

YTL *life*

The YTL Luxury Magazine

Tales & Trails

In Search of
Jim Thompson in
Cameron Highlands

Sun Goddess

Style Under the
Balinese Sun

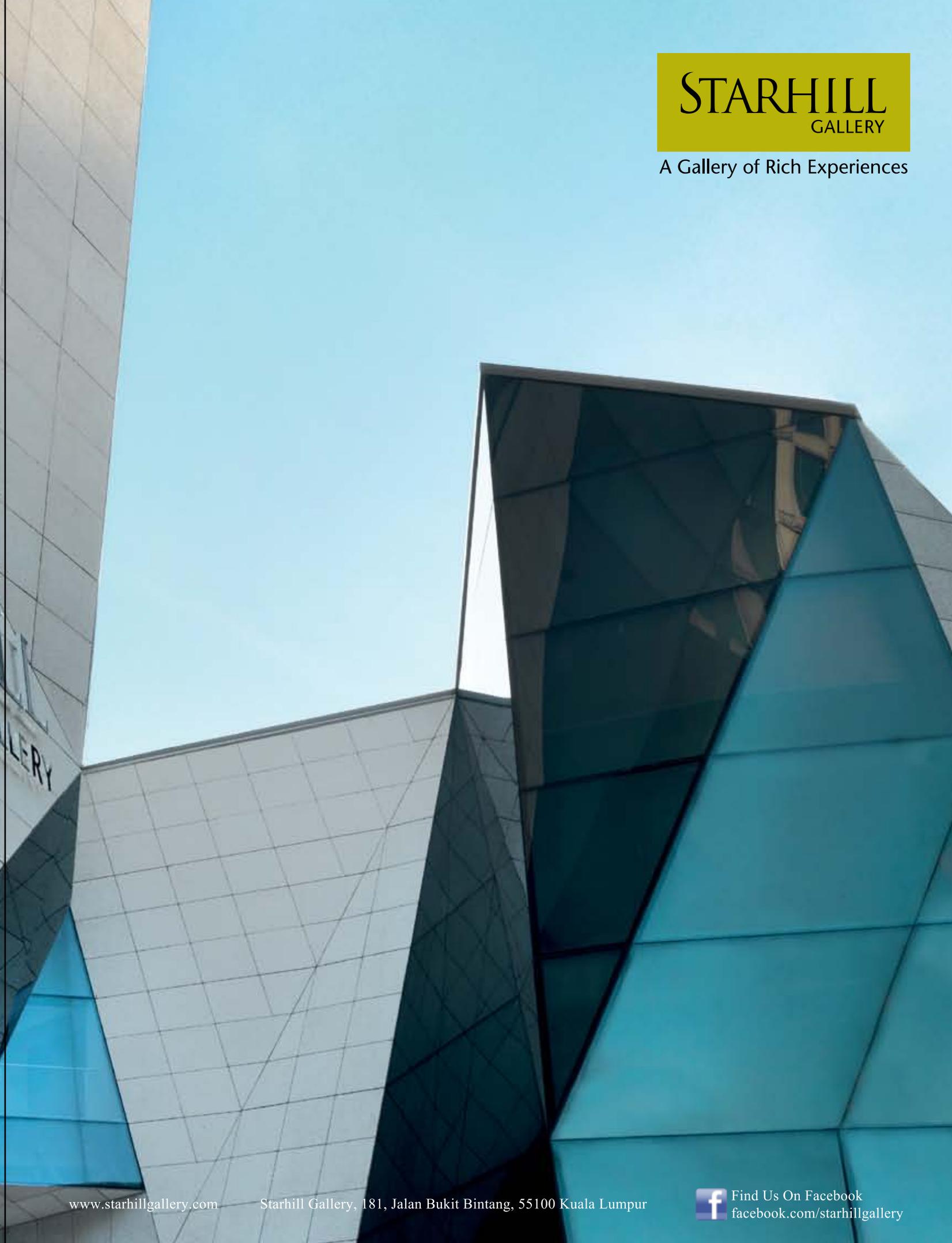
YTL Lives

Ho Peck Choo
Stephen Ooi
Steve Cokkinias



East Coast Diving • Peranakan Spa Rituals • Spring in Saint-Tropez

STARBUCKS
GALLERY

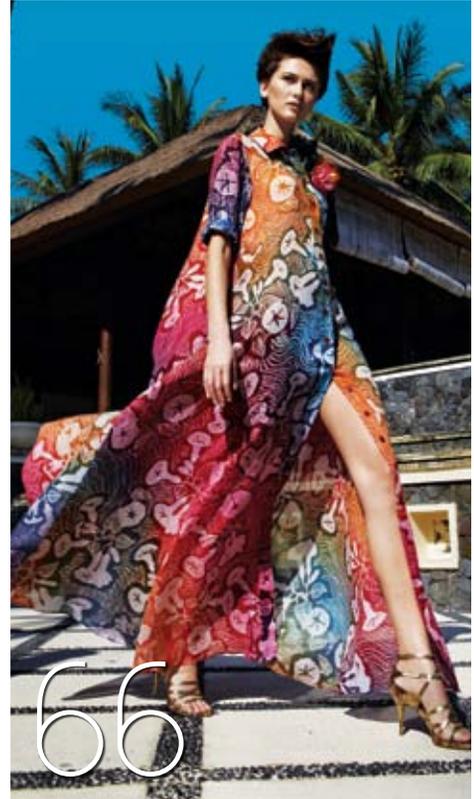
A low-angle photograph of the Starhill Gallery building, showing its modern architecture with large glass panels and a grid of white panels. The sky is a clear, light blue. The building's facade is composed of large, angular glass panels and a grid of white panels. The glass panels reflect the sky and surrounding environment. The white panels form a grid pattern. The building is set against a clear blue sky.

STARHILL GALLERY

A Gallery of Rich Experiences



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YTL *life*

The YTL Luxury Magazine

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A Note from Tan Sri (Dr) Francis Yeoh



*Tan Sri (Dr) Francis Yeoh
Managing Director,
YTL Corporation*

Spring is a time for awakening and rebirth. In this issue of *YTL Life*, we are pleased to bring you the best and brightest of our portfolio of resorts all around the world. In Shanghai, we are especially proud of the Swatch Art Peace Hotel's official opening, attended by YTL Corporation's good friends and supporters, including Nick Hayek, Chairman and CEO of the Swatch Group, Francois-Henri Pinault, CEO of the French conglomerate PPR, and his wife, the actress Salma Hayek. Since its opening, Shook! Shanghai, the hotel's in-house restaurant, whose dining concept is based on the famous Shook! Kuala Lumpur at Starhill Gallery, has also been voted Number One restaurant in Shanghai by TripAdvisor and more recently awarded 'Best Modern Restaurant' in the *Modern Weekly* 2011 Best Restaurants Awards. Needless to say, the great and the good have all visited recently, including Olympian Michael Phelps, the Il Divo quartet and current WBC light heavyweight champ, Bernard Hopkins Jr, aka 'The Destroyer'.

The opening also marked the launch of the hotel's unique artist-in-residence programme. Being a great fan of art, I look forward to seeing a vision realised, where artists may come and work, rent-free, in this unique, historical space, leaving behind a small token of their work, as a mark of their time here and which would also allow future and returning guests the chance to enjoy a living artistic timeline of their creations. The year is also shaping up to be an amazing one for all of us at YTL Hotels. Dedicated to perfecting the hotel experience all over the world for our guests, we are pleased and proud to announce the opening of our first property in Borneo shortly. Located on Gaya Island, just off Sabah's capital city of Kota Kinabalu, we promise you an unforgettable experience at the legendary Land Below the Wind on our all-new Gaya Island Resort.

Enjoy the issue and God bless.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a long, thin horizontal line that extends to the right.

From left: Nick Hayek,
Tan Sri Francis Yeoh,
Salma Hayek-Pinault and
Francois-Henri Pinault at
the opening of the Swatch
Art Peace Hotel, Shanghai.



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When Time Stood Still

La Montre Hermès, the timekeeping arm of luxury label Hermès, recently unveiled its first standalone boutique in Malaysia at Starhill Gallery. Gracing the occasion was Luc Perramond, Managing Director of La Montre Hermès SA. An exclusive gathering of guests, many among whom subtly paid tribute to the brand by sporting at least one piece of Hermès, be it in the form of bag, watch or tie, was present to witness the occasion as well as discover more about the brand's award-winning timepiece, *Arceau Le Temps Suspendu* (French for 'suspended time').

1. The Hermès store, Starhill Gallery.
2. Yulia Dolmatova and Rita Shum.
3. Tien Yao H'ng and Luc Perramond officially open the store.
4. Marinna Indot, Tien Yao H'ng, Datin Pat Indot and Datin Alissa Fitri.
5. Anita Ibrahim, Datin Mariam Abdullah, Yap Teak Sing and Shawna Yap.
6. Eric Eoon and Jonathan King.
7. Melissa Indot.



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8

Eastern Awakening

A bevy of glamorous women thronged Starhill Gallery for the recent launch of Shiatzy Chen's first boutique in South-East Asia. This flagship store, located on the Indulge Floor, marks the first step of the brand's Asian expansion. Renowned for its East meets West design and dressing philosophies, Shiatzy Chen is often referred to as the 'Chanel of the East'. The launch also saw a fashion showcase of its Spring/Summer collection, inspired by the snuff bottle – a symbol of affluence in 17th-century China. Guests admired the elegant collection, crafted from fine materials like organza, satin, vintage lace and jacquard, followed by a virtuosic performance by soprano Tan Soo Suan, accompanied by the celebrated Dama Orchestra.

1. Nilou de Luca Gabrielli and HE Folco de Luca Gabrielli, Ambassador of Italy to Malaysia. 2. Models showcasing fashion from Shiatzy Chen's Spring/Summer collection. 3. Dr Casey Chow and Ashley Chow. 4. Datin Sri Tiara Jacqueline. 5. Tay Liam Ngee, Angie Lai-Tay and Olivia Tay. 6. Tan Soo Suan. 7. Dato' Ruby Khong and Mansor Tun Abdul Aziz. 8. Tiffany Hsu Wei Ning.



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Image from Karri Ueaz

Teutonic Treats

German celebrity chef and television star Johann Lafer recently welcomed young chefs from YTL Hotels to his 800-year-old Stromburg Castle in the Rhine Valley to study, cook, marvel and eat. The YTL delegation, headed by Executive Vice President of Resorts, Laurent Myter, enjoyed a day out with the celebrated chef, preparing a colourful fusion of Malaysian and German dishes. Each went home awarded with a certificate for cooking skills. Chef Lafer has, to date, trained over 30 YTL Hotels chefs over the past 10 years in Stromburg Castle. "Malaysia inspires me so much and I love spending my holidays at Pangkor Laut Resort. Lovely people, beautiful landscapes, unbelievable colours, exotic smells and most astonishing spices – they all touch my heart and inspiration," said Chef Lafer.

1. Preparation for the cooking class.
2. Sharon Leong, YTL Sales Director Europe, mastering haute cuisine.
3. Final touches by Chef Kok Yew Nin and Chef Ahmad Zamirudin Yahaya.
4. Chef Johann Lafer, Reinhard Modritz, Chief Editor of Traveller's World magazine and Laurent Myter as the Tremendous Trio.
5. Laurent Myter, Executive Vice President Resorts for YTL, proving his cooking skills.



5



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3

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YTL's latest news, events, attractions and not-to-be-missed experiences.



01

Savoring Shanghai

If you're in Malaysia and are yearning for a true taste of Shanghai's sublime culinary flavours, head to the appropriately-named Shanghai Restaurant at the **JW Marriott Kuala Lumpur** to sample authentic and delicious fare. From hearty *dan dan* noodles and the must-have traditional *dim sum* delicacy of soup-filled *xiao loong bao* dumplings, to slightly less well-known (but no less delicious) dishes like simple cold cucumber salad and spring onion pancakes, Shanghai promises a treat you'll not forget in a hurry. For reservations, tel: +603 2715 9000.

02

Ahoy, There!

Guests travelling to the luxury private island of **Pangkor Laut** will now check in at the Marina Island Pangkor, a new front office with modern and spacious facilities, to ensure you embrace an island frame of mind even before arriving at the fabled luxury resort. While waiting for your transfer, there are also souvenir shops, a Tourism Malaysia Marina Island office and a café to have a quick browse through. Guests will also experience a quicker journey from the mainland to the resort by speedboat, with the journey time shortened to just 15 minutes.

03

Touched By Angels

No matter what the circumstances we may find ourselves in, we all deserve to be happy and healthy. If you feel warmth, happiness or hope as you read this, you might wish to open your heart and follow your inner voice to embrace Angelic Reiki. The **Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali** now offers a 2½ day Angelic Reiki workshop for guests wishing to learn to be Reiki facilitators, either for self-practice or to help others. A manual and recognised certificate will be presented upon completion of the course.



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04

Breakfast Sunshine

Relive memories of sunny mornings in Spain by breakfasting at the **STS Café** or the **Starhill Tea Salon** in Starhill Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, which now offers delicious piping-hot *churros* – to be dipped in sinful chocolate sauce. Available throughout the day, choose to start or end your day with this sublime Spanish treat or simply enjoy them as a mid-afternoon indulgence, accompanied, always, by a glass of the café's highly-rated orange juice. *Ole!*

05

Fisherman's Catch

Tanjong Jara Resort's Nelayan Restaurant – the name means 'fisherman' in Malay – welcomes guest chef Florent Passard, who will be cooking at the sea-front restaurant until August this year. A master of French slow-cooking techniques, Chef Florent has honed his skills all over France, including at Michelin-starred restaurant Le Villa Belrose in Saint-Tropez as well as, most recently, the Muse Hôtel de Luxe in Ramatuelle.

06

All Shook Up

Shook! at Starhill Gallery in Kuala Lumpur launches its all-new Shook! Shanghai Sunday Brunch, evoking all the flamboyance and fun of 1930s Shanghai. Offering an extensive East-meets-West buffet spread, from *dim sum* to roast duck and whole roast lamb, choose from a food-only option at RM168++ or enjoy your brunch with free-flowing champagne at RM268++. For reservations, tel: +603 2782 3875. **▼**

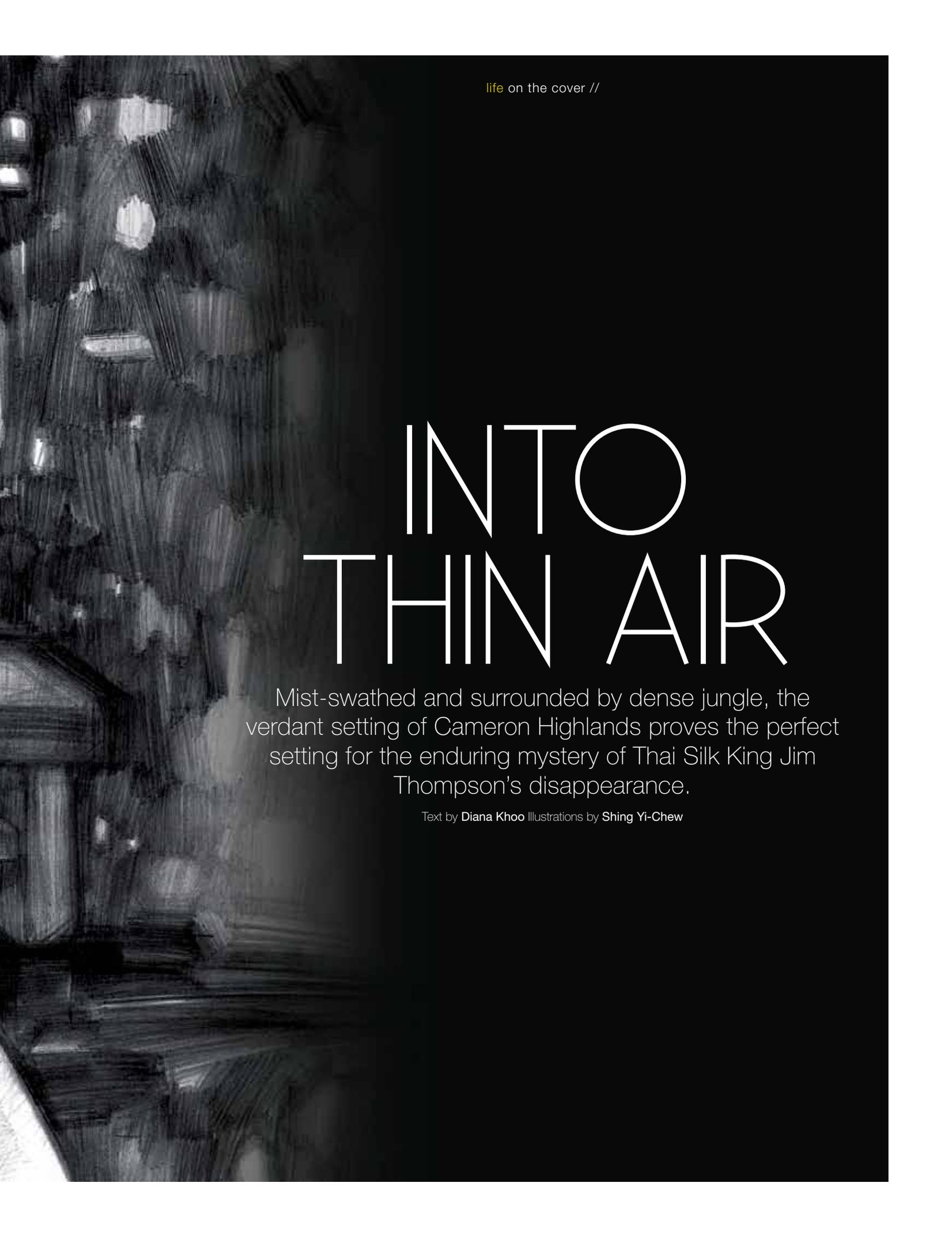
For more information on YTL Hotels' events and promotions, go to www.ytlhotels.com

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life on the cover //

INTO THIN AIR

Mist-swathed and surrounded by dense jungle, the verdant setting of Cameron Highlands proves the perfect setting for the enduring mystery of Thai Silk King Jim Thompson's disappearance.

Text by **Diana Khoo** Illustrations by **Shing Yi-Chew**

In 1967, on a Sunday afternoon, 61-year-old James HW Thompson, an American businessman and founder of the modern Thai silk industry, mysteriously disappeared while supposedly having gone for a post-lunch stroll in Malaysia's Cameron Highlands. For those unfamiliar with Thompson's name, he was already something of a legend in South-East Asia, particularly Thailand, as he had been credited with reviving interest in the Thai silk industry with the establishment of the Jim Thompson Thai Silk Company, which survives and thrives to this day. It has been said that, in his heyday, if you wrote a letter to Thompson in Thailand, addressing it, simply, 'To Jim Thompson, Bangkok', it would be sure to find its way to him.

Forty-five years on, still no one knows for sure what happened to Thompson that fateful day in the highlands. Faded photographs still survive, showing images of a relaxed-looking Thompson, reclining on a picnic blanket, taken just hours before he disappeared on Easter Sunday. Moonlight Cottage, where Thompson had been staying with his good friends, a Singaporean couple named Dr TG Ling and his American wife, Helen, as well as his companion, Mrs Connie Mangskau,

today remains the focal point of interest among conspiracy theorists as it is where Thompson stayed before vanishing.

Looking at it today, surrounded by fragrant pine trees and looking out onto mist-swathed hills, it seems improbable that an idyllic setting like this could be shrouded in such ominous mystery. As legend has it, Thompson spent the morning of Easter Sunday rather peaceably, attending service at the little Anglican church in Tanah Rata, before moving on to a nearby hill site for a picnic lunch. Nothing untoward happened during the picnic, although some of his companions did recall Thompson's restlessness. By mid-afternoon, the party had returned to Moonlight Cottage for an afternoon siesta. The Lings retired to their room and Mrs Mangskau to hers. Whatever happened during the next few hours remains an enduring mystery.

Thompson had left his jacket on the chair and his cup of tea on the table. A half-smoked cigar still rested against an ashtray. Reports also note that Thompson's bed was not even lain on and, if he had decided to go for a post-lunch stroll, it would not have been unusual in the least, given Thompson's love of the outdoors. Although Cameron Highlands today is a thriving hill station, in Thompson's time, its surrounding jungle was decidedly denser, with tigers and other wild animals known to be still lurking in it. Local aboriginal tribes hunted with blowguns and poisoned darts, a practice that continues today, and it wasn't uncommon for deep, plunging ravines and animal traps to be hidden amidst the thick jungle. "It's actually tremendously easy to lose yourself in the highlands," says Captain Mokh, one of YTL Hotel's resident naturalists and who was part of the original search parties that went out to hunt for Jim Thompson the moment he was reported missing. "Compared to what you see now, the jungle was very much denser in the 1960s. I was in the Malaysian Army at the time and had been stationed in Cameron Highlands about a month before the incident."

