs, beauty products, gourmet grocery, and gifts, Harrods is a booming shopping destination in Knightsbridge, London. For over 160 years, the brand has been committed to presenting premium food, fashion, and technology. Here, the luxury womenswear department, Superbrands, has 17 boutiques featuring brands like Valentino, Prada, and Dior; Salon du Parfums houses some of the best designer fragrances; the fine jewellery department has popular labels such as Tiffany and Cartier; and there are 27 restaurants, including Chai Wu, The Brompton Deli, and The Georgian. There's also a Gift Concierge for gifting options and the Urban Retreat Spa, which offers rejuvenating hair and body treatments. *harrods.com*

THE DUBAI MALL, UAE

Home to the Dubai Shopping Festival, this mall redefines grandeur with more than 200 luxury brands and an array of lavish entertainment and dining options. It is rightfully the world's second largest mall with its 250-room luxury hotel, 22 cinema screens, and over 120 restaurants and cafes. Apart from being the most visited shopping and leisure destination, it is also home to the world's largest aquarium and OLED screen. It is the perfect romping ground for shopaholics with over 1,300 retail outlets, including Galeries Lafayette and Bloomingdale's, and over 200 food and beverage outlets! *thedubaimall.com*





CLockwise from left: The old and the new come together to give you a unique shopping experience at Harrods; the Loewe x Paula's Ibiza Patchwork Denim Jacket (Harrods); the Sicily bag by Dolce & Gabbana (Harrods); inside vibrant Bloomingdale's; patent opyum sandals by Saint Laurent (Harrods).







CLOCKWISE: WALTER BIBIKOW/GETYIMAGES; COURTESY OF HARRODS (2); ATLANTIDE PHOTOTRAVEL/GETYIMAGES; COURTESY OF HARRODS





Clockwise from left: Inside ICONSIAM Bangkok; a wide range of clothing for men is on offer at de Bijenkorf; the luxurious interiors of de Bijenkorf in Amsterdam; Wandler's Lina leather ankle boots (de Bijenkorf).

ICONSIAM BANGKOK, THAILAND

This high-end shopping mall is an all-in-one retail destination that offers an abundance of shopping, leisure, and dining options at impressive prices. With 500 shops and 100 restaurants from more than 30 countries, it is a shopper's paradise in the Thai capital. The mall features an indoor floating market, an art gallery, and an exhibition space, all in a beautiful riverside location with beautiful views of Bangkok. Brands such as H&M and Uniqlo, and luxe labels like Dior and Louis Vuitton dominate the first three levels of the mall. Visitors can enjoy a quick snack or a gourmet meal at the wide range of restaurants that serve everything from Thai favourites to appetising desserts. *iconsiam.com*

DE BIJENKORF, AMSTERDAM

With its flagship store in Dam Square, de Bijenkorf is a chain of deluxe department stores in the Netherlands. In 1870, it opened its doors as a small shop in one of Amsterdam's oldest streets, and has now expanded to seven stores nationwide. The brand presents a variety of options, including designer labels such as Marc Jacobs, Missoni, and Diane von Furstenberg, luxury accessories, cosmetics, dinnerware, souvenirs, beverages, desserts, and gifts. Plus, the online segment offers great discounts through the year. *debijenkorf.nl*





CLOCKWISE: TRAVELSTOCK44/ALAMY; COURTESY OF DE BIJENKORF (3)



LA VALLÉE VILLAGE, PARIS

Since its grand opening in 2000, La Vallée Village has been catering to the fashion needs of the high-end shopper. The retail destination, located five minutes from Disneyland, evokes the rural splendour of the Ile-de-France region with its wayfared streets and overlapping buildings. It is a hub of over 110 boutiques and a gallery of international labels such as Gucci, Valentino, Prada, Jimmy Choo, Givenchy, and many more. It also features a gallery that exhibits fashion-related art. The village operates a regular shuttle service to and from the Disney hotels, and its direct Shopping Express Coach runs daily from central Paris, only 40 minutes away. *thebicestervillageshopping collection.com*

ISETAN THE JAPAN STORE

A chronicler of authentic Japanese culture, ISETAN is based in Tokyo and has branches spread across Japan and Southeast Asia. The department store has garnered the attention of fashionistas all over the world with its wide range of Japanese brands such as Tela, Anna Quan, and alice McCALL, along with dining options like Nayuta Chocolatasia and Yakitori Robata-Yaki Touan. You can also shop for exquisite handmade watches here at Hanamokko and experience head-to-toe beauty treatments at the salon, UKA x 76STYLE—everything with a blend of Japanese refinement. *isetankl.com.my*





Clockwise from right: A clothing display at ISETAN The Japan Store; pick from the wide variety of bags available at La Vallée Village, Paris; accessory shopping at La Vallée Village.

FROM TOP: DIRECTPHOTO COLLECTION/ALAMY; AFLO CO. LTD./ALAMY; COURTESY OF THE BICESTER VILLAGE SHOPPING COLLECTION



Clockwise from here: The Tax Free Texas experience; Aquazzura's Purple Vertigo (The Mall Firenze); a shopper's haven, The Mall Firence in Italy; shop without a woe with Tax Free Texas' offers.

TAX FREE TEXAS, USA

The city's largest sales tax refund service, Tax Free Texas offers Texas's sales tax refund on over 6,000 world-class partner brands such as Gucci, Harry Winston, Jimmy Choo, Louis Vuitton, Macy's, Michael Kors, and many more. It has 17 refund stores at which customers can receive instant cash refunds in lieu of their purchases by presenting their passports and purchase receipts, along with the unused item purchased within 30 days of departure from Texas. Customers can also register online for a quick and easy processing of their items. *taxfreetexas.com*

THE MALL FIRENZE, ITALY

A luxury outlet, The Mall Firenze offers products from the world's best designers at discounted prices. Situated in the paradisal Tuscan countryside, it has luxury labels such as Armani, Fendi, Gucci, Jimmy Choo, Tod's, and Versace at incredible prices, housed in an elegant architectural space. Shoppers can find bags, clothes, and accessories at Prada, which has a separate store near the shopping centre. To reach The Mall, visitors can take the shuttle service that departs every 30 minutes from the Santa Maria Novella railway station in Florence. *themall.it*







CLOCKWISE: COURTESY OF TAX FREE TEXAS; COURTESY OF THE MALL (2); COURTESY OF TAX FREE TEXAS

From here: OUTLETCITY METZINGEN, Germany's premiere shopping destination; a large number of luxury designers offer their wares at unimaginable prices at OUTLETCITY METZINGEN.

OUTLETCITY METZINGEN

Award-winning architecture and a wide range of brands, restaurants, and leisure activities come together at OUTLETCITY METZINGEN, Europe's best ranked outlet, to provide an unmatched shopping experience. Located in southwest Germany in the small town of Metzingen, hometown of Hugo Boss, the shopping destination offers a large number of luxury designer and lifestyle brands in flagship outlet stores at attractive prices. In fact, here, international brands such as Prada, Bottega Veneta, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Tory Burch, Calvin Klein, and Tommy Hilfiger offer a great product selection with up to 70 per cent off throughout the year!

In addition to premium brands, there are numerous tempting leisure activities for the family. It is not only lower-priced designer fashion that makes OUTLETCITY METZINGEN appealing. With fun and games at the Kids Camp, OUTLETCITY METZINGEN's childcare makes sure even the little ones find everything their hearts desire.

New in: The expansion of OUTLETCITY METZINGEN is in full swing. The first phase of the extensive project was finalised in April. Thirteen renowned brands including Versace, Philipp Plein, Karl Lagerfeld, Breitling, Patricia Pepe, and many more, opened flagship outlet stores.

The second phase will be finalised in the beginning of October with another 13 stores, including the world's largest Hugo Boss flagship outlet store, opening. In total, OUTLETCITY METZINGEN will welcome and pamper their guests on 650,000 square feet with a one of a kind shopping and service experience.
outletcity.com



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF OUTLET CITY (2)



WHERE TO SHOP

DUTY FREE

Getting stuck at airports between flights is no longer a pain, thanks to these tax-free shopping paradises.



Shop till you drop at Istanbul Airport Duty Free.



Find everything under the sun at Dubai Duty Free

DUBAI DUTY FREE

The Dubai Duty Free company offers duty-free operations at the Dubai International Airport and Al Maktoum International Airport. The retail giant has grown to become one of the largest travel retail operators in the world since it opened in December 1983. It offers goods such as cigarettes, cosmetics, handbags, leather goods, and liquor, that are free of import duties and sales taxes. The shopping experience has bagged over 650 awards including the Frontier Award for 'Airport Retailer of the Year'. Travellers can also buy unlimited 'Win this Luxury Car' tickets for the Dubai duty-free Finest Surprise Car raffle at the cost of Dh500 each to stand a chance to win a Porsche or Bentley. *dubaidutyfree.com*

ISTANBUL AIRPORT DUTY FREE

Opened in 2000, the Atü Duty Free at Istanbul Atatürk Airport provides a diversity of products from international brands and luxurious labels. Travellers can purchase perfumes, cosmetics, eatables, alcohol, cigarettes, and confectionary products at this duty-free location. It also features Turkish speciality concept stores, the Old Bazaar, where passengers shop for local products such as *lokum*, baklava, dried nuts, textiles, and souvenirs. The second phase of the development of the duty free will see brands such as Bottega Veneta, Bulgari, Celine, Emporio Armani, and Fendi. *atu.com*

DELHI DUTY FREE

Terminal 3 of the Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport houses Delhi Duty Free. Launched in 2010, it is India's largest retail space with over 1,000 brands offering 43,000 products at tax-free rates. Travellers can shop for an array of items like apparel, liquor, travel accessories, electronics, beauty and wellness products, fashion and luxury accessories, souvenirs, and other convenience items. It also offers special pack sizes that are not available in the regular marketplace for certain brands. You can also purchase gift cards and avail attractive



Indian designer brands abound at Delhi Duty Free.

FROM TOP: MINEMERO/GETTYIMAGES; IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK



discounts later while you're shopping at the stores. Besides, customer feedback and refund management are provided by retailers to enhance service standards. *delhidutyfree.co.in*

MUMBAI DUTY FREE

Designed for international travellers and committed to their preferences, this retailer at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport is the one-stop-shop to take advantage of tax-free shopping. It caters to varying customer profiles and economic criteria with outlets of international labels offering a wide assortment of imported cigarettes, cigars, confectionary items available in various packaging options, traditional and classic gift products, cosmetics and fragrance brands like Bulgari, Chanel, Dior, and Hugo Boss, along with duty-free savings on a selection of over a 100 liquor brands. Travellers can also visit Akashi or MyEast, which present exquisite Indian fabrics, handcrafted pashmina scarves, and traditional jewellery. *mumbaidutyfree.net*

CHANGI AIRPORT DUTY FREE, SINGAPORE

Present your ticket and purchase a wide range of items from the duty free section at Changi Airport. Travellers can choose from international brands from over 350 retail stores offering a diverse mix of duty-free items. There is a wide selection of the world's most premium liquor available at DFS Wines and Spirits, with popular names like Johnny Walker Red Label Scotch, Hennessy XO Grande Champagne, and Camus L'Elegant on the list. THE SHILLA Duty Free is famous for Asia Pacific's largest range of cosmetics, perfumes, and skincare products with over 140 international brands like Chanel, Dior, and La Praire to choose from and their in-house spa treatments to give a refreshing touch to your journey ahead. You can also shop online for duty free items. *ishopchangi.com*

DFS

The world's leading luxury retailer, Duty Free Shopping is the source of the finest fashion accessories, watches and jewellery, food, gift items, wine, spirits, and more. It offers tax-free shopping at leading international airports and downtown shopping destinations with over 700 designer brands like Givenchy, Fendi, Rado, and Burberry through 420 boutiques spread across four continents. DFS

From above: The artistic Mumbai Duty Free; luxury brands galore at Changi Airport Duty Free; A DFS display.





FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; GRANT ROONEY/ALAMY; COURTESY OF DFS







Clockwise from above: Heathrow Duty Free is a shopper's delight; East meets West at Abu Dhabi Duty Free; find the lowest prices in Asia at Kuala Lumpur Duty Free.

also has 20 downtown T Galleria locations, as well as affiliate and resort locations, and caters to over 160 million travellers annually. Visitors can avail loyalty points, exclusive promotions, and return or exchange their products even via email. They can also order products online and collect them from the store before they board their flight. *dfs.com*

KUALA LUMPUR DUTY FREE

Located at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, this duty-free retailer offers loads of goodies that are exempt from import, sales, or excise duties by Malaysia's customs department, making shopping here the cheapest in Southeast Asia. While waiting for their flights, travellers can shop from a wide selection of tobacco products, chocolates, alcohol, cosmetics, cameras, watches, beauty products, luggage, wine, and confectionary at attractive prices from brands like Kiehl's, M.A.C., Bobbi Brown, Shu Uemura, Benefit, and La Prairie. *klia.com.my*

ABU DHABI DUTY FREE

Set up in 1984, Abu Dhabi Duty Free manages the retail, food and beverage, and service operations within Abu Dhabi Airports, serving millions of travellers who arrive, depart, or transit through the airport annually. It offers a selection of best-selling cosmetics, skincare products, confectionary goods, perfumes, gold jewellery, and items from the middle eastern markets at incredibly low prices. Travellers can find an array of luxury boutiques and top-rated brands and enjoy a fulfilling shopping experience. They can also participate in the 'Spin and Win' promotion that offers prizes such as Duty Free vouchers or airline tickets to international destinations. a*ddf.ae*

HEATHROW DUTY FREE, UK

World Duty Free at London's Heathrow Airport offers the ultimate airport shopping experience. It features over 17,000 products ranging from a premium collection of cosmetics, confectionery, fragrances, fashion accessories, souvenirs, skincare products, food, toys, spirits, and sunglasses to quality cigars and cigarettes. Featured brands include world-class brands like Tiffany and Co., Cartier, Swarovski, and Gucci, among others. Travellers can also avail the reserve and collect option at stores and pick up their preferred products before boarding their flight. *boutique.heathrow.com*

CLOCKWISE: HEORSHE/ALAMY; GREG BALFOUR EVANS/ALAMY; IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY

THE T+L GUIDE TO SHOPPING IN Paris



Le Mont St. Michel's boutique in the Marais neighbourhood carries an array of Breton-stripe sweaters.

You've been to the Louvre, the Tuileries, and the Eiffel Tower. Now it's time to bring home some of the city's legendary chic. From the venerable *grands magasins* and flea markets to the newest purveyors of street style, our experts will lead you to that essential outfit or objet you won't find anywhere else.

