

YTL *life*

The YTL Luxury Magazine

White Is Right
Niseko's Winter
Season Is Now!

**Green
Movement**
Hiking the
Mossy Forest

Cultural Pearl
Penang's Thriving
Soul

YTL Lives
Daniel Brühl
Rosemary Palmer
Mariah Carey

Canticle Singers • Nutmeg & Rice Therapy • Straits to Luxury

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GREEN *gb* LEAF
Niseko Village



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PERFECT POWDER SKI HAVEN

Niseko Village rests at the base of Mount Niseko An'nupuri, Japan; a land of powder white slopes, natural onsen and dramatic landscapes. The Green Leaf Niseko Village is a vibrant ski-in ski-out hotel, contemporarily redesigned to embrace the creative touch of renowned local artists.

For enquiries or reservations, please contact YTL Hotels Travel Centre at travelcentre@ytlhotels.com or call +60 3 2783 1000

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Mount Kinabalu appears mystically behind the parting clouds.
And once again, you remind yourself that you're not dreaming.
Your moment awaits.

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- Served with Ginger Tea & Refreshment

Usual Price: RM550

PRICE: RM420 nett

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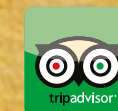
- 40 minutes RM120 nett
- 60 minutes RM150 nett

MANICURE

- 45 minutes RM110 nett

PEDICURE

- 45 minutes RM110 nett



recommended on trip advisor

* **Best Traditional Massage Award**
(Harper's Bazaar 2013)

* **Things to Do in Kuala Lumpur**
(Lonely Planet)



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A Note from Tan Sri (Dr) Francis Yeoh



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

The white season has begun in earnest in Hokkaido, Japan. And gracing our cover this issue is Niseko Village, one of the world's snowiest resorts, in all its glory. The resort was recently voted *Japan's Best Ski Resort* at the World Ski Awards 2014 for the second consecutive year. With the launch of our new Kasara Niseko Village Townhouse by YTL Hotels, complemented by the new fully-integrated Niseko Village with more choices for unique retail and dining experiences and après ski, I can assure you there's no better time to rediscover the famous powder snow and charm of Niseko Village. The development will offer winter sports enthusiasts seamless ski-in, ski-out convenience as well as all the comfort of a world class alpine destination, with the added allure of fine Japanese cuisine and the therapeutic *onsen* Japan is so famous for.

It's also not often that an individual's shopping spree hits the headlines but when singing sensation Mariah Carey visited Kuala Lumpur, it's safe to say she caused a sensation as hordes of fans trailed the glamorous chanteuse as she made her retail rounds of Starhill Gallery. On a more gustatory note, more good news came our way as YTL's Shook! Shanghai clinched the second spot in the *Best Restaurant* category during Shanghai's Restaurant Week, which was organised by *DiningCity*, the leading international restaurant guide, in a tally that saw over 260 dining establishment vie for the top spots. If you have yet to try out Shook! Shanghai's cuisine, I strongly urge you to visit it, strategically- and beautifully-located on the penthouse floor of The Swatch Art Peace Hotel, a historical landmark along the Bund.

God bless and enjoy the issue.



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1. Shirley Dow and Chris Dow. 2. Michael Choice, Misty Choice, Shelly Alt and David Alt. 3. Songbird Jaclyn Victor. 4. Replica of Lauren Baker's Swarovski sculpture. 5. Lucy Archer and Rikki Mace. 6. Yasmin Stoffer and Bianca Chan. 7. None Abdul Aziz and Ahmad Rizal Samad. 8. Amee Halim-Illiya and Ning Baizura.



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A Roar of Hope

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur truly was the perfect place to highlight the plight of the majestic wild tigers.

The tiger is the largest of the cat species and can reach a total body length of up to 3.4m and weigh up to 300kg. Despite their formidable size, the impressive mammals remain highly endangered. Only 3,000 tigers are estimated to be roaming in the wild, and are predicted to go extinct within the next decade unless serious action is taken. Fortunately, efforts are already underway to save these majestic beasts and this was especially evident following the tremendous success of the recent Majestic Tiger Ball, which took place within the resplendent halls of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur. Held in aid of the Save Wild Tigers charity initiative, the event was graced by the presence of several prestigious guests, including HRH Sultanah Hajjah Kalsom of Pahang. Guests were invited to take part in a high-profile auction showcasing several tiger-inspired items, which included a one-of-a-kind *Crystal Tigress* sculpture created by London artist Lauren Baker, which featured over 50,000 Swarovski crystals. The evening's entertainment included graceful performances by renowned ballerina Maria Sascha Khan; ballads sung by chanteuses Ning Baizura, Amanda Imani, Jaclyn Victor and Natasha Sass. **W**



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9. The grand ballroom at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur proved to be the perfect venue for the Majestic Tiger Ball. 10. Datin Mina Cheah-Foong, Dato' Simon Foong and Datin Nariza Hashim Petra. 11. HRH Sultanah Hajjah Kalsom of Pahang and Datuk Yasmin Yusuff.



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A Night of Intrigue

With the holiday season around the corner, many folks are gearing up for their next big vacation. For those seeking a truly memorable weekend filled with fun and mystery, head up to Cameron Highlands Resort to partake in the annual *A Curious Twist in Christmas Tradition* weekend. Upon arrival at this award-winning resort of Pahang, one will immediately be greeted by the various Christmas décor strewn throughout its charming colonial-style interior, which

includes lovely poinsettias lining up the marble staircase entrance, decorated gingerbread houses, beautiful Christmas trees and roaring fireplaces.

It would take much effort to pry yourself away from the cosy ambience of the resort, which has 56 rooms and suites with panoramic views of rolling hills. A magnificent 18-hole golf course fronts this impressive property. It's the perfect



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setting for the weekend's "Murder Mystery in the Misty Mountains".

The thrilling whodunit was inspired by the disappearance of Jim Thompson, the American businessman and Thai Silk King who went missing in Cameron Highlands in 1967. Till today, no one knows what happened to him. Each participant in the whodunit will receive a kit that includes a character card explaining in detail the characters they are supposed to portray. Unbeknownst to those in attendance, one of the partygoers is about to be accused of murder, and it will be up to everyone else to determine who among them is the guilty suspect.

After hunting for clues that have been strategically hidden throughout the resort, guests will then proceed to indulge in a lavish dinner, which is also where the true fun begins. Throughout the dinner, murders will

be committed, blackmail money and gossip will be traded, and guests will have to use their wits to solve the mystery. Beyond the vibrant characters and hilarious twists, there will also be opportunities to experience the resort's various signature activities. This includes the Jim Thompson Mystery Trail, which involves a refreshing stroll in the misty forests located just minutes away from the resort; pampering tea-inspired treatments at the award-winning Spa Village; the time-honoured ritual of English Afternoon Tea at the Jim Thompson Tea Room, complete with freshly-baked scones, clotted cream and strawberry jam; and last, but not least, the Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony featuring thousands of fairy lights strung on the pine trees lining the resort driveway.

Overall, experiencing the chills and thrills that this resort has to offer would certainly be worth the journey to Cameron Highlands. ❖

1. Cameron Highlands Resort sparkles to life during the annual Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony. 2. Refreshing Holiday Punch gifted by Cocktail Solutions. 3. Christmas carollers spreading holiday cheer. 4. Jeremiah Tan and Mr and Mrs Jagjeet Singh. 5. Festive decorations on display at The Dining Room. 6. Christmas wouldn't be complete without Uncle Steven, the resort's resident pianist. 7. Sheena Liam, Aja Ng and Reiko Ong. 8. Lennard Gui and Leigh Phillips. 9. Tracy Khee, Jeffrey Nasir and Mala Punjabi. 10. Yee Chai Lih and Zoe Liew. 11. Emma Chong Johnston, Jeffrey Nasir, Ian Johnston, Geraldine Dreiser and Jeremiah Tan.



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Bravo, Bravissimo!

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur proved to be the perfect venue for a recent concert, titled *Bravissimo*, by The Canticle Singers. With a twist from the group's previous productions, guests were treated to a combination of both classical and non-classical musical elements while part of the proceeds were for the benefit of the SUKA Society – Putting Children First, an upcoming and worthy non-governmental organisation. This production of *Bravissimo* was also used as a platform to kick off a fund-raising project involving a centre for delinquent teens. ▣

1. The Canticle Singers perform at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.
2. Guest soloists with The Canticle Singers for the production of *Bravissimo* in August 2014: Yap Jin Hin, Jane Soong Shin Yi, Stefano Chen, Ang Mei Foong, Cipriano De Guzman and Kay Balajadia-Liggayu.



1. Mariah Carey poses with the exclusive and limited edition Louis Vuitton handbag designed in collaboration with global star-architect, Frank Gehry, much to Tan Sri (Dr) Francis Yeoh's visible delight.
2. YTL Corporation's Tan Sri (Dr) Francis Yeoh accompanies chanteuse Mariah Carey on her shopping spree around Kuala Lumpur's Starhill Gallery.
3. Dior does it for the world-renowned diva.

The Not-So Elusive Chanteuse

Shoppers at Kuala Lumpur's exclusive Starhill Gallery got a celebrity sighting to beat them all when international superstar Mariah Carey caused a sensation as she went on a shopping spree prior to her concert in Malaysia, accompanied by Tan Sri (Dr) Francis Yeoh, Managing Director of YTL Corporation. The famous songbird jetted into town as part of her *The Elusive Chanteuse* 2014 Asian Tour. According to sources, the world-renowned diva reportedly indulged in a retail therapy session that hit the six-figure mark at some of Starhill's luxury boutiques. For fans of the songbird, The Elusive Chanteuse tour in Malaysia was organised by IME Production and supported by Malaysia Major Events, an agency under the Ministry of Tourism & Culture, Malaysia. ▣





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01

Nuts Over Coconuts

There are few better places in which you may immerse yourself completely in the Balinese spa experience than at the **Spa Village Resort Tembok, Bali**. Fronted by the Bali Sea and black volcanic sand beaches and set amidst groves of coconut trees, guests come here to heal and rejuvenate themselves on all levels – mental, physical, spiritual and even emotional. On the physical front, though, a new service is in store – the two-hour-long *Coconut Care Treatment* is not to be missed, offering guests a full-on pampering session which includes a coconut oil massage, coconut and tamarind body polish, coconut hair masque and a dreamy Balinese face massage.

02

Guest, Please!

The award-winning **Spa Village Pangkor Laut Resort** now offers guests a unique medley of Guest Artist Programmes to immerse themselves in. Currently in residence are Sarah, a renowned *yogi* and massage therapist, and Martin, a watercolour artist and tutor. Both will be on-site to conduct either group or private sessions, depending on the program. Choose from private Hatha or Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga sessions as well as various massage therapies, including Indian head massage and reflexology. For guests with an artistic streak, look to Martin who will be conducting regular water colour demonstrations as well as hold private classes. The Guest Artist Programmes are available daily, except Wednesdays.

03

Feeling Island Fine

If you're on a romantic break at the award-winning **Pangkor Laut Resort**, gracefully perched along the Straits of Malacca, make it a point to dine *à deux* at **The Straits**, its elegantly-appointed dining room. Offering guests a choice of two degustation menus, choose from *Experience* or *Embark*, where you may feast on dishes as diverse and as exciting as tiger prawns with masala sauce, tom yam sorbet, beef consommé paired with wagyu carpaccio, glass noodles and Vietnamese herbs and caramelised pineapple cake. Select a bottle of bubbly to go with your meal before calling it a night and retreating, by moonlight, to the serenity of your over-water villa. Sounds like paradise, doesn't it?



04



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Welcome, 2015!

It's always lovely to escape from the tropical heat for a few days. Those in the know would tell you the best place to retreat to would be to the **Cameron Highlands Resort**. Here, ensconced in luxury, make time for the pleasures of life, like indulging in spa treatments, hiking and communing with nature or simply eating and drinking well. In light of the season, a special New Year's Eve gala dinner menu is now available. Priced at just RM350++ per person, enjoy creations like duck consommé, Angus beef and ale stew with Yorkshire pudding and chocolate mousse mille-feuille with caramelised banana and toffee Anglaise before you start singing Auld Lang Syne. Always end and start the year right, we say!

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

05

East Coast Tranquility

Revive flagging spirits and restore bodies at the ultimate Malay-style sanctuary at **Spa Village Tanjong Jara**. Set in Dungun on the eastern seaboard of the Malay Peninsula, Tanjong Jara's philosophy of *Sucimurni*, a concept that embrace tranquillity and purity through wholesome living, is designed to nourish, nurture and rejuvenate world-weary souls. From traditional flower baths to the art of Malay massage known as *urut*, know that all treatments at this award-winning spa centres around a menu of traditional Malay restorative treatments as well as royal court rituals that have healed and soothed countless people for centuries.

06

Gin, Chin!

Keep your gin up at **The Majestic Malacca**. Being one of the few places in the world that serves Tanqueray's rare Malacca Gin, sample it over a signature cocktail or three – prepared to perfection by the expert team helming the old world style bar. From the best-selling *Spiced Straits* with hazelnut syrup, ginger and green apple juice to the *Tanquetini*, which features Cointreau, orange bitters and orange zest, there's also the *Ginberry*, which uses lychee liquor, sweet lychees and crème de cassis. All perfect sundowners after a hard day's exploring and hunting for antiques in nearby Jonker Street. All are priced at RM80++ each. ■

LET IT SNOW

From December till May, the mountain resort of Niseko Village in Japan transforms into a dreamy winter paradise with plenty of champagne powder to play with, *onsen* to warm up in and fresh seasonal produce to be content with.

Text Vivian Chong



All is calm and quiet except for the sound of the day's first ski lifts slowly rolling out from the station at Niseko Village Snow School. Ardent skiers are already out and about in their thickly padded gear, ready to glide into action on the groomed runs or off-piste terrains blanketed by some of the driest and lightest snow in the world. The effect of Siberian winds mingling with moisture from the Sea of Japan, up to 18m of the powdery flurry descends upon Niseko Village in winter, making it one of the world's most coveted skiing destinations and a perfectly dreamy getaway to experience the charms of a Japanese winter.