Moonlight Cottage, where Thompson spent his last few days before his disappearance.





THE JIM THOMPSON MYSTERY TRAIL

Jim Thompson's eye for beauty was not only confined to silk and ancient artefacts. He had a genuine love of nature and one of his greatest pleasures in life was to walk off the beaten track and explore his surroundings, be it dense jungle or rambling countryside. At the Cameron Highlands Resort, don't miss joining its signature walk, The Jim Thompson Mystery Trail, led by the hotel's resident naturalist and de facto 'Thompson hunter', S Madi, to explore the surrounding hills, all the while regaled by theories and the mysterious circumstances surrounding the legendary Silk King's disappearance. The walk begins at Moonlight Cottage, where Thompson stayed before his disappearance, and is a rambling trek, climbing all the way to 200m above sea level, before ending at the Luther Mission House, whose gardener at the time was the last person to have seen Thompson in the flesh. On the walk, expect to see flora and fauna that could include millipedes endemic to the highlands, bamboo orchids, wild strangler figs and ant's nest ferns. To book, contact the YTL Travel Centre at +60 3 2783 1000.

“Surrounded by fragrant pine trees and looking out onto mist-swathed hills, it seems improbable that an idyllic setting like this could be shrouded in such ominous mystery.”

life on the cover //

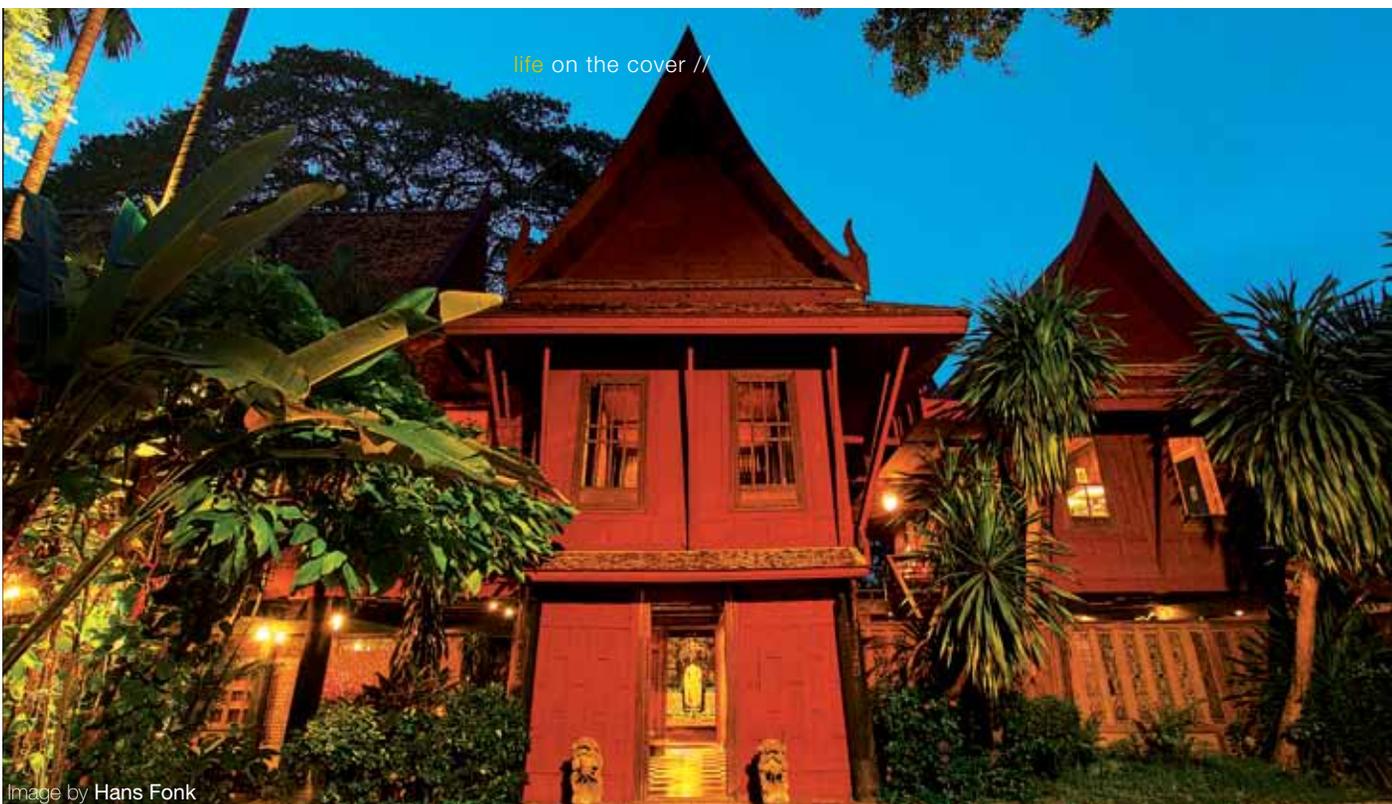


Image by Hans Fonk



Top: The Jim Thompson Museum in Bangkok.
Right: Captain Mokh was part of the original search parties that went looking for Thompson.

MYTHS OF THE HILLS – Who are *Orang Bunian*?

In Malay belief, *Orang Bunian* are said to be supernatural beings who inhabit the deep jungle and forests, living in communities much the way humans do, but in a parallel world. Invisible to the eye, unless you possess the gift of the third eye, *Orang Bunian* are generally said to shun human contact and are believed to possess great supernatural powers. They have, however, been known to assist humans, particularly *pawangs* and *bomohs* (witch-doctors and shamans) when called upon. Malays also believe them to be similar to *djinnns* (genies). It is often believed that, when people go missing in the jungle, it is because they have been led away by *Orang Bunian*. There is a Malay saying also that, when you can't find something and you know it's just in the area, they say it is "disorok Bunian" (hidden by *Orang Bunian*).

"There are many conspiracy theories on Thompson's disappearance," adds Mokh. "Some say he was attacked and killed by a tiger; others say he simply got lost and was swallowed up by the jungle. But I am certain he wasn't taken by animals as there was simply no trace of Thompson's clothing to be found. He also couldn't have left the area on foot as he definitely would have been spotted. Also, we'd brought in four sniffer dogs and it really does seem as if he just vanished into thin air."

Another probable theory is that Thompson had fallen into a ravine or long-forgotten animal trap. "The jungle has many patches of land which are very soft. And the leaf fall here is quick and heavy, and could have concealed any of the holes... Thompson might have simply fallen into one," adds Mokh. On an esoteric note, Mokh does share, however, in the local belief of *Orang Bunian* – genie-like beings who live in the jungle and often spirit away virgins and young children. "Many of the people in the area believe in *Bunian*," adds Mokh. "There was a case, as recent as two years ago, of a quantity surveyor who went missing and was only found after a week. He said he could see people in front of him, searching for him, but, somehow,



they couldn't see or hear him. He was just lying there, apparently unable to call out to them."

There are, however, other theories... some with a decidedly more sinister insinuation. Some are aware that Thompson was alleged to be a CIA agent and believe that he had been kidnapped for his previous involvement in spying activities. After all, Malaysia still bore the scars of The Malayan Emergency – the period between 1948 and 1960 and a dark patch in Malaysia's early history, when vicious communist activity struck constant fear and terror on the citizens of the young nation.

Tragically, just five months after Thompson's disappearance, the body of Katherine Thompson Wood, Thompson's eldest sister who lived in Pennsylvania, was discovered bludgeoned to death, which only served to renew speculation in the mysterious disappearance of Thompson. Many followers of the case, particularly in Thailand and Malaysia, can't believe that two such tragedies in a single family can be mere coincidence. Whatever the theory, it would seem that Jim Thompson the man left as great a mark in death as he did in real life. ☒

"Cameron Highlands today is a thriving hill station; in Thompson's time, its surrounding jungle was decidedly denser. with tigers and other wild animals known to be still lurking in it."

Perfectly In Tune

Guests of the Cameron Highlands Resort in Pahang, Malaysia, would, undoubtedly, recognise Stephen Ooi's face... or, at least, the melodies he plays. **Diana Khoo** speaks to the resort's resident pianist at the Jim Thompson lounge.

It might be referred to as the Jim Thompson Tea Room but, when night falls, the Jim Thompson Lounge is definitely the place to relax in, while knocking back a few drinks, at the Cameron Highlands Resort. While daylight hours beckon guests to explore the unique environment of the highlands and engage in nature-immersing activities like jungle trekking, strawberry-picking or even playing the full 18 holes at the golf course just across the road, night time is an invitation to relax by the Highlands Bar and its roaring fireplace, nursing a drink and simply soaking up the music of the night, rendered by resident pianist, Stephen Oswald Ooi.

Hailing from the beach resort haven of Batu Feringgi on the island of Penang, Ooi has been a fixture at Cameron Highlands Resort since 2006. Coming from a musically-inclined family, the jovial 69-year-old vividly remembers family 'jam sessions', where his mum would play the piano, dad the clarinet and two elder brothers on the guitar. Not that this streak of talent is limited to his parents and siblings. Most of Ooi's extended family also makes beautiful music, with a niece having studied in the prestigious Berklee College of Music in the United States and is now working as a composer, while another nephew, Nicky Ooi, used to be the frontman

of Malay rock band *Headwind*, arguably one of the biggest and most popular names on the local scene in the 1980s. "I myself have been



Photography by Sharon Lam

Stephen Ooi sets the mood in The Cameron Highlands Resort's Jim Thompson Lounge.

playing professionally since the age of 21," smiles Ooi, "and I used to play part-time with a jazz band when I was still living in Penang."

Today, fully retired from his 9-to-5 job and enjoying a restful life in the highlands, Ooi credits his current position to a mixture of good luck as well as being in the right place at the right time. "I was enjoying a retiree's life here, spending my days gardening and collecting orchids – a great passion of mine. Then, the son of a close musician friend of mine called me up, asking if I could play a two-hour gig for just two nights as it was the resort's soft opening. I hadn't played the piano since 2000 and I had just two weeks to brush up and practise... and only on the little keyboard I had brought with me!"

The first song Ooi played was Erroll Garner's jazz standard, *Misty*. "It has always been part of my repertoire," he shares. "Anyway, I

was one of many people playing or singing that night and I was just having fun. I certainly didn't expect anything more than the two days of work." As luck would have it, Dato' Mark Yeoh, Executive Director of YTL Hotels, which owns and operates Cameron Highlands Resort, was among the audience on the first night, taking in Ooi's medley of jazz and golden oldies. "Dato' Mark spoke to me after that and asked if I was interested to come and play regularly. All I could think was, if he reckoned I was good enough, I was more than willing to give it a go! My wife sums it up quite well, I think. She says I spend my days working in the garden or pottering about at home, while, at night, I get all dressed up, go out and thoroughly enjoy myself. All I can say is, how wonderful it is to do what you enjoy and get paid for it," he beams. ■

Stephen Ooi plays at the Cameron Highlands Resort's Jim Thompson Lounge from 7pm-11pm, Mondays to Saturdays.

"I spend my days working in the garden or pottering about at home, while, at night, I get all dressed up, go out and thoroughly enjoy myself."



HIT LIST

STEPHEN OOI'S TOP 10 MOST-REQUESTED NUMBERS

Misty - I like playing Johnny Mathis' version as it is fairly easy to play and a most popular request among guests.

My Way - What I like about this song is that it can be played in a very simple way or made interesting with arpeggios.

New York, New York - This is a great, upbeat song and is really made for dancing, I think. It has a great patchwork style and lots and lots of rhythm.

What a Wonderful World - I love playing this in a moderate swing style. But you'd need to know when to play this as I think it's best to wind down the night with.

My Funny Valentine - A sombre and moody song. The perfect accompaniment to a smoky glass of Islay whisky.

I've Got You Under My Skin - I love playing this in a thoroughly upbeat and jazzy way.

Smoke Gets in Your Eyes - This is another great winding-down song.

Unforgettable - I love adding bits and pieces to this one, to make it fun and more easy listening.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow - I play this with lots of feeling and arpeggios.

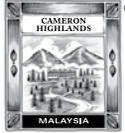
Skylark - This is actually Dato' Mark Yeoh's favourite song request. I can tell you honestly I didn't know how to play this Hoagy Carmichael tune when he first asked. But I certainly do now.



Introducing Gaya Island Resort

The Land Below the Wind is the perfect setting for the latest addition to the YTL Hotels portfolio – Gaya Island Resort. Set within the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park, just a short boat ride away from Sabah's capital of Kota Kinabalu, Borneo's latest luxury retreat sits gracefully on Gaya Island, the largest of the five islands in the marine park. Golden beaches and lush tropical rainforest beckon sun-worshippers and those wishing to commune with nature, while the waters off the island teem with marine life, including bamboo sharks and enormous barrel sponges. One hundred and twenty luxurious hill villas and one two-bedroom suite invite you to embrace island living, while the resort's two distinctive restaurants, Feast Village and Fisherman's Cove, allow for stylish indulging. A Spa Village, particularly unique in its mangrove setting, is also set to open alongside the resort in July 2012. ■

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Splendour After the Snow

Niseko ticks all the right boxes as the perfect spring getaway. **Catherine Shaw** explores a different side of Japan's top ski resort.

As winter draws to a close, Niseko, Japan's premier ski destination, gets set to welcome a whole new season of activity. The cosmopolitan upscale resort, tucked away on its picturesque perch at the base of Mount Niseko Annupuri and dominated by the 1,898m Mount Yōtei (often referred to as the 'Mount Fuji of Hokkaido') on Japan's northernmost island, is renowned for its deep powdery snows and groomed ski slopes, winning multiple prestigious international travel and design awards in 2011. For those looking to get away from it all, however, this is also the perfect destination this spring.

One of the main reasons is the landscape, which is, quite literally, breathtakingly beautiful – whatever the season. Think

majestic soaring mountains, crystal clear rivers and wide open plains, which, together with the elegant simplicity of Japanese rural life, make this the perfect natural retreat for stressed urbanites. Luckily, Niseko is further blessed with the best of both worlds when it comes to weather: its winter snows are legendary, guaranteeing deep powder ski conditions, but, come spring and summer, the island's cool and dry conditions offer an enticing alternative to the rest of Japan's soaring temperatures and humidity.

It is this unbeatable combination, topped off with a friendly local community and a new influx of luxury accommodation, and modern spa and dining ventures, that has transformed Niseko into a year-round must-visit destination. In the early post-

Golfing in the shadow of Mount Yōtei is one of Niseko's main draws

“The Hilton Niseko Village was voted the world's Best Ski Resort by CNNGo.com in 2011 and received accolades for The Lookout Café, located atop of Mount Niseko Annupuri.”

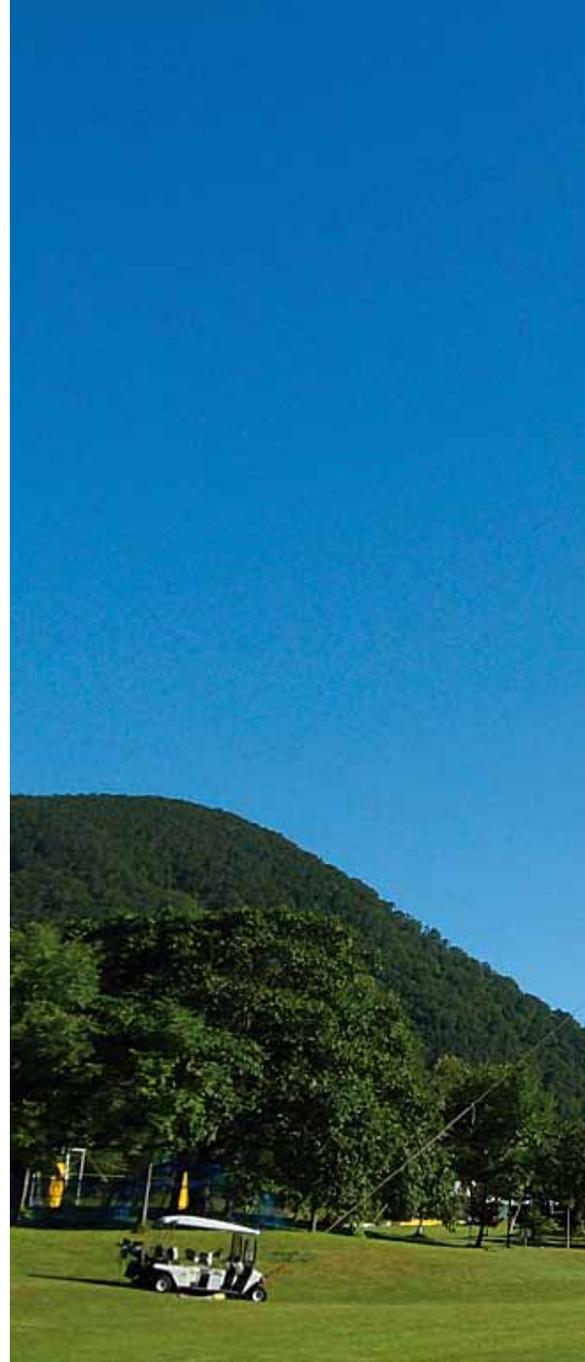
at the foot of Niseko Annupuri, is another popular spot for gentle hiking courses.

winter months, rafting enthusiasts make the most of the Shiribetsu River's icy waters, swollen with fast-melting snow; there are courses for all levels of expertise, from beginners to white knuckle rides. Kayaking and canoeing are also available – the Japanese Sea and the Toya and Shikotsu freshwater lakes nearby offer a wide variety of experiences. The area is also particularly popular with fly and lure fishing enthusiasts.

Those famous ski slopes come into their own during spring, when vegetation slowly emerges verdant green and hikers come to enjoy the hundreds of trails through spectacular scenery. A hike to the summit of Mount Yōtei is highly recommended for the very fit; alternatively, take a scenic ride on the gondola to the top of Mount Annupuri and walk back down to enjoy spectacular views of Mount Yōtei and Niseko Hirafu village. Lake Kagaminuma,

Mountain bikers are spoilt for choice, with access to tracks varying from cruising to technical downhill courses. Hokkaido-born bike tour concierge, Hiro Takahashi, says many of the cyclists who join his eco-tours come from as far as Hong Kong, Australia, Singapore and Taiwan to enjoy Niseko's scenic cycle routes. His personal recommendations include cycling through the farms around Mount Yōtei, Lake Toya, the water fountain parks created from melting snows and... a stop at the excellent local ice cream shop.

Wild mountain flowers, such as the butterbur sprout, dogtooth violet and crocus, appear in early spring, bringing a vibrant colour to the landscape and,





Niseko offers a myriad of pleasures including hot air balloon rides, while hikers enjoy spectacular views and vibrant wild flowers like crocus.



GETTING THERE

The nearest airport to Niseko is Sapporo's New Chitose Airport, with direct flights between most major domestic and international airports. The flight from Tokyo (Haneda) is around 90 minutes. Niseko is about two hours by car and 3½ hours by train from New Chitose Airport.



The outdoor adventure park at the Niseko Village Pure Action, where you will also find suspended wooden bridges and can go horse riding.



LATE SEASON SKIING

Niseko enjoys a particularly long ski season – last year's ran to mid May and 2012 appears ready to break all records again as snow enthusiasts make the most of spring's reliable weather, excellent visibility and lack of crowds. Many resorts are planning to remain open until Golden Week in May.

New to the scene is the eight-seater, high-speed gondola from Niseko Hirafu to the apex of the ski area, with 31 lifts and more than 60 ski and snowboard runs to choose from.

Niseko's award-winning, newly-renovated 200-room Green Leaf Niseko Village is the ideal luxury retreat for those seeking to make the most of the late snows. The Champalimaud Design-contemporary mountain-lodge style hotel (recently noted as one of the Best New Hotels by *Travel & Leisure* and one of the top 41 Places To Go by *The New York Times*) remains open until early April, offering guests contemporary luxury, sophisticated dining and spa services. "We wanted to create a modern social space attractive to a youthful and global clientele," explains Alexandra Champalimaud. The hotel's spa was also named as one of the 40 Best New Spas in The World by *Condé Nast Traveler US*.





“Lake Kagaminuma, at the foot of Niseko Annupuri, is another popular spot for gentle hiking courses.”

this year, Japan Railways Hokkaido has extended its popular ‘Spring Foliage Viewing Train’ (*Harukoyo Ressha*) from Sapporo to provide an opportunity to appreciate the spectacular display. The train leaves from Sapporo on a daily basis and some of the best areas to view flowers include the Panorama Line and the Goshiki Onsen area, and the Higashiyama area and Lake Hangetsu at the base of Mount Yōtei.