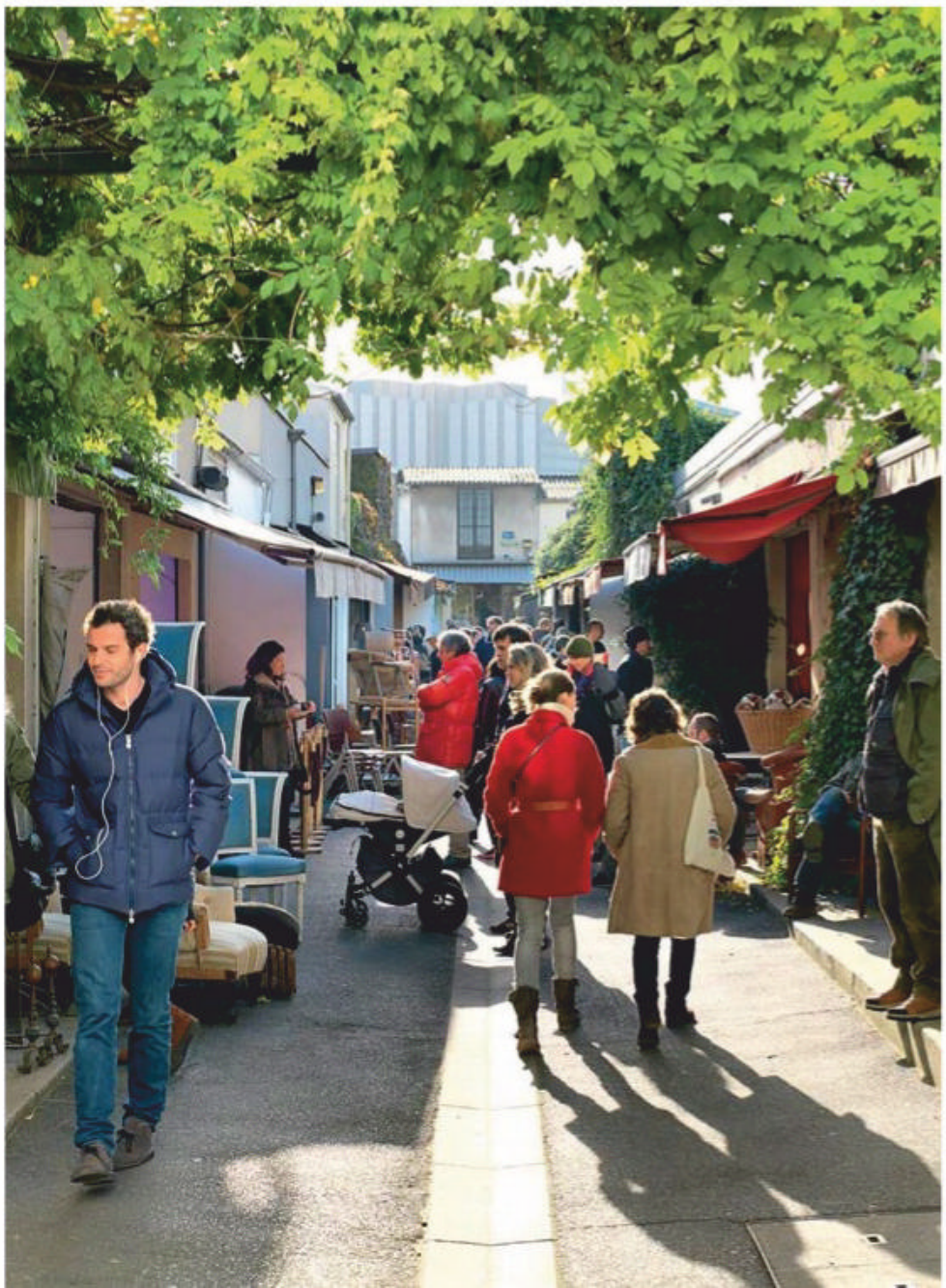
Photographs by Céline Clanet

THE ENTHUSIAST'S PARADISE

Paris lets you indulge your passions, no matter how out of the ordinary. Whether it's antique maps, exotic spices, or artful graphic novels you seek, you'll find it for sale here. *By Alexandra Marshall*

PEOPLE COME TO PARIS for all the usual reasons: to explore museums, stroll the banks of the Seine, nibble pastries, and haunt bistros. But according to the informal polls I've conducted with visiting friends over the dozen years I've lived in France's capital, above all else they come to shop. Who can blame them? Paris has been producing world-class design for centuries. Yes, many of the city's signature goods have become available outside France, reducing the urgency to buy them at the source. But this hasn't rendered the city's offerings any less desirable—it's just made it more of an adventure to sniff out the stuff you can't get elsewhere.

Commit yourself to going local, one-of-a-kind, eccentric, or nerdy—qualities that Paris has in spades. The flea markets are a natural first stop. While on the weekends connoisseurs with cash to burn go north to **Les Puces de St.-Ouen** *(marcheauxpuces-saintouen.com)*, where permanent stalls are filled with high-ticket antiques, stylish bargain hunters head in the opposite direction to **Les Puces de Vanves** *(pucesdevanves.fr)*, at the southern edge of the 14th Arrondissement. It's a proper Saturday and Sunday flea market with a far less intimidating degree of specialisation: a joyful jumble of transferware by French producers like Sarreguemines or Saint-Amand, fur coats, wartime maps, and stentorian oil portraits, all from sellers eager to clear off their tables by morning's end. On weekdays, go to the Ninth, where the basement level of the accessible, often quirky auction house **Drouot** *(9 Rue Drouot; drouot.com)* is loaded with antique medals, handbags, and enough wine to fell an army. These are less glamorous realms than beautifully curated boutiques like **Montaigne Market** *(18 Ave. Matignon; montaignemarket.com)*, in the Eighth, or the **Broken Arm** *(12 Rue Perrée; the-broken-arm.com)*, in the Marais. But no one back home will have anything you walk away from Drouot with.





From left: Les Puces de Saint-Ouen, one of the city's famous flea markets; vintage Louis Vuitton luggage at the market.

Paris is a hobbyist's dream. If you have a love of cooking or comics, you'll find more here than you ever could on Amazon. It helps if you speak French, although sales staff on the geekier ends of the shopping spectrum use so much jargon that even the fluent may need to just point. **E. Dehillerin** *(18-20 Rue Coquillière; edehillerin.fr)*, an exhaustive cooking supply store, displays only floor samples of its high-ticket wares, so if you want a copper pot so large it could fit a small child, you have no choice but to use sign language to request it. Reading French also helps if you want to take full advantage of the country's graphic novels, called *bandes dessinées* or *bédés*, but the artistry of Bastien Vivès's love stories, Riad Sattouf's memoirs, and Manu Larcenet's goofy odysseys have a pull beyond language. Good selections are at **Album** *(67 Blvd. St.-Germain; albumcomics.com)*, in the Latin Quarter, and **Opéra BD** *(2 Rue des Tournelles; operabd.com)*, in the Marais. You can simply follow your nose at **Épices Roellinger** *(51 bis Rue Ste.-Anne; epices-roellinger.com)*, the Second Arrondissement spice emporium of chef Olivier Roellinger, whose roasted cumin seeds, Madagascar vanilla, and buckwheat butter cookies are some of the easiest gifts to pack.

It would be a crime against the country to leave without Breton stripes, which the French really do wear, constantly. **Le Mont St. Michel** *(96 Rue Vieille-du-Temple; lemontsaintmichel.fr)* uses heirloom knitting techniques to fashion Wes Andersonesque separates for men and women, for sale at its Marais boutique. While you will pay a wee bit more there, it's worth it. But really, some of the best sailor shirts in town are at **Monoprix** *(multiple locations; monoprix.fr)*, the local equivalent of Target, where almost anyone can afford to bring back multiples.





From left: Sennelier art-supply store; linens embroidered by hand at Noël.

Traditions of Excellence

With their roots in earlier eras, these establishments don't break the mould—they made the mould. *By Joshua Levine*

ANY PARISIAN WHO HAS put brush to canvas has likely bought paints at **Sennelier** *(3 Quai Voltaire; magasin sennelier.net)*. Well, since 1887 anyway, which is when chemist and colourist Gustave Sennelier opened his shop just across from the Louvre. Former clients include Picasso, Cézanne, and Degas.

The word *chemisier*, or shirtmaker, was coined for Joseph-Christophe Charvet, who opened the world's first shirt store in 1838. **Charvet** *(28 Place Vendôme; charvet.com)* has made shirts for such notables as Baudelaire, Churchill, and Gary Cooper.

The Noël family began embroidering linen in 1883. New owners took over the house of **Noël** *(1 Ave. Pierre Premier de Serbie; noel-paris.com)* 110 years later, but the shop still draws on the 13,000 patterns in its archives for its exquisite collections.

The 150,000 woodblocks at **Zuber & Cie.**'s factory, in the Alsatian town of Rixheim, are classified as French historical monuments. The firm has been using them since 1797 to print panoramic landscapes—Brazilian jungles, Swiss mountains—on wallpaper. Stroll by the Paris showroom *(36 Rue Bonaparte; zuber.fr)* to pick up a roll or two.



THE INSIDER

LOLA BURNSTEIN RYKIEL

Owner of Le Chocolat Noir Public Relations

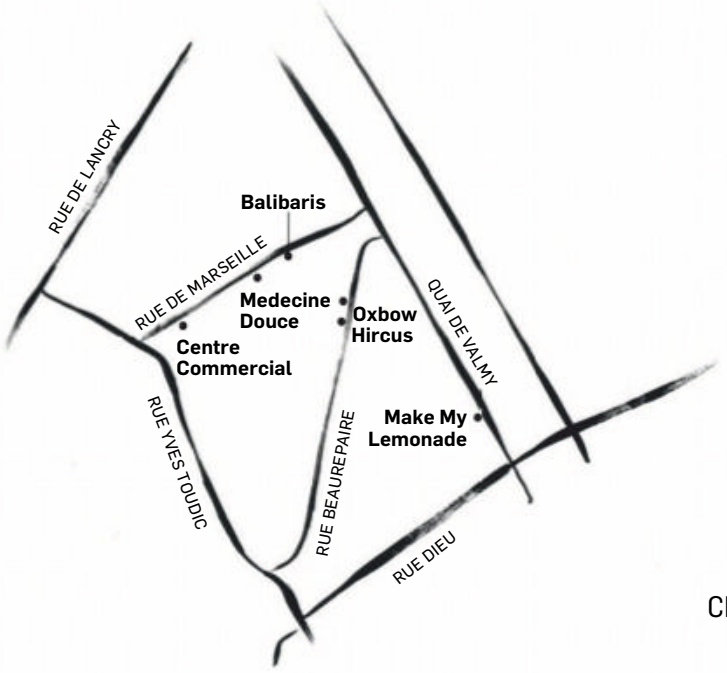
I GREW UP IN St.-Germain-des-Prés, where the flagship of my grandmother's clothing label, **Sonia Rykiel** *(175 Blvd. St.-Germain; soniarykiel.com)*, is located. The neighbourhood is still one of my favourite places to shop. One of my go-to spots is **Moss** *(22 Rue de Grenelle; 33-1-42-22-01-43)*, an under-the-radar shoe boutique that stocked brands like Golden Goose and Gianvito Rossi a decade before anyone else. **Sabbia Rosa** *(73 Rue des Saints-Pères; 33-1-45-48-88-37)* makes delicate, colourful undergarments in silk and lace. Three generations of women in my family have shopped for jewellery at the atelier of **Marie-Hélène de Taillac** *(8 Rue de Tournon; mariehelenedetaillac.com)*. I have a pink sapphire ring she designed that I adore. At **Pharmacie du Four Bonaparte** *(26 Rue du Four; 33-1-46-33-20-81)*, you can find French beauty staples from brands like Avène and Rogé Cavaillès at crazy low prices.

ILLUSTRATION BY MAY PARSEY

NEIGHBOURHOOD GUIDE

CANAL ST.-MARTIN

Small, independent stores have been opening all over this bohemian quarter, transforming it into a dynamic shopping destination. *By Lindsey Tramuta*



CENTRE COMMERCIAL
This multi-label boutique, founded by the owners of sustainable shoe brand Veja, specialises in colourful, casual clothing for men and women, including labels like Saint James, Roseanna, and Common Projects. *2 Rue de Marseille; centrecommercial.cc.*

MEDECINE DOUCE
At this boutique and atelier, jeweller Marie Montaud crafts an ever-rotating line of sleek accessories, from gold-plated brass hoop earrings with chiselled metal beads to ultrathin rings in 18-carat gold dotted with diamonds or precious stones. *10 Rue de Marseille; bijoux medecinedouce.com*.

MAKE MY LEMONADE
With its pastel pink-and-green interior, this is the first brick-and-mortar shop from designer Lisa Gachet, whose penchant for vibrant prints and retro fashion has earned her a following online. *61 Quai de Valmy; makemy lemonade.com.*

HIRCUS
Think of this as the Everlane of Paris: luxurious garments—including grade-A Mongolian-cashmere tops, sweaters, and jackets for men and women—at reasonable prices, made using transparent production methods. *29 Rue Beaurepaire; hircus.fr.*

BALIBARIS
With timeless cuts and well-made fabrics, this menswear label straddles everyday apparel and business casual in a subdued, classically Parisian colour palette. *14 Rue de Marseille; balibaris.com.*

OXBOW
France's leading brand of surf clothing now has a flagship, with wet suits, swimsuits, and accessories for stand-up paddleboarders. *31 Rue Beaurepaire; oxbowshop.com*.





From left: Make My Lemonade, a new clothing boutique. Earrings from Medecine Douce.



THE INSIDER

DANIEL BOULUD

Chef and restaurant owner

MY WIFE LOVES tea. You can find **Mariage Frères** in many places these days, but they have a unique blend at their salon in the Fourth Arrondissement *(35 Rue du Bourg-Tibourg; mariagefreres.com)*. We bring hot chocolate from **Angelina** *(226 Rue de Rivoli; angelina-paris.fr)* back to New York—our kids adore it. **La Chambre aux Confitures** *(multiple locations; lachambre auxconfitures.com)* sells its own wonderful seasonal fruit jams, as well as honey and a range of chocolate spreads. **La Bovida** *(36 Rue Montmartre; labovida.com)* is like a huge supermarket for cooking supplies. It's where I used to go as a young chef to see all the new equipment.

ILLUSTRATION BY MAY PARSEY





OUTLETCITY METZINGEN

VISIT EUROPE'S No. 1* OUTLET
OUTLETCITY METZINGEN

OUTLETCITY.COM

In the home town of Hugo Boss, OUTLETCITY METZINGEN offers a unique and stylish shopping experience in modern inner-city surroundings with award winning architecture. Only 30 minutes away from Stuttgart and two hours away from Frankfurt, Munich and Zurich, you will find a wide range of premium and luxury brands in flagship outlet stores with savings of up to 70%** throughout the year.

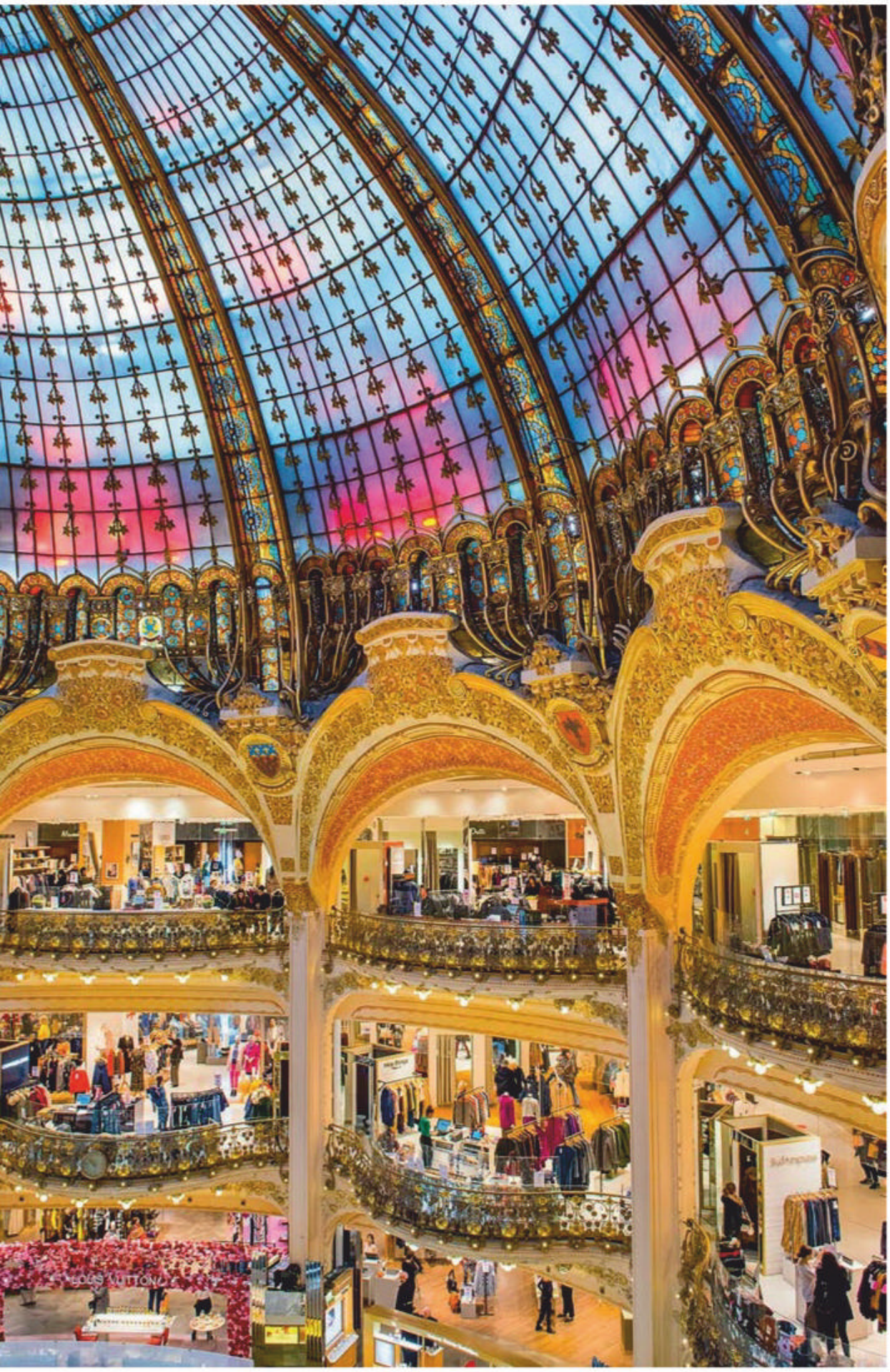
If you are visiting from a country outside the European Union, you qualify for tax-free shopping with an additional saving of up to 14.5 %. OUTLETCITY METZINGEN is the only outlet center in Germany that offers an immediate tax-free refund on site in cooperation with the international financial institution 'ReiseBank'.