About 700,000 visitors find their way here in Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido every December to May, to ski or snowboard – or learn how to at the school, where other winter sports are available. Plough through the all-white terrain in an ATV-style snowmobile or be towed around by one while you sit tight in a snow raft, an exhilarating experience that's not unlike riding a banana boat; strap on a pair of snow shoes and go on a guided walk, or explore the cross-country ski courses in the area. How about dashing through the snow in a reindeer-drawn sled?

Early birds can sign up for the First Tracks Cat Skiing, which lets you ride to the slopes in a snowcat before the runs open and the truck-sized vehicle gets to work grooming the ski trails. On New Year's Day, book a spot on the gondola to catch the year's first sunrise, a Japanese tradition that portends good blessings. Most of the activities are suitable for various ages but young travellers aged three to six have the most fun at the Niseko Kids Snow School

and Day Care programme, tailored to instil a love for winter sports through private or group lessons.

There are certainly many ways to savour nature's bounty at this integrated mountain resort 100km south of Sapporo. Most visitors fly in to the New Chitose Airport followed by two hours – three, on a blustery day – by road to Niseko. The village lies at the southern base of the 1,308m Mount Annupuri, the highest peak in the Niseko mountain range, with Mount Yotei as its closest neighbour. Capped in snow up to seven months a year, both make for a majestic backdrop to the goings-on of the village where visitors have a choice of three YTL Hotels properties, each with its own distinctive personality and appeal.

Lofty Living

The World Ski Awards 2014 named it the *Best Ski Hotel in Japan* for the second consecutive year, an accolade that guests of **Hilton Niseko Village** would find plenty of reasons to agree with. Adjacent to the gondola station and with ski-in ski-out access, the semi-circular tower houses 500 rooms and suites, including new Deluxe Family rooms that were unveiled earlier this year. Up to four guests can relax comfortably within the 38 sq m spaces without having to fight for uninterrupted views of Mount Annupuri's ski runs through the panoramic windows that frame the rooms and lend to their name.

To feast your eyes on Mount Yotei instead, get a window table at the restaurant named after it, where guests begin their day breakfasting on a choice spread of Western and Japanese favourites. Do like the locals and make rice your first meal of the day,



Left: Feast your senses on breathtaking views of Mount Yotei; This page, above: Learn how to ski with friendly English-speaking instructors; The Green Leaf Niseko Village is one of three YTL Hotels properties at Niseko Village.

with a variety of dishes and condiments scooped over: pickles, smoked fish, seaweed and everyone's favourite *onsen tamago*, eggs that are slow-cooked in low temperature water. Traditionally, they were simply dipped in a natural *onsen* or hot spring, and you can do the same for your ski-weary muscles at Hilton's *onsen* and spa, where hot spring waters feed both the *uchi buro* (indoor bath) and *roten buro* (outdoor bath). The latter lets you enjoy the best of two climes: the sub-zero chill of winter, offset by the natural heat of the nutrient-rich healing waters.

“Hilton's *onsen* and spa, where hot spring waters feed both the *uchi buro* and *roten buro*.”

Do yourself another favour and book a massage at the award-winning **Wakka Spa**. 'Wakka' means water in the language of the Ainu, the indigenous people of Hokkaido, whose culture and traditional remedies are embraced at the spa. Delivered by highly trained therapists through intuitive and gentle touches, *zen* is just a massage away.



Like the Hilton, **The Green Leaf Niseko Village** offers easy ski-in ski-out access as well as an *onsen* and a spa. The two are located just minutes apart, and are linked by a free regular shuttle. Where the former is a picture of contemporary minimalism, the latter fuses a neoteric eye with Japanese sensibilities where art plays a central role. Black and white paintings of forested winter landscapes bring the natural surrounds into the boutique hotel's 200 rooms, while Sapporo native Emi Shiratori's signature hand-drawn art can be seen in the public spaces. The walls and even the lockers in the hotel's ski-in ski-out facility are the canvases for her nature-inspired murals.

Altogether, The Green Leaf is intimate and artistic, with an alpine rusticity that feels luxuriant and comforting all at once. Its all-day dining restaurant, **Goshiki**, illustrates that perfectly with its cosy cabin ambience and wraparound floor-to-ceiling windows through which the white-washed terrain



is laid out like a blank easel, marked by the browns of bare birch trees and the colourful wardrobe of the skiers.

It's certainly not an easy choice between the Hilton and The Green Leaf, so many guests split their nights between the two. Come December, a third YTL Hotels property will open adjacent to The Green Leaf and present you with yet another option to live it up at Niseko Village.

Home Among Heritage

They're known as *machiya*, townhouse that developed during the end of the Edo period and are part of Japan's traditional vernacular architecture. Favoured by well-heeled merchants and craftsmen of the time, the boxy buildings with lattice beams and sliding *shoji* doors were utilised as both residential and work spaces.

At **Kasara Niseko Village Townhouse**, each *machiya* is designed purely for living and enjoying your time at this alpine escapade. The Kasara brand, the latest in YTL Hotels' collection, is committed to creating memorable experiences by integrating authentic elements that reflect its locale. In this debut project – the next two are slated for Koh Samui, Thailand, and Pulau Tiga, Borneo – it delivers on that promise through a fusion of tradition and current styles.

The exterior and structure are a nod to the past, but encase modern comforts that exude an understated glamour within. A neutral palette of greys, taupes and browns create warm accents among the spacious interiors, from the soft furnishings in the bedrooms to the sleek fittings in the lounge area. The use of natural building

Left: Treat yourself to a relaxing rubdown after a day out on the slopes; Emi Shiratori's nature-inspired designs can be seen throughout The Green Leaf; Above: The *roten buro* at The Green Leaf is fed by natural hot springs.



Left: Warm up with an après ski tippie at Tomioko Lounge; below & right: The new Kasara Niseko Village Townhouse are modelled after the traditional machiya and dressed in modern luxuries.

“The first phase of Kasara Niseko Village Townhouse features eight units that all look out to Mount Yotei, with each 240sqm house accommodating up to six guests in three bedrooms.”

materials add an organic touch, in line with the underlying principle of Kasara’s outlook and approach – *shibumi*, a Japanese concept that speaks of simple, subtle and unassuming beauty.

The first phase of this new property features eight units with each 240sqm house accommodating up to six guests in three bedrooms. The *tatami*-style dining area can be converted into an additional room with futon bedding, suitable for two children under 12 years of age. Designed to be self-sufficient abodes, each townhouse comes complete with a fully-equipped kitchen, laundry room, and ski-in ski-out access. To manage the winter chill,

Kasara has included thoughtful features like a heated ski gear storage, insulated glazed windows and individual climate control.

Your other needs will be seen to by a concierge, backed by a dedicated team, who will deliver personalised services such as securing reservations for dining, activities and ski facilities. Also at your disposal are a host of complimentary privileges, including a guided mountain orientation trek, in-residence ski or snowboard boot fitting, an on-call driver to ferry you around Niseko Village, and the use of both Hilton’s and The Green Leaf’s *onsen* and spa as well as the former’s gym.



At your request and for a fee, the team can also stock the kitchen with a selection of groceries or get you a chef-on-call if you prefer not to cook; arrange for in-residence child (aged one and above) minding services and sports massages; provide overnight ski or snowboard waxing services; Indeed, you will be ensconced in luxury hospitality from the minute you arrive to the moment you leave – no doubt reluctantly but with enduring memories to reflect on. As the Japanese are fond of saying, 'Ichi-go ichi-e', which means that every moment is singular and unique, and Kasara is proof of that.

Sublime Seasonal Specials

Across all seasons, Hokkaido lives up to its reputation as a seafood heaven but the coldest days are the best times to indulge in the island's famous snow crabs. The seasonal shellfish, along with popular catches such as sea urchins, scallops, salmon and squid, are prepared in a multitude of ways that bring out their natural sweetness and succulence: in a *donburi* (rice bowl), *nigiri sushi*, as sashimi, thrown on the grill or a teppanyaki hot plate, swimming in a *shabu shabu*, or layered over springy *ramen* that is a specialty of Sapporo.

You can indulge in the myriad sea produce and cooking styles at seven different dining outlets at Hilton and The Green Leaf, where other Japanese specialties, like beautifully marbled A4-grade wagyu, are given equally refined treatment.

After all the seafood and meat rejoicing, end on a sweet note with yet another of Hokkaido's famous produce – dairy delight, made from the milk of cows that graze on Niseko's natural pasture and feed on spring water. In a red farmhouse shop just outside of the Hilton, **Milk Kobo** whips the milk into luscious cream to fill chewy choux puffs and



éclairs, and churns out ice-cream, fresh yogurt and creamy cheese cakes. More delectable creations await at **Niseko Fromagerie** just a short stroll away from The Green Leaf, loved for its havarti, award-winning gouda and flavoured cheese crisps.

Niseko has everything that makes it a top winter destination and it's set to get even better with a new food-beverage and retail hub at **the village**. Designed after a traditional Japanese hamlet and built in the same architectural style as Kasara, it's perfect for après ski winding down over international cuisines at world-class restaurants and shopping for luxury designer brands, Japanese art and Hokkaido specialties.

One of the highlights is Two Sticks, an Asiatic tapas pub that pairs global influences with local flavours, conceived to be the place to eat, drink and be merry – besides the **Lookout Cafe**, that is, which sits at the top of Mount Annupuri. Seasoned skiers who manage to make their way there can recharge with a tippie of their choice from a full bar and drink to magnificent views of the snow-clad surrounds. What better place to clink and toast to Niseko and its spectacular wintry wonders? ▣

Kasara Niseko Village Townhouse opens 1 December, with rates starting from USD2,000 per night. Check-ins are on Wednesdays and Saturdays with minimum stays of three and four nights, respectively, throughout the ski season.

Clockwise from top left: Dairy dreams come alive at Niseko Fromagerie; indulge in a variety of world-class gourmet fare at Niseko Village; enjoy a glass of sake with the crustaceans at Crab Shack; head to Milk Kobo early if you don't want to miss out on their legendary cream puffs.



A Mossy Adventure

Explore the green trail in the Malaysian highlands and be rewarded by Nature's beauty.

Text **Eric Ian Chan** Photography **Edmund Lee**

Behind me, a frenzied network of roots, barks and low branches. Before me, an intertwining series of the same. We are going down a particularly steep slope. My hands and feet are on autopilot – I am relying solely on my hiking instincts.

1. The Mossy Forest is famous for its soft green coat that covers the trunks and branches of trees. The deeper one ventures into the forest, the more stunning the sight. 2. Rolling hills of tea plantations on a narrow road leading to the Mossy Forest. 3. Looking up and not focusing on the black peat that sticks to your shoes, delicate and beautiful flora can be observed.

My heart is pumping, my body is heating up, something I didn't think would happen in the cool temperate weather. My foot makes contact with a protruding root – hard. My toes are aching from the constant bumping. "Vary your steps, vary your steps," I remind myself.

We finally reach a clearing and S Madi, Cameron Highlands Resort's resident naturalist who often acts as a guide on trekking expeditions, points. I follow the



direction of his finger. "That's the peak," he says.

Starting out

The drive to the foggy pinnacle of Gunung Brinchang was on a narrow winding road where cars have to honk to warn other vehicles and avoid collision. Surprisingly, even on a weekday, the traffic was quite consistent. Much of the road was wide enough for one car to pass, making the travel time longer than it actually was. Thankfully, we were not going to the touristy peak. We had done that the day before. On this crisp morning, we had our sights set on Gunung Irau, the highest mountain in Cameron Highlands.

Madi, my guide, had done this trail sometime ago and was eager to do it again. We had met the day before and, as it usually happens when hikers meet, our enthusiasm kindled our mutual passion for adventure. Within the first few minutes of talking, we knew that what we wanted was more than the confines of our itinerary. Madi later told me that he knew we were going to go on an adventure the moment he saw my "Adidas kampung" (locally-made rubber hiking shoes that have no affiliation whatsoever with the brand and literally translated as "village Adidas") and my gear.

We went over the itinerary and made revisions. I didn't want tourist spots; I

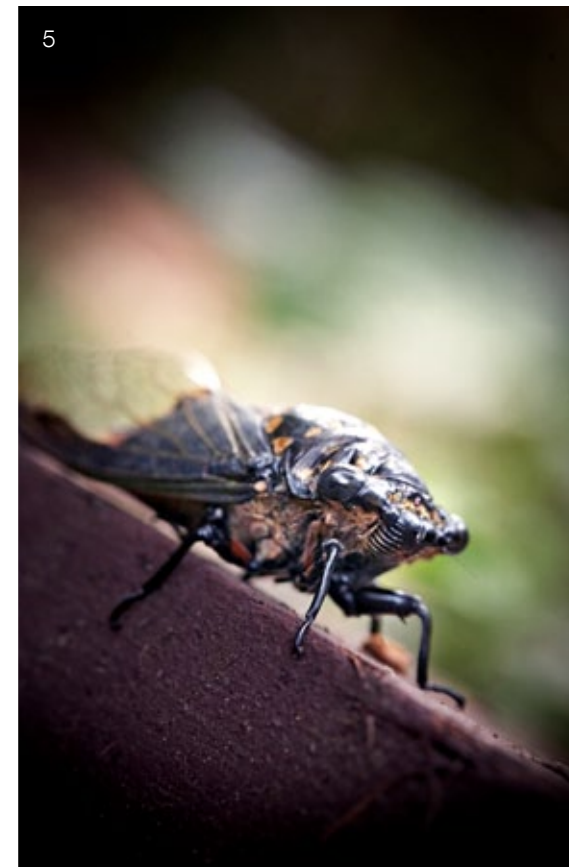


wanted something that showed off the natural wonders the highlands had to offer. Also, Edmund, the photographer, had not really hiked before and he would be a good gauge as to the difficulty of the trails and their suitability for novices.

The Mossy Forest, a famous spot in these parts, draw in visitors who want to see moss-covered trees. Cab drivers are willing to take tourists in for a fee and according to Madi, not a small one either. The trees do offer a certain charm, even enchantment. The moss drape down from branches like something from the pages of a fairy tale.