Golf in Niseko remains a key draw for many in warmer months, thanks to its exceptional golfing facilities, including the Arnold Palmer-designed 18-hole, par-72 Niseko Golf Course, the Niseko Village Golf Course and Hilton Niseko Village’s three full-sized practice golf holes and driving range. The 506-room hotel’s Niseko Village Pure Action is the heart of Niseko’s outdoor activities, with a

23-court tennis centre, equestrian centre, hand gliding, paragliding, abseiling, motor-cross, bungee jumping and rock climbing facilities. An inflated outdoor adventure park, hand-made by Pure staff using natural materials, offers adventure-seekers of all ages tree trekking through suspended wooden bridges, ladders and hanging features made of ropes. An exciting new zip line activity will be unveiled this summer.

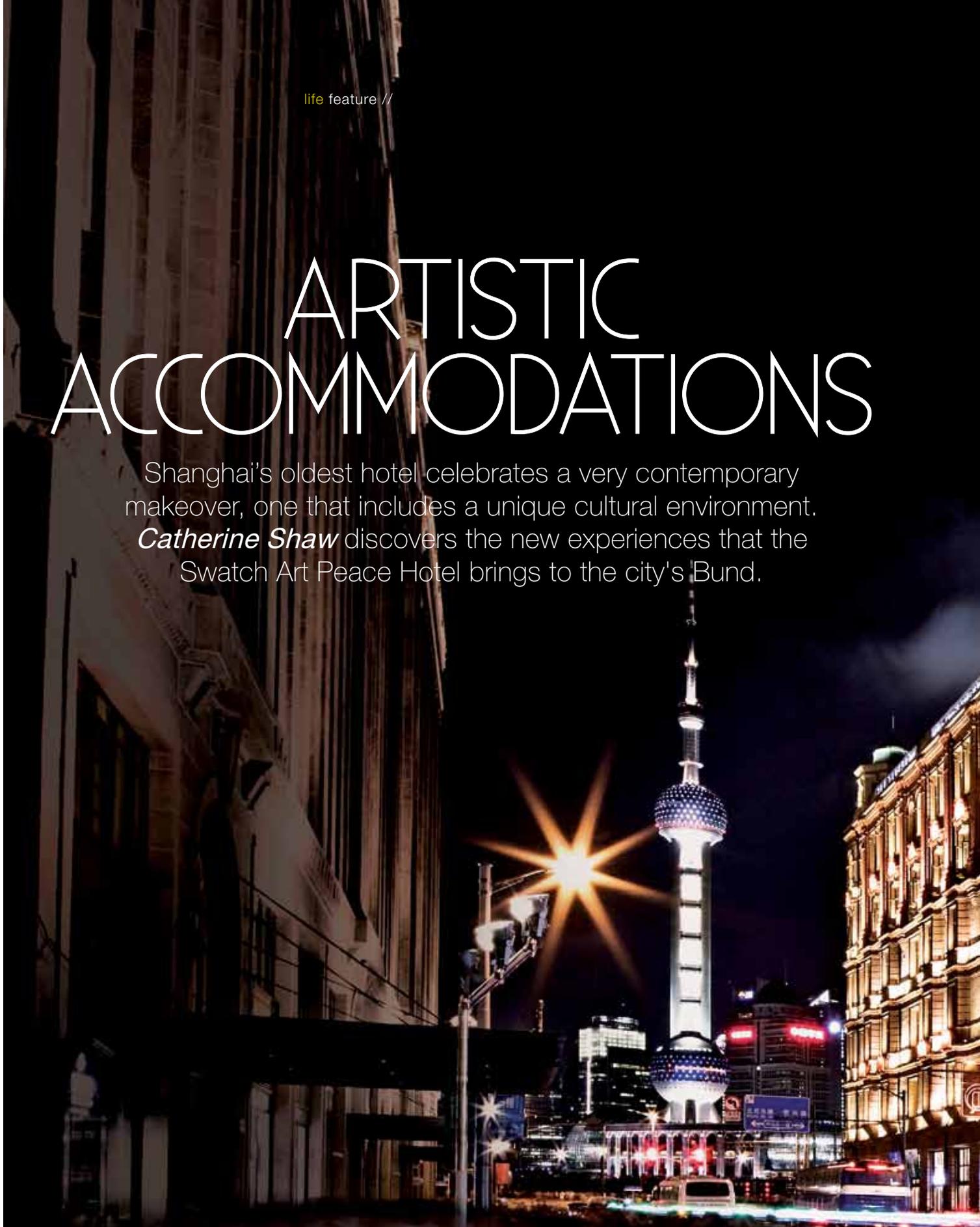
The Hilton Niseko Village was voted the world’s Best Ski Resort by CNNGo.com in 2011 and received accolades for The Lookout Café, located atop of Mount Niseko Annupuri. The design, by Yuhkichi Kawai of Design Spirits, won the Best International Restaurant award at the Restaurant & Bar Design Awards in England and was placed in the Best 100 at the JCD Design Awards in Japan. ■



life feature //

ARTISTIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Shanghai's oldest hotel celebrates a very contemporary makeover, one that includes a unique cultural environment. *Catherine Shaw* discovers the new experiences that the Swatch Art Peace Hotel brings to the city's Bund.







Shanghai, once renowned as the “Paris of the East” during its heyday in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is experiencing a very modern revival while keeping one foot firmly planted in its glamorous past. At the very centre of this new lease on life is the former Palace Hotel, now the Swatch Art Peace Hotel, one the city’s oldest and most venerated hotels fronting Shanghai’s Bund, the mile-long embanked riverfront lined with grand stone-fronted Neoclassical and Beaux-Arts buildings. Many of these structures, once traditional architectural tributes to international banks and trading companies, have now been transformed into the most striking symbols of modern-day Shanghai and are home to world-class boutiques and luxury hotels.

The city’s urban makeover was driven in large part by the unprecedented levels of investment (some USD45billion) at the time of the 2010 World Expo, where the embankment was identified as *the* centrepiece. Its subsequent USD700million, three-year facelift included diverting traffic lanes underground and creating landscaped public plazas. Anticipating a resurgence of international travel to the city, many of the waterfront’s most distinctive buildings have also enjoyed some rejuvenation (although purists do note that some changes are more authentic than others) that has brought a new wave of activity, including chic restaurants and bars, art galleries and stylish boutiques, to the area.

The old Palace Hotel, located on the Nanjing Road/Bund intersection, once occupied the south building of the renowned Art Deco Peace Hotel next door and was famous for hosting a number of important events, such as the International Opium Commission meeting in 1909 (the first international conference to discuss the world’s narcotics problems). Chiang Kai-shek and Soong Mei-ling also celebrated their engagement there in 1927.

The hotel is today the Swatch Art Peace Hotel, its elegant six-storey, red-brick Victorian façade the face of an intriguing reinvention courtesy of its new leaseholder, the Biel-based Swatch Group, whose flagship Breguet, Omega, Blancpain and Swatch boutiques enjoy pride of place on the street level. The company has long been associated with the art world and, with this new venture, was able to bring its inspired design ethos to the preservation of one of Shanghai’s most stunning cultural landmarks while simultaneously creating a new artistic concept.

While its frontage has been faithfully restored to its former glory, the hotel’s interior is a bold mix of heritage décor (the stunning Jacobean staircase, period ceiling and wood panelling

Overleaf. The Swatch Art Peace Hotel is an intriguing reinvention of the historic Palace Hotel. 1&2. The communal library and the modern designer kitchen in the hotel for visiting artists. 3 & 4. Shookl is spicing things up with a fresh approach to food.



5. The king-sized bed in the Happiness Suite is enclosed within a birdcage. 6. The Hotel has 18 workshop-apartments for visiting artists. 7. Some of the quirky details in the Prosperity Suite.

have all been carefully renovated by experts), contemporary design centre and seven modern art-inspired guest suites with uniquely quirky interiors by Paris-based designers Jouin Manku. The suites were inspired by traditional and modern Chinese culture, creating a fascinating blend of cutting edge design and whimsical touches: the vast king-sized bed in the Happiness Suite, for instance, is half-enclosed within a birdcage while, elsewhere, Chinese characters provide a decorative but meaningful touch. The Prosperity Suite is a favourite for those planning a private party, thanks to its vast cocktail bar. Other themed suites include the Joyful, Wondrous and Cheerful rooms, and the Peace and Good Fortune suites: all designed to create a feeling of goodwill. The interiors are a glorious celebration of highly inventive European design and cutting-edge style, with the latest state-of-the-art technology.

The hotel's innovative concept, however, goes well beyond modern hotel and retail to include a unique cultural environment dedicated to contemporary art. At the heart of the concept is the desire to promote cross cultural exchanges of different artists "so as to enrich personal experience and creativity". Eighteen-specially designed studio apartments and workshops (including a stunning communal library, modern designer kitchen and relaxing lounges with panoramic views of the Bund) have been created, where artists-in-residence from all around the world can work, live and exhibit their creative talents.

After their 'tenure,' which is usually limited to a maximum of six months in order to keep interaction between artists dynamic and vibrant, each artist leaves a "trace" of their work

“The Swatch Art Peace Hotel, its elegant six-storey, red-brick Victorian façade the face of an intriguing reinvention courtesy of its new leaseholder.”

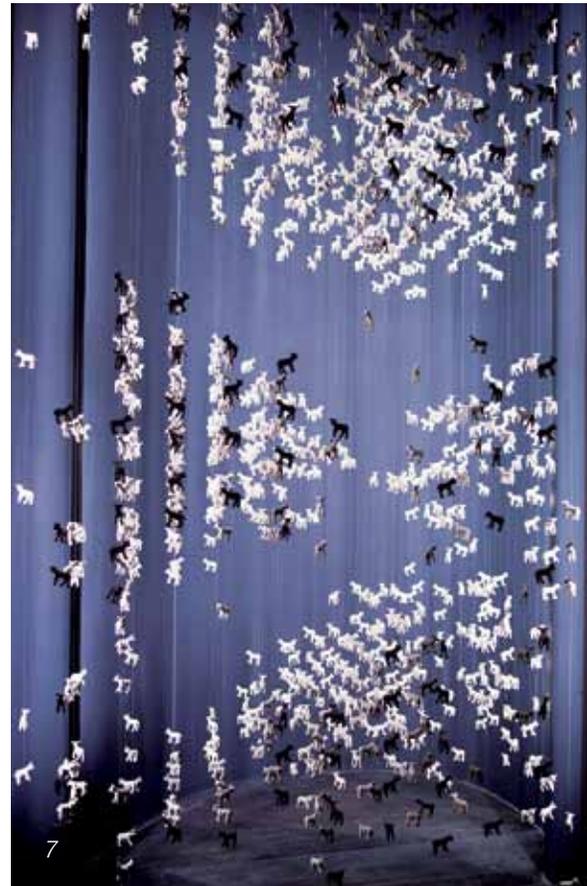


that will become part of the hotel's contemporary art collection. A trace is usually a piece of art created by the artist during their stay at the hotel: the actual choice of the artwork is up to the artist to decide. All traces become part of the Swatch Art Peace Hotel Collection and will be exhibited for the public to enjoy. A virtual online museum also help promote the artists to a wider audience. The first artists (Kathryn Gohmert is currently in tenure) were welcomed in April 2011 and have already made their distinctive mark with a broad range of artistic styles and media. In addition to the guest rooms and artist spaces, the hotel also has bespoke art exhibition spaces and a multi-purpose venue for cultural events.

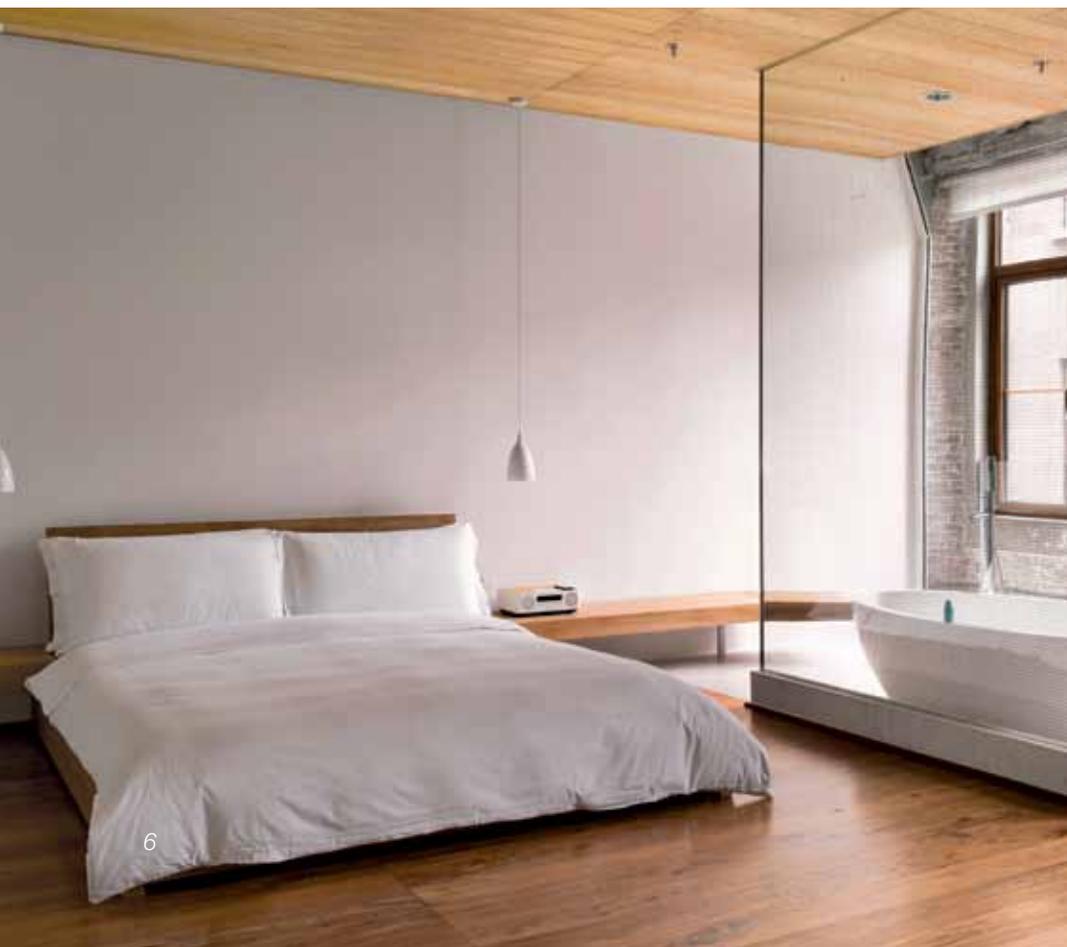
Although it has yet to be awarded any Michelin stars, Shanghai is a veritable smorgasbord for gourmands. Again, the Bund is *the* place to go. Although there are plenty of well-known restaurants, Shook!, located on the sixth-floor penthouse of the hotel, has already shaken things up with its fresh approach to culinary delights.

The appropriately-named venture embodies an already phenomenally popular international dining led by UK-born chef Kevin Cape, whose culinary skills were honed at London's Connaught Hotel (under Michel Bourdin) and as executive chef on the luxurious Eastern & Oriental Express train. Try the stir-fried prawns and hot mayonnaise sprinkled with honey-glazed walnuts – a firm favourite with the restaurant's regulars.

The restaurant's wine cellar also offers oenophiles two rare vertical collections of Bordeaux's most famous estates – Château Cheval Blanc and Château d'Yquem, with vintages from 1945 through to 2008. The al fresco roof terrace garden is another must-see for its panoramic views over the city and the two domes that house intimate restaurant dining spaces for the ultimate romantic dinner against Shanghai's favourite vista. ■



7



6

ARCHITECTURAL AND BESPOKE TOURS

For those interested in the Bund's stunning architecture, look no further than the fascinating information-packed walking tours offered by local historian and author Peter Hibbard. The president of the Royal Asiatic Society China in Shanghai, as well as the author of *The Odyssey Guide to Shanghai* and *The Bund Shanghai: China Faces West*, is a mine of information about the heritage buildings along this famed stretch. Another highly recommended service is Luxury Concierges China, for its bespoke tours led by local experts.

www.swatch-art-peace-hotel.com



A Dive into Underwater Paradise

One of the best-kept diving secrets in Malaysia is Pulau Tenggol on the East Coast of the peninsula. **Simon** and **Sofie Pridmore** take their first dives there and discovered the perfect base to do it from – Tanjong Jara Resort.

The locals always know best. Each year, towards the end of March, city folk in Kuala Lumpur dust off their scuba gear and start planning weekend road trips to the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia in anticipation of cloudless blue skies and calm, clear seas ushered in by the south-west monsoon.

These knowledgeable folk eschew the attractions of many famous dive destinations that lie only a short flight away from KL in favour of less well-known sites just up the road. Over the years, friends have told us stories about this “best-kept secret in diving” and, to be honest, we have always reacted a little cynically. After all, we have been around the scuba world a long time and have learnt that, sometimes, the reason that dive sites remain a secret is that, (whisper it softly) they are really not very good.

However, such was the high calibre of the divers passing on these recommendations and so consistent were their reports that we decided to do a little research and plan a trip for ourselves.

A Good First Impression

Initial indications were positive. The East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia borders the South China Sea and lies at the edge of the famed Coral Triangle, the epicentre of marine biodiversity, so we knew we could expect plenty of colour and variety in the marine life. We also saw that a major ocean current flows along the coast and there are a limited number of offshore islands along its route. Therefore, we thought we might justifiably anticipate encounters with large pelagic animals resting and feeding in and around these marine oases on their journey from ocean to ocean.



Left: Clown fish nestling in a bed of anemones. Below: Nudibranchs are typical sights in the Tenggol Island bay.



We were aware that the time to go was during the six months of the south-west monsoon or in the transitional months of March and October either side of the season; but which specific destination should we visit? The Terengganu National Marine Park seemed ideal, as the waters of the park, its islands and their inhabitants have been under government protection and allowed to thrive undisturbed, except by divers and snorkelers, since 1994. There were a number of areas within the park that attracted us but, the more research we did, the more the name of Tenggol, the southernmost major island, kept popping up.

An Easy Decision to Make

Then we heard that there was an excellent spa resort in the vicinity and the decision was easy. We would head for Tenggol and

set up our diving base at the Tanjong Jara Resort. After all, there are not many places in the world where you can revel in both wonderful scuba diving and sumptuous spa treatments.

It was the perfect choice. As we discovered when we arrived, when you stay at Tanjong Jara, you have Tenggol on your doorstep. While guests recline on the resort's long, golden beach, they can look out to the sea and spot the island out on the horizon, tempting them to rise from their torpor and get a little action in their lives.

The Tanjong Jara folk make it easy to get the best out of a day out on the water. A van is on hand every morning to whisk you from the resort to the dock, which is a 10-minute drive away and close to the mouth of the Dungun River. From there, the island is a mere 45 minutes of flat sea away in the resort's fast speedboat.

A Day on Tenggol

Tenggol is steep, rocky, rugged and heavily forested, but a large, sheltered white sand bay scooped out of the western side offers calm, crystal clear water and a thriving coral reef to entertain snorkelers and new divers.

Everyone's base for the day's activities lies in the bay, where the resort has an open-air lodge with bathroom and dining facilities. The speedboat anchors in the shallows and you wade to the beach through translucent, aquamarine water.

The action for more experienced divers lies on the other side of the island, where the vertical cliff line continues under water to form current-swept walls, and around the various rocks and pinnacles that lie to the north and south. The water movement, healthy corals and a vibrant reef community create a perfect environment to sustain large schools of fish and bring big animals in from the deep. Eagle rays, trevally, barracuda and black tip reef sharks are common sights and a selection of all of the above turned up from time to time to say hello during our

THE 'WOW' FACTOR

Every holiday should have its 'wow' moment and we should not end this story without mentioning ours. As we passed through the resort lobby on our return from one dive day, we were chatting to fellow divers about damage that we had incurred to the strobe arm on our underwater camera housing. A few minutes later, a knock came at the door of our room and we opened it to find one of the maintenance staff holding a tube of superglue!

three days on Tenggol. The location and water conditions looked perfect for ocean travellers such as manta rays and whale sharks, and the guides told us that these were often spotted around the island, usually at the beginning or end of the diving season.

Not Only for the Experts

Arriving back in the resort in the late afternoon after a second day of excellent diving, we joined Jim and Anna, on holiday from Hanoi and visiting Malaysia for the first time, for Happy Hour around the pool. They were new divers and said they had chosen this as the destination for their first post-certification dives but had almost resolved to go elsewhere because they had read that Tenggol was for advanced divers only.

Eventually, they had decided to stick with their original plan and were delighted with their choice. The Tanjong Jara dive centre manager had given them a short review of their skills in the pool on the evening of their arrival and had ensured that they started their holiday with a couple of less challenging dives within the bay itself. They described what a wonderful experience they had had and it all sounded so promising that we decided to dive in the bay with them the following day.