*According to the ranking in the 'Outlet Centre Performance Report Europe 2018' of ecostra GmbH, Wiesbaden in collaboration with magdus, Troyes. The report is based on a Europe-wide survey of international brand manufacturers on the economic performance of their stores operated in different outlet centres. **Compared to the manufacturers' former recommended retail price, if there is any.

7 FOR ALL MANKIND
ADIDAS
ARMANI
BALLY
BOGNER
BOSS
BOTTEGA VENETA
BURBERRY
CALVIN KLEIN JEANS
COACH
CONVERSE
DESIGUAL
DIESEL
DOLCE & GABBANA
DOUGLAS
ERMENEGILDO ZEGNA
ESCADA
ETRO
FALKE
FOSSIL
FURLA
GANT
GUCCI
GUESS
HOUR PASSION
JACK & JONES
JIMMY CHOO
JOOP!
KIPLING
LACOSTE
LEVI'S
LINDT
LORO PIANA
MAMMUT
MARC O'POLO
MAX MARA
MICHAEL KORS
MISSONI
MONCLER
NAPAPIJRI
NIKE
ONLY
PATRIZIA PEPE
PETIT BATEAU
PUMA
SALVATORE FERRAGAMO
SAMSONITE
SCHIESSER
SEIDENSTICKER
SIGIKID
STRELLSON
SUNGLASS HUT
SUPERDRY
SWAROVSKI
SWATCH
TEFAL
THE NORTH FACE
TOD'S
TOM TAILOR
TOMMY HILFIGER
TORY BURCH
VALENTINO
VERSACE
WINDSOR
WMF
ZWILLING
and many more

NOUVEAUX RICHES

Get up close and personal with the latest fashions at Galeries Lafayette—all while taking in the architectural wonder of its century-old stained-glass dome. *By Elaine Sciolino*



GALERIES LAFAYETTE, the grand department store complex in central Paris, is a great place to take visitors—and not just for shopping. It must be seen for its architectural masterpiece: a neo-Byzantine dome designed by artists of the Art Nouveau school of Nancy, in northeastern France, early in the 20th century. Soaring 141 feet above the topmost shopping floor, it consists of stained glass inside a metal frame carved with elaborate floral motifs.

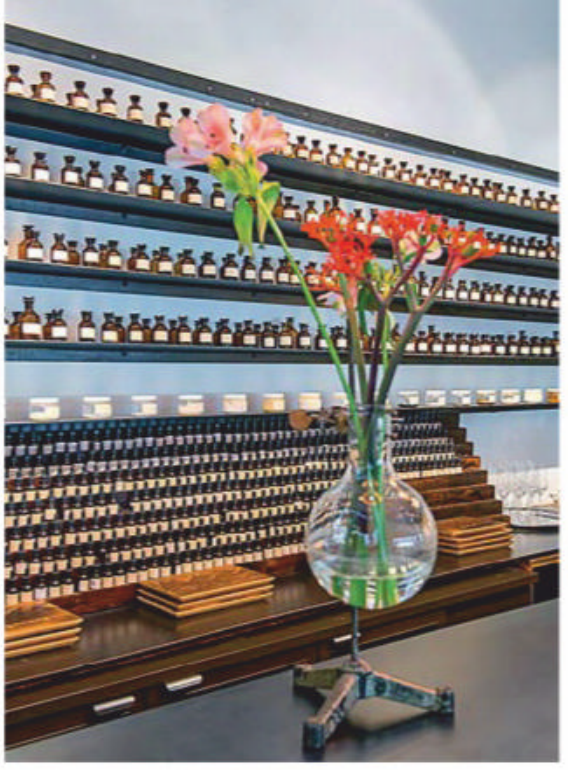
You can now get closer to the dome via the Glasswalk, which opened late last year. Suspended 52 feet in the air, the 30-foot-long bridge has a glass strip in the floor for viewing the action below. It's also the perfect perch for seeing the coats of arms adorning the base of the dome, which represent the 10 French cities that were most important in the textile industry a century ago.

A more self-indulgent way to enjoy the view is to sit on the second-floor balcony at Kaspia, a branch of the restaurant on Place de la Madeleine. Caviar is Kaspia's speciality, although a plate of *tarama* with a flute of champagne as you look down over the vast expanse of shops and above to the coloured dome is no less perfect. Head to the Ice Cube Bar on the rooftop terrace for cocktails and arguably the best free-of-charge view of the city.

Galeries Lafayette carries 3,500 brands of women's wear, menswear, beauty products, and housewares. When you need the perfect handbag but haven't decided on a designer, you can find the highest-end offerings, from Bottega Veneta to Louis Vuitton and Chanel. Unlike some boutiques, where you can only look at beautiful clothes, here you can touch them and try them on for fun. On rainy days it's a great place to go to lift your spirits. *40 Blvd. Haussmann; galerieslafayette.com.*

The main atrium of Galeries Lafayette.



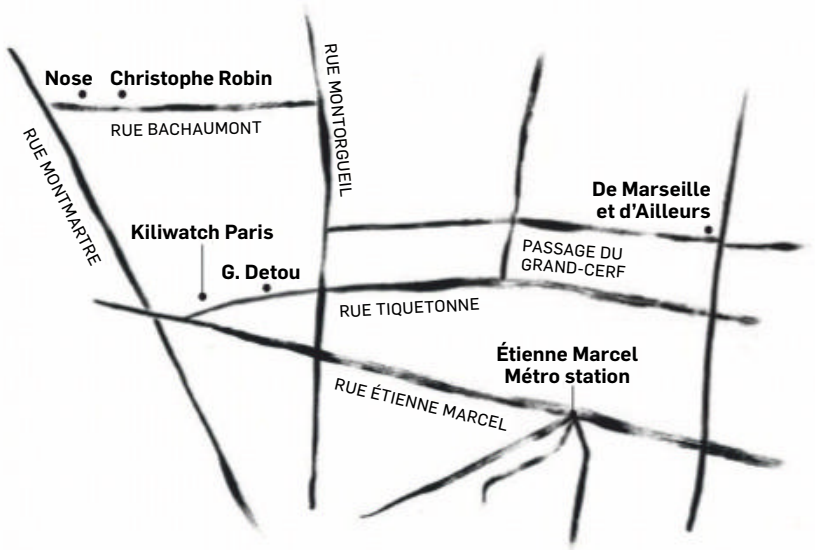


From left: Some of the many fragrances available at the boutique; nose perfumery uses a library of reference scents to guide customer selections.

NEIGHBOURHOOD GUIDE

QUARTIER MONTORGUEIL

The area near the Étienne Marcel Métro stop in the Second Arrondissement has a number of small boutiques and a welcome lack of crowds. *By Rachel Felder*



NOSE
This perfumery offers more than 500 scents—including options from Aether, Miller et Bertaux, and Heeley—but the assortment never seems overwhelming, thanks to a clean layout and a knowledgeable team. *20 Rue Bachaumont; nose.fr*.

CHRISTOPHE ROBIN
This French hairstylist's products are cult favourites. The shop at his salon is grand yet inviting, with retro furnishings and a welcoming staff. The focal point is a shell-shaped sink that resembles a Renaissance fountain, where customers can have their hair washed and sample the wares. *16 Rue Bachaumont; christophe-robin.com*.

DE MARSEILLE ET D'AILLEURS
Located in a covered arcade that evokes a scene from a Balzac novel, this boutique offers handcrafted soaps as well as a small selection of personal-care and beauty products. *1 Passage du Grand-Cerf; demarseilleet dailleurs.com*.

G. DETOU
A favourite of gourmands since the 1950s, this shop is packed with hard-to-find pantry items. Baking ingredients are a speciality, from silver *dragées* to chocolate bars from heritage French brands like Voisin and Weiss. *58 Rue Tiquetonne; 33-1-42-36-54-67*.

KILIWATCH PARIS
A mainstay for Parisian tastemakers looking for casual clothes, this concept store stocks pieces from French labels like Avoc and April 77, as well as accessories and vintage items. *64 Rue Tiquetonne; kiliwatch.paris*.

ILLUSTRATION BY MAY PARSEY

I LOVE SHOPPING in the First Arrondissement in the area around my store, **Memo Paris** *(24 Rue Cambon; memoparis.com)*. There's a fantastic lingerie brand, **Cadolle** *(4 Rue Cambon; cadolle.com)*, run by the same family for generations. I also like **Fauré Le Page** *(21 Rue Cambon; faurelepage.com)*, which makes beautiful leather handbags. For clothes, **Le Bon Marché** *(24 Rue de Sèvres; 24sevres.com)* is one of the go-to destinations in Paris. It has a great selection of on-trend designers. **L'Écume des Pages** *(174 Blvd. St.-Germain; ecumedespages.com)* is one of my favourite bookshops in Paris. I appreciate that it's open late at night.



THE INSIDER
CLARA MOLLOY
Cofounder of Memo Paris fragrances



Librairie Marian Goodman, an art bookstore in the Marais.

PRINTED MATTERS

In a city dedicated to providing aesthetic pleasure to residents and visitors alike, it's no surprise that some of the best bookshops highlight art, fashion, and photography. *By Sarah Moroz*

AT LIBRAIRIE MARIAN GOODMAN *(66 Rue du Temple; marian goodman.com)*, a sleek and slender bookstore across the street from the influential Galerie Marian Goodman in the Marais, you'll find monographs on such artists as Gerhard Richter and John Baldessari, as well as a smattering of limited-edition art objects, like a scarf designed by Maurizio Cattelan. A few blocks away, **Le Comptoir de l'Image** *(44 Rue de Sévigné; 33-1-42-72-09-17)* is a compact boutique overstuffed with teetering stacks of vintage issues of *Vogue Italia*, *The Face*, and other collector bait. The wooden shelves bow under the strain of fashion books, including out-of-print titles by such photographers as Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Herb Ritts, and Walter Pfeiffer.

The prestigious auction house **Artcurial** *(7 Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées; artcurial.com)*, which occupies a stately 19th-century mansion, has its own bookshop, with sleek titanium shelves and tables that display titles on art, sculpture, ceramics, and furniture, including catalogues for current auctions. You'll find a more cutting-edge sensibility at **Le Bal Books** *(6 Impasse de la Défense; lebalbooks.com)*, which adjoins an art space of the same name. The neatly edited selection includes titles, many of them signed, from independent presses, zines from around the globe, and rare editions.



Nikhil Thampi

The Minimalist

Discover fashion designer **Nikhil Thampi**'s secrets to buying all the right things. *By Nirja Dutt*

Designer extraordinaire Nikhil Thampi has quintessentially preached classics, but what makes him unique? His twist on them. His separates—formal or casual—always seem to have fun with cuts, construction, and draping. From a very early age he was drawn to the creative side. So, when it came to choosing a career, he knew he wanted to work with something he could have fun with. "I was working in my family's aviation business for two years, but things just took a turn for the better when one of my childhood friends asked me to help him with his debut collection for Lakmé Fashion Week—I loved every minute of it. The world of fashion was too contagious, and I wanted to be a part of it more and more everyday. I asked my father to give me one year and I've never looked back since. I still feel like I'm living the dream," says Thampi.

What does a consumer look for when they are shopping for designer wear?

People are constantly enamoured by originality. It is something that has always appealed to them. But on the job, I realised that not everyone shares the same vision as you. So for them, a balance between something creative with a commercial outlook really works. When it comes to Indian wear, the consumer always plays it extremely safe. As for western wear, people are more forthcoming and excited to experiment. Luckily for us, this is where we come in and give them the quintessential classic silhouette with a twist. And that's what the consumer appreciates from us.



What do you look for when you go shopping?

I am not a very experimental dresser myself. So when I go shopping, I always look for something that is versatile enough to go from home to an evening out with my friends, to an event and more. And that is something I maintain for my label as well. We work on pieces that can be taken from day to night, all in classic silhouettes, with an experimental touch.

What are you currently excited about and looking forward to?

Our latest spring summer collection called Semi Colon just came out after a break of three long years, so we are busy with its production. It was very well received and touted the best of the season, so I'm definitely excited about that and a few collaborations that will make us more of a household name.

NIKHIL THAMPI





Clockwise from above: Thampi loves to shop at flea markets; the designer's favourite buys include a Mulberry bag, a pair of Mykita sunglasses, and a Tom Ford suit.

THAMPI'S FAVOURITE

HOTSPOTS

Where would you buy a new pair of sunglasses?
I always do plenty of research online before buying a pair, and I feel that more than a store, it's the label that makes the sunglasses unique. My favourites are Mykita and St. Bernard. So I choose my holiday destinations according to where these are available!

What defines a perfect pair of sunglasses?
I am very lucky to have a big oval face that supports most shapes of sunglasses, but oversized styles suit me best. So I would say big sunglasses are always perfect.

Where do you shop for clothes?
I love vintage markets, so no matter where I am—London, Paris, or Florence—I always look for streets that house these stores and local in-bred brands. I steer clear from the big fashion labels when I am overseas, and mostly look for local brands.

Your favourite spot for accessories.
Italy and Italian brands are best for accessories for men. The bags, leather, shoes, all always work. Their clean aesthetic and high quality is unparalleled.

Three buys you will never forget.
My Mulberry bag—it's like second skin to me, I can't function without it. My Mykita sunglasses, I never leave home without those. And a Tom Ford suit I had bought long ago. I can never let go of these three.

Your most prized possession.
My grandfather's Rolex watch. And it belonged to his father back in the day, so I don't even know how old it is! But I love it, and have only mustered the courage to wear it once. So it has immense emotional value.



One place that offers the best bargains.
Flea markets and street shops. I strongly recommend spending a day in these markets when you are overseas—they open up a whole new world!