We walked through the wooden scaffolding and steps, and came to the trailhead that led to Irau. The slopes grew steeper and the trail gradually became more challenging. Not challenging enough, though, for Madi and I to stop swapping stories of our previous hiking adventures. Going along a path, Madi told me that the trails go past Irau and, from there, was a way that would lead

4. *Just a few metres from the entrance to the Mossy Forest, the breathtaking vista of the highlands will lift spirits. 5. Insect chirps are faint compared to lowland forests. We observed this cicada as we were leaving the Mossy Forest, one of the few bugs we saw. 6. The Begonia Rex, with its soft petals and slight hues, is indigenous to Cameron Highlands and is an endangered plant. 7. In the mostly dark and brown hues of the Mossy Forest, colourful pitcher plants stand out.*



down to Simpang Pulai, a small town that's but a hop and skip away from Ipoh. I quietly wished we had the time to do that. The vegetation grew thicker the deeper we went. With stone markers that assured us that we were on the right path, we soldiered on. The green net of moss that covered the barks grew more vibrant and I greedily took in the cool air and admired my surroundings. The scenery is wonderful and the serenity this forest exudes is wonderfully calming. This hike is different from my usual in another way. Usually, an hour or so into a trek, I would be swarmed by either mosquitoes or bees, or having to scrape leeches off my legs. Not here. Aside from birds and chirping insects that knew to keep their distance, there were no bug or slug attacks.

We continued our ascent. The roots and low branches of the trees were

helpful as handholds. They were sturdy, and I could pull myself up using them as leverage and support. At times, my trust did falter whenever there was a little give, but no roots broke and all the branches held.

I looked back at Edmund and he seemed to have gotten the hang of hoisting himself up to higher ground and lowering himself down trenches. With the load of camera equipment strapped on him, he was doing an amazing job. That is the best thing about hiking – the body adapts and the mind goes into a problem-solving mode, telling even the new hiker which are the best ways to manoeuvre and navigate around obstacles.

Uphill climbs are never a problem for me. Rather, it is descents that give me pause. The elevation of the route to Irau contains a few of these. Varying one's

steps when going downhill is a way to avoid the dreaded jamming of toes. This happens when your feet keeps jabbing the front of your shoes. After a while, this can hurt - a lot. The uneven terrain made varying difficult and our pace was consistent with virtually no breaks. After a few hours, even with my best efforts, the toe jams started and, while they were bearable, I found myself grimacing.

The trail was quite clear, although at times the plethora of trees and rocks required some bearing adjustments. "Sometimes, we would find people stranded here," said Madi.

Sucking on mints to avoid thinking about my toes, we came to the bottom of a slope with a small clearing. Madi stopped and peered into scrubs. "Look at this, isn't it beautiful?" he said, pointing at the delicate white flowers amidst the leaves that almost covered them. "*Begonia rex*," he said. "These are endangered."

These blooms, indigenous to Cameron Highlands, were suffering the same plight as any vegetation that comes head-to-head with development. And Madi would know, as he has helped catalogue the fauna of the highlands and at last count, there are more than a hundred that are native to these parts.

We went around another bend, breathed in more of the highland's cool air and proceeded up another elevation. We were at Mini Irau, the last stop before the peak. A yellow and green sign said that we were at 6,666 feet, just 256 shy of the summit.

The campsite of Mini Irau splintered into multiple trails. There is no signage showing the correct route. Madi said that this is where people get stranded, by going the wrong way. The path immediately to the left of the clearing would take us to the summit and Madi



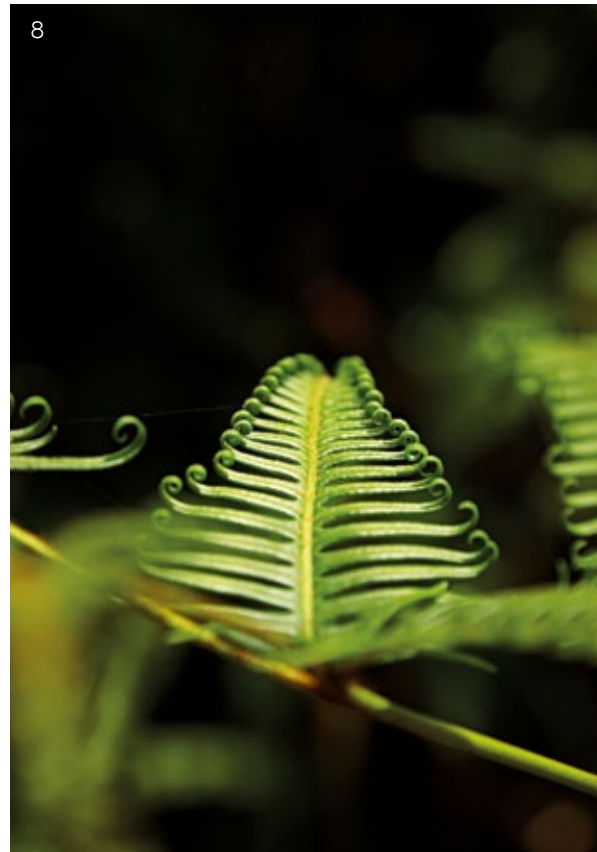
PLAN YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

The hike to Gunung Irau is moderate and may be attempted by new hikers. However, it is necessary to have a guide at all times. At Cameron Highlands Resort, hikes and other nature tours can be arranged and tailored to suit your needs. Talk to the resort's resident naturalist and guide, S Madi. Allow him time to plan your hikes and tell him what you want to achieve out of it; this way, you can see the highlands at its best.

WHAT TO BRING

For moderate hikes in Cameron Highlands, be sure you have the following items with you.

- A good pair of hiking shoes – torn or repaired sneakers are not advisable. Be ready to get them dirty, so perhaps no white ones.
- A backpack – All your gear should fit into the pack, leaving your hands completely free. Cameras need to be secured to your body using either another bag or pouch.
- Three litres of water – Crucial for a day hike. Nothing is more dangerous than not having enough water.
- Headlamps – You may not need it on a day hike but having one for emergencies can never be a bad thing.
- A compass – Not a crucial thing to bring but it would be interesting to get your bearings as you hike.
- A good attitude – Hiking is a sport that gets more enjoyable the more open you are to experiencing nature and the terrain. Also, never ask, "Are we there yet?"



8. Cameron Highlands is home to different species of ferns, some small and others huge. Madi, our guide, told us that he has worked to catalogue the ferns native to Cameron Highlands. 9. Though the sun was shining down on us, the forest interiors proved invitingly cool. 10. With no mosquitoes or leeches to worry about, we had time to enjoy the sight of interesting flora we chanced upon.

“The Mossy Forest, a famous spot in these parts, draw in visitors who want to see moss-covered trees.”

said it would be just half an hour or so to reach the top. I was pumped up.

Reason to return

On our way back, the route that we slogged through before was in reverse, making some of the stretches easier and others more challenging. We were tired but there was a certain elation that comes when a hike is done.

“Hey,” Madi said two hours into our return. “We should have finished the trail, we should have gone to the peak.” “I

thought you wanted to turn back and so we did,” I said, pulling myself up a trench.

“I thought you wanted to turn back also,” said Madi. We laughed. The truth was we needed to get ready for another hike, a night hike Madi was taking us on after dinner. We would have been too tired if we had summited Irau.

While I thought that the half hour wouldn't have made much difference, there is something to be said about not finishing a trail. There is now a reason to return. ■



If you are in George Town, the first thing you'll notice is how the city is decidedly more relaxed compared to the other major cities on the west coast. Renowned as a paradise for foodies, what also makes the city such a tourist hotspot can be attributed to its fusion of eastern and western influences. Named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2008, here are some suggestions that might pique the interest of travellers with a curiosity for all things historical.

Clash Of The Clans

Built by the forefathers of the Khoo family who emigrated from southern China, this *kongsi* (clan house) is one of five that were built by the big clans that formed the backbone of the Hokkien community during the olden-days of Penang. Clan houses served as a haven for Chinese families of the same surname to gather in solidarity and worship their ancestors.

The entrance to the clan house can be tricky to spot seeing as it almost blends in with the nearby shoplots. As for the actual clan house, it is located in the centre of a compound called Cannon Square surrounded by a maze of alleys and pre-war houses. In 1894, the original structure was almost razed to the ground after being struck by lightning, which many claimed had to do with the gods being provoked by its resemblance to the Emperor's palace. A scaled-down version that was built in 1906 stands in its place.

Many who have explored the structure regard it as one of the most lavishly designed in South-East Asia. Expect to finish your visit here with a sore neck from gazing at all the richly ornamented carvings found on the roofs, walls and pillars, which serve to reflect the art and architecture of ancient China.

Khoo Kongsi opens from 9am to 5pm (weekdays) and 9am to 1pm (Saturday).

A Fort To Be Reckoned With

The largest fort in Malaysia, Fort Cornwallis was built on the very site where the founder of Penang, Sir Captain Francis Light, first stepped foot on the island. Named after Charles Cornwallis – an 18th century Governor-General of Bengal, India – it was originally built in 1793 in the design of a four-pointed star.

Blast From The Past

Step back in time by gallivanting around Penang's George Town.

Text **Maya Michael** Photography **Colby Choi & Getty Images**



1. A glimpse of the intricate carvings, woodwork and porcelain decor found at the Khoo Kongsi. 2. A statue of the legendary Sir Captain Francis Light greets visitors at Fort Cornwallis.



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3. Exploring the streets of George Town brings back fond memories. 4. Pinang Peranakan Mansion beautifully captures what life was like for a wealthy Straits Chinese family in the 19th century. 5. Worshippers at the temples light and burn sticks of incense. 6. One of the many antiques and collectibles found in Pinang Peranakan Mansion. 7. Cannons of different ages and calibres line Fort Cornwallis' walls. 8. The second oldest lighthouse in Malaysia can be found at Fort Cornwallis.

Avid fans of war history would definitely have a field day exploring the grassy grounds housed within the formidable outer walls, which include actual cannons. The largest cannon found here is the Seri Rambai Cannon, which was cast back in 1603 and gifted by the Dutch to the Sultan of Johor in 1606. Fortunately, the fort has never once engaged in battle, which probably explains why most of its structure still remains relatively intact till today.

It would be hard to miss the giant skeletal steel lighthouse found in the northeast corner of the fort. Built in 1882, it is the only one in Malaysia that features a framework constructed using white steel. As for the view, this 21-metre structure possesses a visual distance of 16 nautical miles, making it the perfect place for taking amazing pictures of the nearby shoreline.

Fort Cornwallis opens daily from 9am to 6.30pm.

Antiques And Artefacts

Tucked away in Church Street of the George Town Heritage Zone is the famous Pinang Peranakan Mansion, considered by many to be one of greatest jewels and tourist attractions found on the island. It was first built in the late 19th century by Chung Keng Kwee, a legendary philanthropist and leader of the local Chinese community. The mansion was eventually abandoned and has since gone through many hands. At one point, it was even occupied by Japanese invaders during WWII.

Today, the mansion provides curious visitors a glimpse of the opulent lifestyle of the Peranakan community back then. Inside, you will find countless items of interest, including antiques and various forms of memorabilia. These complement the eclectic architecture, which was built using only the finest materials of the time – Scottish ironworks, English floor tiles and intricate, hand-carved Chinese wooden panels.

Pinang Peranakan Museum opens daily (including public holidays) from 9.30am to 5pm.



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9. Colourful, hand-painted signs found at Chew Jetty. 10. The House of Yeap Chor Ee is a social history gallery that tells the story of one of Penang's richest traders. 11. A local trader displays his exotic wares. 12. A mural found in Chew Jetty that was done by Lithuanian artist, Ernest Zacharevic. 13. Intricately carved Chinese wooden panels painted in gold are displayed at the main entrance of the Pinang Peranakan Mansion.

“A mere 12 minutes’ walk from the Pinang Peranakan Mansion, yet another intriguing story is waiting to be told at the House of Yeap Chor Ee.”

Rags To Riches

A mere 12 minutes’ walk from the Pinang Peranakan Mansion, yet another intriguing story is waiting to be told at the House of Yeap Chor Ee, considered one of Penang’s most savvy businessmen. As a teenager, Chor Ee arrived on the island virtually penniless, and worked his way up to become its richest man.

Housed within a late 19th century shophouse, the space was renovated and reopened as a social gallery in 2008 by Yeap’s grandson, Dato’ Sri Stephen Yeap Leong Huat. Expect to spend countless hours putting together the pieces of what life as an immigrant was like back then.

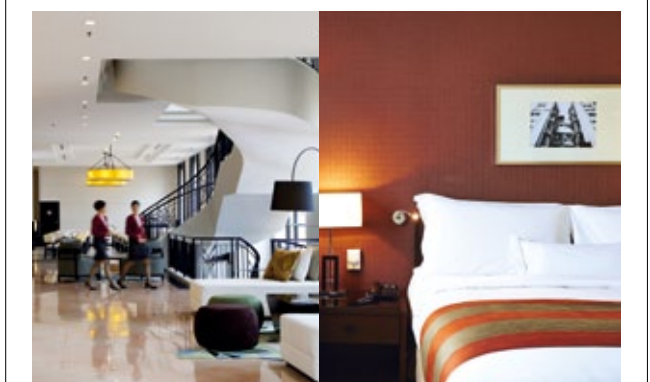
The House of Yeap Chor Ee opens every Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 6pm.

Life On The sea

Billed as one of the last bastions of old Chinese settlements on the island, the Clan Jetties might initially appear to be simple dwellings on stilts, but closer inspection will provide a glimpse into a community that has been around for over a century.

The jetties were built in 1882 following the construction of Weld Quay. Huts were later added to provide shelter for those waiting for the arrival of the cargo boats. It didn’t take long for the opportunistic settlers to move in and transform these huts into makeshift residences. Over time, the jetties would be dominated by various clans, and many of their descendants still reside there to this very day.

A good place to experience this would be Chew Jetty, which also happens to be the most tourist-friendly jetty. Located close to the Penang ferry terminal, the entrance features a quaint temple surrounded by food stalls serving simple yet delicious morsels of local street food, a perfect place to drop by for a quick bite after a long day exploring George Town’s hidden gems. To venture inside, simply follow the path made of planks. If you’re up for it, stick around until sunset for those perfect Kodak moments. ■



SETTLING IN

When you’re finally done exploring all the sights, smells and sounds that this intriguing city has to offer, one of the best ways to recover would be to check in to Vistana Penang Bukit Jambul. A mere 10 minutes away from Penang International Airport and 5 minutes to the First Penang Bridge exit point, this premier business hotel strives to be the shining jewel in this “Pearl of the Orient”.