We had a terrific time and it reminded us that great dives do not always have to be about fast drifts and big fish. Sometimes, it is just as much fun to take your time, moving slowly and stopping to observe the behaviour of some of the more unusual and entertaining inhabitants of the reef. You can pause and listen to parrot fish crunching down on hard corals with their sharp beaks, or watch octopus moving over the sea-bed, their skin changing colour and texture to match their immediate surroundings. It is always fascinating to see lionfish floating gracefully over schools of small fry, the beauty of their feather-like fin arrangements belying their predatory intent, and shrimps and gobies co-habiting in burrows in the sand where they work tirelessly together to keep their homes clear of debris.





“One route on the north side of the bay takes snorkelers over a lush, multi-coloured field of stag-horn coral, filled with a million cardinal fish of different kinds that sparkle in the sunlight of the shallows.”



A Day in the Bay

The day in the bay also gave us the opportunity to share what the snorkelers see during their Tenggol experience. One route on the north side of the bay takes them over a lush, multi-coloured field of stag-horn coral, filled with a million cardinal fish of different kinds that sparkle in the sunlight of the shallows. Guides then lead the snorkelers to a section of the bay where they are almost guaranteed to come across at least a couple of the resident population of turtles. A second route on the opposite side of the bay offers schools of larger fish and some close encounters with clown fish, nestling in the profusion of anemones that have come to rest on large boulders just below the surface.

Sometimes, those of us who are long-used to exploring tropical oceans can forget what a thrilling experience it can be for beginners. Over lunch during our surface interval between dives, we overhear a girl who has just been snorkelling for the first time describe her morning as “life-changing, couldn’t believe it was real, it was like a 3D movie!”

No Longer a Secret

Tenggol is just too good a dive destination to remain a secret. The combination of top quality diving for new and experienced divers alike, ease of access from Kuala Lumpur by road or air, and the proximity of a high-class spa resort with an excellent day-boat programme is an enticing cocktail. We will be back! 🍷



Clockwise from left: Tanjung Jara Resort has an open-air lodge with bathroom and dining facilities in Tenggol's bay; Blue-ringed angel fish; Black Damsel.

The Rites of Spring

Spring heralds the start of the sublime Saint-Tropezian summer season.



The south of France has always had 'it'. In the mind, images of jet-setters and Hollywood A-Listers hiding behind their sunnies, languorous lunches at long tables overflowing with all kinds of good things and an all-pervasive sense of chic in the air, instantly spring to memory. With its craggy rocks, pink ochre buildings, charming shuttered houses and a sea of masts from all the luxury yachts berthed in the sapphire waters, certainly Saint-Tropez remains one of the most popular getaways for the rich and the restless, and spring heralds the arrival of the first-wave of well-heeled, genteel holidaymakers although summer is the ultimate season for people-watching.

After all, it was *Le Figaro* which reported that "the greatest number of famous faces per square metre" is present when the summer sun hits Saint-Trop.

The season officially begins in mid-to end-April, when the days begin to stretch out a little bit longer and when the pretty, feathery yellow mimosas (an icon of the French south) are in bloom. This time of year also marks the reopening of the Muse Hôtel De Luxe. Located in the village of Ramatuelle, which faces the Bay of Pampelonne, and just along the Route Des Marres, the 15-suite hotel (10 of which come with their own private pools) is just 10km from the heart of



Saint-Tropez and a wonderful place to bed down for the night. After checking in at the reception, which, charmingly, resembles a mill, you may wish to wander the beautiful, 100 per cent-ecological terraced gardens, designed by celebrated landscape architect Sophie Agata Ambroise, which leads the way to a perfectly-integrated spa at its highest point. In high summer, spend the evenings at the Muse's open-air cinema or while lazy afternoons away in sybaritic style at the spa, which uses thyme and lavender essences from the gardens as part of its therapies.

If the idea of lounging on a sun bed isn't as appealing, take the short drive to Saint-Trop, where chic cafes, boîtes and

boutiques await. The glamorous beach clubs all open in May and the azure blue waters of the sea should be just warm enough to dip in come June. These months are also when Saint-Tropez proves irresistible to the international jet-set, as this is when the celebrity circus that is the annual Cannes Film Festival descends upon the area (the 65th Festival de Cannes takes place this year from 16 to 27 May), while Nikki Beach, one of the sexiest beach clubs in the world, is holding its 2012 opening party on 9 June. So, be it beach lounge or beach club, it's easy to see your spring and summer days are glamorously sorted either way in Saint-Tropez. ■

To reserve, visit www.muse-hotels.com

Summer sun, soft light, blue waters and chic laidback days form the undeniable allure of south of France living at its best.





Ho Peck Choo, The Majestic Malacca's new resident historian.





Walking Down History Lane

Malacca's history-soaked streets are best explored *en pied*. And who better to show you around and share the secrets behind each alley, street and walkway than Ho Peck Choo, The Majestic Malacca's new resident historian?

Text by **Diana Khoo** Photography by **Yong Keen Keong**

I'm not sure about you but, oftentimes, when I am told the name of the person I'd be interviewing, someone whom I'd never met before, my mind would instantly deliver an image, a presumption, a general visage based on nothing more than his or her name and, perhaps, profession. When I heard I'd be interviewing Ho Peck Choo, the resident historian of The Majestic Malacca, my mind flashed an image of a slight, pale Chinese woman... bespectacled and book-ish. And, when I finally met Ho (or 'Choo' as she prefers to be known), I couldn't have been more wrong.

Malacca exudes history and charm. A walk with Choo starts from The Majestic Malacca and will unearth traditional treasures, like these beaded Nyonya slippers.

Small, bubbly and exceedingly tanned, no thanks in part to the often-searing

Malaccan sunshine, Choo is a fifth-generation *Peranakan*, or *Nyonya* as Straits Chinese women are often known. The 47-year-old Choo is Malaccan-born and bred and has been the hotel's resident historian since August 2011. Proud of her Peranakan heritage, Choo is descended from a family of Chinese rubber merchants, who have made Malacca their home since the late 1700s. "My maternal grandfather had also worked at Firestone, a rubber company here. But, for me, nothing is worse than working in a routine, desk-bound job. So, being able to share the stories and history of my city and country with guests and visitors is wonderful. No two tours are ever the same and there's always something new to discover and learn!"

Certainly, the passion and enthusiasm Choo has for her job is evident, even in her tone and voice. As we walk away from The Majestic Malacca, the starting point for all her tours, Choo shares that, in colonial days, the hotel used to be the preferred hangout spot for all the planters around the area, who would prop up the bar with copious glasses of gin and tonics. "Tonic was for the malaria, gin was just the excuse," laughs Choo.

What makes Choo's walking tours such fun is that it's not all about stuffy dates

and boring facts. With her unbridled enthusiasm and breezy style, she brings all of Malacca's culture and history to life – and in glorious Technicolour. Always happy to stop and explain some more, the minute anything catches your eye, Choo is like a companion (albeit a most knowledgeable one) in your exploratory adventure. In between pointing out the ruins of **St Lawrence's Chapel** and the sprawling **Kampung Morten**, the oldest inhabited Malay village in Malacca and named for the British district officer who'd gazetted the land for the community in the 1920s, Choo is also quick to spot a huge water monitor lizard in the river and the trees after which Malacca are named. "*Phylluntus embilica*," she exclaims, "and, although it's known to locals as the Malacca tree, it may also be found in northern India, where it's called *amla* or the Indian gooseberry."

It is along **Jalan Tukang Emas**, however, that Choo's eyes really gleam with excitement. Also known as **Harmony Street** to the locals, due to the close proximity of three distinct places of worship of differing faiths – the **Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthy** temple dedicated to the Hindu deity Ganesha, the **Kampung Kling** mosque and Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy's **Cheng Hoon Teng** ('temple of green clouds') – and with all three co-existing harmoniously, Choo acknowledges that arriving on this special street has always been her favourite part of the entire journey. "I can spend endless hours at the Cheng Hoon Teng temple alone, which dates back to 1646 and is the oldest Chinese temple in Malaysia," she shares. "As a five-year-old,



From left: On the 2½ hour historical walk, visit temples and traditional bucket-makers and walk past ornate shophouses, before stopping to grab a snack on the run, like these bright red angkoo kuih, a tasty Peranakan treat.



“What makes Choo’s walking tours such fun is that it’s not all about stuffy dates and boring facts. With her unbridled enthusiasm and breezy style, she brings all of Malacca’s culture and history to life.”

I'll have you know I was so mischievous that my mother brought me here and made me crawl under the temple altar three times in the hope the Goddess of Mercy would notice and bless me, making me a well-behaved child. All I can tell you is that it didn't work," she laughs. "This was quite a common practice by Malaccan mothers up to 40 years ago. I don't see many children being made to crawl under the altar these days," she winks. Another thing Choo loves sharing with her guests is the reading of the *I-Ching* at the temple. "There are essentially 61 fortune sticks, with one that's blank... meaning Guanyin prefers not to answer your question for now. Once you get your fortune stick, you then interpret it accordingly as it comes in the form of an ancient Chinese poem, whose meaning can sometimes be vague. Guests simply love it!"

Her 27 years of guiding experience hasn't dampened her enthusiasm a whit either. "I often get asked if I'm bored showing the same places over and over but, really, there's always something new to see and learn and I just love seeing the faces and reactions of the people who walk along with me," says Choo. "Each guest sees things differently and each group I lead somehow opens up new facets of Malacca's stories and history. Once, I also had the opportunity of leading a group of professors of art and anthropology. And that was such an experience, seeing their faces as they discovered Malacca's temples and heritage treasures." It actually seems



incredulous that, as a schoolgirl, Choo absolutely hated history. "But now," she smiles, "I really can't imagine doing anything else."

Ho Peck Choo's guided walks depart The Majestic Malacca daily, except on Wednesdays and barring inclement weather, at 10am and 5pm. Each walk lasts between two to two-and-a-half hours. To book, contact the Front Desk at The Majestic Malacca. 📍

As you walk with her, Choo will take both time and trouble to point out interesting architecture elements or introduce you to the local artisans, like this traditional clog maker.





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Hughes On Flavour

The face of the television series *Chuck's Day Off*, Chef Chuck Hughes cannot remember his last break as he juggles hosting the popular television show and running his two restaurants in his hometown Montreal. The burly celebrity chef isn't complaining, though.

Text by **Petrina Jo Fernandez** Photography by **Asian Food Channel**



Never mind the proverbial rabbit's foot; lobster seems to be the lucky charm for celebrity chef Chuck Hughes. Fans of *Iron Chef America* will remember the kitchen battle when Canadian lobster was revealed as the secret ingredient for the final showdown between Hughes and culinary heavyweight Bobby Flay. Hughes, who loves the crustacean so much that he has one tattooed on his forearm, was alternately thrilled and terrified as he wondered if the shelled surprise would cement or destroy his reputation. The signal was given, the cooking began and the title – in a close score of 45-41 – went to Hughes and the lobster *poutine* he whipped up with his two sous chefs, making him the youngest Canadian chef to win the series.

The dish continues to feature heavily in Hughes' restaurant, *Garde-Manger*, a brick-walled rollicking den in Old Montreal with loud music and excellent seafood, the summation of which is the CAD120 seafood platter, described by *The New York Times* as "a giant wooden trough with enough raw shellfish to feed a romp of otters". Fresh Alaskan crab legs and poached shrimp on a bed of ice and seaweed feature on smaller platters, while the steak – the measure of any restaurant – is assuredly seasoned and perfectly cooked to preference. A chalkboard menu informs of daily specials, while regulars are thoroughly familiar with the classics. *Le Bremner*, the second of Hughes' ventures with his

two best friends, has a completely different vibe. "When you have two restaurants four blocks apart, they have to be distinct in character and menu," says Hughes, describing the soft tones and delicate dishes of his younger business. "I like to think of *Garde-Manger* – with its rustic ambience and incredible noise – as the male counterpart and *Le Bremner* – intimate, classy – the female of our portfolio."

Here on his maiden visit to Asia recently, Hughes discovered, to his surprise, that his knowledge of Asian food was relatively superficial. "I love how you use Thai celery here. At home, we throw away the leaves and use the stalks but the real flavour is in the leaves. I also had to come all the way to Malaysia to really taste baby spinach. Even the spinach in Montreal is bland!" he exclaims, after illustrating the straightforward tastes of Canadian fare in comparison with the richness of Asian cuisine. Though Canada is big on seafood, the animated chef was awed by the varieties that greeted him at every turn in local markets here.

Best known for his quirky commentary and expressions as the host of the Food Network series *Chuck's Day Off*, Hughes is relishing the license to share his creations with viewers: "I love showing people how easy cooking really is. Some chefs closely guard their culinary secrets but I like sharing the fun and excitement of creating or perfecting something." During a recent cooking demonstration at The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur, he impressed with his improvisational skills, replacing a missing ingredient with an uncommon substitute at hand. "The beauty of cooking is that there is so much room to play with. If something goes wrong, you can improvise on the fly to fix it or turn it into something completely new, and that is what attracted me to cooking as a child: that there are no rules. It's entirely about making every dish your own. You are free to put in what you like and leave out what you don't."

As a youngster, Hughes displayed a knack for cooking that hinted at a professional future, but scoffed at his mother's predictions of chef stardom. He graduated in communications and marketing but left a career in advertising to pursue his weekend passion full-time. "My mom is a good cook as well. She was the pastry chef at



Opposite page: Though he's co-owner, Hughes is very hands-on in the kitchen of *Garde-Manger*; This Page: The tender and tasty pan-seared beef carpaccio with potato chips, fried capers and lemon aioli was one of the dishes prepared by Hughes at The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur.

Garde-Manger when we first opened but, as we kept growing, the work eventually became overwhelming. She just plays golf now," he deadpans.

Though the Malaysian leg of his tour with the Asian Food Channel had a tight itinerary, Hughes took 10 minutes from his schedule to talk to *YTL Life* about his life as a celebrity chef, must-haves for cooking and affinity for tattoos.

It's been almost exactly a year since you won *Iron Chef America*, beating Bobby Flay in that intense final to win the title.

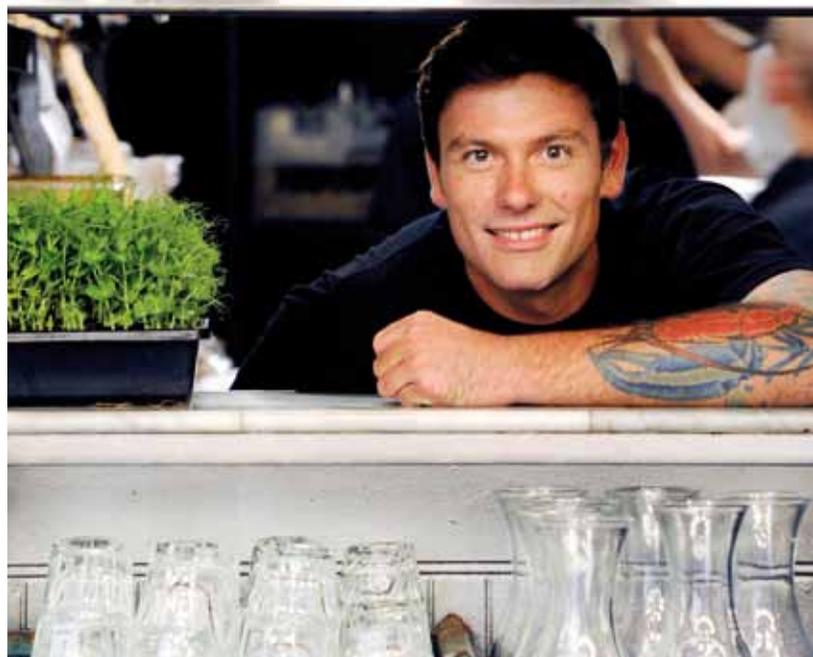
Yeah, it is a bittersweet memory for me. The opportunity to be in the competition alongside such strong chefs was an amazing honour. Winning was a great experience for me and the guys, but it's become part of my title now: people know me for that one hour of fame and, cooking in those conditions – with a time limit and the cameras everywhere – does not allow for the best food you can make. I much prefer cooking in real life, where people are actually paying to taste my creations. It's complicated and tough, but also real and honest.

Now that you have *Iron Chef America* under your belt, what would be the greatest culinary accolade you would like to achieve?

Nothing beats a truly satisfied customer and I maintain that till today. No celebrity stardom or money can compete with a child who was inspired to take up cooking after watching my show, which is the greatest legacy I can imagine.

In the cooking series, music seems to be a very big part of your restaurant. Is that so in real life?

I wanted to make sure *Chuck's Day Off* represented the reality of Garde-Manger. I've worked in many places that played non-descript elevator-style music that was really annoying and, when we opened Garde-Manger, I decided I would have real music that people listened to on our sound system. We're all about being loud at Garde-Manger, from the volume of the music to the kitchen clatter. Our playlist is pretty safe right now, with Jack Johnson, Black Keys and a little Led Zeppelin thrown in for good measure. We don't play music in the kitchen at serving time but we usually have Metallica blasting before we open. We've even catered backstage for acts such as Coldplay, Eminem and KISS, which we absolutely loved.



Your tattoos are very unusual – most of them depict different types of food.

I grew up loving tattoos and used to tell my mom I'd get one the second I turned 18. As a tribute to her, I had three flaming skulls holding the word "mom" tattooed on me but, funnily enough, she wasn't too pleased. Most of my tattoos speak of my affair with food, and I have arugula, lobster, clams, bacon, lemon meringue pie and pomegranate inked on me, along with "I ♥ oysters". The most outrageous is probably a glow-in-the-dark skull I have on my chest and I've invented the pineapple fish in my body art inventory: it's the fruit with a head of a fish. The graphics are stories of my experiences and I'm thinking of having a durian tattoo done while in Singapore. I've reached the point of no return.

Have they ever gotten in the way of your career?

I honestly thought they would work against me when I first started cooking professionally, but they haven't been an issue so far. I sometimes cover them up when I'm working in more conservative conditions but, as a rule, people don't mind.

If you could cook beside anyone, dead or alive, who would it be and why?

Probably Julia Child. She's the original. Also Jamie Oliver – he's very honest and real, and is probably still the best TV chef



Opposite page: The chef's antics and expressive commentary keep Chuck's Day Off a hit with fans. This page (from left): Hughes uses lemon or orange zest to give dishes an extra kick; Fresh seafood is the highlight at both Garde-Manger and Le Bremner, prepared with minimal fuss to maintain taste and texture.

out there. He comes across really well on screen and is one of the personalities I really look up to.

If you could go out cooking one last dish, what would it be and why?

It's impossible to narrow it down to a specific dish, but it would probably be an improvised lobster dish; something honest and simple and unexpected.

What are five ingredients you always have at hand?

Butter, olive oil, salt, vinegar and a hot sauce, chilies or spices. I put these in pretty much everything, with orange or lime zest added for a little kick.

Three things you cannot live without in a kitchen.

A sturdy work station, a sharp knife and a spoonula, which is the marriage of a spoon and a spatula. A good sous chef is a bonus.

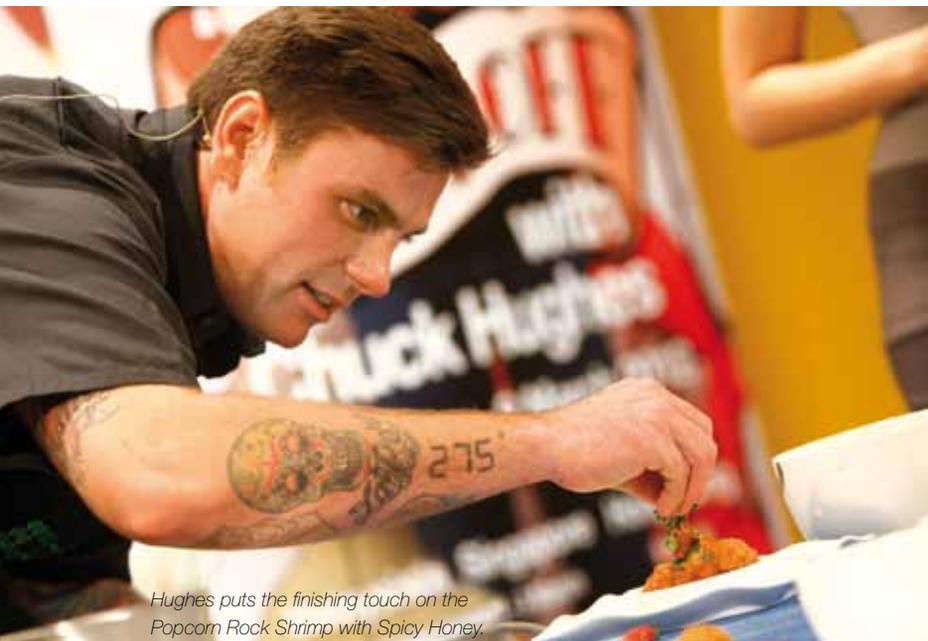
Is there a cooking method you are hoping to master?