An overrated shopping destination.
Milan. Somehow, I have never had a good experience shopping there. ×

MULBERRY; MYKITA; TOM FORD

TRAVEL+ LEISURE
INDIA
& SOUTH ASIA

WELLNESS & SPAS



DAVID TROOD/GETTYIMAGES

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Luxury Unlimited

Chef Ranveer Brar takes a much-deserved break at our Spa of the Month: the exquisite **ESPA** at **The Leela Palace New Delhi.**
Photographs by Manik Kapoor

WHO

RANVEER BRAR

A myriad delicious flavours define chef, TV host, and author Brar's life. He's always on his feet, sometimes travelling to three cities in a day, all the time cooking delicacies from around the world. And when he's got an afternoon off, he likes nothing better than to whip up a meal for his family and friends!



Follow Brar on @*ranveer.brar*

WHERE Steeped in luxury, ESPA at The Leela Palace New Delhi offers a peaceful escape from city life. The spa is spread over two levels, has separate wet areas for men and women, a cafe, seven treatment rooms, a couple's spa suite, and a finishing studio. The spa menu opens up to reveal an array of treatments and journeys that range from rejuvenating Leela Signature Rituals and ESPA Ayurvedic Inspired Treatments to ESPA Facials and Body Treatments. At the Spa Café, eat healthful meals; pick from a variety of delicious smoothies, juices, soups, salads, mains, and desserts. Allow the beautiful art-filled and fragrant spa to stimulate your senses and rejuvenate you from inside out. *theleela.com*

EXPERIENCE

"I landed in Delhi after travelling for over a week. Fatigued, I got into a meeting and then made my way to ESPA at The Leela Palace New Delhi—the perfect subject for an experience at the spa.

And the spa decided to pamper me to the core with the Essence of Leela experience. Relieved that I finally had the opportunity to take a break from my travel-filled schedule, I decided to put my phone away for the duration of the treatment. And boy, was I glad!

I walked into the treatment room to find that it was all set for my therapy. A refreshing fragrance filled the room, and the dim lights and candlelight cast a soothing glow in the room. The experience began with a dry brushing and exfoliation that really stood out for me. For me, a day at the spa usually means spending time in the sauna, or hitting up the steam room, and that's how I let my skin breathe. I'm not much of an exfoliation person, but I realised that with all the pollution and dirt I subject my skin to, I need to take care of it. And the exfoliation reminded me that I had to do this more often!

My back really suffers when I travel, especially because I'm sitting for extended periods of time in long-haul flights. So, I asked the therapist to focus on my lower back and shoulders during the *marma* points massage. And this is when I saw a palpable change in my posture, and my back started feeling less stiff. The facial and head massage that followed allowed my body and mind to steep in and enjoy the immense sense of relaxation the exfoliation and massage had brought on.

The spa journey was professional and bespoke at the same time—it was customised to my needs, yet it wasn't intrusive. It gave me a sense of rejuvenation and revival in the true sense of the word."

—AS TOLD TO
PARVATI MOHANAKRISHNAN

How was your experience?

It was great—a perfect combination of personalised care and professionalism, and I came out feeling absolutely refreshed!





#TNLPICKS

ESPA AROMA THERAPY
Pick an oil of your choice for this soothing treatment that includes a light-to-medium-pressure body and head massage.

ROYAL LEELA FACIAL
This elaborate face treatment is luxurious and effective in equal measure.

LUXURY MANICURE & LUXURY PEDICURE WITH HOT STONES
Going beyond a regular manicure and pedicure, this includes a massage with essential oils and hot stones.

Clockwise from top: The pre-treatment setup at the couple's suite; a treatment room at ESPA; Brar at the Spa Café; Brar is all smiles at the entrance to the spa.

REVIEW SAWADHEE TRADITIONAL THAI SPA
VASANT KUNJ, NEW DELHI



Thai in the City

At Delhi's **Sawadhee Traditional Thai Spa**, relaxation is a guaranteed after-effect of the excellent services on offer.



Clockwise from here: At the entrance to Sawadhee Traditional Thai Spa; a scrub in progress; one of the seven treatment rooms at the spa.

IT IS ONE OF THOSE DISMAL, terribly gloomy, grey days on which I have absolutely nothing planned, surprisingly. So I decide to get myself a little pick-me-up at Sawadhee Traditional Thai Spa.

Located in a verdant nook in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi, Sawadhee is known to be one of the few authentic Thai spas in town. Besides, owner Vibha Rastogi adds her personal touch to every experience offered. In fact, most of the ingredients used at the spa are homemade, be it the scrubs or the bath salts! So I know I'm in good hands.

At the spa, Rastogi directs me to the newly-added Pevonia facials on the menu. And as I catch sight of my pollution and dust-affected reflection in a mirror, I can't help but agree that I am in desperate need of something for my face. So I let my therapist lead me from the coolth of the spa reception, up a couple of flights of stairs, and into a fragrant room glowing with candlelight. Here, I change into a robe and dip my feet in a brass bowl filled with water and rose petals. The warm water and soothing ambience come together to take the gloomy out of my day, and I sit back and allow the therapist to wash my feet.

I lie back with a sigh on the massage table. My hair's held back with a band, my face is free of make-up, and my mind is focussed on the mellifluous voice of the therapist. She goes about the facial, talking me through all the processes and products she's using on my face. She examines my skin, pointing out sensitivity and pigmentation, and selects the products that will best work on my skin. Then the facial starts with two rounds of cleaning, both gentle but effective. It's somewhere between the exfoliation and massage that I fall asleep, her voice still registering somewhere in the back of my head. But it is only with a little nudge that I awaken to find that there's a mask on my face, and it's dry!

The therapist gently removes the mask and applies a cream and a sunscreen. My skin feels fresh, and beautifully clean. But I have to wait until after my Deep Tissue Massage to see how it looks. So, I remove my robe and lie face down on the bed, waiting for the therapist to return with the aromatic relaxing oil she'll use for the massage. As the deep strokes on my back begin, I start feeling happy that



I have nothing else planned for the day. Fogged over by sleep, my mind is determined that the rest of the day will be spent basking in the restful after-effects of my afternoon at Sawadhee Traditional Thai Spa.

—PARVATI MOHANAKRISHNAN

#TNLPICKS

Try the 90-minute Lotus Signature Massage that uses a hot compress on your pressure points with a combination of Swedish massage techniques to clear blocked energy lines and improve circulation.



The exquisitely appointed Kaya Kalp – The Royal Spa

A Sensorial Journey

Kaya Kalp – The Royal Spa at ITC Sonar Kolkata juxtaposes various facets of wellness with the goodness of Bengali traditions.

THERE'S RICHNESS AND RELAXATION oozing out of Kaya Kalp's walls. Dark mahogany interiors, golden silk curtains, bright zinnias floating in ceramic bowls, and greenery in every corner make it look like a haven of holistic healing.

As I settle down in the reception, I am offered a pomegranate cooler to soothe my senses. It is a humid afternoon, but a quick pat with a hot towel surprisingly makes me feel fresh. I sit back and flip through the spa menu and decide on the two-hour Eastern Journey.

My masseuse, Jiraporn from Thailand, escorts me to the therapy room. She starts with a gentle foot massage with a mixture of sea salt, rosemary, and eucalyptus oil. She seems to know exactly where to apply pressure; her touch almost instinctive. She washes my feet with lukewarm water, wipes them with a towel, and then astonishes me by starting to pound my feet with a wooden paddle! "Foot pounding is a great way to boost blood circulation," she says.

After about 10 minutes I am ready for my massage. I lie face-down on the therapy table and take three deep breaths, visualising all the stress escaping my nostrils in the form of dark grey smoke. Jiraporn starts polishing my body with a homemade scrub made up of *Gobindobhog* rice, sandalwood, *moong* dal, turmeric, and hints of *Gondhoraj* lemon juice. After 30 minutes of gentle scrubbing, I wash myself clean, readying myself for the oil massage.

#TNLPICKS

If you are looking for a fruity delight, opt for the Exotic Pomegranate Journey. This two-hour therapy starts with a invigorating pomegranate body scrub and concludes with a relaxing oil massage.

I lie back on the table and Jiraporn massages my back with a lime and ginger oil. She tells me the oil is great for healing. I can't agree more. Thirty minutes down and the knots in my neck and shoulders have disappeared. I am drowsy yet alert. The massage strokes are long and the pressure sturdy. She kneads my back and then moves to my legs, arms, and stomach. The session concludes with a firm head massage.

Jiraporn turns on the hot water in the shower. The water envelopes me in a loving embrace. I wipe myself dry, put on a fresh robe, and sip on a hot cup of green tea before heading out for dinner. I seem to have internalised the physical calm the therapy aroused in me. *itchotels.in* —PRIYANKA CHAKRABARTI

Nature's Classroom

In **Iceland,** *Raji Sunderkrishnan* finds that wellness is the result of a consciousness of the world.

I SHOULD HAVE BEEN DISTRESSED, but I wasn't. I should have moped, but I didn't. I continued sipping my hot chocolate as though nothing had happened, staring expectantly through the foggy window for signs of that magical swoosh of green, the Aurora Borealis. Worried about my lack of reaction to the bad news, my husband proceeded to console me by saying that he was hopeful the storm would not set in the next day. I cheerfully told him that we should turn back as advised, halfway into our road-trip around Iceland—the trip I had meticulously planned, the trip that was all I could talk and dream about the last six months,.

That night, we were the only guests at a cosy wooden inn at Breiddalsvik, a small fishing town in Iceland's craggy East Fjords. For that matter, in the week we had spent driving from Reykjavik—Iceland's capital—to Breiddalsvik, we had been the only guests everywhere. I am not exaggerating for effect—we were literally the only two people on the road at most times, barring at Reykjavik, home to almost half of Iceland's minuscule population. In October, at the onset of winter, the weather in Iceland is at its most tempestuous. So when the locals at Breiddalsvik told us that a 'don't travel for a few days' warning had just been issued because of a storm brewing all along our route, we knew it was prudent to turn back. That was a huge blow, but why wasn't I upset? The answer surprised me.

Shorn of creature comforts like luxury accommodation, diverse cuisine, and branded shopping, which sometimes tend to define a travel experience, Iceland had helped me discover what was important to me. I learnt to live in the moment, without a plan—quite a challenge for someone who likes to be on top of things. My definition of well-being had changed; I realised that feeling alive and happy could result from just a consciousness of the world, my surroundings, and its wonders, including undesirable ones like the impending storm.

A week ago, a day after I had arrived in Iceland, the Snaefellsnes Peninsula had welcomed me with howling wind that rattled our parked SUV like a cradle. Overcome by fear, I had sat clutching the car door until my knuckles had hurt. Our guide had already descended to the bottom of the hillock, and gesticulated wildly, beckoning me to join him. Mustering all my courage, I had stepped out into the 25 mps (90 kmph) wind, the warning for which had blinked on the digital display by the roadside, and had prompted us to stop driving until it subsided. I had quickly wobbled down the slope. There, sheltered from the wind by the rocky drop, I had gaped at the deceptively tranquil sight before me: Kirkjufell, with its small cascading waterfalls. As the adrenaline coursing through me had slowly mellowed, and my heart had ceased to thump wildly, I had wondered



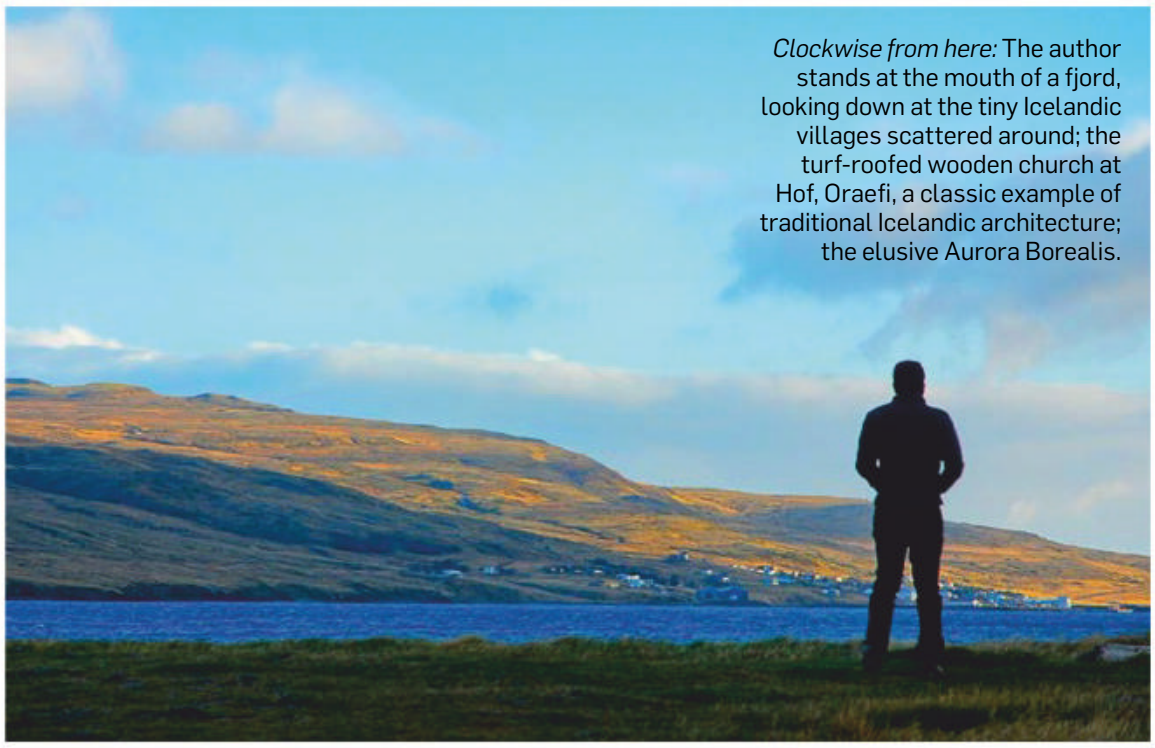
MANTAPHOTO/GETTYIMAGES

whether the threat of danger made one feel alive. The epiphany came yet another day, when I had walked the slippery slopes of a glacier, with crampons strapped on, every step calculated and purposeful, avoiding crevasses and thin ice. In spite of the intense concentration, my mind had registered both the sheer expanse of the glacier as well as the delicate lace-like patterns on patches of frozen ice. The threat of danger had made me pay closer attention to my every movement, and detail of the landscape, which might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Iceland took me out of my comfort zone, challenged me to rely on cues given by nature, and reinforced my belief in goodness. A fairly egalitarian society; the refusal to have an army; the rental company asking me to leave my car with its doors unlocked and the keys inside so that they could pick it up; museums refusing to charge us for our second visit because they said they noticed how much time we spent appreciating each exhibit—through large doses of pragmatism and visual poetry, Iceland reassured me that a lot is well with the world.

Bobbing in the hypnotic blue water of Blue Lagoon, a geothermal spa, images from the road trip flashed before my eyes. Geysers, bubbling soil, volcanoes, lava fields, craters, glaciers, icebergs, auroras, and fjords—phenomena that had merely been words, but were now memories. To be in the lagoon's warm water while the land around was in winter's grip was a surreal experience. Slathering some mineral-rich mud on my face, I floated to the bar for a drink, happy that driving back had given us more time to spend at the same places we had visited, as well as a chance to meet those who had waved us goodbye days earlier. Our promise of returning another day had come true, albeit sooner than expected.

A day before I left Iceland, I stood on the viewing deck of Perlan, an erstwhile water tank in Reykjavik that had been converted into a public building. The blue ray of light from the Imagine Peace Tower—John Lennon's memorial—shot up into the night sky, with a full moon for a neighbour. Below twinkled Reykjavik's lights, as though all the stars had fallen down from the sky. And then, unexpectedly, two green beams emerged from the moon and snaked across the inky canvas. The Aurora Borealis is rarely seen unless the sky is clear and dark, yet here it was, defying convention. The unbridled joy in that moment was a fitting culmination to what had been constantly reinforced throughout my trip to Iceland: "Allow yourself to be surprised." ✕



Clockwise from here: The author stands at the mouth of a fjord, looking down at the tiny Icelandic villages scattered around; the turf-roofed wooden church at Hof, Oraefi, a classic example of traditional Icelandic architecture; the elusive Aurora Borealis.