Catering for working professionals and pleasure-seekers, the hotel offers a wide range of amenities. Guests arriving at the hotel will certainly appreciate its strategic address as it is located near to major commercial, financial and government offices, key historical and cultural sites, popular eating areas and shopping complexes.

To make a booking, visit vistanahotels.com



Island Charms

Gaya Island Resort is more than just a holiday destination. It's a place to get close to nature, too.

Text **Maya Michael** Photography **Edmund Lee**

You can't beat word of mouth. A cursory glance at the TripAdvisor travel website will show up Gaya Island Resort as a luxury destination that is worthy of high praise. Those who have spent a few nights at the Sabah resort have described it as a "fantastic and relaxing stay", a "great Borneo experience" and a "first class resort".

Gaya Island Resort, located in the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park off the coast of Kota Kinabalu (KK), is accessible, just a 15-minute speedboat ride from Sutera Harbour Marina. The marina itself is also a mere 15 minutes by road from Kota Kinabalu International Airport.

The resort is a natural sanctuary nestled in the hillside along Malohom Bay with a hinterland replete with ancient rainforest and a magnificent view of Mount Kinabalu on the horizon.

Part of YTL Hotels' chain of luxury properties around the world, the resort's architecture harmonises with Sabahan elements. It comprises 121 villas including a two-

With its coral reefs, sandy beaches and rainforest, Gaya Island Resort is truly a paradise for nature lovers.



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1. One of the many species of mushrooms found on the nature trail.
2. Resident naturalist Justin Juhun believes that nature is meant to be observed. 3. High-end luxury meets nature at Gaya Island Resort.



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bedroom suite that use local materials and blend with the natural environment while villa interiors are designed with a contemporary elegance.

Guests can snorkel or dive amidst coral-rich reefs, while day cruises and bird watching trips can also be arranged.

The pool-side Feast Village serves the best of local and international cuisines from three large kitchens and offers wine from its private cellars. What's more, the Fisherman's Cove on the rooftop serves freshly caught seafood. For cocktails, head to the Pool Bar & Lounge. In addition, the resort features an outdoor pool, yoga classes and a pampering Spa Village set amidst lush mangroves.

As the five-star non-smoking hotel is a walking resort, designed to minimise pollution, only minimal motorised vehicles

are used for operational purposes.

Yet this is more than just a beautiful beachfront resort in stunning surroundings; this is a place for the curious to engage or absorb all Borneo has to offer. So it was with much anticipation that we set out to soak in the resort lifestyle off KK and explore the nature trail as well as do a spot of turtle-watching.

The first activity of the day after a restful sleep and a hearty breakfast was to set out on a discovery of what Gaya Island has to offer. At the entrance to the nature trail, one can see flights of steps leading upwards framed by the branches of dense foliage. These steps, according to the resort's resident naturalist Justin Juhun, took eight months just to complete.

My photographer, Edmund Lee, and I decided to take on the 700m trail. During

the journey, Juhun was quick to point out all the various fauna and flora scattered along the path. From the dainty dragonfly to the mighty amber tree, almost nothing escapes his sight, and everything has a story to tell.

It truly is amazing to watch as Juhun spouts all kinds of scientific names and the descriptions of each individual creature that we came across. He truly seems like a walking encyclopaedia on all things to do with wildlife. But what a real treat it was when he started to mimic the various sounds of creatures, which resulted in an instant reaction from the animals somewhere in the jungle.

At one point, he even decided to teach this writer how to mimic a bird-call using one of the leaves folded in half. Unfortunately, the experiment with the makeshift harmonica was a flop, but it certainly was memorable.

"The thing about nature is that everything is here for a reason. What might look like a dead tree actually serves as a habitat (for a creature)."

Asked what was the most satisfying part about his job, Juhun replied: "The biggest reward for me is changing the mindset of the guests who participate in the nature trail. I was born in the jungle, and lived there until I was 12."

"My parents used to work for a timber company, and they would bring back all these young critters, and it would be my job to look after them. The jungle is my university."

After wrapping up the short trek, we made our way down to Tavajun Bay shortly after noon. Not only is this private beach perfect for guests looking for more seclusion, it is also perhaps the best place to get



up close and personal with corals and the elusive sea turtles at the Gaya Island Resort Marine Centre, Malaysia's first turtle rescue organisation. Manning the centre is marine biologist Scott Mayback.

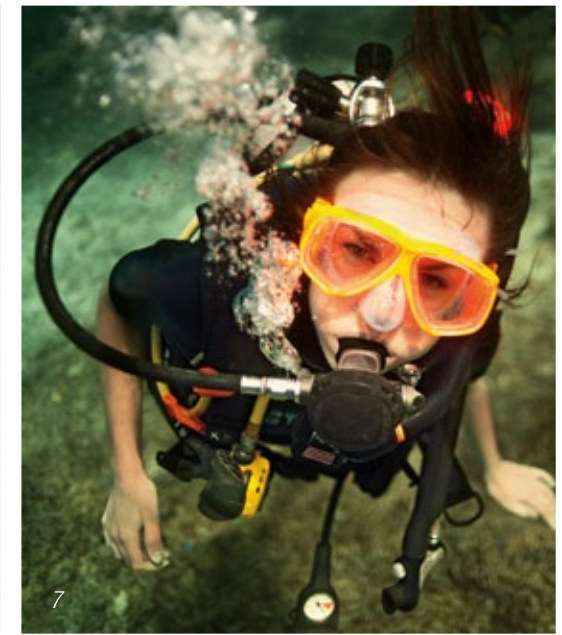
Mayback, a New Yorker, said: "The turtles that arrive at our centre are usually afflicted with what we call 'floating disease.' This occurs when they eat bits of plastic, which get lodged in their intestines, causing them to develop gas. This in turn affects their ability to dive back into the ocean, making them vulnerable to starvation, dehydration or getting hit by a boat."

"There was this one turtle we named Ninja. When she arrived at our centre, her torso was covered in barnacles and had sunken in because she was so emaciated. It took several months of tender loving care, but it was all worth it once Ninja was declared fit enough to be released back into the ocean."

The centre is also an educational showcase, displaying various types of soft and hard corals that can only be found on the island, the largest in the marine park at 1,465ha. In September 2014, the centre launched a special conservation project to plant corals on artificial reef structures to see if they would thrive. The project is ongoing.

So the next time you are looking for a restful and relaxing holiday, why not try Gaya Island Resort? Its stunning location, beauty and proximity to Mother Nature will surely entrance. ▀

"Snorkel or dive amidst coral-rich reefs, while day cruises and bird watching trips can also be arranged."



4. Resident marine biologist Scott Mayback observes a baby sea turtle. 5. One of the many fascinating highlights found at the resort's Marine Centre. 6. Nobody really knows what happens once these hatchlings head out to sea. 7. The surrounding seas are perfect for diving and snorkelling. 8. Catch the sunset while cruising on the resort's luxurious Lumba-Lumba yacht.



Singing for Joy

With the festive season in full swing, it's time to look at how songs bring joy to the world. The Canticle Singers share their ups and downs with *YTL Life* after a successful performance at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

Text **Fong Peng Khuan** Photography **Yong Keen Keong**

Confucius once said music produces a kind of pleasure, which human nature cannot do without. How true. The irrepressible charm and joy of song and music have always moved Malaysians. In the late 1980s HK Chong staged a fund-raising concert featuring *His Sounds*, a 30-voice choir from the Philippines. "I wept when I first heard them as they blew me away," he recalls. When the opportunity arose to organise another charity event in 1992, he formed a chorale comprising a dozen of his music-loving friends.

Today, the Canticle Singers (TCS) is a leading Malaysian chorale with a record of 23 musical productions of different musical genres. Their successful shows have contributed significantly to the local performing arts scene and benefited deserving causes in Malaysia, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the Philippines. Among their achievements are the Best Group Performance (Vocal) at the 9th Boh Cameronian Arts Awards 2012 for *Odds & Ends* in 2011 and nominations for

Best Group Performance (Voice) for *Do You Hear the People Sing?* and *Ovation* in 2004 and 2012 respectively.

Drawn from diverse professional backgrounds, all TCS members share a passion for music and sing for fun and pleasure without monetary compensation. They even venture on their own as far as Manila and Singapore for voice workshops and clinics in order to gain exposure and improve their singing skills from masters in the field. Their aim is to reach a musically sensitive audience appreciative of songs ranging from acapella to opera. This voluntary

community choir's repertoire embraces traditional classics, negro spirituals, folk, pop, jazz, rock, lounge, film, stage and Broadway music.

Despite challenges and hard work to promote music as entertainment for the Malaysian public, Chong admits his motivation is tantamount to foolishness. "Oftentimes, I refuse perhaps to see the reality of things as they are. There is still a long, long way to go, judging by the standards of many college-level choirs in the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia. What can be achieved depends on the quality, passion and commitment of the



The Canticle Singers is a leading Malaysian chorale, comprised of people drawn from diverse professional backgrounds.

Chin San Sooi and HK Chong are the talents and main driving force behind The Canticle Singers.

“Without music, life would B-flat.”
- Itzhak Perlman-



singers we get. But commitment in this era is a bad word,” says the TCS founder and music director.

All TCS singers are volunteers with day jobs and some are college students. Because of family and other commitments, the membership keeps changing. “I dare not think more than even a year ahead as it is always a problem to assemble and retain a team of good singers and have them (stay) focused,” says Chong. “It’s also difficult to get skilled singers without an attitude even though the max for any production varies from 20 to 22 only.” TCS artistic director Chin San Sooi is a theatre educationist who created the music and drama society at Ipoh’s Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) where he taught during 1964-73. Fondly known by its acronym, MAD Society, presented musicals and Shakespearean plays yearly. ACS was then the leading school in performing arts in Malaysia. After the British Council sponsored his advanced studies in speech and drama in London, Chin returned to his hometown, Kuala Lumpur, in 1974. While at Taylor’s College, he did Bertolt Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* with two musicians and a small cast playing multiple roles, a groundbreaking production then as local theatre always used the traditional proscenium stage. In 1984, he co-founded the Five Arts Centre with the late Krishen Jit and Marion De Cruz to promote theatre and drama in Malaysia in an “organised/unorganised” manner.

He has also written and directed *Lady White*, a re-telling of the Madam White Snake story (1976), *Refugee Images* (musical), which was initially banned in 1980 and finally staged in 2005, *Yap Ah Loy* the play (1985), *Reunion* (musical)

in 1995 and Kuala Lumpur Sentral (musical) in 2001. Chin is best identified with Stella Kon’s *Emily of Emerald Hill*, winner of the Singapore Drama Writing Competition 1984. In Kon’s words, he is the godfather of the play.

“No director or theatre group then took up the challenge to stage it as it was too long a monodrama,” Chin recalls. “It would not have worked but history has shown otherwise. Now, the play is studied in schools, colleges and universities in Singapore and Malaysia and anyone worthy to be called an actress would be hard pressed not to do the role of Emily Gan.” As he wanted the world to see it, Chin held successful productions in Vancouver, Canada and Wollongong and Sydney, Australia. His foray into other areas of theatre also led him to direct Yudi, the Chinese chanteuse, in some of her shows.

In early 2002, Chin received a call from Chong, a former ACS student, asking him to direct the musical, *Two From Galilee*, to raise funds for Malaysian Care Society. He agreed straight away. According to him, TCS productions involve directing a choral group and stage acting. “When movement is required, I choreograph them and try to keep it simple and effective for singers aren’t trained dancers and have to concentrate on the music. I also enhance the music conductor’s concern for proper diction and articulation and remind them of the emotional content of the lyrics.”

As the only non-singer of TCS, working hard on the songs with the conductor guiding the singers to perfect the nuances of the music is delightful to Chin. “In KL, they travel distances for rehearsals from as far as Klang, come



moonshine, rain or traffic jam. I envy them and am humbled. Ordinary people they are you may say, but extraordinary in their commitment. I am enriched for being part of TCS.”

To wannabe singers, Chin has this advice: “Get a sound knowledge of music, enjoy making music of diverse genres, thankfully share it with other people, stay humble with the talent given to you. Finally, get lost and find yourself.”

As the TCS continues to evolve under Chong and Chin, they have hosted the acclaimed Philippine Madrigal Singers (MADZ) after their appearance at the 2012 George Town Festival in Penang to inspire and entertain Malaysians. The 50-year-old MADZ is the first choral group to have won the world choral Olympics twice and serves as a national icon for the Philippines. This year, TCS has featured two classical guest singers from Manila as part of the cast in the 2014 production of *Bravissimo*.

Eventually, Chong and Chin would like TCS to spread its wings to other cities in the country. Though the work logistics of the individual



singers make it difficult for this to be realised, still the possibility remains in the future, especially with corporate sponsorship and public support.

Contemporary American music virtuoso Itzhak Perlman once said, “Without music, life would B-flat.” On a similar note, the French novelist Victor Hugo wrote, “Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.” ■

For more information on TCS, go to www.thecanticlesingers.com.

For members of The Canticle Singers, music is a great passion and joy.



Art Direction Yvonne Low Photography Law Soo Phye

The Book of Daniel

Hollywood star Daniel Brühl tells *YTL Life* all about fame, fortune and football while on holiday at the MUSE Pangkor Laut Estates, Malaysia.

If you've ever watched and enjoyed Quentin Tarantino's WWII flick *Inglourious Basterds*, you wouldn't have missed out on the looks and talent of scene-stealing Daniel Brühl, who played German war hero Frederik Zoller in what critics say was his "breakout" role. No stranger to the world of fame, Brühl was already a young star in his native Germany, working in a popular soap opera called *Verbotene Liebe* (*Forbidden Love*) since his teens.

Born in Barcelona to a German father and a Spanish mother, Brühl moved back to Cologne, Germany, as a baby. Brought up in a multilingual home, Brühl put his linguistic

talents to good use, working in several languages for a variety of productions, as well as perfecting an Austrian accent to play former F1 world champion and aviation entrepreneur, Niki Lauda, in the acclaimed movie, *Rush*.