I really want to try cooking with a wok. It's not something I see at home often and it looks so intense; yet people here do it with such ease that it's amazing. I want to see how I can work this into either restaurant.



CHUCK HUGHES' TIPS TO TAKE HOME

- Salt and pepper are the basic ingredients to marinate any meat, whatever cooking method you intend to use.
- Always wear gloves when battering; you will end up with more batter on your fingers than on the meat otherwise.
- Oil should be heated to 275°F (135°C) when frying; Hughes had it tattooed on his arm lest he forgets.



Hughes puts the finishing touch on the Popcorn Rock Shrimp with Spicy Honey.

“Cooking is entirely about making every dish your own. You are free to put in what you like and leave out what you don’t.”

What’s on the menu for a traditional Canadian meal?

To be honest, Canadian cooking is very bland. Traditional Quebecois food is big on meat – usually pork or beef – with sides of potatoes and corn, but cooking styles vary throughout the seasons: we braise meats in heavy sauces during winter, for instance, while going for lighter dishes in summer. Vancouver is unique, with strong Portuguese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Greek, Italian and Sikh communities. The richness of our culinary scene is built on people coming in from around the world with their distinctive flavours and interpretations. If not for Asians introducing spices to the locals, the gastronomy landscape at home would be minimal and extremely boring. On the other hand, we have a great seafood culture that differs throughout the different regions, with the Pacific on one side of the coast and the Atlantic on the other.

What is something we will never see you do in the kitchen?

You will never catch me skimping on ingredients. I always feel lucky when I have a full restaurant and have been known to add in an extra piece of lobster into a dish out of gratitude. I have a great team, though, and they keep an eye on me to make sure I don’t get too carried away. 🍷

CHUCK HUGHES’ POPCORN ROCK SHRIMP WITH SPICY HONEY

Serves 4-6

INGREDIENTS

POPCORN SHRIMP

- 1kg of rock shrimp
- 4 eggs, beaten
- 125ml of flour
- 500ml of cornstarch
- Salt and pepper

SPICY HONEY

- 250ml of honey
- 1 garlic clove, mashed
- 1 teaspoon of peppercorn
- 1 teaspoon of chilli flakes
- 1 teaspoon of smoked paprika
- Sea salt

METHOD

SPICY HONEY

1. Heat a saucepan on medium heat. Stir in all ingredients.
2. Bring ingredients to a boil and let simmer for two minutes.
3. Cool and strain mixture.
4. Transfer to a squeezable bottle and keep aside

POPCORN SHRIMP

1. Preheat fryer to 360°C.
2. Mix flour, cornstarch, salt and pepper in a bowl. Coat the shrimp with the egg mixture, and then the cornstarch mixture.
3. Deep-fry the shrimps.
4. Season to taste with salt and pepper, then drizzle with spicy honey. Garnish with lemon wedges and serve immediately.



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60 mins facial + 20 mins Neck, Shoulders & Foot Massage RM380 nett

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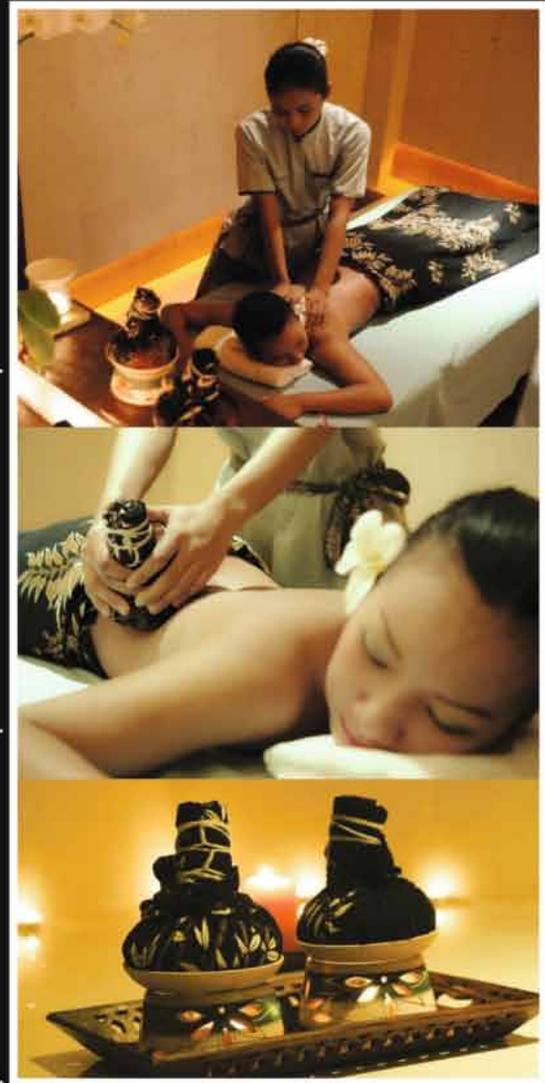
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(Lonely Planet)

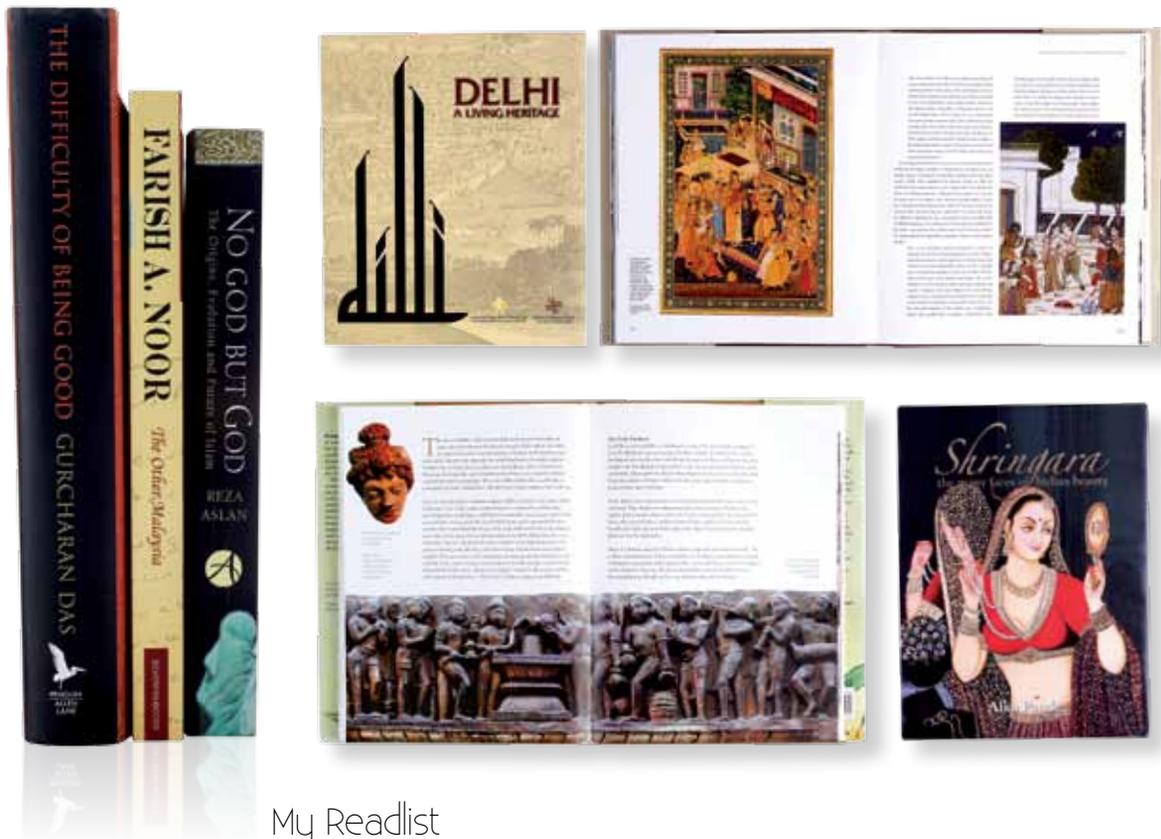


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Read & Listen

Classical Indian dance legend Ramli Ibrahim reveals some of his current literary and musical diversions.



My Readlist

1. *No god but God* Reza Aslan (Arrow Books)
2. *The Difficulty of Being Good* Gurcharan Das (Penguin Books)
3. *Shringara – The Many Faces of Indian Beauty* Alka Pande (Rupa Publications)
4. *The Other Malaysia – Writings on Malaysia's Subaltern History* Farish A Noor (Silverfish Books)
5. *Delhi – A Living Heritage Published* Project Director AG Krishna Menon; Editors Swapna Liddle and Annabel Lopez (published by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage Delhi Chapter)



Ramli Ibrahim Renowned as the guru of classical Indian dance in Malaysia, Ramli Ibrahim is a celebrated exponent of Bharatanatyam and the more sensuous dance form of Odissi. Ramli is, at present, Artistic Director of Sutra Dance Theatre and Chairman of The Sutra Foundation.

The above books first came to my notice as highly recommended by friends – some of which were literally thrust at me as gifts. I would be the poorer had I missed reading them. Most of the writers (except for Farish Noor) are Indians and, by coincidence, they were featured on the list of invited speakers for the recent controversial Jaipur Literature Festival. Presently, Indian writing is

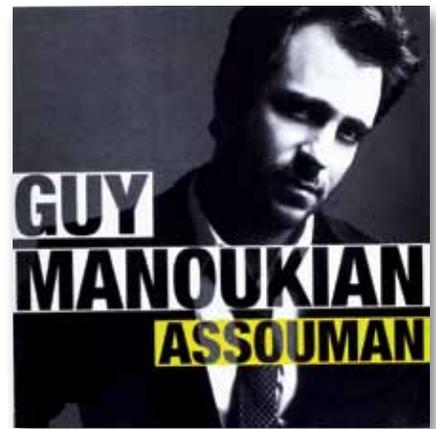
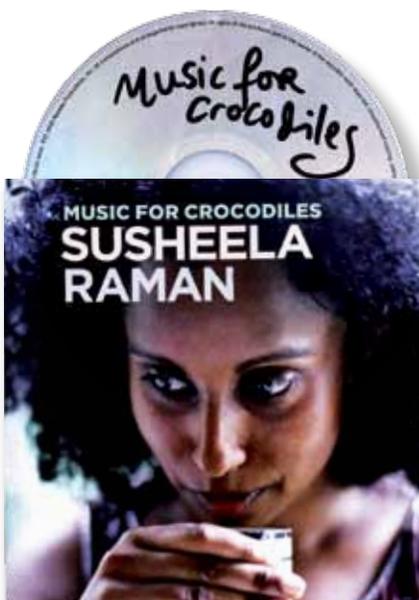
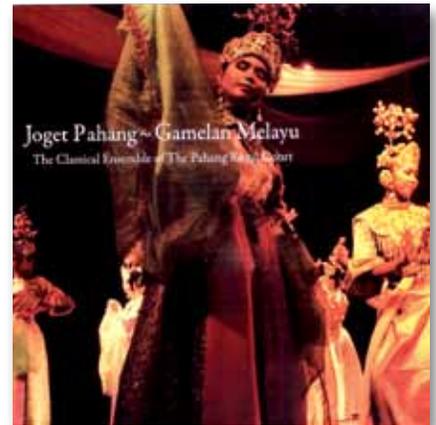
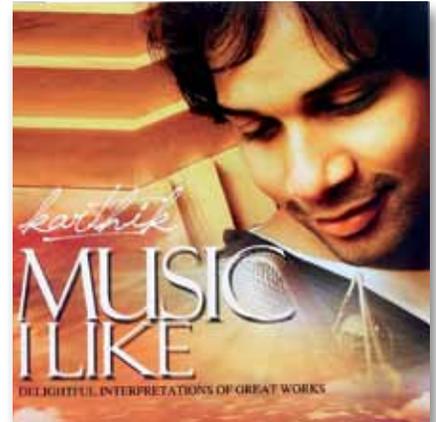
experiencing a high point and Indian writers are engaged in interesting discourses, taking in many contemporary issues and dovetailing them with myths and classical metaphysics of ancient India. I have been travelling a lot lately and meeting interesting writers, artists and dancers. For some reason, I am also reading fewer novels – maybe because reality is more interesting and bizarre than fiction.

My Playlist

1. *This and the Other* Sikkil Gurucharan (Carnatic Vocals) & Anil Srinivasan (Pianist)
2. *Joget Pahang ~ Gamelan Melayu* produced by the Pahang State Museum, Malaysia
3. *Assouman* Guy Manoukian (EMI)
4. *Music I Like* Karthik (Carnatic Vocals) and arranged by Sai Madhukar
5. *Music for Crocodiles* Susheela Raman

I buy a lot of CDs and listen to a lot of music. People send me their compositions and I am always excited by new sounds and compositions. I am very familiar with western classical and contemporary music but what excites me now are the new compositions emerging from Asia, which reinterpret traditional and indigenous idioms in refreshing contemporary creations. I can't help but relate music to dance though I can listen to *gamelan*, Carnatic *kritis* and classical western music, and appreciate the architectonic forms of the works and their

independence from movement. Music, for me, must have substance – this is why I find most commercial music so shallow that they bore me on second hearing. I like music that grows on you with subsequent listening. This does not mean that pop music is not good, but one has to wade through so many mindless ones before arriving at a work which represents the generation's ethos... However, music that represents a tradition or an era and, at the same time, gives a sense of universality and timelessness – this is the music that excites me. 🎵



All Things Bright and Beautiful

Playful princes and pouty princesses dress up for Spring/Summer 2012 in outfits that evoke all the gaiety of a summer holiday.



Floral Fashion

American poet Lydia M Child crafted in the 1800s a lovely poem about the beauty of flowers, describing them as the "hieroglyphics of angels". Her simple yet profound words were the muse designer **Khoon Hooi** had been looking for and it is around this floral theme that he spins this season's collection. Fittingly titled *Blossom*, his trademark avant-garde unstructured designs are woven with three-dimensional origami flowers and ribboned embroidery to create a feminine fantasy swathed in both soft pastels and bold hues. Imminently sophisticated and slightly whimsical, the collection marks Khoon Hooi's foray into bolder creations underlined with his signature simplicity – a move, he says, long coming after 11 years in the industry. The risk pays off: these vibrant designs are among the best he has ever sketched and are sure to be well received.

Khoon Hooi's latest collection merges bold creations with his signature simplicity.



Exotica

Sergio Rossi, under the creative direction of Francesco Russo, goes exotically (dare we say it?) erotic this season, with bondage effects, ropes of silk and elastic winding that snakes around legs. Imagine sandals embellished with carved cotton lilies or perhaps eye-popping fluorescent pumps and sandals. As Russo boldly declared: "I like creating a relationship that merges shoe and body!"



Pretty Woman

Romance, fairy tales and free-spiritedness infuse REDValentino's latest collection for 2012. Evoking the girly-ness of a dewy-eyed doll or perhaps an innocent temptress from the 50s, the collection's appeal lies in the details, such as ribbon-inserted hems, embroidered lace, ruffles and retro florals.



Under The Summer Sun

Hawaii, birds, bougainvillea and glistening water are the inspirations behind Antonio Marras' collection for KenzoHomme this season. Evoking all the happiness and simplicity of 60s-style dressing and summers spent in beachside locations like Palm Springs and the French Riviera, it's all about supple pyjama cuts, bright jacquards and a palette of bright floral prints, stripes and vivid hues.

SUN GODDESS

Embrace the splendour of the light with bright colours and vibrant prints that bring out the best of you under the Balinese sun.

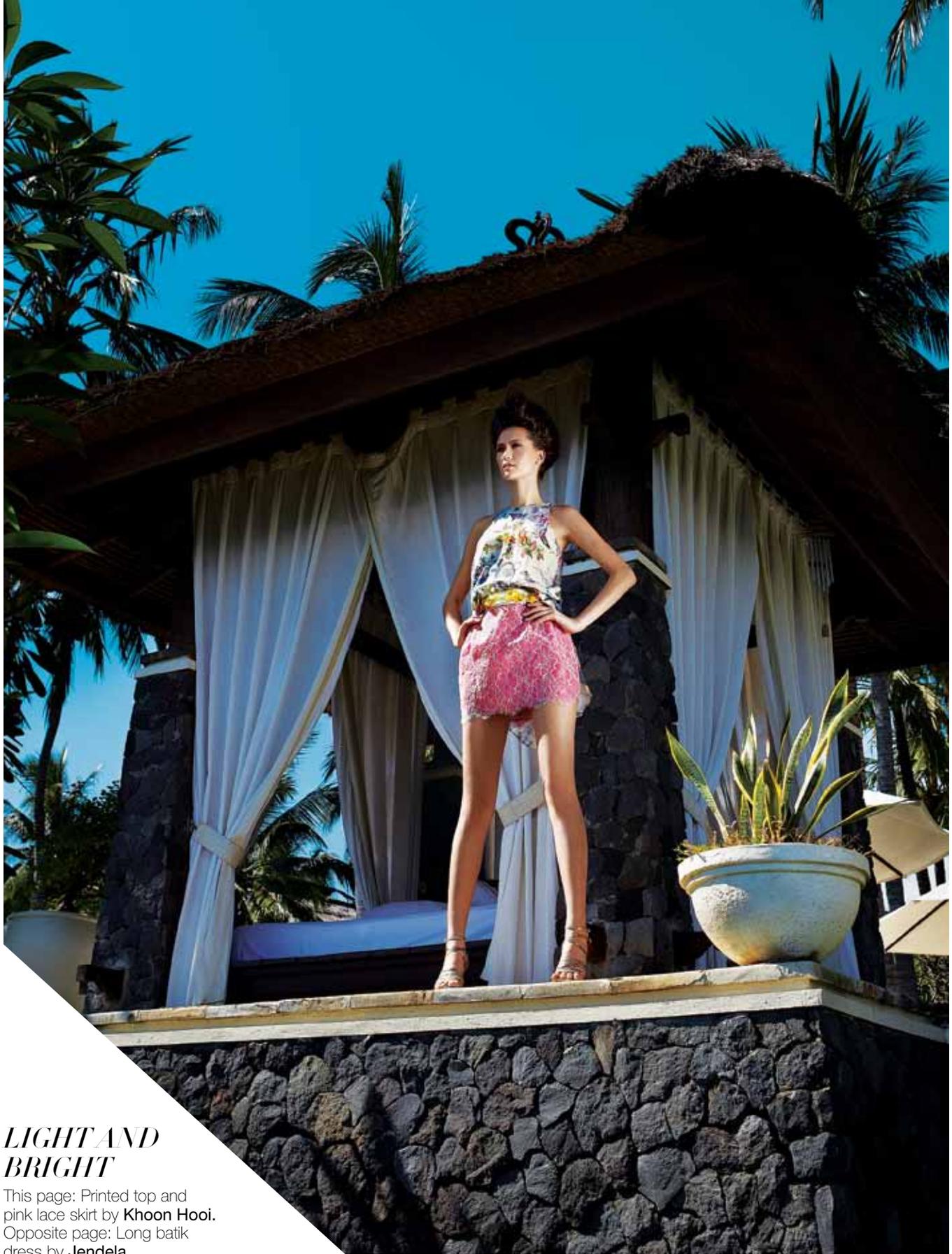
Photographed by Eric Chow Styling Victor Goh Assistants Max Mak & Richard Chin Hair & Makeup David Shaw
Model Elena A/Andrews Models Location: Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali





**MORNING
GLORY**

Glossy silk and wool
blend fuchsia dress
with butterfly and
chrysanthemum motifs
by Shiatzy Chen.



***LIGHT AND
BRIGHT***

This page: Printed top and
pink lace skirt by **Khoon Hooi**.
Opposite page: Long batik
dress by **Jendela**.







***GOLDEN
GLOW***

This page: Muted gold dress with florid cane tendrils motifs by **Shiatzy Chen**. Opposite page: Printed knit dress by **M Missoni**.





***REGAL
LUSTRE***

This page: Purple long silk dress by **Jendela**.
Opposite page: Royal blue top and orange skirt by **Khoon Hooi**.