RAJI SUNDERKRISHNAN

THE DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Take a Finnair *(finnair.com)* flight via Helsinki from Delhi to Reykjavik. Rent a car from Reykjavic Rent a Car *(₹8,500 a day for a 4x4; reykjavikrentacar.is)*

STAY

In Reykjavik, stay at the stylish **Hilton Reykjavik Nordica** *(₹17,400 per night for a Queen Guest Room; hilton.com)*, popular with tourists and locals alike. **Hotel Bláfell** *(₹13,000 per night for a double room; breiddalsvik.is)*, tucked between the mountains and black sand beaches, makes for a comfortable stay in pastoral Breiðdalsvík.

Ocean's 9

Keep your skin happy with these beach-friendly summer releases.
By Parvati Mohanakrishnan



Flaunt your flawless skin as you splash around in the ocean.



Sparkle Lipstick, **KIKO Milano**, ₹1,290; *kikocosmetics.com*



Gulab Akra Refreshing Toner, **Mantra Herbal**, ₹625; *mantraherbal.in*



Wheat Germ Oil, **St. D'vencé**, ₹899; *stdvence.com*



Drop The Base Serum Foundation (Lungo), **SUGAR**, ₹899; *in.sugarcosmetics.com*



Green Tea Cleansing Water, **Innisfree**, ₹990; *innisfree.com*



SunShun Sunscreen, **Omorfee**, ₹1,499; *omorfee.com*



Citronella Mosquito Repellent, **fabindia**, ₹450; *fabindia.com*



Power Blender, **Practk**, ₹1,055; *beautysource.in*



Balms Away Eye Makeup Remover, **theBalm**, ₹1,799; *amazon.in*

SHUTTERSTOCK



COURTESY OF THE FARM AT SAN BENITO

From ASIA *with* LOVE

Discover spas that offer some of the most innovative Asian-wellness-tradition-inspired therapies.
By Parvati Mohanakrishnan

Healing Sanctuary Spa

THE FARM AT SAN BENITO, THE PHILIPPINES

Set in a natural environment that stimulates the senses and promotes a sense of peace and positivity, The Farm at San Benito is ideal for anyone who's looking to up their wellness ante. The resort offers a variety of holistic programmes that range from health to aesthetics and spa treatments. At its Healing Sanctuary Spa try the traditional Filipino healing treatment *hilot* in a variety of forms—the Hilot Lakan (for men) and the Hilot Lakambini (for women) include a scrub, herbal bath, and aroma massage each; and the Hilot Massage helps you feel renewed in 90 minutes. A must-try is the unique Chlorophyll Body Wrap that cleanses and reinvigorates the skin naturally.
thefarmatsanbenito.com



Banyan Tree Spa

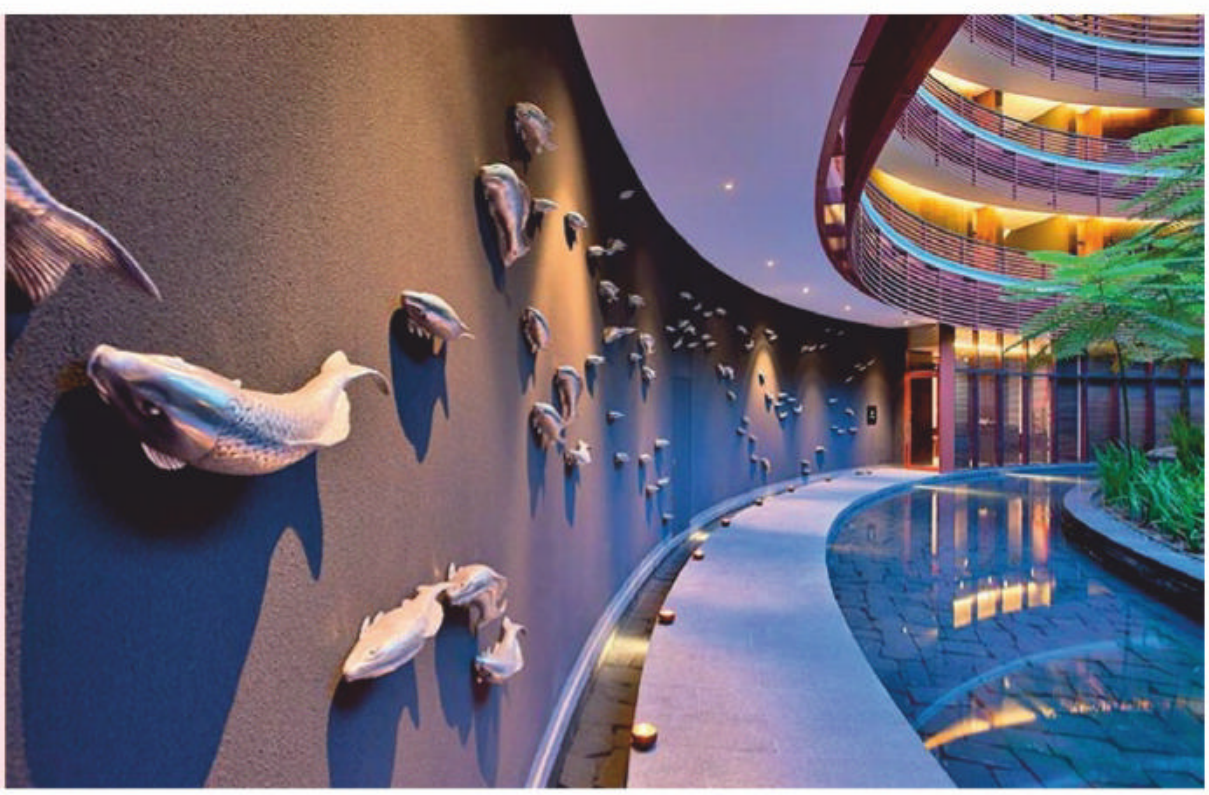
BANYAN TREE SPA SANCTUARY
PHUKET, THAILAND

Twelve exclusive villas on Bangtao Beach make up Banyan Tree Spa Sanctuary. Here, you can experience a range of 50 well-being activities besides the complimentary daily in-villa spa treatment and nightly rest rituals. If you're looking for a guided itinerary, pick from four wellness programmes: New Wellbeing initiates you into a wellness lifestyle and immerses you in Thai culture; Balanced Fitness revitalises your body with a regimen of workouts; Mindful Awareness helps you find balance and inner peace; and Urban Detox helps your body detoxify with a low-calorie plant-based diet. *banyantree.com*

Auriga

CAPELLA SINGAPORE

Tucked away in the rainforest at Sentosa Island, Auriga has a unique approach to wellness and beauty. Using natural and organic products from The Organic Pharmacy, the spa offers experiences based on the cycles of the moon. The Signature Experiences—New Moon (invigorating), Waxing Moon (replenishing), Full Moon (relaxing), and Waning Moon (cleansing)—promote this philosophy. The menu features a range of treatments for couples, mothers, and teens, as well as a variety of holistic and specialised therapies. Try the Senja Sunyi Massage, a combination of traditional Asian therapies including Chinese Tuina body balm, long strokes, and moon stones that eases muscle pain. *capellahotels.com*



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF BANYAN TREE SPA SANCTUARY; COURTESY OF CAPELLA SINGAPORE



Shamana Spa

GRAND HYATT GOA

Spread over 35,000 square feet in Grand Hyatt Goa, Shamana Spa offers a range of rejuvenating experiences in 19 treatment rooms, an Indian treatment suite, a fitness centre, relaxation studio, beauty salon, indoor and outdoor pools, wet areas, and a halotherapy studio. When here, try the Monsoon Ritual, a lemongrass, vetiver, and papaya scrub that detoxifies, followed by a deep-tissue massage with lemongrass oil that rejuvenates the skin. Or pick the Indian Spices Scrub, which uses rice powder, clove, cinnamon, and cardamom to exfoliate and improve the texture of the skin, while at the same time relaxing the body. *hyatt.com*

Explore Spa

LE MÉRIDIEN MAHABALESHWAR RESORT & SPA, MAHARASHTRA

Surrounded by dense forest, Explore Spa offers the ultimate escape from the rigours of life. The elegant all-white European aesthetic sets the tone for the therapeutic massages, rejuvenating facials, and customised body wraps and scrubs on its menu. What's more, the spa incorporates indigenous produce such as organic strawberries, pumpkin, kale, and honey in its unique blends. Try The Relaxation River Rock Package, which includes a body polish, River Rock Massage, Ageless Beauty Facial, and an Explore Signature Pedicure. *marriott.com*





Astitva ANANTYA, TAMIL NADU

Located on the banks of Chittar Lake, against the backdrop of the Western Ghats and in the lush greenery of rubber plantations, Anantya is all things tranquil. Astitva, the Ayurveda spa here, embodies holistic wellness. Here Ayurveda, yoga, and meditation are used to realign the mind, body, and soul. Besides a range of individual treatments, the spa has a variety of seven- to 28-day wellness programmes. Opt for a Panchakarma Rejuvenation if you're looking to boost your sense of well-being, or for the weight management, anti-ageing, diabetic care, and arthritis care programmes if you're looking for specific cures. A highlight here is the Ayurveda cuisine that can be customised according to your needs. *anantyaresorts.com*

CLOCKWISE: COURTESY OF GRAND HYATT GOA; COURTESY OF ANANTYA; COURTESY OF LE MÉRIDIEN MAHABALESHWAR RESORT & SPA



Antahpura Spa

PARK HYATT CHENNAI, TAMIL NADU

Floating above the hustle-bustle of the city and overlooking the verdant canopies of Guindy National Park, Antahpura Spa is the ideal destination to relax, rebalance, and rejuvenate. Inside are six treatment rooms in which you take a journey through the *sutras* to help you achieve *samattva* or the height of happiness. Besides a variety of therapies, the spa offers Antahpura Packages—Vishudhi Sanskar (detoxifying), Jagruti Sanskar (energising), Parivartan Sanskar (transforming), and Samattva Sanskar (elevating)—that make use of unusual ingredients such as pumpkin butter, Chettinad spices, avocado, tea tree, ylang-ylang, frankincense, damask rose and guava. *hyatt.com*

Club Olympus Spa, Salon & Fitness

HYATT REGENCY DELHI

With natural remedies and organic rituals as its mainstays, Club Olympus Spa, Salon & Fitness offers personalised experiences that aim to help you maintain your wellness quotient. The menu features everything from Swedish Massage to scrubs and wraps. Highlights include the Philippine Hilot massage, which uses banana leaves, coconut oil, and hilot balm to alleviate joint pain; Marma Abhyanga with Ayurvedic herbal oils that balances; Shiatsu, a form of Japanese bodywork; Indian Back Kama that uses sandalwood oil to rid your back of any tension; and the Herbal Heat Revival, which uses a herbal compress for deep relaxation. *hyatt.com*



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF PARK HYATT CHENNAI; COURTESY OF HYATT REGENCY DELHI



NIHIOKA Spa Safari

NIHI SUMBA, INDONESIA

'The return to a life well lived', Nihi Sumba is a haven for wellness seekers and adventurers alike. Here, NIHIOKA Spa Safari is dedicated to refreshing you holistically. The wide range of treatments it offers include journeys that aim to nurture you inside out. Try the Traditional Healing journey that uses Indonesian healing traditions to help you harmonise and attain balance. It starts with a Sumbanese Lulur, the sacred art of body exfoliation with rice, green tea, and natural spices that has been practised since the 17th century. This is followed by a relaxing Aromatherapy Massage, after which you experience a Hydrating Hair Smoothie. A traditional Indonesian ritual, this uses avocado cream, cocoa butter, and coconut oil with rosemary essential oil to stimulate blood circulation, nourish the scalp, and strengthen the hair. *nihi.com*

Aheli Spa

THE ROSEATE NEW DELHI

Offering a retreat in the true sense of the word, Aheli Spa is set in a peaceful environment just outside the capital. Here internationally trained therapists and beautifully curated spa experiences come together to endow on you an all-encompassing sense of calm. Try the Aheli Signature Experience that uses a variety of massage techniques that are customised keeping your needs in mind to soothe and make you feel pampered to the core. The treatment makes use of the Recover oil, a blend of safflower, camphor, and eucalyptus that relieves body pain and helps the respiratory system. *roseatehotels.com*

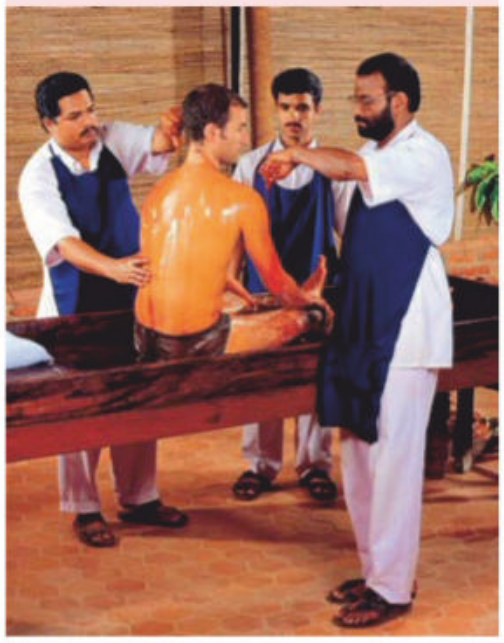


FROM TOP: COURTESY OF NIHI SUMBA; COURTESY OF THE ROSEATE NEW DELHI

Somatheeram Ayurveda Resort

KERALA

'Natural' defines the Somatheeram experience best. Established to provide authentic Ayurvedic healing in a resort setting, the property is spread over 15 lush acres on Chowara Beach in Kerala. There's a huge range of authentic treatments on offer at the Ayurveda Centre here. However, every journey at the resort starts with a consultation with an Ayurveda doctor who, based on your *doshas* and needs, create a healing programme that uses a combination of treatments and food to balance your *doshas*. An essential part of the experience is the Ayurveda menu that has over 250 different vegetarian dishes that are prepared on the lines of Ayurveda. *somatheeram.in*



The Lodhi Spa

THE LODHI NEW DELHI

A walk down a cool art-lined corridor leads to The Lodhi Spa. Inside, there's a beautiful play of dark wood and light stone that gives you a calming sense of space. In fact, the entire vibe of the spa is soothing. The spa menu offers a mix of traditional Indian therapies and international spa cures. In addition, you can experience a variety of signature treatments, Turkish hammam therapies, and yoga classes. The Pride of India package aims to help you feel completely relaxed and rejuvenated. The Ayurveda-based programme helps rebalance and harmonise you holistically. It begins with a full body exfoliation, after which an Abhyanga massage is performed. The treatment comes to a close with an express Ayurvedic facial that makes your skin glow. *thelodhi.com*





Anaha Spa and Wellness Centre

SHREYAS, KARNATAKA

A luxury ashram and boutique property, Shreyas offers a 'journey of self discovery' through healthful eating, yoga, meditation, Ayurveda, and Naturopathy. Anaha ('well-being' in Sanskrit) Spa was established to help offer more holistic healing experiences at Shreyas. The 16,000-square-feet space has 13 spa rooms, with dedicated spaces for Ayurveda, Naturopathy, and Hydrotherapy. Most of the ingredients used at the spa are sourced from the property's organic gardens. So you'll find aloe vera, sandalwood, coconut, brown rice, cinnamon, nutmeg, and pepper in face, body, and hair treatments. Try Choorna Pinda Sweda, a fomentation process that helps with joint-related issues. *shreyasretreat.com*

FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF SOMATHEERAM AYURVEDA RESORT; COURTESY OF THE LODHI NEW DELHI; COURTESY OF SHREYAS



CHI, The Spa

SHANGRI-LA'S - EROS HOTEL, NEW DELHI

A hidden haven in the middle of the city, CHI, The Spa is where you retreat for rejuvenating spa therapies that have a long-lasting impact on your well-being. Inside the spa, soothing lighting, alluring fragrances, and the mellifluous gurgle of flowing water come together to stimulate your senses. The spa menu features an array of treatments ranging from Aromatherapy and Swedish massages to Ayurveda and Thai. Try the authentic Ayurveda therapies offered here—*Abhyanga*, *Pinda Sweda*, or *Shirodhara*. There's also a Royal Thai Herbal Compress that focusses on pain relief using Thai massage techniques. *shangri-la.com*

Taaras Spa

THE TAARAS BEACH & SPA RESORT, MALAYSIA

Located on the beautiful Redang Island, The Taaras Beach & Spa Resort is surrounded by crystal clear waters that are home to an abundant marine life. Complimenting the natural vibe of the resort is Taaras Spa. Here, experience a range of massages, scrubs, wraps, and treatments that use a variety of wellness techniques and some local ingredients to relax and revitalise you. Try the Taaras Signature Massage, in which a heated poultice filled with herbs and spices is applied on the meridiens to relax muscles and a vigorous massage is performed to ease joint pain. For honeymooners, the resort offers Honeymoon Bliss; the package includes land and sea transfers, accommodation, romantic dinners, snorkelling adventures, yoga, and experiences at Taaras Spa. *thetaaras.com*



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF SHANGRI-LA'S - EROS HOTEL, NEW DELHI; COURTESY OF THE TAARAS BEACH & SPA RESORT

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TRAVEL+LEISURE
JUNE 2019



DESIGNING THE NEW

HONG KONG

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A LONG WAY FROM THE NINETIES'

CAMBODIA

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The Police Married Quarters (PMQ) renovated as an art and design hub in Hong Kong.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY PHILIPP ENGELHORN

Local artist Alex Croft's mural of old townhouses on Hollywood Road is one of the most famous examples of street art in Hong Kong. *Opposite:* The Jockey Club Innovation Tower was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Zaha Hadid.