YTL Life caught up with the rising star amidst the paradise-like surroundings of MUSE Pangkor Laut Estates on Malaysia's west coast.

Tell us about your recent role in Michael Winterbottom's *The Face of An Angel*, which is based on the real-life story of Amanda Knox who was accused

of murdering Meredith Kercher some years back.

I play Thomas Lang, a young film director who wants to make a film based on the book, *The Face of An Angel*, but struggles as he finds out the murder case is so much more complicated than what he initially thought. There are so many angles, making it impossible to uncover the truth. I always thought of this part as being Michael Winterbottom's alter ego, in fact.

You also played Niki Lauda in *Rush*. Still very much a European icon, what tips did he give you on playing him and what was the overall experience like?



Daniel Brühl relaxing at the MUSE Pangkor Laut Estates.

Niki was great! He supported me all the way and we developed a close relationship. He would answer all my questions and give me advice like not to be afraid and not to listen to what other people might say behind your back. It was a relief, in the end, that this tough, iconic man, who's known for being blunt, loved the film and my performance; otherwise, I probably could never go back to Vienna!

Did you find it hard perfecting Lauda's Austrian accent?

We both speak German but our accent and mentality couldn't be more different.

You've always wanted to act since your teens. What were the factors that made it seem like an appealing



career option for you?

I enjoy it! Even as a child, I had made up very boring and long theatre plays for my family and performed for them at home. Very often, they would end up falling asleep.

Was that your original childhood ambition, though?

No. I wanted to be a soccer player and world champion!

What are the most important lessons you've learnt working as an actor?

That it is very hard to make a good film. All the pieces have to match. That's why I have the highest respect for the directors. They are the 'captains' who celebrate with their crew if all is good but who take the most responsibility if the ship sinks!

And what are the most important qualities every actor should possess?

Curiosity, sensitivity, patience and open ears and eyes.

You've been honoured with heaps of awards, from the Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actor to the Critic's Choice Award and many more. How important are these accolades to you?

I won't lie. It feels good if your work is recognised and appreciated in every possible way.

How easy was it for you to make the transition from European films to the US mainstream?

I consider myself European but, having grown up with two cultures, I've always been very keen on being on the move and discovering the unknown. Also, to work in foreign languages is a fascinating process. So, it is wonderful to have the privilege of working with magnificent American filmmakers. But, no matter where they are from, I always try to stay grounded, knowing where I belong, choosing the right place and people and working in a good environment. I would ideally love to continue working in many different places.

What are the prospects like for young German actors in Hollywood?

Being German, it's almost impossible to not play a soldier sooner or later. My advice? Be patient and persistent. It's always good to keep asking yourself the question: 'What drives you? Is this really what I want to do and for what reasons?'

Are there any personalities you would particularly like to work with?

Oh, so many! There are so many great actors around and my list is very long. I do admire one European actor in particular, though – Javier Bardem.



Brühl and Niki Lauda at the German premiere of the movie, Rush, in Cologne, Germany.

“Being a German in Hollywood means it's impossible to not play a soldier sooner or later!”

What would your dream role be?

I would love to do a *film noir* and one set in outer space!

You also own a tapas bar in Berlin. Tell us about it.

It's called Bar Raval and it's in Kreuzberg – a vibrant neighbourhood. I named it after Barcelona's Raval neighbourhood, which has a similar energy. I designed it with a friend who also happens to be my business partner. I'm very proud of it. It's authentic and the tapas tastes just like they do in Spain.

Any plans to expand your F&B business?

We'll open a Spanish-style deli in Berlin Mitte soon. We are collaborating with the Spanish Culture Institute as we want to make the Germans more curious about Spain's rich Iberic culture. We are also looking to open a place in a market hall in Berlin. Markthalle 9, a popular place here,

reminds me very much of Barcelona's lively old market halls.

So, would you entertain the idea of switching industries permanently?

Personally, I love new challenges, including the necessary risks involved. So, if I like a certain idea and the concept makes sense, I usually go for it. If it works, the pleasure is huge. If not, you just go on searching. However, I'm not about to give up what I do now. I love this work too much.

What are your impressions of Malaysia?

It's a wonderful country with wonderful people. The hospitality here is amazing.

And how has your stay at the MUSE Pangkor Laut Estates been?

It is paradise and one of the nicest places I've been to so far. It is incredibly peaceful and picturesque, and, yet, you can always feel the energy coming out of the jungle that surrounds you. Magic!

Have you had a chance to try the Spa Village?

That is a must-do! I had a fantastic experience where I felt like a king and a warrior as well as a newborn afterwards. One word: wow!

What's your idea of a dream vacation, though?

If not Pangkor Laut, I always love going back to Spain and southern France, where I spent many vacations as a kid. I know the whole area quite well already, so I can just chill as I don't have the usual hunger to discover and explore everything around me.

You are a big Barcelona fan. What about the German football clubs?

FC Barcelona will always be my club. But having grown up in Cologne, I also support its local club. As for the national teams, I absolutely couldn't be happier. Spain won the 2010 World Cup, and look who were the most recent winners! 🇪🇸



1. For Rosemary and her husband David Palmer, The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur holds the key to unravelling forgotten memories of the past.
2. Rosemary was only two when her family came to stay at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur.



Childhood Revisited

Memories are fleeting, especially when it comes to childhood memories. But for one former guest of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, returning to where it all started could be the first step to finally piecing the puzzle together.

Text **Maya Michael**

In 1947, the Bernacchi family found themselves travelling thousands of miles from Britain to what was then Malaya, a country that was still recovering from the aftermath of World War II. The patriarch of the family, then a member of the Royal Navy named Michael Louis Bernacchi, had been posted there to serve in the British government's overseas service. He was accompanied by his wife, Elaine, and their two children: Alan, three, and Rosemary,

two. So how does one start piecing together those hazy memories of growing up in post-WWII Malaya? For Rosemary, now 69, the first thing to do was to reach out to the very hotel where her family had stayed during those early days.

Her efforts paid off. By August 2014, Rosemary and her husband, David Palmer, found themselves back at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, experiencing the familiar tea lounge, where they were more than happy to share their stories about what life was like back then. "The first thought I had when I stepped inside was how absolutely beautiful everything is. We actually stayed in this hotel for the first three months because there was a shortage of housing after the war."

The Bernacchis could not have arrived at a more challenging time, as the country was in dire straits following the war, which had ended in September 1945. During the Japanese occupation, many of the local tin mines and plantations had been destroyed, resulting in an unstable economy. Seeds of future unrest had

also been planted during the occupation, resulting in some violence, and it was now left to the British to help stabilise the country.

Given these daunting obstacles, the Bernacchis saw The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur as the starting point for the next chapter of their lives. Even back then, the hotel served as a haven for both expatriates and members of Malaya's elite looking to get away from the chaos of the outside world. Rosemary admits she was too young to remember much but, fortunately, had managed to hold on to several vintage photos that were taken during the family's stay in Malaya, one of which included a photo of her brother riding around in a toy car on the hotel rooftop.

Even more revealing were the notes written by Rosemary's late mother, which chronicled the family's life prior to their departure in 1952. Neatly typed out, the notes offer a candid portrayal of what it was truly like to raise a family during the tumultuous period prior to Malaya's independence. In one entry, Elaine

“The first thought I had when I stepped inside was how absolutely beautiful everything is. We actually stayed in this hotel for the first three months because there was a shortage of housing after the war.”



3. In this candid snapshot, Rosemary's brother Alan takes his toy car for a joyride on the rooftop of the hotel. 4. A vintage photo from 1947 offers a glimpse into Kuala Lumpur's past. 5. A photo of the siblings which was taken at the front lawn of the hotel.



mentioned how rice was rationed, and that the locals found it hard to afford enough food for their families: “At first, we did not know about the shortages because we had all our meals in the hotel, but soap, for instance, was very hard to get.”

In reference to their brief stay at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, Elaine wrote: “The children and I were amongst the first families to return to Malaya partly because of an acute housing shortage. We lived for three months in a hotel, which I found very difficult with two small children. I had an *amah* to look after them, partly because their bedroom and ours were on different floors.”

The notes revealed how the children's caretaker was eventually replaced with “a Malay *ayah*”, who was going through a difficult time following the tragic loss of her husband during the war: “One of the things that I remember was that the only clothes she had were made of khaki material, although they were still the traditional *sarong-kebaya*... I remember coming home at night to find *ayah* lying on the wooden floor between the children's beds all sound asleep, she holding their hands under the mosquito nets.”

According to Rosemary, her mother would often talk about how dull life was during those early years. “But I don't know; there must have been other government wives around and they would have gotten together to have coffee, I suppose. I was only two then, so I really had no idea what went on.” Being so young then, it is understandable why Rosemary

would have no recollection of those early days nor would she even be capable of truly comprehending the severity of the problems during the Malayan Emergency. It was a time when the British colonial government sought to check the insurgency of the Communist Party of Malaya, led by Chin Peng.

According to Rosemary, the family later relocated to a house near the Lake Gardens, which they shared with a British senior administration officer. This was followed by a stint in Kuala Kangsar before they finally settled down in a district officer's residence in Batu Gajah, Perak – which still exists as part of Batu Gajah's heritage trail. As Elaine's notes showed: “By this time, the Emergency had started and we had to travel by train with all our belongings, including the car, as the roads were not safe.”

It was also during this time that Rosemary's father was roped in to take part in a village resettlement project under the Briggs Plan – which was devised by the first Director of Emergency Operations, General Sir Harold Briggs. The plan's objective was to defeat the communists operating in rural areas by cutting them off from their sources of support among the civilian population.

In one incident, Rosemary recalls: “When we were living in Batu Gajah, my brother and I would watch the British planes dropping incendiaries in the jungle behind our house. These were used to light up the jungle so that they would know where to bomb the communist camps. We called them ‘honey bombs’, as they looked like big droplets of honey dripping into the jungle.”

The British offensive also meant that Rosemary's father was now a prime target of the communists. “Michael had a price on his head, and we had to have a guard on the grounds, which was a bit unnerving,” Elaine wrote in her notes. The situation worsened to the point that Rosemary's father decided he would inform only his wife of his whereabouts, and had even told her to carry a gun, just in case.

Despite all their troubles, Rosemary insists that her parents did their best to ensure that their childhood was not affected in any way. “Our parents tried to make it as much of a normal life as possible. How many children had a chance to live overseas at that time? We were lucky to have had that experience and, in a way, it was an idyllic childhood.”

These sentiments are also shared in the notes written by her brother, Alan, who seems to have inherited their late mother's love for writing. But unlike Elaine's jottings, Alan's highlighted what childhood life was like during those troubling times. The one that stood out most was the day that he and his sister found out they would no longer be calling Malaya their home.

“I remember lying in my parents' bed one morning, as they discussed all the pros and cons of staying or taking up the Resident Commissioner role in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (now Kiribati and Tuvalu). I can't exactly remember my feelings, but it was a sad moment when they decided to leave. I still wish that we could have stayed longer.”



Bold Beauties

Inspired by brightness and beauty, and an edgy touch, step out in style with these effortlessly chic and cheerful pieces.



Colour Me Beautiful

The art and life of Frida Kahlo is the fount for the House of **Valentino**, which goes bright and beautiful for Spring 2015. Led by Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pierpaolo Piccioli, the look is strong, intense, courageous and oh-so wearable. The palette and complementing accessories are positively kaleidoscopic and the overall look is vivid, varied and wonderful, all visually-disruptive blocks and energetic lines. Complete the look with heels, precious *minaudières* and anything with studs.



Mondo McQueen

Brit style once again is re-interpreted to perfection by **McQ Alexander McQueen** for Spring/Summer 2015. Whether you are a King's Road Sloane Ranger or Notting Hill trustafarian, these looks will see you through, regardless of occasion or location. Fusing youthful playfulness with technological rigour and precision, all the exuberance of British street culture is captured in arresting pieces, from oversized shearling-lined biker jackets to Mod-inspired 60s-style parkas and dresses accented with edgy zip fastenings. Iconic streetwear chic is also bandied about throughout the collection, referenced in pieces as playful as varsity jackets to oversized skater shorts, tees and sequinned sweaters. For the bold, beautiful and brave.



High And Low

For its 2015 Cruise Collection, two words ring out for **Sergio Rossi**: attitude and style. Helmed by its Collections and Design Director Angelo Ruggeri, the new collection reveals clean silhouettes, architectonic cuts and sophisticated femininity. From high heels to flats, it's all about skilful contrasts and timeless elegance, as ably demonstrated by this wonderful expression of black and white paired with sharp, geometric lines.



French Kiss

Inspired by the ubiquitous chic Frenchwomen seem to exude, **Kenzo** once again looks to the feminine French wardrobe for his Resort 2015 collection. From staples like Breton stripes, enamelled cuffs, the white-hot *Bike* bag and legionnaire sandals, there are many items to covet, each one reinforcing the effortless chic of *mode à la Française*.



THE RETURN OF THE SUPERS

YTL Hotels plays host to the judges and contestants for the reality TV show, *SupermodelMe*. Two of its celebrity judges, model Lisa S and Los Angeles-based photographer Kevin Ou, explain what makes a supermodel.

Text **Ong Chin Huat** Photography **Sam T** Location **The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur**

When Lisa S arrives for this interview in the plush surrounds of the Library Lounge located in the lobby of The Residences at The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur, she struts in wearing ankle high boots, dark indigo skinny jeans, a black top matched with a fitted unstructured black jacket, a gold necklace with a robot pendant dangling around her swan-like neck and gold jewellery adorning her wrists and fingers. Tall and model-esque, Lisa towers over everyone in the room and definitely commands attention from the other guests in the room.

As the judge and host for the reality TV show, *SupermodelMe*, this is the third outing for Lisa on the hit series, now in its fifth season. "This season, we are hosting it in KL and the contestants this time round make the series very different from the previous ones," she says. "They are very beautiful, smart and competitive, but they are all very, very nice people." A surprising pronouncement, as most viewers who follow any model competition know that, apart from the modelling skills required, clashes and catfights are all part and parcel of the programme. "In past seasons, we had a couple of contestants who caused friction and were more edgy, and were playing the reality game as opposed to wanting to do the fashion part, but, this season, the girls definitely want to be models."