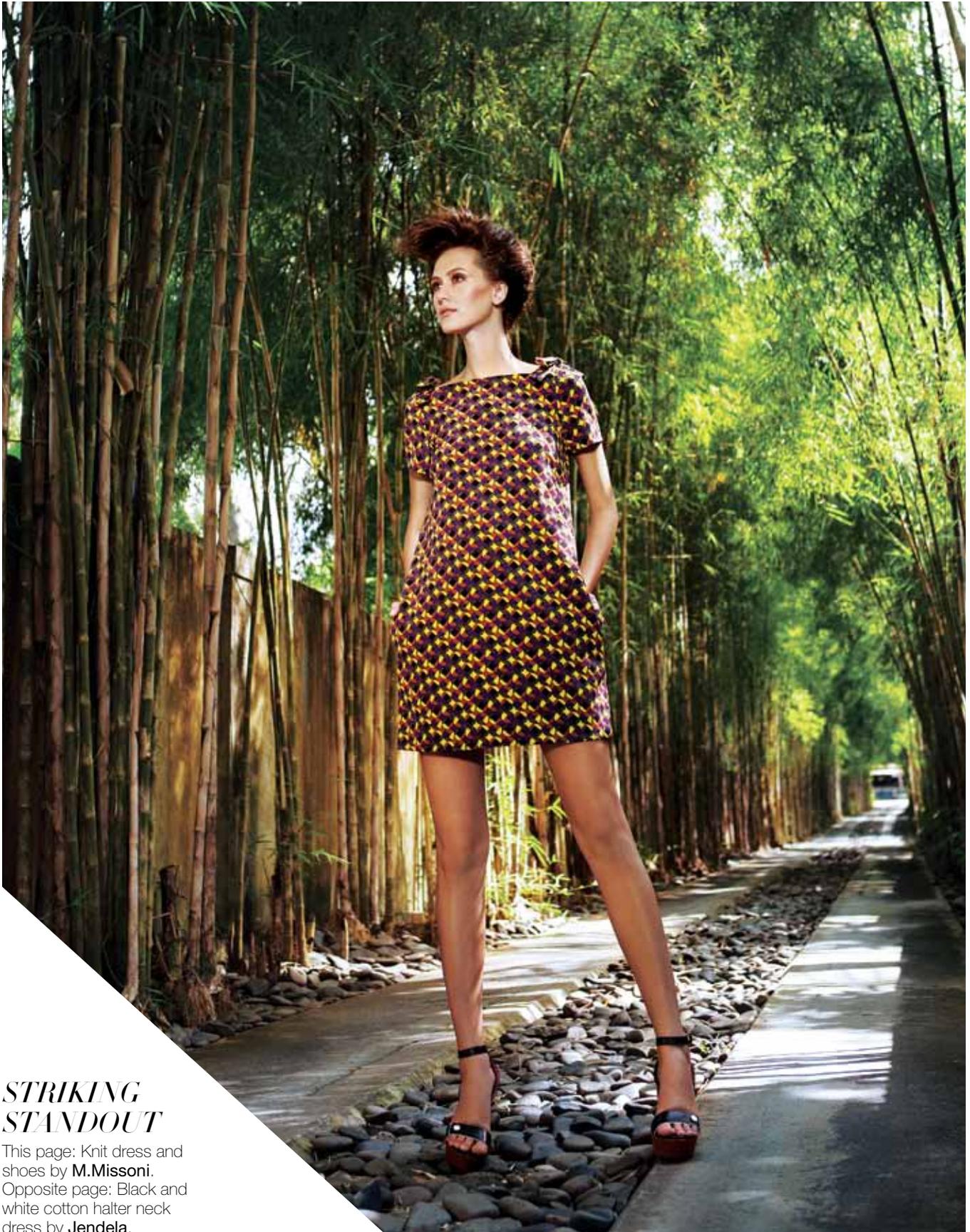
BLOOMING FOR SPRING

This page: Black and white knit dress and shoes by **M Missoni**.
Opposite page: Lace dress by **Khoon Hooi**.





VILLA
BARUNA



***STRIKING
STANDOUT***

This page: Knit dress and shoes by **M. Missoni**.
Opposite page: Black and white cotton halter neck dress by **Jendela**.



Blow Hot, Blow Cold

The Majestic Malacca's Spa Village offers a range of treatments inspired by the unique beauty rituals and healing therapies of the Peranakans, or Straits Chinese, whose world is a unique and stunning *mélange* of Chinese and Malay influences, customs and traditions.

Text by **Diana Khoo** Photography by **Yong Keen Keong & YTL Hotels**



For those among you who've visited The Majestic Malacca, it's not hard to be completely enchanted by its old world elegance, colonial charm and classic historical setting, with architecture that bears Portuguese, Dutch and Baba-Nyonya influences. From the colourful Peranakan floor tiles to the Victorian furniture so beloved of the Straits Chinese, the hotel is also home to the Spa Village Malacca.

As with all Spa Villages – from Tembok in the northernmost tip of Bali, to the latest one, soon to be unveiled in the picturesque Gaya Island, Borneo – each displays a strong sense of place that is evident in every healing therapy or beauty ritual. At Spa Village Malacca, the essence of the location exudes from every facet of the spa, from the *pai pien* hanging just above its entrance, crafted from fine lacquered wood and gold leaf, to the intricate wood carvings and *pintu pagar* (saloon-style doors), which mark the entrances to the hair treatment rooms. It is in this spirit I am privileged to be able to experience its signature Peranakan hot and cold spa rituals – the *Suam-Suam Panas* (warm) and *Shiok-Shiok Sejuk* (cold).

As Spa Village Malacca's therapies revolve around the Traditional Chinese Medicinal belief of *yin* and *yang*, all guests are required to

Clockwise from right: Soothing shades of teal and green set the mood at Spa Village Malacca; Ingredients used in the spa treatments come straight out of a Nyonya's kitchen; Sip on tea as you luxuriate post-treatment.



“Spa Village Malacca’s hair ritual is inspired by the elaborate preparations of a Peranakan bride for her 12-day-long wedding celebrations.”

answer a simple questionnaire so that your energy, be it warm or cool, corresponds best with the treatment chosen. It would appear, upon completing the form, that I am decidedly *yang* (warm) and, thus, the signature *Shiok-Shiok Sejuk* was recommended to cool me down as well as cleanse, replenish and reinvigorate me, physically and mentally.

However, as an unabashed fan of bone-breakingly strong massages and powerful fingerwork, I gingerly ask if I could swap the session of gentle egg-rolling therapy (uniquely using hard-boiled eggs to lightly press all over the body) as well as the yoghurt and guava leaves body scrub with the more intense (and *yang*) options of a *Gula Melaka* (palm sugar) and honey body scrub and the nutmeg and rice rolling massage from the *Suam-Suam Panas* experience. Thankfully, my request was granted.

Prior to the treatment, I also learn that each and every treatment in Spa Village Malacca is preceded by a hair ritual, inspired by the elaborate beauty rituals of a Peranakan bride’s preparation for her 12-day-long wedding celebrations. This soothing step of the spa journey includes a hair wash with shampoo made from the fruit of the Malacca tree, a scalp massage, a rinse with flower water spiked with lime and rose petals and, finally, combing. A delightful touch at Spa Village Malacca may be seen in the thoughtful mounting of television screens on the ceiling of the hair treatment rooms, allowing guests to relax and enjoy traditional black and white P Ramlee movies, one of the legends of classic Malay cinema, while undergoing the ritual. Yet another charming detail is the presentation of *ang pow* – a bright red packet which, traditionally, contains a gift of money for a newly-married Peranakan couple, but, here, and in keeping with the spa theme, containing instead a beautiful sandalwood comb for you to bring home as a keepsake.





*Clockwise from above:
Being pressed with a
warm poultice; Spa Village
Malacca's appetising
post-treatment treat;
The treatment suite is a
couple's delight.*

After the hair ritual, I make my way upstairs to one of six luxuriously-appointed spa treatment rooms and suites. Before beginning, your therapist will first show you the ingredients to be used, none of which would look out of place in a Nyonya kitchen, and may include palm sugar, pandanus leaves, coconut, tapioca and even precious bird's nests. The next three hours seemed to unfurl almost dream-like as my therapist polished my skin with honeyed, crumbled *Gula Melaka* before proceeding to massage and press my body with a warm pouch containing nutmeg and rice. This warmth on the body, combined with strong kneading strokes, is positively heavenly. A cool bird's nest and starfruit facial, rich in vitamins and anti-aging properties, completes the treatment.

Once the ritual comes to a close, you are invited to luxuriate in post-treatment bliss over a cup of hot Malacca fruit tea, while picking on a small dish of tangy *acar* – an appetising pickled carrot and cucumber salad. You may continue basking in splendour at the relaxation lounge on the ground level, where traditional Peranakan Chinese day beds and a pool view beckon, inviting you to simply lie back, recline and watch the hours go past in a town where time has, for the most part, stood still. ▀

The Suam-Suam Panas and Shiok-Shiok Sejuk spa experiences are priced at RM1,000 and RM600 for couples and singles, respectively. Each experience is expected to take around three hours. For enquiries, contact Spa Village Malacca at +606 289 8000.





Spring Is In The Air

The arrival of spring demands a lighter palette. Think pink, florals and, perhaps, something with more than a touch of playfulness.

La Vie En Rose Meets Film Noir

Guerlain's collection for spring is a juxtaposition of light and dark, of strength and femininity. Sophisticated, seductive and elegant, **Guerlain** offers a tantalising palette – from the must-have *Noir G*, the first Guerlain mascara to combine the extravagant luxury of a jewellery case with an extraordinary formula for perfectly-defined eyes, to *Meteorites Cruel Gardenia*, a limited edition illuminating iridescent powder in the shape of a precious flower.



The Brotherhood

For Spring 2012, **Jean Paul Gaultier** Parfums offers new, limited edition travel flasks of “Le Male” and “Le Male” Terrible, crafted from metal with funky parallel stripes and a pivoting arm made of zamak. Ideal for travelling, choose from the fresh, sensual “Le Male” or the more mischievous “Le Male” Terrible – made livelier with notes of grapefruit and pink peppercorn.



The Eyes Have It

Laura Mercier highlights natural femininity with its newest addition to the exquisite *Eye Basics* range. Tawny shares the same sheer creaminess as its light-hued predecessors, with a silky semi-matte finish in a bolder statement shade. The versatile crème shadow can be worn on its own or applied before a powder eye shadow for long-lasting coverage. Other shades in the line include Buff, Peach, Wheat, Flax, Linen, Cotton and Eyebright.



It Takes Two

Spring is in the air and the abundance of soft light demands clean, clear skin with which to bask in its reflected glory. To maximise slip and minimise irritation as well as soothe and hydrate the skin afterwards, experience **Aesop's Moroccan Neroli Shaving Duet** – a low-foaming serum that allows for a close shave without aggravating the skin, while a complementary post-shave lotion works quickly to calm and nourish every skin type.

Toys Stories

From a coupé to die for to a bar like no other, here are complications to take pleasure in.

A Product of Power

Posterity is the philosophy behind the refined sportiness of the **Mercedes-Benz CLS**, which boasts a design that is a generation ahead of its competitors in the four-door coupé class. Intelligent lightweight construction bridges low weight with high strength for outstanding aerodynamics, while a new electromechanical power steering marries the ultimate in driving dynamics with the very best in comfort and convenience. The result? A sleek machine just raring to go





Called to the Bar

Two great names team up in style. **Porsche Design** and **Johnnie Walker Blue Label**'s latest collaboration has resulted in an exquisite *Private Bar*. Made only to order at a cost of £100,000, it is crafted from luxurious leather and brushed titanium, while utilising state-of-the-art motion sensors with which to activate its opening sequence, ensuring each serving celebrates Johnnie Walker Blue Label's 'perfect serve'.



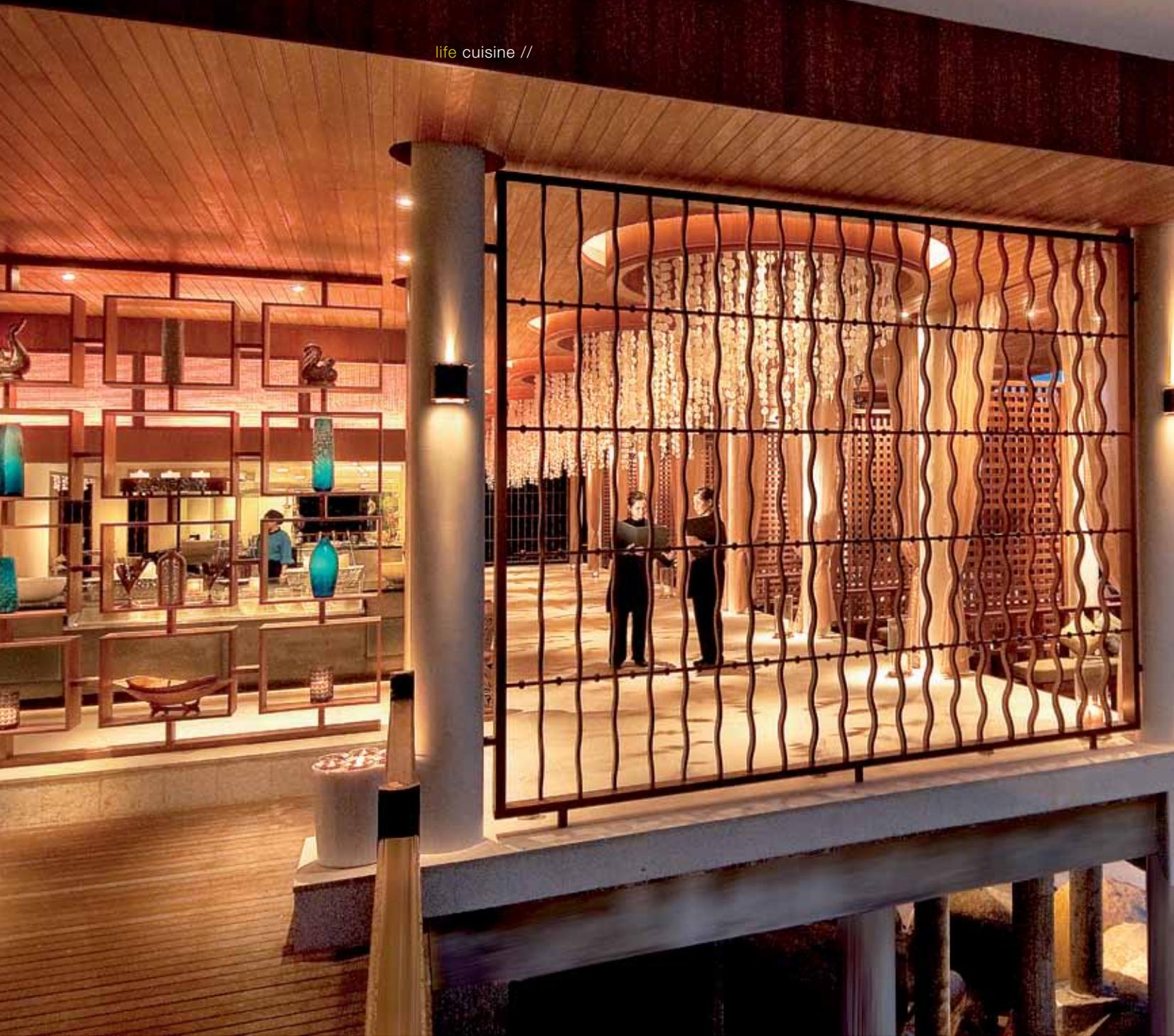
Sweet Spring

Armani/Dolci celebrates the arrival of spring with a softer touch in its packaging. Using elegant blue cobalt paper and adorned with a precious dove emblem, let your springtime gift of luxurious artisan chocolates be dedicated to a dream, life and peace.



Watch this Space

Swiss watchmaker **Maurice Lacroix** recently unveiled a shiny new look for its first flagship store in Kuala Lumpur's Starhill Gallery. Opened in 2008, the newly-revamped space is certain to delight watch enthusiasts and collectors alike, with its ample display of uniquely-crafted timepieces as well as a new private corner for guests to browse, try and experience in privacy and comfort.



By The Sea

For dinner with a difference, you might wish to consider the culinary charms of Pangkor Laut Resort's Straits private dining experience.



The Straits' tranquil views and warm décor make for a perfect evening experience.

Recently voted as one of the world's top 500 hotels and one of the top three resorts in Malaysia by *Travel + Leisure Southeast Asia*, Pangkor Laut Resort, on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, has always been special. From its private island setting, ensconced amidst 300 acres of two-million-year-old rainforest, and surrounded by emerald green waters, guests arrive only by yacht or speedboat (or, for the jet-setter in a hurry, helicopter) and are immediately enveloped by island luxury. There are private villas embedded in the verdant hillside or, if you wish to evoke the feeling of being cast away, opt for the dreamy sea and spa villas – gracefully perched atop stilts – and where, if you're lucky, you might spot a colourful parrot fish or a slender garfish swimming past.

Naturally, when one is accommodated in such a unique, luxurious way, expectations are equally high when it comes to dining. Pangkor Laut Resort houses seven unique restaurants on the island but, for a truly special evening, it has to be The Straits Experience, a private dining experience that offers a melange of East-meets-West cuisine, prepared to perfection by the resort's chefs.

Held at The Straits on a strictly 'by prior arrangement' basis, guests will delight in the sea-fronting restaurant's tranquil views, all the while fanned by sea breeze. With its warm wood and granite décor, it

“The Straits Experience offers a melange of East-meets-West cuisine, prepared to perfection by the resort’s chefs.”

is, at once, elegant yet relaxed. One of the most arresting features about The Straits is its capiz seashell chandeliers. Once here, pop open a bottle of vintage champagne and await the first of many delicious courses to arrive at your table. The menu changes according to what the chef has found fresh at the markets (or, even, caught from the sea) and divided according to the elements, like Beginning, Interlude, Sea and Land. Always a merry melange of the finest South-East Asian flavours, every Straits dining experience begins with a selection of the chef’s *petit preludes*, followed by a Beginning of, say, seafood dumplings served in a piping-hot fish broth. Once your palate has been suitably warmed up, move on to an Interlude of something piquant yet cleansing, like a Thai-inspired *tom yam* sorbet, before delighting in the spice and savouriness of a dish of tiger prawns in *masala* sauce. Let the marine theme continue in the chef’s Sea creation of freshly-caught grouper served with eggplant green curry, pomelo salad and a serving of scallop sambal, before, finally, moving on to Land, where the chef may just treat you to his special creation of beef tenderloin with chilli, turmeric leaves, onions, garlic and tamarind.

Endings are always sweet at The Straits and the dessert of the day also depends on what ingredients have inspired

the chef that morning. That evening, however, we were treated to a particular dreamy banana layer cake as a stunning finale to a gastronomic experience, after which, all you need to do, really, is to saunter back to your villa and drift off to sleep with just the sound of lapping waves as a natural lullaby. *La dolce vita?* Definitely. ❏

To book your private dining experience at The Straits, kindly contact the Dining Concierge at Pangkor Laut Resort.





Clockwise from top:
The capiz seashell chandeliers are one of The Straits' more unique features; Start your Straits Experience with some vintage champagne; Spices to heighten the flavours of the dishes at the restaurant.

WHAT TO WEAR TO YOUR STRAITS DINING EXPERIENCE.

THE COLOUR OF SUNSHINE – Farah Khan's breezy, billowy *Dinara* kaftan makes dressing up to dinner a, dare we say, breeze.



APPLE OF MY EYE – Such a special dining experience deserves a bejewelled clutch to go with it. In keeping with the gourmet theme, consider Anya Hindmarch's apple-shaped lovely... quite the hit of the season.



SOLE FOOD – Much as we love the embellished, towering beauty of *Iris*, crafted from tan suede Nappa leather, we have to be practical as well, bearing in mind the walk from the villas to The Straits. Hence, be properly (and stylishly) shod in **Jimmy Choo's** multi-mirror leather *Hedda* flats. Style and comfort!

BAG IT – Although the beauty of resort living means you needn't bring much more along with you than your room key, a girl still needs her lipstick... and camera, and, maybe, her BlackBerry as well. Contain them all in style with this summery wicker handbag by **Emilio Pucci**. Bellissima!



RING, MA BELLE – Add a touch of luxe to your resort look with **Boucheron's** special 'Black Edition' of its enigmatic *Quatre* ring, made with both white and black gold.

My Top Picks



Who: Steve Cokkinias
What: General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton,
Kuala Lumpur
Where: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia





The Sights & The City

Kuala Lumpur has always been a mish-mash of elements. Be it culture, luxury, history or world-class cuisine, you can be sure the slick capital city of Malaysia has something for you. **Steve Cokkinias** lets us in on what to do, what to see and where to go.



Sentul Park Koi Centre

The Sentul Park Koi Centre is a hidden jewel of Kuala Lumpur and is, in fact, a recreation of a traditional Japanese village. It's wonderful coming here and learning all about the Japanese art of Nishikigoi as well as the different varieties of *koi*, what makes each so special and, of course, valuable. I find it fascinating! The breeding facility here is also amazingly scientific and I always end my visit with lunch at Yuritei, the Japanese restaurant next door, whose name means 'house of playful *koi*'.