The Yin & Yang Of

ON ONE HAND, **HONG KONG** SEEKS TO PRESERVE ITS UNIQUE CHARACTER AND COLONIAL HISTORY. ON THE OTHER, IT HARBOURS AN ART AND DESIGN REVOLUTION THAT IS TRANSFORMING OBSOLETE STRUCTURES INTO CREATIVITY HUBS. TWO STORIES DELVE INTO THIS DUALISM.

Hong Kong

DOUBLESPACE-VIEW/ALAMY. OPPOSITE: ANIRUT RASSAMEESRITRAKOOL/ALAMY

THE *Design* RENAISSANCE

Behind the veneer of skyscrapers, a design revolution is brewing in Hong Kong. Cross-disciplinary collaborations between home-grown brands and artists are elevating their Chinese heritage and immigrant stories to showcase the city's unique DNA.
By Aparna Pednekar

Call it the glitzy gateway to the Asia Pacific or a soaring paean to consumerism, but few will accuse Hong Kong of harbouring a creative design renaissance, least of all Hongkongers themselves. They'll gamely hem and haw over the notion. Like Jillian Xin does.

Born in China and brought up in the UK, the fashion retail consultant worked in London and Shanghai before shifting base to Hong Kong to work as a buyer with the city's iconic luxury retailer, Lane Crawford. Nibbling into a sweet-salty ice cream sandwich—we're at the Admiralty outlet of hipster cafe chain **Elephant Grounds** (*elephantgrounds.com*)—helps melt her initial dismissive stance. Jillian is bullish on a new breed of brands that are forging a fresh Hong Kong identity. From the gender-neutral streetwear of Ground Zero (*groundzeroclothing.com*) to rebelliously feminine dresses by **Anaïs Mak** (*anaismak.com*) that have broken out on global ramps and are seen on the likes of Gigi Hadid and Priyanka Chopra, she points out a new league of designers who are pushing the creative envelope. They carry forward the mantle of Hong Kong's handcrafting talent that enchanted the West—**Ascot Chang**'s (*ascotchang.com*) bespoke men's suits and **Blanc de Chine**'s (*blancdechine.com*) sequinned gowns included—while infusing a contemporary, multicultural storytelling element into their aesthetic. On weekends, you won't find Jillian mall-hopping. Instead, she's scoping new talents at **PMQ** (*pmq.org.hk*)—a design and retail hub with 100 shops and studios, located in two historic buildings on Hollywood Road—and **The Mills** (*themills.com.hk*), a business incubator and experiential retail space in Tsuen Wan. These hybrid, experimental spaces are providing a stage for new designers and brands to thrive in a cut-throat and notoriously expensive retail landscape.

The design renaissance isn't limited to Hong Kong's young guns only. The city's modern design chops are collectively flexed at **Hotel ICON** (*hotel-icon.com*), located in Kowloon, a few blocks away from the milling crowds at Tsim Sha Tsui. It has neither the colonial grandeur of **The Peninsula** (*peninsula.com*)—the grand dame of Asian hotels, also located in Kowloon—nor the whimsicality of **Mira Moon** (*miramoonhotel.com*), but ICON showcases an ambitious collaborative of the city's most recognised artists and architects, all 'icons' in their own right. Rocco Yim's architecture is a blend of sleek, sharp lines and all-glass interiors letting in plenty of sunshine, while William Lim has balanced yin-yang elements and customised a folding gate at the entrance by the last of Hong Kong's gate makers. While luxury couturier Barney Cheng's smart staff uniforms contribute to the hotel's design-forward philosophy, New York-based Vivienne Tam has infused her signature urbane glamour into an eponymous suite. Even when the collaborators aren't Hongkongers, their expertise channels home-grown inspiration. Like French botanist Patrick Blanc's swirling **Vertical Garden** (*verticalgardenpatrickblanc.com*)—Asia's largest—over the wall in the lobby, which uses 8,500 native plants. Many collaborators are alumni of the prestigious **Hong Kong Polytechnic University** (*polyu.edu.hk*), which owns the hotel. Another famous PolyU alumnus, product designer Freeman Lau has curated ICON's artworks, which reflect the local art scene and range from student works to pieces from socialite Victor Lo's personal collection. But it's not all big names, pomp, and show. There's a lot of functionality and innovation at play. In my room on the 23rd level, I bask in dreamy views of the Victoria Harbour, but it's the intelligent details—a printer, power bank, wireless speaker, and WiFi-hotspot-sharing Handy phone—that make a real difference to my stay. I also spot a custom-created Kowloon guide in the room, which leads me to some local gems, like the 40-year-old single-screen **Lux Theatre** (*2J Bulkeley St, Hung Hom*)—Hong Kong's oldest cinema that still issues handwritten tickets—tucked away in Hung Hom, and the postmodern **Jockey Club Innovation Tower** (*Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon*) that resembles a space-age creature.

On my second night at ICON, I dine at **Above & Beyond** on the 28th floor of the hotel, where stunning harbour views fade in the background as the smoked egg with oolong tea leaves and black truffles and wok-fried Wagyu with soy-marinated goose liver take centre-stage. The contemporary Cantonese food lives up to its Michelin-Plate status, and the vibe—closely-placed tables, plush sofas, a private dining room, and buzzing bar—evokes the glamour of the 1920s. It's the sort of space that's characteristic of the city's modern luxury scene—a zingy mix of multicultural influences strung together by a strong Hong Kong DNA.

Present-day Hong Kong glamour is best

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF THE MILLS; COURTESY OF HOTEL ICON



The Mills collaborated with Hong Kong Youth Arts Foundation and six local artists to create innvoative murals along Pak Tin Par Lane. *Below*: A glimpse of the suite designed by fashion designer Vivienne Tam in Hotel ICON.







The Joyce Wang Studio in Hong Kong. *Opposite:* The Police Married Quarters (PMQ) have been renovated as art and design spaces.

represented by **Mott 32** (*mott32.com*), the flagship restaurant and crown jewel in Maximal Concepts' global empire. Even as it sees new outposts in Dubai, Bangkok, and Vancouver, Mott 32 has set the bar high in Hong Kong with multiple design awards, including the 'World Interior of the Year Design Award' in 2015 in collaboration with **Joyce Wang Studio** (*joycewang.com*). Having reserved a table for a dimsum lunch, I hurry to the Standard Chartered Bank building on Des Voeux Road and am directed down a dazzling, gold mirror-embellished spiral staircase to the restaurant, where an underground party is in full swing. Wang has spun a fascinating immigrant story across a 111-square metre sunlight-starved space, weaving in elements from the city's heritage, history, and myths. The name, Mott 32, is a homage to the New York street that housed America's first Chinese convenience store in 1851. Seductive dark wood, copper, and leather interiors look like they could belong to any global metropolis, but as I take in the ambience, an intriguing Hong Kong story emerges from the silk-embroidered walls bearing Chinese calligraphy brushes, traditional terrazzo flooring with gold coins inset, Shanghai-style brick work, a portrait of Chinese-American actress Anna May Wong, and the bar modelled on a Chinese apothecary. The restaurant's signature dishes—pork *siu mai* stuffed with quail egg and caviar, Shanghai soup dumplings, and barbecue Pluma Iberico pork slathered with yellow mountain honey—are stylish spins on Cantonese classics. My tip: avoid skimping on the teas, which will eventually lead you to the most atmospheric vintage restrooms in the city.

A brisk walk away from Mott 32, the **James Christie Room** (*christies.com*) is on the other end of the design spectrum—all white and clean lines. Besides high-profile auctions and exhibits, Christie's education wing, headquartered in Hong Kong, offers invaluable insight into the world of art and luxury. I happen to be in the city in time to sign up for a Masterclass in Modern and Contemporary Jewellery Design with Wallace Chan. This special opportunity coincides with Shapeshifter–The Multiverse of Wallace Chan, which showcases the city-based, globally renowned sculptor, designer, and innovator's most important works over the past 40 years. A brisk walk through the exhibit leaves me breathless at the fantastical, flamboyant gardens—dazzling butterflies are a recurring motif—of daringly large gemstones set in lightweight titanium. Chan's relentless research and innovation with gemstone cutting techniques and avant-garde material studio harness memories of an underprivileged childhood fuelled by imagination—his inventions include a technology that enhances the luminosity of jade and a patented unbreakable porcelain. His daring, dreamlike world is a result of curiosity and years of challenges and experimenting at his famously guarded Stanley Street studio. Post Chan's masterclass, where he encourages us to "change constantly," "fight habits," and "embrace failures," while always staying "empathetic," I get a chance to interview the 62-year-old who's as much a philosopher as he's a globe-trotting inventor. "I can travel the world in Hong Kong. It's a window to the biggest tech advancements, art, and innovation," he says of the city that became his home when he was five.

It's a quiet testament to Hong Kong's surprising ability to fuel its stories into an avant-garde design aesthetic that's at once, at home anywhere in the world yet all its own.



GETTING THERE

Cathay Pacific Airways (*cathaypacific.com*) operates non-stop flights from Delhi and Mumbai to Hong Kong.

STAY

Book the Club 65 Studio Suite at **Hotel ICON** (*from ₹11,828; hotel-icon.com*), with a living room, walk-in closet, access to the Timeless Lounge (for early check-ins and check-outs), one of the city's best brunches at The Market, and free airport transfers. For an island option, **Mira Moon** (*from ₹14,815; miramoonhotel.com*) offers Cantonese-inspired interiors and a tapas bar.

SEE & DO

The **Hong Kong Space Museum** (*lcsd.gov.hk*) on the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront offers astronomy exhibits and sky shows. Browse the works of contemporary Asian artists at **Massimo De Carlo** (*massimodecarlo.com*), the renowned Italian art dealer's third international outpost. Sign up for day-long courses on specialised art curation and high jewellery provenance at **Christie's** (*christies.edu/asia*), conducted by globally-feted masters of the trade. Spend an afternoon learning to create exquisite dim sum at the **InterContinental's 'Cooking with the Culinary Stars'** programme (*ihg.com*). For the classic red-sail cruising experience, book the luxurious **Aqua Luna** (*aqualuna.com.hk*) with a 10-course dinner.

COURTESY OF JOYCE WANG STUDIO JOYCE WANG STUDIO. OPPOSITE: IAN TROWER/ALAMY

THE DOMINION OF *History*

To get a taste of Hong Kong's history, *Kalpana Sunder* takes a walk in Old Town Central, discovering colourful Bruce Lee murals, priceless antiques, re-purposed prisons, and more along the way.



Shafts of sunlight pierce smoky interiors painted in red and gold. The Man Mo Temple on Hollywood Road, built in 1847, is a serene space tucked between skyscrapers. It is dedicated to the God of Literature and the God of War. This is where students come to pray with their parents. The air is thick with smoke wafting from giant incense coils, and the interiors dotted with golden urns, dazzling altars, and Chinese wood carvings. Worshippers burn joss sticks, make offerings, and shake thin bamboo 'fortune sticks' vigorously to read their fortunes. The God of Literature, clad in a green robe, holds a calligraphy brush and the God of War, dressed in a red robe, totes a sword. The temple was built by wealthy Chinese merchants and doubled up as a court of arbitration that resolved local disputes.

I am in Old Town Central in Hong Kong, beneath the glitzy skyscrapers of Central. Bordered by Wyndham Street, Caine Road, Possession Street, and Queen's Road, this district is often described as a place where "East meets West". It's the place to be if you like your destinations with layers of history and tradition.

We start at Possession Street, the place where the British officially took over Hong Kong, beginning 150 years of colonial rule. Once it was on the waterfront; today, it's a sprawl of restaurants and boutiques. Hollywood Road is not named after the Californian city of stars, but for the holly shrubs that grew in the fishing village. Hollywood Road is where merchant sailors hawked their artefacts from Mainland China. In present-day Hong Kong, Hollywood Road is dotted with dozens of antique shops filled with furniture, ceramics, and objets d'art.

We traipse up and down hilly streets of the Sheung Wan area on steps flanked by apartment buildings, shops, and schools. Laundry hangs from bamboo poles, and wrinkled men play mahjong under a bright sun. Schoolkids in their navy blue and white uniforms trudge along with knapsacks on their back. We climb Ladder Street, a long granite stone staircase that begins at Queen's Road Central. It was built in the late 1800s to connect the Chinese populace with the foreign communities in the area. The Tung Wah Hospital, which is the oldest western hospital in Hong Kong, is also located on this street along with funeral homes that date back over a century.

A sharp left turn lands us in Upper Lascar Street, named after *lascars,* or Indian officers in the British military who lived in these parts and sold second-hand goods. This is also called Cat Street, because it historically sold stolen goods known as 'mouse goods' in Chinese. Cheung tells us that this was once the heart of a crowded slum, notorious for its opium dens, gambling parlours, and brothels.

Today, however, the stretch is lined with old memorabilia, antiques, propaganda notices, Bruce Lee posters, vintage postcards, Mao statues,

SHUTTERSTOCK; OPPOSITE: STEVE VIDLER/ALAMY

The famous Man Mo Temple. *Opposite:* Queen's Road runs through the heart of Old Town Central.




齋辟古玩
Chai Curios Store
ANTIQUE & ARTS CO.



One can still find Bruce Lee posters in street-side shops. *Opposite, from top*: Some of the oldest red-brick buildings in Tai Kwun, Hong Kong; Cat Street is a delight for antique enthusiasts.