Themed *Sirens*, this season premiered on 24 November on Diva Universal Channel and will run for 12 episodes, with the finale airing on 9 February. With 12 contestants who come from all over Asia, the show promises an exhilarating journey, with adrenaline-charged tasks and cutting-edge photo shoots, all designed to test the mettle and fortitude of the contestants to the limit. But with fewer squabbles among contestants, what drama can the viewers look forward to? "I feel that this season, most of the fighting and drama is coming from the judges instead," Lisa says with a cheeky grin. "This adds a

"You have to know what your limitations are and use it to your advantage and create a different business model for yourself."

different dynamics to the show... the girls are concentrating on the competition itself and being good fashion models and, then there's us, the judges, fighting among ourselves as to who we want to eliminate or keep."

Lisa says that this new aspect has broadened the show so that it now not just focuses on the contestants but also the personalities on the panel. "This makes for very interesting viewing as all the judges on the panel come from different parts of the entertainment business, so we all have our own views on what we believe is beautiful." Among the other permanent judges who sit with Lisa are TV host Dominic Lau and model/actress Ase Wang, as well as a group of guest judges such as fashion blogger Bryanboy and photographer Kevin Ou. Lisa believes it's important to have different points of view and definitions of beauty when choosing a supermodel.

Standing at almost six feet tall in her heels, Lisa is the epitome of what most people would think a model should look like. Her jet black hair is luscious and shiny, and she has cheekbones pronounced enough to probably slice the carrot sticks she is nibbling on during the interview. But she's the first to say that although height is a good start to a modelling career, being tall isn't mandatory. "You can be successful in this business even though you aren't the exact package of what the world thinks a model should be," Lisa says emphatically. "You have to know what your limitations are and use it to your advantage, and create a different business model for yourself."

Among the celebrity judges for the fifth season of SupermodelMe, which was shot in various YTL Hotels in Malaysia, were host Lisa S and celebrity photographer Kevin Ou.

Lisa cites the example of Ase Wang, who isn't as tall as other models but has carved her own niche. "You also don't have to be stick thin to be successful ... and it's important for the girls to see that there are many different facets of the modelling industry. To be a supermodel, you don't have to be just a fashion girl; you need to be able to endorse products, act and host, and do fashion shows, commercials and editorials."

Lisa's straight-talking and unpretentious attitude makes her a breath of fresh air in the chi-chi and air kissing world of fashion. In real life, Lisa who started modelling at age 14, is grounded and realistic; she wears her maturity as comfortably as the clothes on her back. Her modelling career has taken a back seat, having retired about four years ago before she gave birth. "This is knowing what my limitations are and, at some point, you are too old to be a model," she says matter-of-factly. "When you reach a certain age, it's time to start branching out into different avenues."

She has since turned to TV and became a VJ for Channel [V], which, in turn, led to other TV gigs, *SupermodelMe* being the latest. It's not a stretch to see why, apart from being host and judge, she's also mentor to the contestants. "I'm like mama bear and I try to be a positive force for the girls. I always want to present to them the positive aspect of their performance. I think building confidence in girls is so important in this industry."

She says the modelling industry is harsh in that young models are often told they are not good enough and face rejection at every turn. "It's not my job to push them down or over-criticise them. My job is to make a young model realise the good things about herself. Okay, so you might not be six feet tall but you may have an amazing body and your face may be beautiful enough to stop traffic."

So what does Lisa and the other judges look for in the winner? "We are looking for a well-rounded personality. We need someone with versatility and who is well spoken. Someone who understands the business and understands how to be professional." She stresses that the winner must be able to carry the brand of *SupermodelMe* and represent it to the fullest. "It's no easy feat to find someone who has all those qualities and, as you know, there are very few supermodels in the world."

Recalling the two months she spent filming in Kuala Lumpur and around Malaysia, Lisa says she was delighted with the service and the "amazing staff" at all the YTL properties she had stayed in. "I've stayed in a lot of hotels around the world because my parents are in the casino industry and the service I've experienced in The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur and Pangkor Laut Resort was outstanding," Lisa says.

"I've grown up in the hotel system and I feel most comfortable in one. This hotel we are staying in (The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur), I think, has the best staff I have encountered in my life!" She cites instances where the staff had helped her babysit and entertain her daughter, while she and her husband were having their meals. "The butlers have been so helpful; I can't even begin to tell you how amazing the staff here is."

Married to Hong Kong actor Daniel Wu, Lisa said Pangkor Laut Resort is her favourite place to holiday because she loves the sea and the sun, and it was there that her 17-month-old daughter took to the sea for the first time. "We had personalised service at Pangkor Laut Resort, where we had our own butler and private chef. They were just so nice and helpful at all times of the day and night." With a hectic daily filming schedule that sometimes lasts up to 18 hours, Lisa knows that when she retires for the day, she is surrounded by luxury and comfort.

"My job is to make a young model realise the good things about herself. Okay, so you might not be six feet tall but you may have an amazing body and your face may be beautiful enough to stop traffic."

Having spent two months filming *SupermodelMe* in Malaysia, Lisa S says that she was delighted with the service and amazing staff at all the YTL Hotels she stayed in.





Celebrity photographer Kevin Ou loves the grandeur and luxury of The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur, especially the freshness of the hotel's Orchid Conservatory.

Being rejected for a photography course was probably the best thing to have happened to celebrity photographer Kevin Ou. "I'm one of those who will go all out to prove you wrong if you tell me I can't do something," he says. Having obtained a Mass Communication diploma, he was turned down for a photography course, while all his friends were accepted. The rejection drove him to learn as much as possible about photography from books and magazines. "In school, you only learn

as fast as the teacher teaches you. For me, as I was self-learning, I absorbed the knowledge at a much faster pace."

When Ou turned 20, he packed his bags and left Singapore for Los Angeles with an ambition to make it big. "I went there with a dream... I just jumped in and did it." Just as well because, today, Ou is a hot-shot celebrity photographer who has been named as one of the 10 most influential photographers in the United States.

The first thing he did in Los Angeles was enrol at the Art Centre College of Design, which he says is like the "Harvard of design schools". "It's really hard to get into, and lots of famous designers and photographers have graduated from there," he says. Known for its transportation design department, Ou says he made valuable contacts with car design students who have since gone to work for car makers like Mercedes-Benz and Maserati, to name a few. Although Ou graduated with a Bachelor's of Arts degree, he admitted that education wasn't his priority at the time. College "bought me three years of time to get to know the industry and market."

While doing his photography course, Ou interned with several photographers, including celebrity photographers Jill Greenberg and David LaChapelle. He said he learnt as much as he could. "I learnt how to re-touch photographs with Jill Greenberg as well as run the office. All that gave me insight into the business and taught me things school couldn't."

Ou says he took up photography out of a rebellious streak. He got hooked onto photography when he was 16 years old but never thought of making it a career. But while working as an intern at an advertising agency, he met several photographers and was intrigued with what they did and the lives they led. "I saw how much fun they were having and their lifestyle appealed to me, so I decided there and then I wanted to be a photographer."

Ou hasn't looked back since. His work has been published in magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *Nylon*, *Elle*, *W Magazine*, *DUB*, *People*, *Surface*, *Vogue* and *Entertainment Weekly*. Although he specialises in photographing Hollywood's A-listers today, he says he started out focusing on cars and advertising. "Advertising was the path of least resistance," Ou says with a laugh, recalling his salad days spent honing his craft. "I was so hungry then I would say yes to everything." Taking on whatever jobs that

"The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur, I think, has the best staff I have encountered in my life! The butlers have been so helpful; I can't even begin to tell you how amazing the staff here is."

came his way paid for his education in the United States. But, today, celebrities and musicians such as Johnny Depp, Andrew Garfield, Emma Stone, Lewis Hamilton, Nick Cannon, Ludacris, Mariah Carey, P Diddy, Elijah Wood and 50 Cent come a-calling when they want him to photograph them for their album covers or movie posters.

As a guest judge of *SupermodelMe*, Ou also directed the opening titles and fashion film of the show. "I do quite a lot in this series," Ou says after his photoshoot. "I shot all the promotional materials for the TV show, which included all the girls and the other judges, and I was also the photographer for several episodes."

To Ou, a supermodel is more than a regular model. "A supermodel has more demands placed on her. She not only has to model but act, host and make stage appearances ... she must be articulate and personable. A supermodel needs to be well-rounded and multi-faceted."

Apart from his skills behind the lens, Ou is also an entrepreneur. He and a college mate have started a photography rep agency where they represent up-and-coming photographers. "There was a big gap in the market as everybody wanted to use big name photographers. If you are just starting out, no one wants to touch you, so we filled this niche in the market by representing younger photographers." His other entrepreneurial pursuits included co-founding celebrity and lifestyle magazine, *Modern Home + Living*. His latest venture is a celebrity and entertainment marketing and media agency called The Lumenere Group, which connects brands in Asia with international celebrities and influencers.

Staying at several YTL Hotels around Malaysia while filming *SupermodelMe*, Ou says his favourite was The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur. "I love The Majestic. It is grand and every bit as luxurious. We shot in multiple locations within the hotel, so I got to experience the ambience and the staff as well... the experience there was impeccable. I especially loved the freshness of The Orchid Conservatory, where you can have meals served there. I've travelled a lot, and seldom see a hotel taking such great care of their guests that way."

Staying at YTL Hotels more than made up for the fact he is away from home. "My most memorable experience was when I was staying at The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur. As I had to deal with multiple sets and models, schedules were constantly back to back. After a 12-hour shoot, I returned to my suite to find my favourite pair of brown shoes already polished, with a note saying it was complimentary. I had neither left the shoes out nor given instructions to polish them. That little bit (of attention) certainly made my day."

SupermodelMe Sirens airs on NBC *Diva Universal* every Monday night beginning from 24 November. ■

Gorgeous George Town

Get ready to be inspired by the unique city
of George Town's colourful past.

Photography **Gerald Goh/Image ROM** Photography Assistant **Colby Choi** Styling **Calvin Cheong** Hair **Ckay Liow**
Makeup **Kenny Yee** Models **Alena V/BASE Models & Mikaela/Icon Models**

On Alena:
Princess cut dress
with belt, **Kenzo**.
On Mikaela:
Vest dress, **Kenzo**.





On Mikaela:
Embellished silk boxy
shirt, silk peplum belt and
pencil skirt, **Khoon Hooi**.

On Alena:
Peplum corset top
and pencil skirt,
Khoon Hooi.



On Alena:
Princess cut dress
with belt, **Kenzo**.
On Mikaela:
Vest dress, **Kenzo**.

On Mikaela & Alena:
Knitted mini dress,
Kenzo



On Mikaela:
Leopard print silk
mini dress, **McQ
Alexander McQueen**.

On Alena:
Chiffon shirt and
leather-patched jeans,
**McQ Alexander
McQueen**.



On Mikaela:
Cotton shirt and flared
skirt, **Kenzo**.

On Alena:
Sweater and umbrella
skirt, **Kenzo**.



On Mikaela & Alena:
Knitted dresses, **Kenzo**



On Alena:
Princess cut dress
and ostrich feather,
Khoon Hooi.

On Mikaela:
Jacket cut dress with
embellishment
details, **Khoon Hooi**.



On Alena:
Silk dress, **M Missoni**.

On Mikaela:
Silk top, **McQ**
Alexander McQueen.
Printed pencil skirt,
Kenzo.



Of Yin & Yang

Coolness and warmth, ice and fire, the eternal art of balancing one's life force is mastered by Spa Village Malacca's gracious team of expert therapists.

Text Diana Khoo Photography Yong Keen Keong



*Above: Spa Village Malacca's gracious interiors.
Facing page: A lucky basket filled with scented water that the therapist will use to symbolically purify and cleanse you prior to the commencement of the spa treatment*

Still the only spa in the world to base its therapies on the healing heritage of the Baba-Nyonya or Peranakan culture, the Spa Village Malacca at The Majestic Malacca offers guests a glimpse and experience of Malaysia's unique hybrid of two cultures and influences, namely Chinese and Malay. Spreading itself out over two levels in this charming historical hotel that was once the home of Chinese tycoon Leong Long Man in the 1920s, Spa Village Malacca overlooks the property's cobalt blue lap pool and is as pretty as they come – a composition of colourful and intricate floor tiles (a Nyonya signature), wood carvings, traditional *pintu pagar* (saloon doors) and teal-hued shutters.

Due to its strong Chinese influence, treatments are all designed to restore balance and vigour of one's *qi* or 'life force'. Fusing of its therapies with Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) philosophies as well as Straits Chinese sensibilities, expect a wealth of natural ingredients to be used as well as therapies designed according to your body's energy. Guests are expected to fill out a detailed questionnaire before commencing any treatment in order to ascertain whether they are more *yin* (cool) or *yang* (warm). Your therapist will then recommend the best possible treatment to cleanse, restore and reinvigorate you on both the physical and mental levels.