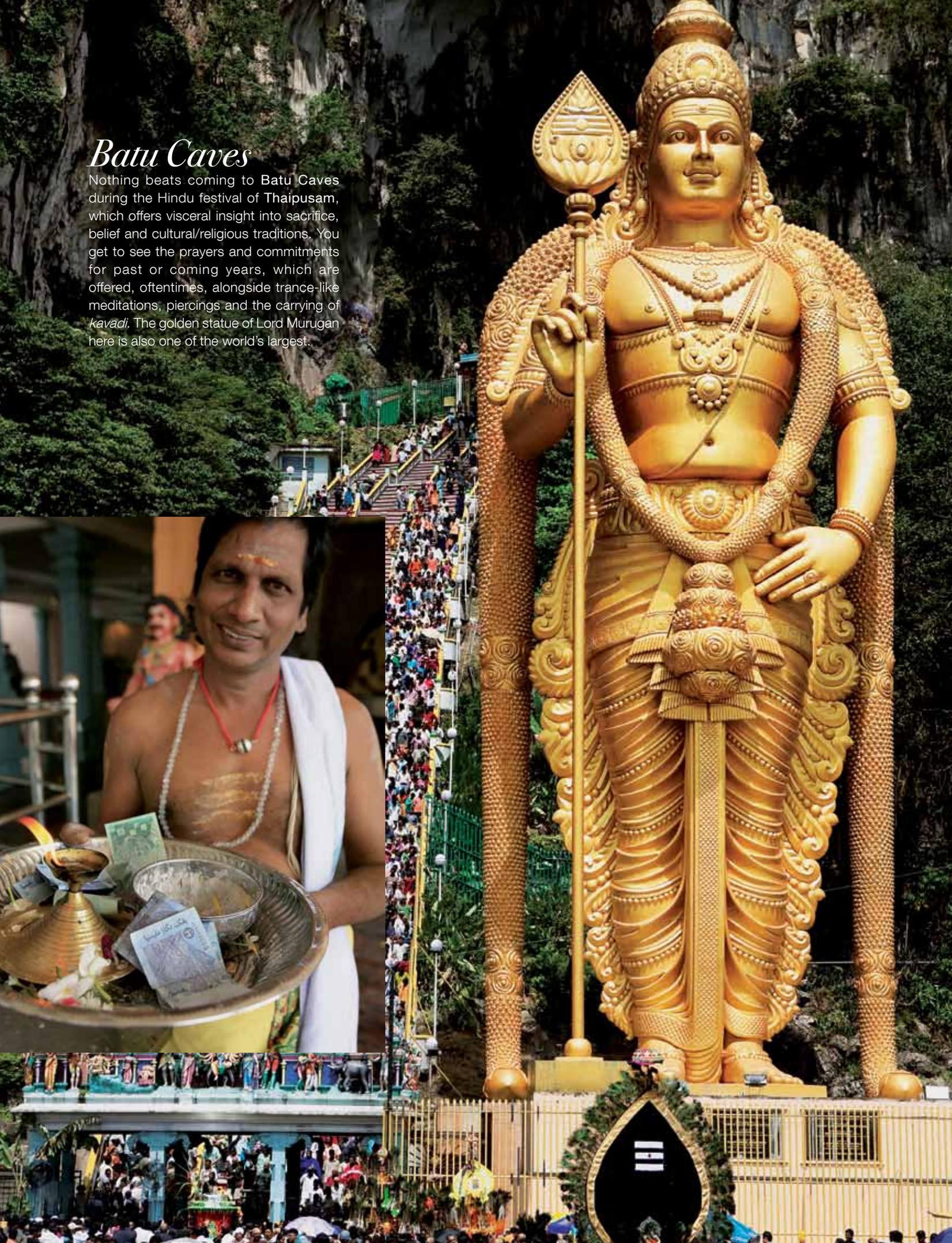


Batu Caves is also a haven for monkeys.



Batu Caves

Nothing beats coming to Batu Caves during the Hindu festival of *Thaipusam*, which offers visceral insight into sacrifice, belief and cultural/religious traditions. You get to see the prayers and commitments for past or coming years, which are offered, oftentimes, alongside trance-like meditations, piercings and the carrying of *kavadi*. The golden statue of Lord Murugan here is also one of the world's largest.



Acme Bar & Coffee

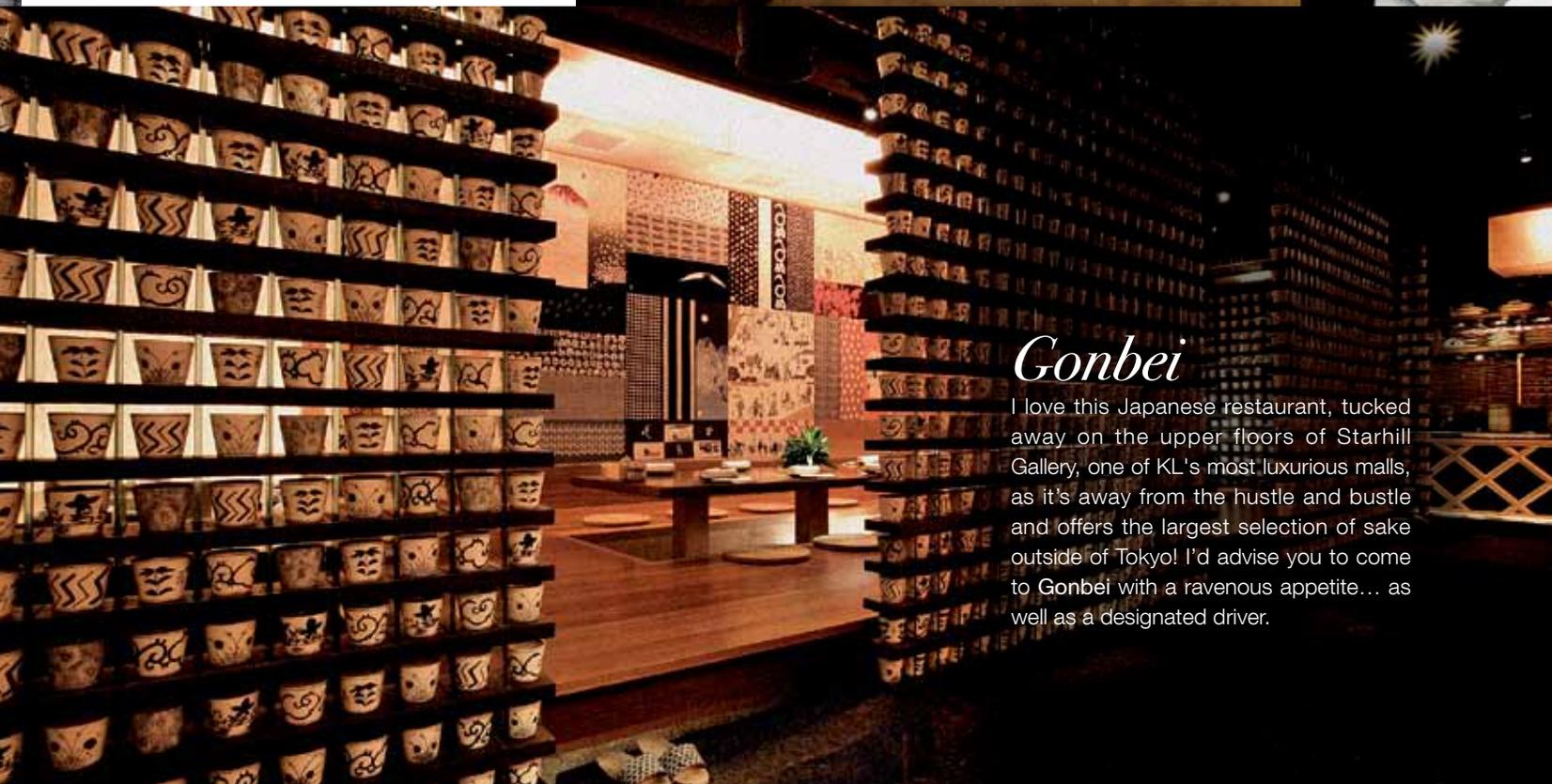
Malaysians love abbreviations and this chic new boîte at The Troika, a new building by Lord Norman Foster, is popularly known as 'ABC'. I love its great atmosphere and design and, surprisingly, fast service. It offers a fresh menu and dining concept that really works.





Sao Nam

If you venture into the Changkat Bukit Bintang area, you'd have to look hard to find **Sao Nam**, a tiny Vietnamese restaurant wedged between rows of eateries and reflexology stalls on 7 and 9 Tingkat Tong Shin. It's just off Bukit Bintang and closer to the clubbing street of Changkat. It has a great environment, though, and don't miss the curry chicken dish, which has a sweet coconut flavour that is to die for!



Gonbei

I love this Japanese restaurant, tucked away on the upper floors of Starhill Gallery, one of KL's most luxurious malls, as it's away from the hustle and bustle and offers the largest selection of sake outside of Tokyo! I'd advise you to come to Gonbei with a ravenous appetite... as well as a designated driver.



The Adorn Floor, Starhill Gallery

I'm a big fan of fine timepieces and I must recommend Starhill Gallery's **Adorn Floor**. I'd consider it to be a most 'dangerous' place to walk through as it features the world's single largest concentration of fine watches – over 50,000 sq ft of wallet-crushing tick-tocks that are a treat for connoisseurs of complicated movements.



Tate at the Intermark

This is a really funky cool bar... the trick is being able to find the place! You enter on the ground level, look for a hat and an unmarked door. I think finding **Tate** is half the fun!





Malaysian MotoGP

Not to be confused with the Formula 1, the **MotoGP** is the two-wheeled version of the race at Sepang. Typically held in October each year, it offers the public more access to the drivers and teams and is always an exciting, albeit dangerous, race. This was, sadly, proven in 2011 with the death of Marco Simoncelli in Malaysia after a horrific motorcycle crash just minutes after the race started.

A large, modern building with a glass facade and a metal roof structure, illuminated from within at dusk. The sky is a mix of purple and blue. Bare trees are visible in the foreground.

KL Performing Arts Centre

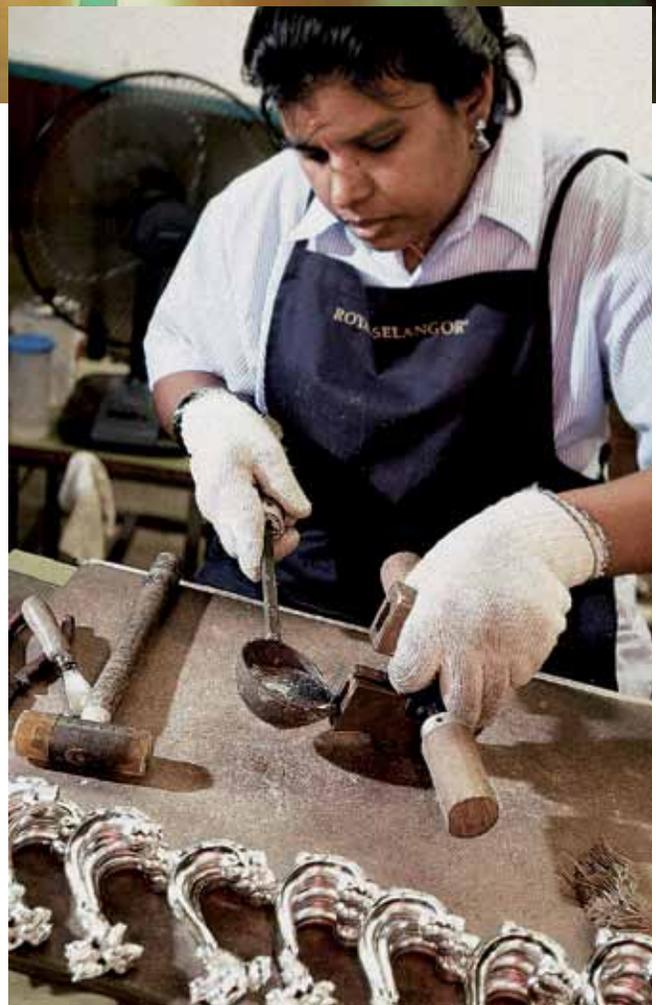
The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre ('KLPac' for short) is located in Sentul West Park and hosts terrific acts, from music to comedy. And recently, *TimeOut KL* magazine hosted its Food Awards here, where, I must tell you, Li Yen, our Chinese restaurant at The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur, picked up the award for 'Best Chinese Restaurant'.





Royal Selangor Visitor Centre

Seeing how tin and pewter are crafted into fine works of art makes a tour of the **Royal Selangor Visitor Centre** in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur, a must. The best part about it is being able to work on your own little masterpiece at its famous 'School of Hard Knocks', and taking it home with you. ❏



From edgy plays to crafting your own pewter treasure at Royal Selangor's School of Hard Knocks, KL has it all.



Explore The World of YTL Hotels...

SHOOK! SHANGHAI AT THE SWATCH ART PEACE HOTEL CHINA

Perched on a space of symmetry and proportion, Shook! Shanghai features the skills of four epicurean chefs with four distinct cuisines. A show kitchen – dubbed the ‘Ferrari’ of kitchens, is where its signature dishes are created around the senses. The menu flirts with seasonal trends with whispers of Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asian and modern Western, yet flexible enough to transport you anywhere your heart and palate desire. Another highlight at Shook! Shanghai is the showcase of the world’s finest wines and champagnes, including rare vintages from 1945 through 2000. Shook! Shanghai also houses The Time Bar and The Swatch Art Peace Hotel Terrace on the roof top overlooking a stunning backdrop of the Pudong skyline.

Tel: +86 (21) 6321 0021

www.shookrestaurantshanghai.com





THE GREEN LEAF NISEKO VILLAGE

HOKKAIDO, JAPAN

Located in the heart of Niseko Village in Hokkaido, the newly unveiled The Green Leaf Niseko Village is the premium contemporary resort in Niseko, appealing to guests who want to enjoy a seamless experience of stay, snow and ski. The 200 room ski-in, ski-out resort is perfectly placed for all activities and a variety of dining options including the Lookout Café and the hotel's rooftop bar, Altitude. Alternatively relax in the forested *onsen*, a therapeutic natural volcanic hot spring guaranteed to soak away tension and time.



Tel: +81 (0)136 44 3311
www.thegreenleafhotel.com



HILTON NISEKO VILLAGE JAPAN

Set at the foot of the Niseko Annupuri Mountain, the Hilton Niseko Village is the perfect base from which to enjoy a huge variety of outdoor activities throughout the year. Ski on powdery slopes during the winter season, and enjoy family-friendly facilities such as the Niseko Ski Village ski school, Niseko Kids ski programme, a luxurious spa, and five restaurants.

There are also two 18-hole championship golf courses nearby (one designed by Arnold Palmer), a tennis complex, an equestrian centre and a unique nature-based activity area called 'PURE' complete with tree-trekking and beginners golf.

Tel: +81 136441111
www.niseko-village.com





CAMERON HIGHLANDS RESORT MALAYSIA

Set amidst tea plantations and rolling hills, this tranquil hideaway promises visitors all the splendour, romance and nostalgia of Cameron Highlands' grand colonial heritage.

Cameron Highlands is Malaysia's largest hill resort and is largely unchanged since its colonial heyday, this 'little corner of England in Asia' is still dotted with Tudor-style cottages, a place where scones and afternoon tea will not seem out of place.

The resort with its tall French doors, timber-beamed ceilings, plantation shutters and a fireplace add old-world charm to the surroundings. It also houses a Spa Village as well as an eighteen hole golf course and 56 luxuriously appointed rooms and suites which weave in wondrous colours and textures of Jim Thompson's famous silks.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.cameronhighlandsresort.com





PANGKOR LAUT RESORT MALAYSIA

Pangkor Laut is a privately owned island located three miles off the west coast of Malaysia along the Straits of Malacca. This piece of paradise has been 2 million years in the making, and it is here one finds one of the world's premier award-winning resorts nestling in the shade of forest giants as old as the land.

There are no other resorts – just secluded bays curled around pristine beaches, evening skies woven with colour, and a deep sense of serenity reserved exclusively for guests. A combination of luxury, natural beauty and age-old wilderness woven together to produce an environment where peace and magically memorable moments are the currency.

Of the island's 300 acres, only a fraction has been developed to house the resort and its eight estates. Wooden buildings blend seamlessly with the forest as if nature had been the architect dictating how walls curve around foliage, and roofs open up to allow trees to continue on their journey to the sky.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.pangkorlautresort.com





THE ESTATES AT PANGKOR LAUT RESORT MALAYSIA

In a small secluded cove near Pangkor Laut Resort rests the eight wonders that comprise The Estates. Each of these individually crafted enclaves is reminiscent of the traditional south east Asian way of living of days gone by, when an 'estate' was made up of a number of special purpose buildings placed amidst gardens of astounding beauty.

Comprising two, three or four bedrooms, each Estate offers a private infinity-edge pool, as well as pavilions in various adaptations of Malay architectural traditions.

There is also a private vehicle and driver assigned to each Estate should guests decide to leave the seclusion of their villa to dine at one of the resort's restaurants or to go for a treatment at the Spa Village.



Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.pangkorlautestates.com



THE MAJESTIC MALACCA MALAYSIA

The historic city of Malacca is steeped in a rich tapestry of multicultural influences reflected in its heritage architecture, diverse lifestyles and eclectic cuisine.

Located on the banks of the river which in yesteryear teemed with Chinese junks and spice-laden vessels from all over the world, The Majestic Malacca provides a glimpse into the splendid saga of an extraordinary empire.

The Majestic Malacca is an integral part of Malacca's colourful history. The original serene mansion, dating back to the 1920s, remains at the heart of the hotel, whilst a new building has been created, mirroring the original architecture, to house 54 spacious rooms and suites.

From the original porcelain flooring, teakwood fittings, intricate artwork and antiques, to the finely crafted Nyonya cuisine, every aspect echoes the history of the region, and offers a beguiling journey through this enchanting heritage.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.majesticmalacca.com





TANJONG JARA RESORT MALAYSIA

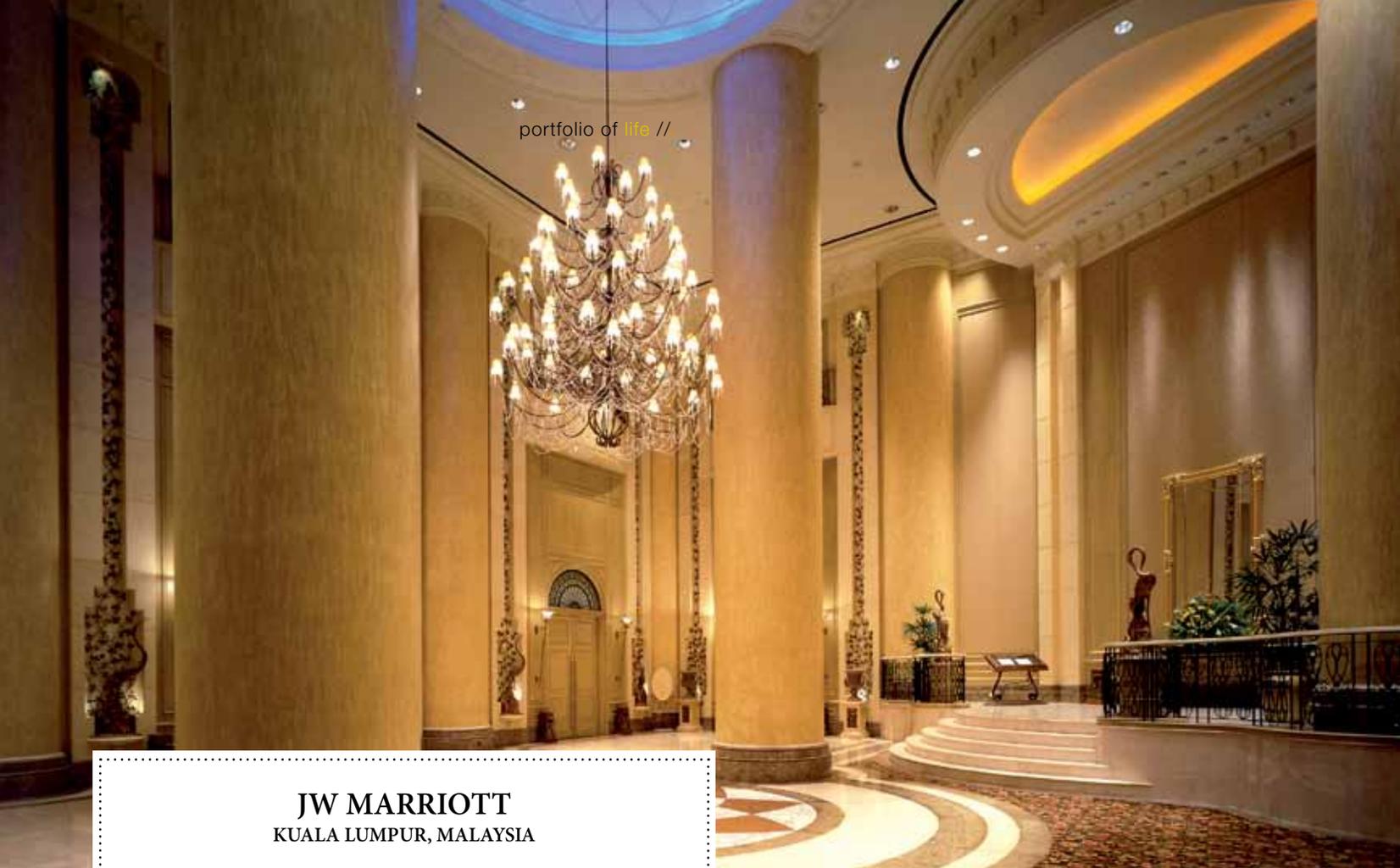
Located on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia, Tanjong Jara Resort is a sanctuary of luxury and well-being steeped in age-old Malay traditions. Designed to reflect the elegance and grandeur of 17th Century Malay palaces, Tanjong Jara is a 99-room resort embodiment of the gentle Malay art of service and hospitality.