PAUL RUSHTON/ALAMY; OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; WENDY CONNETT/ALAMY

paperweights, watches and clocks, snuff bottles, and tea pots of a bewildering variety. Some shops even sell Ming-era furniture and jade jewellery. We walk up the bustling alleys to an upcoming neighbourhood called Poho—buildings here have names beginning with 'Po' ('treasure' in Chinese). Covering Tai Ping Shan Street, Po Hing Fong, Square Street, and Pound Lane, the laid-back neighbourhood has a curious mix of galleries, concept stores, printing shops, coffin makers, art studios, and teahouses, all standing cheek by jowl with street art tucked away in hidden alleys.

I browse shops that sell vintage goods, vinyl records, film posters, Scandinavian furniture, and a unique range of local designer goods. Rare, original posters of classic movies from the 1960s, old transistors and radios, toys, vintage spectacles, hats, and tin cans—the shops let you travel through time.

Every now and then, we stop at popular local joints for a refill—from Hong Kong's famous egg tarts with short crust pastry at **Tai Cheong Bakery** (*taoheung.com.hk*) to a glass of sugarcane juice at the old fashioned **Kung Lee Herbal Tea House** (*60, Hollywood Rd*) with its ceramic tiles and old ceiling fans. A wealth of street art and graffiti adorns the alleys off Hollywood Street. Among them is a huge mural at the intersection of Graham Street and Hollywood Road that is so popular on Instagram that people line up to be photographed against it! Another sought-out mural is one of Bruce Lee done by a South Korean graffiti artist on Tank Lane.

Chinese and Western architecture came together in the area in the colonial era, and we see a fine example on Bridges Street, where Cheung points out the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong (*ymca.org.hk*) with its blend of red-brick walls, a green Chinese roof, and the Chicago School style of architecture. In this area, many historical buildings have been given new purposes and are turning into functional avant-garde spaces for the public to enjoy. For instance the former milk depot **Fringe Dairy** (*hkfringeclub.com*) on Lower Albert Road is now a cosy venue for jazz and rock performances.

Our last stop on Hollywood Road is **Tai Kwun** (*taikwun.hk*), an erstwhile police station, jail, and magistrate's court spread over 16 colonial buildings with colonnades and Doric columns. After a multi-million-dollar renovation, it is now a culture, art, and restaurant hub. You can still take a tour of its old cells where Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh was jailed in the 1930s, with audiovisual displays that showcase the life of the inmates, or sit under a canopy of Tiffany-style domes with images of dragonflies at the swish Ashley Sutton-designed bar Dragonfly, and end the evening at **Madame Fù** (*madamefu.com.hk*) with a Cantonese meal housed in the Barracks Block.

To find Hong Kong's soul, a walk through Old Town Central is essential. Beneath the glitz and of urban chic and development, this pocket of tradition and culture is where time seems to have stood still.



STAY

The trendy **Dorsett Wanchai Hong Kong** (*from ₹8,102; wanchai.dorsetthotels.com*), conveniently located between Wanchai and Causeway Bay, comes with a shuttle service. Choose from its various themed suites, like the Jockey Suite themed on horseracing (the hotel is right across the Happy Valley racecourse), and the OSIM Massage Suite, ideal for those with sore muscles.

EAT

Have a dim sum meal at **Tim Ho Wan** (*timhowan.hk*) on Fuk Wing Street in the Sham Shui Po area; it's known as the cheapest Michelin-star restaurant in the world.

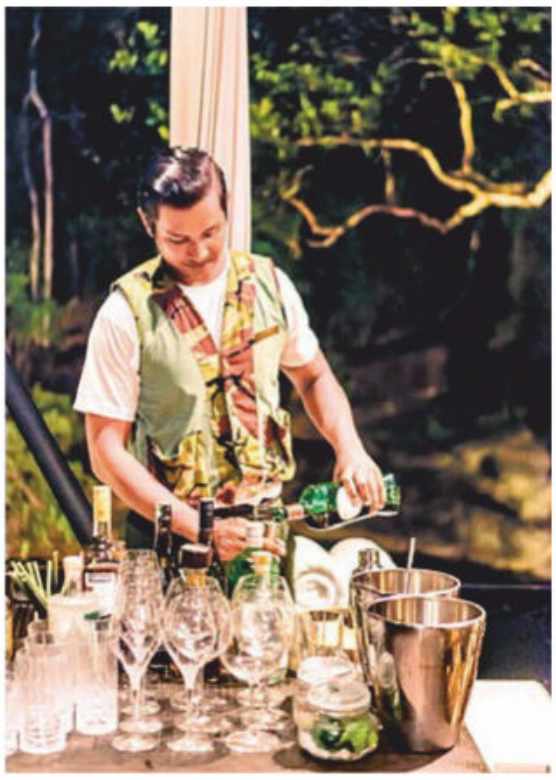
SHOP

Harbour City (*harbourcity.com.hk*) is a gargantuan luxury retail complex with over 700 shops and restaurants.

An oceanfront villa at the new Six Senses Krabey Island resort in southern Cambodia. *Opposite, clockwise from top left:* A Buddhist blessing ceremony at the resort; making chilli sauce at Six Senses' Tree restaurant; a staffer prepares for a dinner party at Shinta Mani Wild, a new lodge in the Cardamom Mountains; a glass of Khmer-style iced tea; a floating fishing village near Krabey Island; going on an anti-poaching patrol at Shinta Mani Wild.



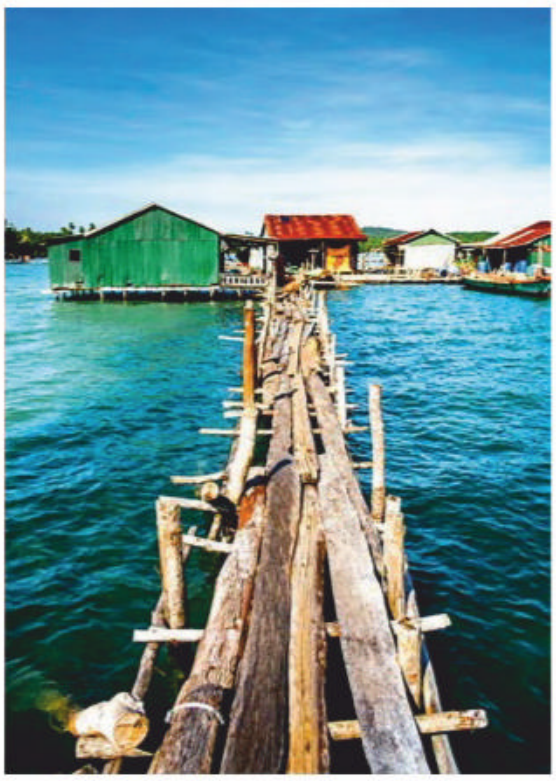




CAMBODIA REVISITED

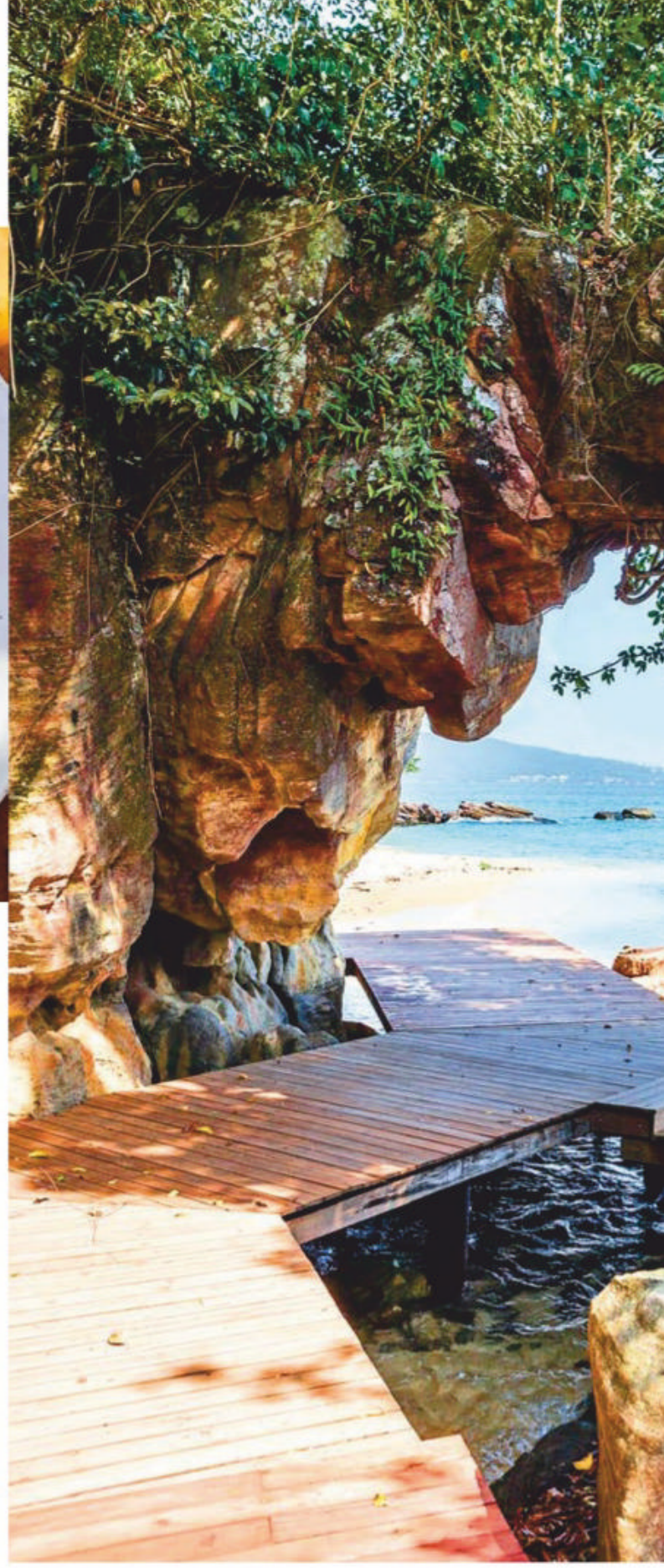
A lot has changed since *Charles Graeber* first travelled to this bewitching Southeast Asian kingdom in the 1990s. As an optimistic young generation strives to move on from decades of genocide and civil war, a new swath of the country is opening up, inviting visitors to the protected forests and idyllic islands of the south. *Photographed by Christopher Wise*











Clockwise from top left: Seared red snapper in Cambodian-style *kuri* sauce at Six Senses Krabey Island; boardwalks allow guests to walk the perimeter of Krabey Island; the Cambodian capital, as seen from the rooftop bar of the Rosewood Phnom Penh.

THIS,

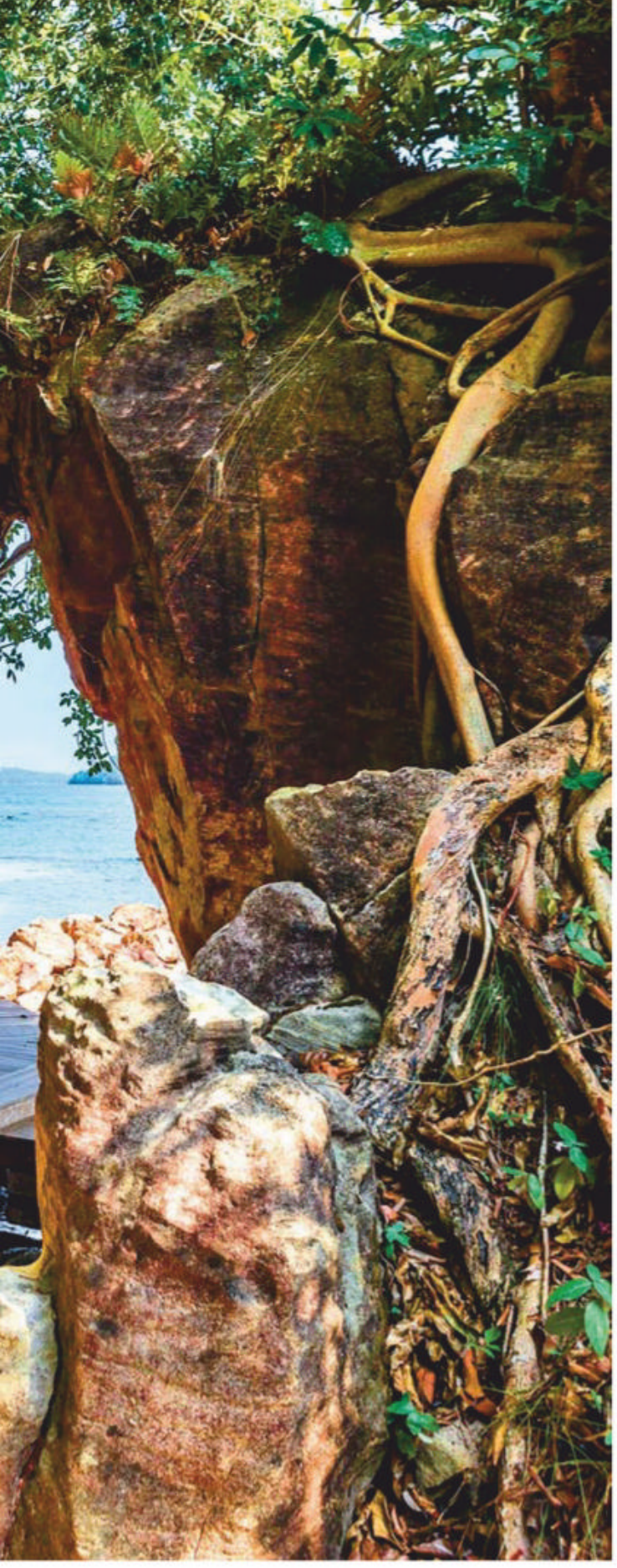
believe it or not, was the job: to check out intriguing new luxury hotels in a country I had not been back to in some 15 years. The country was Cambodia, and the only catch was—well, there wasn't a catch.

I first went to Cambodia in 1996, at the invitation of an old friend and fellow journalist. He was writing for a newspaper named the *Cambodia Daily*. He insisted I come see this place. I did. My two-week visit stretched into a life-altering year, then longer.

The country captured me, charmed and confused me. It has that effect on people, it draws them in. I abandoned my plans, cancelled medical school, dropped out of a relationship with a wonderful girl, and wrote half of a juvenile novel about expat life, about the streams of bats that blackened the skies at sunset and the conflict of feeling so happy and free in a country savaged by genocide and war.

I got a motorcycle, a rented room, a new love, and a new sense of purpose. It was a thrilling time. My friend had been right: there really was no more interesting or important place. Cambodia was on the cusp, emerging from the nightmare of the cultural cleansing carried out by Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge; between 1975 and 1979 an estimated 1.7 million people, nearly a quarter of the country's population, had been killed by starvation, overwork, or outright murder. But the intervening years had pushed the Khmer Rouge into hiding, and after another decade of civil war, the country seemed to finally be ready for peace—democracy, even. And perhaps, we all dreamed, we might somehow help it along.

In the late 1990s, the little ruined riverside capital of Phnom Penh had a fledgling free press and fragile peace held together by an elderly king and blue-helmeted UN peacekeepers. The countryside was rough and raw and unspeakably beautiful. It wasn't just the crumbling French-colonial villas and floating villages and miles of pristine coastline, or the ancient spires of Siem Reap's Angkor Wat, rising like a prayer from the jungle. It was the people.



It sounds like a cliché, and it's certainly a generalisation, but the Cambodians I met were good people, pure-hearted somehow. Perhaps, because they were survivors, they considered themselves lucky. Those who visited—people like myself—quickly realised how much we had taken for granted, and how much we had to learn.

Cambodia has undergone a staggering transformation since then. In 2012, the elderly king, Norodom Sihanouk, died, and these days the UN peacekeepers have been supplanted by Chinese investors. The country didn't turn into a democracy, exactly, as the ruling party gradually removed opposition voices from the streets and the newspapers, and even the ballot. But the majority of the country has experienced a novel degree of stability, and with it a swell of development. Over half the population is under 25 years old, too young to remember when their country was a destination mostly for journalists, backpackers, and fugitives. Now, Angkor Wat is one of the world's most popular tourist attractions.