As much of Peranakan life revolves around the Nyonyas (a term used to denote Peranakan ladies) and, hence, the kitchen, expect culinary ingredients to play the starring role in your journey to wellness and relaxation. As Malacca was experiencing all the drama of a tropical thunderstorm, nothing seemed better at that moment than a nutmeg and rice 'rolling'-style massage. As you enter the beautiful treatment room, you would notice a small cooker where, atop it, stands a traditional clay pot keeping warm a generous portion of rice studded with small dark nutmegs. This treatment is a godsend for those who suffer from joint and back aches as it is specifically designed to soothe and loosen tight, constricted muscles. Those who spend long hours slouched over a desktop computer would immediately notice the relief that comes as your therapist smooths and kneads your entire body, focusing on traditional pressure points, before using a cloth pouch filled with the warm nutmeg and rice grains to firmly press and massage all kinks and knots away. As I hear the loud claps of thunder outside and the rain lashing against the windowpanes, I can't begin to describe the pleasure of being massaged with warm oil and pressed with a soothingly-warm poultice, almost as if I was cocooned in bliss. The sensation was amazingly relaxing yet I could feel my body unwind with tangible relief. I had asked for extremely

firm pressure, which was expertly delivered via deft palm and fingerwork. It was impossible to fight drifting out of consciousness and it was with a pang of regret that the spa does not work in an extra hour for a post-treatment nap. I was loathe to pull myself off the treatment bed but, once back downstairs in the spa lounge, my therapist soothed me further with a pot of hot Malacca fruit tea and a small platter of tangy *achar* pickles. Although the 100-minute treatment ended all too soon, I was intrigued enough to start planning a return visit in order to next experience the Malaccan palm sugar and honey body wrap as well as the Nyonya-inspired pandanus and coconut hair mask. In Peranakan households, the kitchen is often referred to as *perut rumah* (the 'stomach of the house'), around which family life revolves. It seems fitting then that Peranakan wellness therapies should also look to the kitchen (and, indeed to the Nyonyas themselves) to administer health and, likewise, happiness. ■

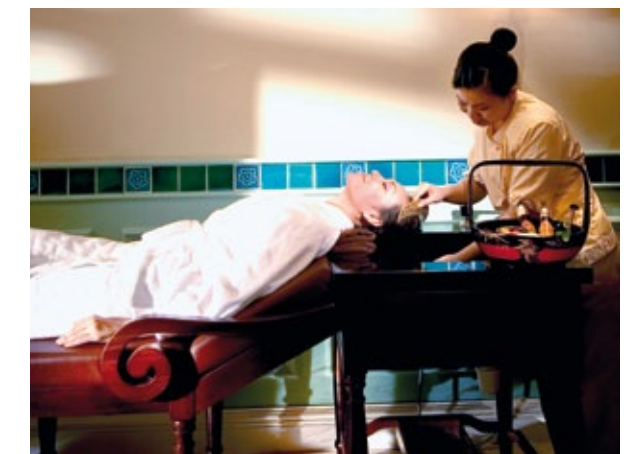


“In Peranakan households, the kitchen is often referred to as *perut rumah* (the 'stomach of the house'), around which family life revolves.”

A LIFETIME OF HAPPINESS

Spa Village Malacca's unique pre-spa hair ritual is inspired by the spirit of an era where long tresses were valued as a symbol of Peranakan femininity, grace and beauty.

Inspired by the elaborate detail, colour and pomp of a traditional 12-day Peranakan wedding ceremony, every guest is treated to a pre-treatment hair care ritual. Your therapist will first welcome you, clutching a 'lucky basket' filled with Nyonya wedding accoutrements. She will then use a fresh blossom to sprinkle you with scented Florida water – a symbolic gesture of cleansing and purification – following which she will lead you through the *pintu pagar* to begin the experience. Once you are comfortably reclined, she will proceed to wash your hair with Malacca fruit shampoo before treating you to a virgin olive oil scalp massage. As she goes about her business, be soothed by a warm pillow placed on your tummy as old P Ramlee movies play on special ceiling-embedded television screens. It is tempting to watch but you might find the rhythmic head massage putting you in a drowsy haze. The ritual ends with a rinse of lime juice and floral water – designed to gently close pores while ensuring a healthy scalp – and a gentle combing-through of hair, after which she will present to you the said comb in a lucky red packet as a parting gift and unique keepsake of your Spa Village Malacca experience. The best part? This is only just the beginning as the treatment proper now begins. Now, if this isn't a prelude to happiness, I wouldn't know what is.



Treatments at the Peranakan-inspired Spa Village Malacca are totally unique and a pleasure to experience.



Let There Be Light!

Charles Dickens might have penned the words that remembrance, like a candle, burns brightest at Christmastime. In the spirit of the season, here are some of the most beautifully illuminating votives that should adorn your living space.

Noël, Noël

Let the notes of bitter orange and Siberian pine waft through your home this season as you illuminate your living spaces with **Annick Goutal's** limited edition *Noël* candles. Available in a generous 300g size, the glass votive has been further embellished with fine gold *moucharabieh* work set against a deep red background, paving the way for languorous evenings accompanied by mulled wine and roasted chestnuts.



L'air Du Paris

We can't get enough of **Diptyque's** gorgeous scents but what we really want for Christmas is this elegant *Photophore Feu du Bois* set, which contains a 190g *Feu de Bois* candle and a large candle holder that is highly sensual in its aesthetics.

Land Of Milk And Honey

Let **Laura Mercier** infuse your evenings with a honeyed touch. Inspired by the artisanal honey of France's Provençal merchants, check out the *Golden Honey Musk* candle, the latest addition to the brand's Gourmande Collection. Based on the essence of beeswax, this decadent honey scent is contained in a voluptuously round candle tumbler with a delicious chocolate brown tinted glass finish.



Scents Of The Season

Beautifully set in frosted glass, to evoke the beauty of winter frost, **Maison Francis Kurkdjian's** box set of three scented candles will perfume your home with the fragrant blend of gingerbread and cedar. Even if you're not celebrating, these votives will make any moment festive.



Luxury On The High Seas

The Straits to Luxury is an extravagant cruise that sails along the Straits of Malacca and the Andaman Sea. Embark on inspiring land excursions and explore alluring islands, while you indulge in the finest gourmet cuisine.

Text **Vivian Chong** Photography **Law Soo Phye**

Pangkor Laut Resort is fading into a speck of rainforest, the warm lights that illuminate the resort nothing more than tiny yellow dots while its Spa Villas, which stand on stilts over water, are simply a cluster of shadowed blocks. The view is increasingly swallowed up by the darkness of the evening as the *YTL Lady II* picks up speed along the Straits of Malacca.

Agile and powerful, the elegant 85-foot Princess Motor Yacht was built for long-range cruises and YTL Hotels has crafted the perfect experience to showcase her prowess: The Straits to Luxury 5D/4N charter that sails from Pangkor Laut Resort to Langkawi and several islands in Thailand, before ending in Phuket. Available exclusively between the months of December and May, the one-way cruise calls at a different port each day and guests can disembark to explore each destination through carefully selected land excursions, bask on powdery sand beaches or soak in emerald waters.

It's a continuation of the YTL Hotels brand of discreet hospitality that you would have experienced the night prior, should you opt to, with a stay at the MUSE Pangkor Laut Estates, after arriving at the island by helicopter or chartered yacht from the mainland. Each of the eight intimate estates were individually crafted according to the natural terrain, and designed to reflect South-East Asia's built heritage. Serviced by a butler and chef, guests enjoy the utmost privacy as they submerge in landscaped or infinity pools surrounded by living and dining pavilions that were constructed around the existing tropical greens. In the evenings, hornbills make themselves heard and seen among the tree tops.

On board the *Lady II*, where four well-appointed en suite rooms accommodate up to six very comfortably, a professional crew sees to your every need and there's also a private chef to whip up decadent dishes at every meal. You can expect nothing less than



The Straits to Luxury experience begins at the dreamy Pangkor Laut Resort before ending in Phuket, Thailand, over a 5D/4N sea journey.



the privacy you want as you swim, snorkel or sunbathe. Beneath its sun-dappled surface, the seabed is carpeted by vibrant coral gardens that support a variety of microorganisms and tropical species. Strap on your J-mask and lose all sense of time as you observe the marine life and colours of the Andaman Sea around and below you. It's a fine way to work up an appetite and, come lunch, the crew will lay out a picnic on the beach so that you don't have to miss a beat of your repose under the sun. You'll wrap up the day with a barbecue dinner, also on the beach, and tuck into more fresh catches and grilled meats.

Can it get any better than that? Apparently, yes. From Ko Rok Nok, the Lady makes her way to yet another paradisiacal island – Ko Kai. As the yacht docks into place between the islets, the first thing you should see is a giant chicken head, a funny rock formation right at the tip of Chicken Island. Flanked by dramatic steep cliffs on one end and unspoilt beaches on the other, Ko Kai's translucent waters are an invitation to dive right in and meet more of the sea's inhabitants swimming among the thriving reefs.

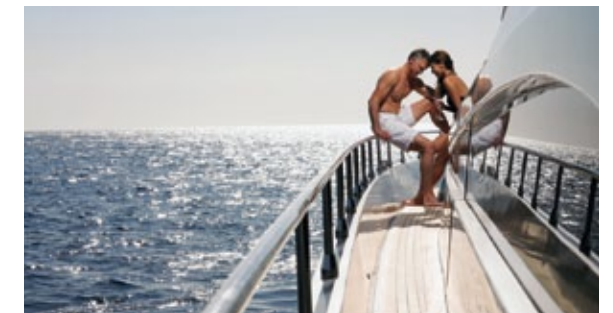
Surface for lunch on board as you head out among six of southern Thailand's best known islands in the Krabi Province that's known collectively as Ko Phi Phi. It was here that Leonardo di Caprio famously frolicked in *The Beach*, which was filmed on the long white beaches framed by picturesque limestone cliffs and lush jungles. That they are considered among the most naturally beautiful islands in the world is really no surprise and you'd want some time to take in the breathtaking vistas.

More visual spectacle lie in its waters: part of the Hat Noppharat Thara-Mu Ko Phi Phi National Park, this area is noted for its marine diversity and abundance of corals. Never mind that you'd spent the last day and a half snorkelling, you won't get enough of what Phi Phi has in store. As the day ends, drink in the spectacular sunset over what will be your last dinner on board the Lady. One more sleep later, the yacht will pull up at the Ao Po Grand Marina in Phuket, the 11th island and the final stop on an exquisite voyage that's all about living the high life on the high seas. All good things, however, don't need to come to an end just yet. You can choose to stay on in Phuket and continue to bask in YTL Hotels' intimate luxury and personable hospitality at The Surin or your preferred choice of accommodation. The Surin Phuket welcomes you with finely appointed cottages, lined with handcrafted teakwood floors and fitted with a secluded sun deck each, set among coconut groves along picture-perfect Pansea Beach.

Whatever your choice may be, one thing's for sure – the Straits to Luxury is an experience you will not forget for a long time to come. ■

The Straits to Luxury is priced at USD45,000 per way; transfer to Pangkor Laut, accommodation at MUSE Pangkor Laut Estates or The Surin can be arranged at additional cost. From Phuket, you can also sail back to Pangkor Laut on YTL Hotels' Princess Yacht.

For reservations and enquiries, contact YTL Travel Centre: (Malaysia) Tel +6 03 2783 1000 or Email travelcentre.my@ytlhotels.com (Singapore) Tel +65 6836 2455 Email travelcentre.sg@ytlhotels.com



to be completely cocooned in the lap of luxury while relishing the tranquil ambience of your seafaring hotel.

With draft-reducing propeller tunnels and a deep V hull, the *Lady II* boasts of superior seakeeping and allows for smooth handling. So much so, you will hardly feel the waves or turbulence as the sleek vessel glides towards the Andaman Sea while you relax into the evenings with a drink in hand. Make the most of the secluded foredeck seating area and let the wind lull you into winding down.

The next morning, Langkawi's mythical islands greet you in between mangroves that teem with wildlife and millennial limestone formations that have earned it the Global Geopark status. Disembark from the yacht and explore Langkawi's many attractions, from mangrove boat cruises – where you may spot an eagle or two – to cycling tours around bucolic villages and a peek inside a bat cave. Lunch on the freshest seafood while learning about Langkawi's many legends.

Indeed, there are so many ways to fill your time at this archipelago of more than 100 islands that, before you know it, the day is gone and it's time to head back to your luxurious floating home. Savour another fantastic spread of fine cooking at dinner while the yacht continues on to Thailand.

A new day begins among the sparkling blue waters and pristine white beaches of Ko Rok Nok, an uninhabited island that affords all



YTL Hotels' Straits to Luxury experience promises to be an unforgettable and decidedly-luxurious maritime adventure.

Spirit Of Romance

Increasingly, Japanese whisky is rivalling the popularity of that from Scotland. Discover more from the wide range of Nikka Whisky at The Smoke House in The Majestic Kuala Lumpur.

Photography **Kenneth Foo**

There is a love story behind the history of the Nikka Whisky Distilling Co Ltd. Back in 1918, Masataka Taketsuru, who came from a sake brewing family, was sent by the Settsu Shuzo Company to Scotland to learn how to make whisky. There, he met Rita Cowan from Campbeltown – one of five areas in Scotland identified as a distinct malt whisky producing region. Against her family's wishes, they marry and, soon after he learned all he could, Taketsuru and his bride returned to Japan.

Settsu Shuzo, however, goes bankrupt and Taketsuru joined Kotobukiya (which later became Suntory) and built Japan's first distillery in 1924. Inspired by Rita, he decided to build his own distillery, settling on Yoichi, a small coastal city on the northern island of Hokkaido that he felt had the most similar conditions with Scotland. Here, Taketsuru set up his first distillery in 1934, utilising the local peat bogs and the sea breeze to give his whiskies a unique character. He was successful enough to build a second distillery in 1969, in Miyagi on Japan's main island of Honshu. Its contrasting environment of rolling hills and peaceful forests produced whiskies noted for their softness, elegance and purity.

Widely regarded as the founding father of Japanese whisky, Taketsuru died in 1979, having set Nikka on the path to becoming internationally famous. As for Rita Cowan, she never saw Scotland again and died 40 years later. Today, there is in Yoichi a Rita Road, a reminder of the muse that launched one of world's best whiskies. ☑



DISTILLED GOODNESS

Some of the Nikka expressions you can enjoy at The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur's The Smoke House.

Black Nikka Spirit - A perfect blend of Nikka's proprietary Coffey grains, smooth and subtle, with a warm afterglow.

Nikka Pure Malt - A skilful combination of single malts that is available in three expressions – Black, Red and White, with flavours ranging from pure fruit to pure peat.

Nikka Miyagiko Single Malt - Available in 10, 12 and 15 Year Old expressions, this is beautifully a balanced, floral and fruity whisky, coming more complex as you move up the range.



Little Miss Khoo

Culinary sensation Rachel Khoo of *The Little Paris Kitchen* fame and then some was in Kuala Lumpur recently to promote her new television series, *Rachel Khoo's Kitchen Notebook: Cosmopolitan Cook*, specially-commissioned by BBC Worldwide. *YTL Life* caught up with her for a quick chat at the Starhill Culinary Studio in Starhill Gallery.

Photography **Edmund Lee**



Celebrated cook and food writer Rachel Khoo is also one of BBC Lifestyle's brightest food and travel stars.