The philosophy of the Resort is as unique as the Resort itself. Based on the Malay concept of *Sucimurni*, which emphasises purity of spirit, health and well-being, Tanjong Jara encourages true rejuvenation of both body and spirit.

Tanjong Jara is an opportunity to withdraw from the pressures of this ever-changing world by offering a chance to immerse oneself in a sanctuary of serenity and beauty.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.tanjongjararesort.com





JW MARRIOTT
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Guest rooms at JW Marriott Kuala Lumpur offer the ultimate in comfort and convenience, designed with the discerning business traveller in mind. An ample work area with adjustable desk lighting and ergonomic chair provides a comfortable environment for executives. Desk-mounted electrical outlets, two-line speaker telephones with call-waiting facility, fax modem and voice mail make for easy communication around the world.

Accommodation comprises 561 guest rooms with 294 Deluxe Kings, 172 Deluxe Twins, 25 Executive Deluxe Rooms, 19 Studio Suites, 32 Junior Suites, 2 Executive Studio Suites, 2 Executive Junior Suites, 8 one-bedroom Suites, 3 two-bedroom Suites, 2 VIP Suites, a Chairman's Suite and a luxurious Presidential Suite.

The 29-storey hotel recently opened three new floors comprising mainly suites with contemporary design and luxury fittings. Marriott Marquis Platinum and Gold card members and guests occupying suites enjoy access to the JW Lounge – with its complimentary breakfast, light refreshments and evening cocktails.

Tel: +60 3 2715 9000
www.marriott.com





THE RITZ-CARLTON KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Discover the exclusive Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur and experience a place where ancient rivers converge and a modern city beckons guests to explore the sights, sounds and flavours of Malaysia. Located downtown in the Golden Triangle business district, this distinctive five-star luxury hotel in Kuala Lumpur is conveniently accessible to upscale shopping, dining and entertainment. At The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur, guests can indulge in soothing spa treatments, delectable cuisine or simply relax in the exceptional comfort of their rooms and take in the best the city has to offer.

The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur is the city's first award-winning full-butler hotel featuring 365 guest rooms and suites. The fresh style of The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur is influenced by a variety of themes reflecting Malaysia's diverse artistry of ethnic cultures. The dark toned woods with angular designs reflect masculinity while details like brass inlays add a touch of elegance. Rich earthy tones in the carpet and wall coverings are used to create a cosy, warm home-away-from-home ambience, while hidden modern technologies add a modern yet subtle flair.

Tel: +60 3 2142 8000
www.ritzcarlton.com





VILLA TASSANA PHUKET, THAILAND

Set amidst a tropical forest on a craggy cliff overlooking the beautiful emerald green of the Andaman Sea is a gem on the YTL Hotels portfolio of luxury holiday destinations. Located just 15 minutes away from Phuket International Airport on the island's quiet, undeveloped North Western coastline, Villa Tassana offers guests a vacation of modern sophistication married with Thai hospitality.

Spread over a generous 2,800 square metres, the villa features 3 large bedrooms with ensuite bath and dressing areas, a 15 metre swimming pool, separate living and dining pavilions, a kitchen and a maid's room. For those looking to get away from it all, Villa Tassana is staffed by one dedicated attendant and a chef specialising in delicious home-style Thai dishes.

Guests can also enjoy the first-class spa and sports facilities located at the nearby Trisara Hotel. There are three excellent golf courses nearby, including the exclusive Blue Canyon course, and a range of luxury motor yachts available to explore Phuket's many bays, islands and dive locations.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000





THE SURIN PHUKET, THAILAND

The Surin Phuket offers guests a choice of 108 thatched cottages that sit cosily under a canopy of coconut groves, where landscaped slopes gently descend to meet a private stretch of sandy shore.

The appeal of the spacious 89 one-bedroom and 19 two-bedroom cottages is further enhanced with private verandahs, secluded sun decks, and handcrafted teak floors.

Renowned for its warm island hospitality and rustic serenity, The Surin Phuket also provides spa services, dining venues, meeting facilities and recreational activities. The Surin Phuket – a veritable gateway to a tropical island paradise.



Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.ytlhotels.com



SPA VILLAGE RESORT TEMBOK, BALI, INDONESIA

Dawn rises and an indigo curtain of stars is drawn back from the sky, exposing a dramatic landscape of soaring peaks that sweep down across grassy lowlands to the black volcanic sand that kisses the blue of the Bali sea. You are in Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali and the day has just begun.

Inspired by the award-winning Spa Village Pangkor Laut, Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali embraces the same healing ethos of celebrating the local culture, honouring the ancient remedies of the region and infusing each visit with the essence of the surrounding scenery.

Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali is a place of peacefulness and calm, combining the therapeutic value of its beautiful location with an ancient and rich cultural heritage. Reflecting the spirituality of ages the environment here is soft and serene; its people go about their days in a caring manner that brings calm to the harried and peace to the stressed; here, at Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali it is possible to recapture one's sense of self.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.spavillage.com





EASTERN & ORIENTAL EXPRESS

The Eastern & Oriental Express is more than a train service: at its maximum length the quarter of a mile in length train is a haven of comfort, style and luxury and the perfect vantage point from which to tour the region. The Restaurant Cars, Saloon Car and Bar Car are located at the centre of the train, while the Observation Car with its open deck area is located at the rear.

The interior walls of the compartments are panelled with cherry wood and elm burr, with decorative marquetry friezes and intricate design inlays. The delicate embroidery work was done in Malaysia, and the bespoke carpets hand-tufted in Thailand. While guests dine at night, the steward transforms the compartment from a living room to a luxurious bedroom.

Chefs onboard the E&O Express are internationally renowned for their tantalising variety of Eastern and European dishes, using the finest fresh seasonal ingredients.

www.easternandorientalexpress.com





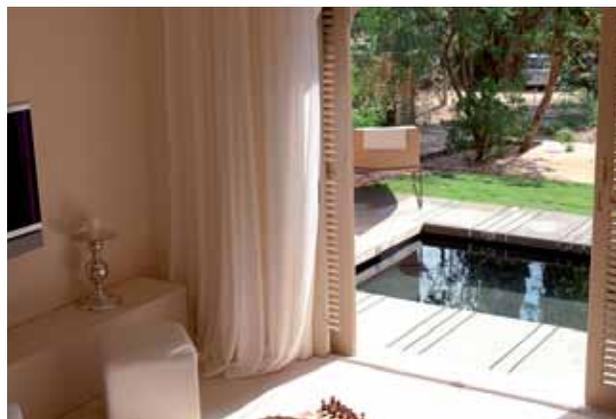
MUSE HÔTEL DE LUXE FRANCE

Bardot would no doubt approve of Saint-Tropez newcomer, Muse Hôtel De Luxe, just minutes from the Place de Lices by car, situated on the stunning Ramatuelle 'route de plages' road set amongst an ecological landscape of terraced gardens.

Fifteen ultra chic suites (ten featuring private plunge pools) are dedicated to famous muses such as 'Edith', after Edith Piaf, 'Catherine', after Catherine Deneuve and 'Lauren' after Lauren Bacall. Each suite sports a unique interior but all blend seamlessly with cool stone floors and mamorino wall finishes. Thoughtful touches include a 42" Loewe plasma screen with over 100 channels, a PlayStation, iPad and iPhone.

Designed with pure lines, a cool elegant reception area and outdoor water cascades, the hotel is a reflection of architectural simplicity, immediately stamping its original and stylish signature on the Saint-Tropezian landscape.

Tel: +334 94 430 440
www.muse-hotels.com





BRAY HOUSE ENGLAND

An elegant private home dating back to the late 17th century, Bray House has been restored and transformed into an elegant, high design boutique home stay. Featuring an eclectic mix of interiors spanning the Art Deco period of the early 1900s, Bray House is a unique experience of the gentrified English lifestyle complete with bespoke service and intimate atmosphere.

Designer furniture, vintage accessories and vivid splashes of colour create an atmosphere that marries the modern and the classic. Each of the bedrooms has its own theme: a lullaby of white or a symphony of Tuscany red in another. Bray House also features a private courtyard and a natural spring found in the garden.

The idyllic village of Bray, near Windsor, is quintessentially English with its period houses, traditional pubs with beamed ceilings and fireplaces and a beautifully restored church dating back to 1293.

Tel: +44 162 858 3505



1. Spa Village Kuala Lumpur Malaysia

This unique retreat offers the world's most sophisticated therapies integrated with traditional healing practices of the region. Paying tribute to Malaysia's fascinating cultural diversity and rich healing heritage, this most stylish of spas seamlessly blends ancient and modern practices, using natural local ingredients to deliver blissful relaxation and rejuvenation.

2. Spa Village Tanjong Jara Malaysia

At Spa Village Tanjong Jara, time-tested health and beauty traditions are revived in the most comforting surrounds. Guests can benefit from a comprehensive programme of therapies created using unique ingredients from indigenous herbs and plants, along with the skills of resident Malay healers.

3. Spa Village Malacca Malaysia

The Spa Village Malacca is the world's only spa to base its therapies on the healing heritage of the Baba-Nyonya or Peranakan culture – a unique combination of Chinese and Malay influences. The spa is spread across the first two floors of the new wing and provides a serene environment in which one can rest, recuperate and rejuvenate in the care of some of the world's best therapists.

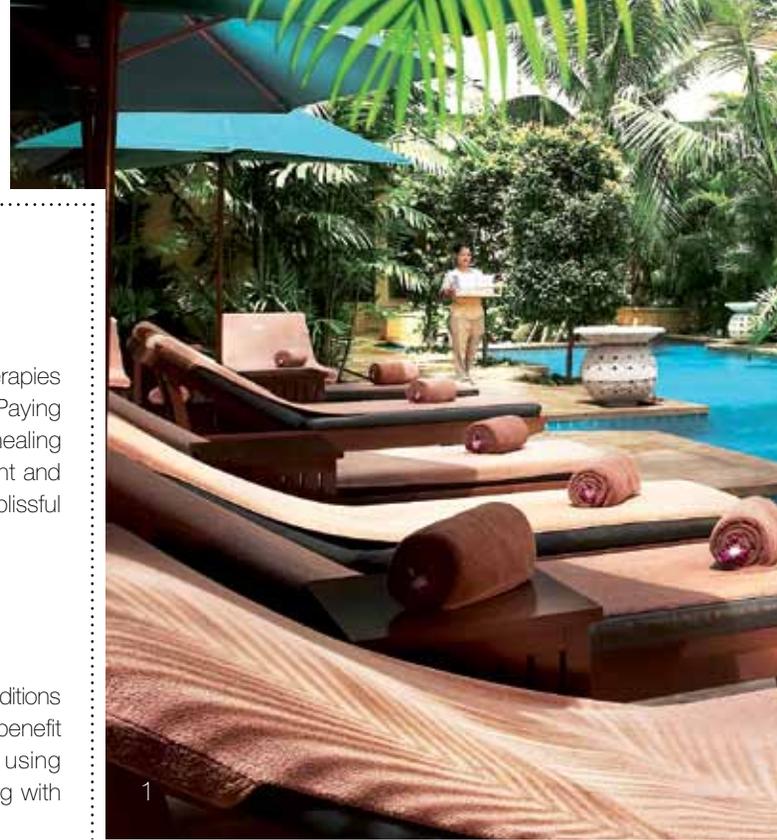
4. Spa Village Cameron Highlands Malaysia

Cameron Highlands Resort features the third wellness centre of the award-winning Spa Village brand with a wide range of sophisticated treatments and healing therapies inspired by the restorative properties of tea. Each guest luxuriates in a signature tea bath before every treatment. Cameron Highlands Spa Village offers tranquil indoor and outdoor treatment rooms, tea bath rooms and a fully-equipped gymnasium.

5. Spa Village Pangkor Laut Malaysia

The Spa Village at Pangkor Laut Resort is a unique ultra-exclusive retreat that extols the healing cultures of Malaysia's diverse history of people and cultures and vast abundance of exotic natural resources. The abundance of Malay, Chinese, Indian and Thai practices make this the ideal tranquil setting for complete rejuvenation of body and soul.

Tel: +60 3 2783 1000
www.spavillage.com







FEAST VILLAGE KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Feast till your heart is content in our Feast Village, a dramatic, stylish dining haven with a village charm. Here, you will find 11 uniquely designed restaurants serving a mix of world-class cuisine and providing a display of culinary skill embodied in a chic and contemporary atmosphere.

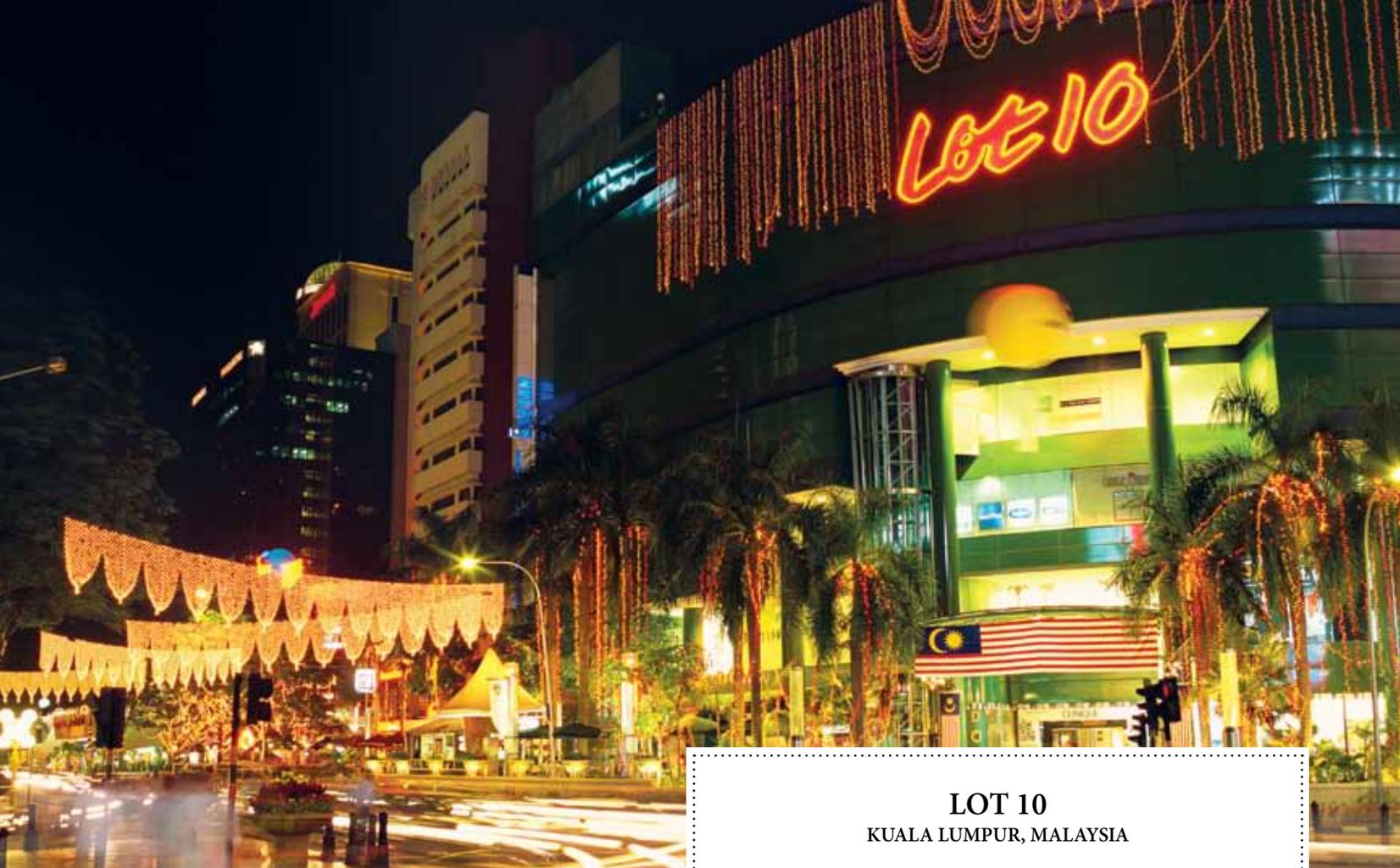
Restaurants and bars at Feast Village include Fisherman's Cove, Luk Yu Tea House, Pak Loh Chiu Chow, Tarbush, Sentidos Tapas, Shook!, Jake's Charbroil Steak, Vansh, KoRyo Won, Enak, My Thai and Village Bar.

The design of Feast Village is inspired by nature. Walls are asymmetrical and serve not to separate, but rather to provide peace enclaves where people may relax.

Rice paper from Japan combines with slate and ikat from Indonesia, granite from China, silk from Thailand, and timber on Myanmar to create the essence of Asia from a design perspective, making Feast Village truly one-of-a-kind.

Tel: +60 3 2782 3855
www.starhillgallery.com





LOT 10 KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

An iconic architectural landmark since the 1990s, the shopping and lifestyle destination, Lot 10, has undergone significant renovation from its basement to its rooftop bringing in a new age of modern style.

The Forest in The City theme is immediately apparent in the inspiring drama of the rooftop of Lot 10. Mature trees of dappled barks and emerging foliage rise above manicured shrubs to greet guests with a refreshing welcome of abundant green.

A dramatic landscape that emulates towering cliffs of overhanging ferns and flora, and a variety of tropical plants against the skies of Kuala Lumpur serve as the stunning backdrop for a unique host of urban lifestyle pursuits and experiences that are exclusive only to Lot 10 at the rooftop.

www.lot10.com.my





Grape Expectations

Jamie Sach, the Barossa Valley-based globetrotting ambassador for Penfolds, one of Australia's greatest wineries, speaks exclusively to YTL *Life* on the joys of pairing life with great food and wine.

Wine can be so subjective. It depends a lot on the moment. I'm a great fan of champagne as well – I simply love it, especially Krug, Salon and Louis Roederer. I think Cristal's superb but, personally, if you're looking for the best non-vintage on the market, I reckon Roederer's unbeatable... especially when paired with fresh South Australian oysters.

Maggie Beer, the great Australian chef, food author, restaurateur and food manufacturer, is one of my great inspirations in life. I had the privilege to work with her before and I really respect her philosophy of finding and using the best ingredients, locally-sourced if possible, and treating them with respect.

A lot of people ask if I come from a family of vigneron or winemakers, but I always say I come from a family of wine drinkers! My dad's a doctor and he's always loved Penfolds wines and has a more than decent collection in his cellar.

Work can be hectic so I de-stress by cooking. I used to be a chef a long time ago. I also enjoy fishing, and my friends and I often go to the Gulf of St Vincent to catch King George whiting and local blue swimmer crabs. Pair them with a crisp, dry white wine and life is beautiful.

I enjoy wine according to the seasons as well, and not just the occasion or food. In winter, for example, I often gravitate towards solid Shirazes, Cabernets and fortified wines. I think Penfolds' Grandfather and Great-Grandfather tawnies are particularly delicious.

Great food and wine pairings for me include Fino sherry with seafood and German Riesling with a simple dish I like to make myself – grilled local Port Lincoln sardines with lemon. Sometimes, the simplest things are best. I mean, sardines in South Australia are inexpensive. You can get a kilo for AUD7. But it really is one of the best things.

The most memorable place I travelled to recently is Vietnam. I love its colonial architecture, particularly in Hanoi, and chaotic sense of hustle and bustle. I am also blown away by its blend of interesting flavours, like crisp hot baguettes filled with spicy beef.

In my fridge, you will always find anchovies, good parmesan cheese and free-range eggs. For fresh herbs, I get them from my garden – but only if my dog, a naughty beagle, doesn't eat them.

My favourite room should, ideally, be my cellar. But, as I've just moved into a new house, I've got to wait a while before I can have my own cellar as it's quite low on my wife's list of renovation priorities. ■



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