That said, those temples, and perhaps Phnom Penh, are all most visitors ever see of Cambodia. But now, a new generation of high-end properties has begun drawing visitors beyond the usual circuit. The coastal islands and jungle mountains in the south and west have been largely inaccessible to visitors for decades. This was a Cambodia I'd never seen. "Do you want to?" asked my editor.

I write for work, usually about difficult things. This wasn't exactly war reporting; it sounded fun, and I needed a break. And I could bring my partner, Gabrielle, on what would be her first visit to Asia. Did I want the job?

Sure, I said. It's a living.

The Phnom Penh I knew didn't have stoplights, a functioning movie theatre, or an ATM. It certainly didn't have a host of spas and luxury hotels. Now it has several. The hotel currently at the top of the food chain, Rosewood Phnom Penh, occupies the top floors of the second-tallest building in Cambodia, the Vattanac Capital Tower.





As well as creating a striking contrast with the low French-colonial buildings that defined the city I remembered, this new monolith of glass and steel provides a remarkable view of the city. You can take it in from Sora, the rooftop bar—already a destination for the city's newly affluent, see-and-be-seen crowd. Similar views are also available via floor-to-ceiling windows in all the public floors of the hotel, from the fine-dining restaurant to the spa, the art gallery to the cafe.

But it was only when Gabrielle and I entered the plush serenity of our suite that I finally had a chance to sit and take the view in. The experience was like being in a hot-air balloon above a cornfield, the entire city a scale miniature. Gradually, I recognised shapes below me: the Central Market, the temple. And there, partly obscured by trees, were my rooms on 178 Street, across from the National Museum. Were the bats still here?



Above: Krabey Island, in the Gulf of Thailand, is a 15-minute boat ride from Cambodia's southern shore. *Opposite:* The Tree restaurant at Six Senses Krabey Island.

THE RESIDENT WELLNESS CONSULTANT LED ME IN A PERSONAL BEACHSIDE YOGA SESSION, SOMETHING I DID NOT ACTUALLY BELIEVE HAPPENED IN REAL LIFE.

We had only 36 hours in the capital and we overfilled them, exploring Buddhist temples and wandering streets I half remembered, cruising the humming night markets and generally reacquainting myself with the uniquely open and delightful people of this city. Arriving in a new place can be jarring, but Cambodia is easy, because Cambodians are easygoing. At least I've found it so, and I was delighted, and a bit relieved, to discover that Gabrielle felt the same. This wasn't exactly sightseeing, it was slowing down and seeing, and we wanted to stay. But we had another trip to make.

The last time I travelled from Phnom Penh to the southern province of Sihanoukville, I rode on the train. That is to say, I rode on the roof of one, the way a surfer rides a wave. It was a budget travel option for locals, though neither safe nor strictly legal. The nearly 241-kilometre journey is still long and hot, but I'm older and lazier. This time, we drove to Sihanoukville in an air-conditioned car.

We were headed for a resort named Six Senses Krabey Island, the latest in a handful of private-island escapes to have opened along the Cambodian coast in recent years. Our driver, Sathya Soun, made great time, working the horn and the gas and the brake across the mountains. Five hours later, we crested a final hill and suddenly there was the Gulf of Thailand: a blue line of horizon, broken by the distant green humps of the islands.

We pulled up to the Six Senses boathouse, where we traded our luggage for chilled hand towels and house-made ginger-and-lemongrass tonic. At the dock our boat awaited, bobbing on sapphire-blue water. Slender fish skimmed the surface like tiny barracuda; swarming shadows of bait pulsed and darted in the depths. "There were dolphins this morning," our captain said, and we whooshed off toward Krabey Island on twin 250-horsepower engines. There, a small contingent of staff was waiting, hands pressed together in welcome as we exchanged greetings and climbed the pathway to the 40 villas discreetly tucked into the rocks and coves and jungle of this little island paradise.

You may have heard about the Six Senses philosophy: at its resorts, the emphasis is on a sustainable, authentic, experiential, and if you choose, wellness-centred stay. Want to sleep better? Eat better? Or just chill out? Krabey is not a large island, but there are places to walk, to explore, to play

and swim. There's a glass-roofed hilltop spa and wellness centre with a lighthouse view of the world.

Ours was villa No. 30: secluded and, I thought, particularly stunning. Its design was naturalistic without being rough-hewn—less Fred Flintstone, more Frank Lloyd Wright. A wall of sliding glass doors faced a small patio and plunge pool, merging with a view of the gulf, a broad-limbed tree fitted with a rattan swing chair, and, at cocktail hour, the setting sun.

Arriving here, the first impulse is to play house. You can control the curtains, the lighting, the fans, and the temperature on a tablet supplied in every villa; you can also stream reggae through the Marshall Bluetooth speakers, check the mini-bar for cold bottles of the local Brewlander craft beer, and jump naked into the pool. The journey had been interesting but not short, and now what we wanted to do was: nothing. Perfectly nothing.

But while Gabrielle puttered around our new nest, I pushed back out into the heat, touring the facilities (common pool, ice cream parlour, water-sports centre), mopping my forehead with a *krama,* the traditional Khmer scarf, which doubles as a sarong, belt, and turban. There were fishing communities to visit and local fish to pick from the nets, cooking classes to attend, bottles of chilled white wine to sample, and facial scrubs to prepare.

An expert elbow-heavy deep-tissue massage brought me to the edge of begging for amnesty, but somehow unknotted the ravages of a four-year book project and a 16-hour flight. Later, the resident wellness consultant, Dr. Anand Peethambar, led me in a personal early-morning beachside yoga session, something I have seen pictured in resort brochures and antidepressant commercials but did not actually believe happened in real life.

I'd return to the villa and find Gabrielle kneeling on the tiles studying a snail the size of a croissant or collecting praying mantises, their jagged arms cocked like paper soldiers. Or legging through the tidal pool like some giant bird, stalking translucent shrimp with luminous eyes.

We discovered that life on a private island quickly begins to resemble an Agatha Christie mystery, with a cast of characters destined to interact. There was a procession of workers who shyly waved, orange-robed monks brought in to chase evil spirits into



A staff member at Alila Villas Koh Russey, one of several private-island resorts to have recently opened off mainland Cambodia.

the sea, and Parag Mahajani, the resort's visiting astronomer. Mahajani genuinely wanted to show us the moon's Sea of Tranquility—the lunar landing site of Apollo 11. Each night he was heartbreakingly optimistic that the clouds would part; each morning I'd see him in the tree-house-like restaurant, still hopeful, peeling his breakfast oranges with a distinctly Euclidian air. I hated to let him down.

Could we have stayed on at Six Senses? Lord, yes. I wanted to. Gabrielle wanted to. It had been, what, two days? Three? But there were other places to have opinions about. And so we stuffed our (mostly unworn) clothes back into the bag, boarded another boat in a profusion of byes and bows and clasped hands, and headed for another resort.

I sometimes have a problem with 'luxury' travel, because luxury can create a barrier from the difficulties and annoyances of daily life. Travel, meanwhile, is an opportunity to experience something unfamiliar and perhaps even uncomfortable—the lives of real people in other places. At our final destination, however, I discovered a version of luxury travel I could live with: a rare and extravagant feast of the senses hidden deep within the jungle; an unexpected, delightful conversation named Shinta Mani Wild.



Each of the 15 tented suites sits above a private stretch of river in South Cardamom National Park.



Rooms at Shinta Mani Wild combine the feel of a luxurious safari camp with an old-world Southeast Asian aesthetic.

To get to that conversation required another boat and a four-hour drive through towns and villages and wedding processions, then an unpaved road and a two-track wooden bridge. The mountains got bigger, the undergrowth greener. At some point we switched to a jeep, so we could crawl the ruts in low gear.

For now, this is the only form of arrival at Shinta Mani Wild, but eventually, general manager Sangjay Choegyal told me, most guests will enter via a 305-metre zipline over the jungle canopy and across a thundering waterfall. (The jeep option will still be available for the faint hearts.) This is theatre with a mission: to separate guests from their workaday mind-set and prepacked expectations, as quickly and completely as possible.

Which is to say, to get them out of their heads and into Cambodia.

Shinta Mani Wild is the latest offering from Bill Bensley, the celebrated, Bangkok-based designer of some 200 hotels in more than 30 countries. Bensley is justly thought to have redefined luxury in the hotels of Southeast Asia, and in recent years he has developed a particular passion for this kingdom.

The resort is something unique and new to Cambodia—not only a distinctive property in a relatively uncharted region but also one driven by a commitment to helping preserve, nurture, and highlight this country and its character.

How to describe Shinta Mani Wild? First, there is the location: a 1.7-million-acre national park preserve deep in the southern Cardamom Mountains, part of the largest unspoiled patch of jungle in Southeast Asia. Not long ago, the reserve was isolated; then a highway was cut across it, providing access for loggers and developers to nibble at its edges, and creating a barrier to the migration of animals between the high plateaus of Cambodia's famous Bokor National Park and Kirirom National Park. Private money, including Bensley's, established a new reserve, and the land was saved.

Then there's the design. The technical term is 'tented camp,' as the 15 guest units—each of which sits perched over its own private stretch of the untamed Thmor Roung River—evoke a glamping aesthetic. But there's really no confusing this for anything approaching camping, or anything other than a Bensley property.

When examined from a distance, each villa reveals itself to be something like a giant boat. The tented portion contains the interior living space; the outdoor space resembles a deck, ringed by netted wings that extend over the river, serving as enormous hammocks. It's as if someone built an ark out of pieces of a North Indian hill station, a jumble of 19th-century African and Cambodian hardwood furniture, and remnants of Barnum & Bailey circus canvas. The vibe is curated fun mixed with local flavour, a mixture of the antique and the fabulous and the foreign, of old-money grace and old-world eccentricity. It is, in short, a room that you do not want to leave.

"Heaven," was how Gabrielle put it as she flitted from river to orchid to

hammock. There was a short happy dance, and, eventually, a facedown flop on the great four-poster bed in the middle of the tent.

"Bill's only rule, in developing this, was just don't cut down any trees," Choegyal, the general manager, told me. I told him it sounded impossible. "But it wasn't," Choegyal said. Instead, structures were built around the trees. "There's always a solution—that's one of the things Bill has taught me."

It's a harmony of nature and design that you feel, rather than notice outright. Like the structures at Shinta Mani, Cambodia's wild spaces must find a way to both resist and accommodate, to bend and not break.

It was tempting, after so much moving around, to just stop and hang the Do Not Disturb sign across the bridge leading to our suite (yes, there is a rope and a bridge). To listen to the river below, to read a book—or not read one. But there were things to do. There were adventure butlers on hand, young men in fitted camo vests more Savile Row than deer hunter, some of whom doubled as resident butterfly experts, others as specialists in the Cambodian martial art of *bokator*. Tulga, a Mongolian fishing guide, wanted to show us his version of *tenkara,* the meditative Japanese art of catch-and-release fly-fishing. I caught two trees, one rock, and no fish, and Gabrielle's luck was no better. *Tenkara* was one option; if a guest wanted to do something else, like forage for mud crabs for that night's dinner, that was possible too.

Later, we hopped on the backs of the mopeds driven by Chen Oudom, a young soldier, and Yervon Von, a local anti-poaching specialist. Both are part of a group Shinta Mani Wild supports called Wildlife Alliance, which fights a war of attrition against the chain saws and snare traps that threaten these forests. Its ultimate goal is to create enough of an ecotourism industry here that villagers see these wild spaces as a resource to preserve, not plunder. Elephants, leopards, and gibbons are regularly captured near Shinta Mani; attempting to catch poachers in the act, or dissuade them from trying, is daily work. We spent the afternoon foot-patrolling the jungle paths the poachers use, eyes peeled for illegal snares that maim and kill any animal that happens upon them.

We had only two nights at Shinta Mani Wild, but they were full, late ones full of stories and fun, jungle sounds mixing with the laughter of the rushing river below. We had dinner, then drinks, then Mongolian vodka. For after-dinner entertainment, Gabrielle learned some *bokator* moves, then the resort's collection of antique front-desk bells were brought out to create a surprisingly pleasing symphony at the dinner table.

A giant Indian moon moth hung over one of the light bulbs high in the tent top, and a great white tokay gecko arrived to keep us company. Gabrielle called it "Friend." Friend didn't disagree, and stuck around. Sometime later, the sky became lighter, the rocks and mountains and river became visible again, and we were there, very much there, in a place like no other.

We were leaving in a few hours. But somehow, it seemed that we had finally just arrived.



PLAN A TRIP TO SOUTH CAMBODIA

Make the capital of Phnom Penh your base for a trip to the unspoiled islands off the coast, followed by a stay in a jungle camp.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Multiple airlines serve connecting flights from major cities in India to Phnom Penh. Regional carriers connect the Cambodian capital and the airport at Sihanoukville in less than an hour. A hired car with a driver takes longer, but you see more.

STAY

Rosewood Phnom Penh

High above the city in the Vattanac Capital Tower, this new hotel has sleek, contemporary rooms with spectacular views. Don't miss a drink at the vertiginous Sora rooftop bar. *Doubles from ₹15,542; rosewoodhotels.com*

Six Senses Krabey Island

About five kilometres off Cambodia's unspoiled southern coast, this private island has everything you'd expect from a Six Senses resort: ravishing waterfront villas, many with private pools, plus extensive spa and wellness facilities. Activities range from watersports and stargazing to cooking classes and tours of fishing villages. *Doubles from ₹29,837; sixsenses.com*

Alila Villas Koh Russey

On the nearby island of Koh Russey you'll find a more familiar tropical beach vacation hotel experience: lounge chairs, a pool, and a cash bar on a crescent of sandy beach. The food is also excellent—from the Khmer-style beef *loc lac* to the croissants. *Doubles from ₹32,148; alilahotels.com*

Shinta Mani Wild

Bangkok-based hotel guru Bill Bensley has brought luxury to an untrodden part of Cambodia. Fifteen tented villas are arranged around a river in South Cardamom National Park, where adventure butlers offer guided activities including patrols with local anti-poaching NGO Wildlife Alliance. *Doubles from ₹1,62,822, all-inclusive; shintamaniwild.com*

TOUR OPERATOR

Wild Frontiers has a team of local specialists who can plan a southern Cambodia itinerary, as well as Angkor Wat extensions (*from ₹5,17,739 per person for nine nights, excluding travel; wildfrontierstravel.com*). They can also arrange a moped tour of Phnom Penh with the moped-riding Motogirls *(motogirltour.com)* or a trip to the Phom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center *(freethebears.org)*, where you can help care for rescued bears.

Wish You Were Here

RAS AL JINZ TURTLE RESERVE
OMAN



HEMIS/ALAMY

A SMALL FISHING VILLAGE on the eastern shore of the Arabian Peninsula, Ras al Jinz in Oman holds an important position with respect to ecology. It is one of the world's largest nesting areas of an endangered turtle species. Green turtles, or *chelonia mydas*, migrate to Oman's sandy shores every year between May and September to lay eggs. It takes about 55 days for the eggs to hatch, before the newborn begin their perilous first journey towards the sea, carefully escaping ravenous foxes, crabs, and seagulls, and other predators.

The Ras al Jinz Turtle Reserve, first established in 1996 by Royal Decree, is among the few institutions to offer guided tours for visitors to witness the incredible natural phenomena of nesting and hatching. Additionally, the reserve offers accommodation in 19 carapace-inspired rooms and 12 luxury eco-tents. The Turtle Visitor Centre, a state-of-the-art museum on the site, takes guests through the life-cycle of the green turtle and displays archaeological findings from the Ras al Jinz beach. *Tours start from ₹1,447 for adults and ₹361 for children aged 5-12; rasaljinz-turtlereserve.com*

—SHRIMAYEE THAKUR



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