London's Croydon seems to have a particular talent for producing elfin beauties. Aside from its biggest star, Kate Moss, the South London borough is also where celebrated cook and food writer Rachel Khoo hails from. Born in 1980 to an Austrian mum and Malaysian dad (he hails from Ipoh, by the way), Khoo rose to international fame when her third food book, *The Little Paris Kitchen*, was released in 2012 to critical acclaim. It was her first English book; her first two books were published in French. "I just happened to get my first book deal from a French publisher. It's as simple as that," she says modestly.

Having graduated from the renowned Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, Khoo dabbled for a while in luxury fashion PR and e-marketing before a love for patisserie lured her to Paris, where she obtained a pastry degree from Le Cordon Bleu. "I've always loved baking. In fact, I remember the first dish I ever made was gingerbread, with my mother. Actually, no, that's not true. I opened my first 'bakery' at the age of six – in my sand pit," she laughs. "I'd make sand cakes and stick flowers on top and then charge my mum 10 pence each for them. See? I was a businesswoman already!"





Coconut Chocolate Truffles

Preparation Time: 30 minutes
Cooking Time: 35-40 minutes

Ingredients

300g Desiccated coconut
85g Icing sugar
85g Sugar
1 nos Egg
200g Dark chocolate
70g Coconut flakes, roughly chopped
Generous pinch of sea salt

Method:

1. Grind the desiccated coconut in a blender until you have a fine, sticky mixture.
2. Set up a bain-marie with a pan of simmering water.
3. Measure out the sugar in a bowl. Whisk in the egg and let it set over the pan of water.
4. Whisk continuously until the mixture turns very pale and creamy. Remove from the heat at this point and let cool a little.
5. Stir in the coconut and sea salt. Mix well.
6. While the mixture is still warm, form the dough into little balls in the palm of your hand, about the size of truffles.
7. Heat the bain-marie again and place the chocolate in a clean, heat-proof bowl. Melt.
8. Dip the coconut balls in the chocolate and scatter with flaked coconut. Use a truffle fork or simply dunk them into the chocolate and fish out with a fork or palette knife and scatter with coconut flakes.
9. Leave to dry on a wire rack or baking tray and place in the fridge to set.



Clockwise, from top: Rachel Khoo guiding participants during her Masterclass held at Starhill Culinary Studio, Kuala Lumpur, recently; baked cheese cigars with green papaya, cucumber and radish slaw; coconut chocolate truffles.

An ensuing stint at La Cocotte, the Parisian culinary bookstore and tea salon, proved to be the launch pad for her culinary career; starting first with providing catering for book launches and moving on to hosting her own cookery classes on site. Her first food program aired in 2013 on the BBC's global Lifestyle channel and a weekly food column for *The Evening Standard's ES* magazine duly followed. And the rest, as they say, is delicious history.

"My art background shows up in my playfulness with food," she grins. "Some people have even commented my salads are 'girly'." While Khoo assuredly brings a touch of feminine glamour to the screen (she is particularly well-known for her quote: "Nothing like a bit of lippy to make cooking more glam"), the filming was anything but. "We did everything over two months, with two days in every city and another two in the surrounding countryside. Basically, you land, quickly put your face on, the microphone and off you go! It's not as glamorous as some people think."

Relating her experiences while shooting *Kitchen Notebook*, Khoo smiles and says: "It's hard to pick a favourite place because they each were all so different. I did so much, from going fishing in the Swedish Archipelago, where nature is at its purest and most pristine, to the hustle and bustle of Istanbul, I couldn't say which I enjoyed more as I believe it is through the contrasts of experiences that you really learn! But one street food particularly stood out, though – Istanbul's famous grilled mackerel sandwich, *balik ekmek*, which comes served in a baguette with chopped onions and greens. I really liked that."

It is against this backdrop that Khoo finds inspiration and content for her show. Viewers following the programme will be taken on a veritable moving feast that eats its way through much of Europe. From family-style meals on the Amalfi Coast to cooking with lingonberries in Stockholm, learning how to make a traditional pizza in Naples and savouring Spain's celebrated hot chocolate breakfasts and *churros*, Khoo then re-interprets these traditional dishes and ingredient in her inimitable style for the camera once back home in London.

"The experiences were all so unique and diverse and there's so much to learn and discover. The mountains near Nice, for

"I've always loved baking. In fact, I remember the first dish I ever made was gingerbread... I opened my first 'bakery' at the age of six – in my sand pit."

example, were actually quite rocky," she says. "It's not like the Alps and totally unsuitable for cows. However, there were lots of goats and the cutest dog ever! What I found interesting was how the goats, which ate all the wild herbs in season, produced naturally flavoured cheese in turn. The thyme in the baked cheese cigars recipe here is inspired by all the flavours of that region, including the lavender honey of Provence. Ultimately, my aim is to always try and bring all these experiences, tastes and memories into my kitchen." ■

Watch Rachel Khoo's *Kitchen Notebook: Cosmopolitan Cook* on BBC Lifestyle (HyppTV Channel 620).



The Simple Pleasures of The Straits Kitchen

Few things comfort the soul quite like the simple, nourishing flavours of home-style cooking. At The Majestic Malacca, Chef Poh's new menu for The Mansion, is a treat both heart and soul can savour.

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



Those familiar with Malacca's history would know the legend of its founding. Parameswara, a fugitive prince from Sumatra, had made his way to the Malay Peninsula and had been resting along the banks of what is today the Malacca River, before witnessing a tiny mouse deer, native to the land, startle one of his hunting dogs to the point it fell into the water. Taking this as a divine sign that the weak would, one day, be a force to be reckoned with, he decided to build his new kingdom on the site. As it happened, he was under the shade of a Melaka (Indian gooseberry) tree and decided, at once, the capital should be named for it. Historians have long chronicled Malacca's meteoric rise as one of the great kingdoms of the region, in part, due to its strategic location as a port and centre of maritime trade between China, India and the Middle East. As a bustling trade capital, Malacca became a melting-pot of cultures, attracting traders, merchants, sailors and travellers from all over the world, each of whom brought new and exciting cuisines, ingredients and cooking styles.

Aside from rich silks and porcelain from China, spices, in particular, established Malacca's importance as a vital entrepôt.

Feast on traditional Nyonya favourites like (from top) sayur lodeh, rojak buah and kuih pie tee at The Mansion.

The Moluccas Islands yielded great shipments of precious nutmeg, mace and cloves, while Sumatran pepper was highly sought-after, each ingredient slowly but surely leaving its influence on Malaccan, and indeed, modern Malaysian cuisine. During your stay at The Majestic Malacca, it would be inconceivable to leave without sampling its resident chef, CK Poh's (better known as Chef Poh) cooking. A recent revamp of its menu sees a fresher, more localised approach to traditional favourites. You may, for example, start your meal with a platter of light-as-air *kuih pie tee*. Also known as 'top hats', these are little pastry cups filled with shredded turnip and topped with shrimp – best eaten in one flavour-filled mouthful. Alternatively, try the *rojak buah*, a piquant take on a fruit and vegetable salad, starring sliced *jambu air* (rose apples), jicama, sprouts, *kangkong* (water spinach), cucumber and tofu puffs, before being tossed à la minute with chili shrimp paste and dusted with ground peanuts – truly a taste of Malaysia.

Once your palate is warmed up, dive straight into the heady, fragrant pleasures of what is possibly one of the most delicious expressions of *sayur lodeh* I've ever tasted. Essentially a dish of stewed vegetables cooked in coconut milk, Chef Poh's version has a distinctively Nyonya flavour to it, heady with aromatics and packed with taste. Laden with chunks of *tempeh*, long batons of carrots and turnip, sweet long beans and cabbage, this dish is served with *ketupat* (compressed rice cubes) but don't be shy to ask, instead, for a heaped serving of steamed white rice or even a

bowl of glass or rice noodles, which we think is perfect with which to soak up all that exquisite coconutty gravy. But if you wish to go the whole nine yards, opt instead for the Majestic Laksa, a grand take on one of Malaysia's most beloved noodle dishes.

One of Chef Poh's most popular signature dishes, however, is the Hainanese chicken rice. A certain crowd-pleaser, it's hard to fault juicy slices of steamed chicken, lightly anointed with soy and sesame, paired with rich, fragrant rice cooked in pandanus-scented chicken stock. "We tweaked the menu slightly as we wanted to offer our guests a traditionally delicious Malaysian dining experience," says Ben Quah, Hotel Manager of The Majestic Malacca. "This new menu offers a wide variety of tastes and textures to suit every palate. And, in keeping with the spirit of The Majestic Malacca, which used to be a Straits Chinese tycoon's mansion, we also chose the hearty, good things you'd get to eat when visiting someone's home – albeit a grand one."



And although it's delightful dining amidst the old world grandeur of The Mansion, with its wooden floorboards, collection of antiques and smart white wainscoting, you should also visit the hotel's arrestingly beautiful bar. There's no better chaser for the meal than with something expertly mixed by the hotel's trio of crack bartenders. Our recommendation? The *Spiced Straits* cocktail, a house signature using Tanqueray's rare, limited edition *Malacca* gin as a most delicious anchor. ■

"We tweaked the menu slightly as we wanted to offer our guests a traditionally-delicious Malaysian dining experience."

Chef Poh's revamped menu offers hearty good eats like Hainanese chicken rice and the Majestic Laksa, all of which you can chase down with the house signature cocktail, Spiced Straits.



The Menu
 What to order on your next visit to The Majestic Malacca.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ROJAK Local mixed fruit and vegetable salad tossed in spicy shrimp paste sauce. • THE MAJESTIC TRIO A tasting platter of <i>ngoh hiang</i> (steamed and deep-fried bean curd skin rolls filled with seasoned, five-spiced minced chicken), <i>otak-otak</i> (steamed spiced fish paste) and <i>pie tee</i> (crispy golden pastry cups filled with julienned vegetables and shrimp) 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHICKEN RICE Chef Poh's specialty of juicy chicken with aromatic rice and condiments. • MAJESTIC LAKSA Yellow and rice noodles in rich spicy coconut gravy with chicken, cockles and bean sprouts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NASI GORENG Wok-fried rice topped with a sunny side up egg and golden fried chicken. • SATAY Charcoal grilled chicken, mutton or beef skewers served with peanut sauce, rice cakes and cucumber and onion slices.

Fit for An Emperor

With the Year of the Horse trotting off and the Year of the Ram marching in, anytime is a good time to indulge in a traditional Chinese banquet. Here, the award-winning Executive Chef of Shanghai at the JW Marriott shares with us some of the dishes that won him and his team the Excellence Dining Award recently by international gastronomic association, La Chaîne des Rôtisseurs.

Photography **Kenneth Foo**



It's not often that a traditional Chinese cuisine restaurant picks up an award from the internationally-respected La Chaîne des Rôtisseurs association of gastronomy. So, when the JW Marriott's critically-acclaimed Shanghai restaurant was presented with the Excellence Dining Award by La Chaîne, it proved to be an honour indeed. In line with this accolade, a special menu has been tailored to celebrate the award, enabling guests the opportunity to try some of the great dishes crafted by Executive Chef Wong Wing Yeuk and team as well as to taste for themselves traditional Shanghainese cuisine expertly-executed and reimagined by a modern master of gastronomy. This menu is currently available at Shanghai restaurant and, should you fancy recreating some of the dishes at home, this might be just the thing to read, given the season of family feasts and banquets is just around the corner.

Shanghai at the JW Marriott Kuala Lumpur is famous for its delicious Chinese cuisine.



End every meal on a sweet note with sinfully-delicious deep-fried sesame dumplings.



Deep-Fried Sesame Dumplings

Ingredients

- 100g Glutinous rice flour
- 50g Flour
- 20g Sugar
- 20g White cream
- 10g Lotus paste
- 10g Sesame

Method

1. Mix the glutinous rice flour, flour, sugar and cream evenly together to form dumplings.
2. Fill with lotus paste before stirring the dumplings with water.
3. Sprinkle with sesame seeds and deep-fry until cooked through.

Pan-Fried Cod With Touch Of Brandy

Ingredients

- 150g Cod
- 2g Fried ginger slices
- 1.5g Parsley and onion
- 60g Homemade brandy sauce
- 3g Cornstarch

Method

1. Deep-fry the cod over a big flame until golden yellow.
2. Place onto a plate.
3. Separately, thicken brandy with cornstarch over a low flame and top the cod with it.
4. Before serving, sprinkle with fried ginger slices, parsley and onion.



“Here, Shanghainese cuisine is expertly-executed and reimagined by a modern master of gastronomy.”



Two Variety Prawns

Ingredients

- 600g Shrimp
- 600g Prawn balls
- 1g Longjing tea leaves (soaked till soft)
- 8g Salted egg yolk
- 15g Salt
- 22g Cornstarch
- 5 nos Egg whites
- 1g Wine

Method for Longjing Prawn:

1. Place the washed and dried shrimp and prawn ball into a pot with some salt and egg white.
2. Beat the egg white until oxidised.

3. Put in cornstarch and stir evenly. Place inside a refrigerator for later use.
4. When serving, drench the shrimp with boiling oil before stir-frying with wine.
5. Add in the tea leaves and thicken slightly with cornstarch.

Method for Salted Egg Yolk Prawn:

1. Repeat method as above until Step 3.
2. Once removed from refrigerator, coat prawn ball with cornstarch and deep-fry.
3. Add salted egg yolk and fry until golden yellow.

A look at La Chaîne through history.

1248: Louis IX of France orders the establishment of several professional guilds, including that of the 'Ayeurs' or 'goose roasters' to improve the technical knowledge of its members, who included apprentices, tradesmen and masters.

1509: During the reign of Louis XII, the guild's knowledge was extended to include the preparation of other meats and poultry, thus taking on the name 'Rôtisseurs'.

1610: The coat of arms of La Chaîne des Rôtisseurs is created, featuring two crossed spits and four larding utensils in the centre, surrounded by the flames of the hearth.

In today's version, this historic blazon is encircled by *fleurs-de-lys* and two chains in between. The inner chain represents the professional members, while the outer chain symbolises the non-professional members.

1793: The guild system established by Louis IX is dissolved during the turbulence of the French Revolution.

1950: After being forgotten for so long, Jean Valby, together with fellow gastronomes and professionals – Cumonsky, Dr Auguste Bécart, Louis Giraudon and Marcel Dorin – revived the association, founding the Confrérie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs.

1963: The Ordre Mondial des Gourmets

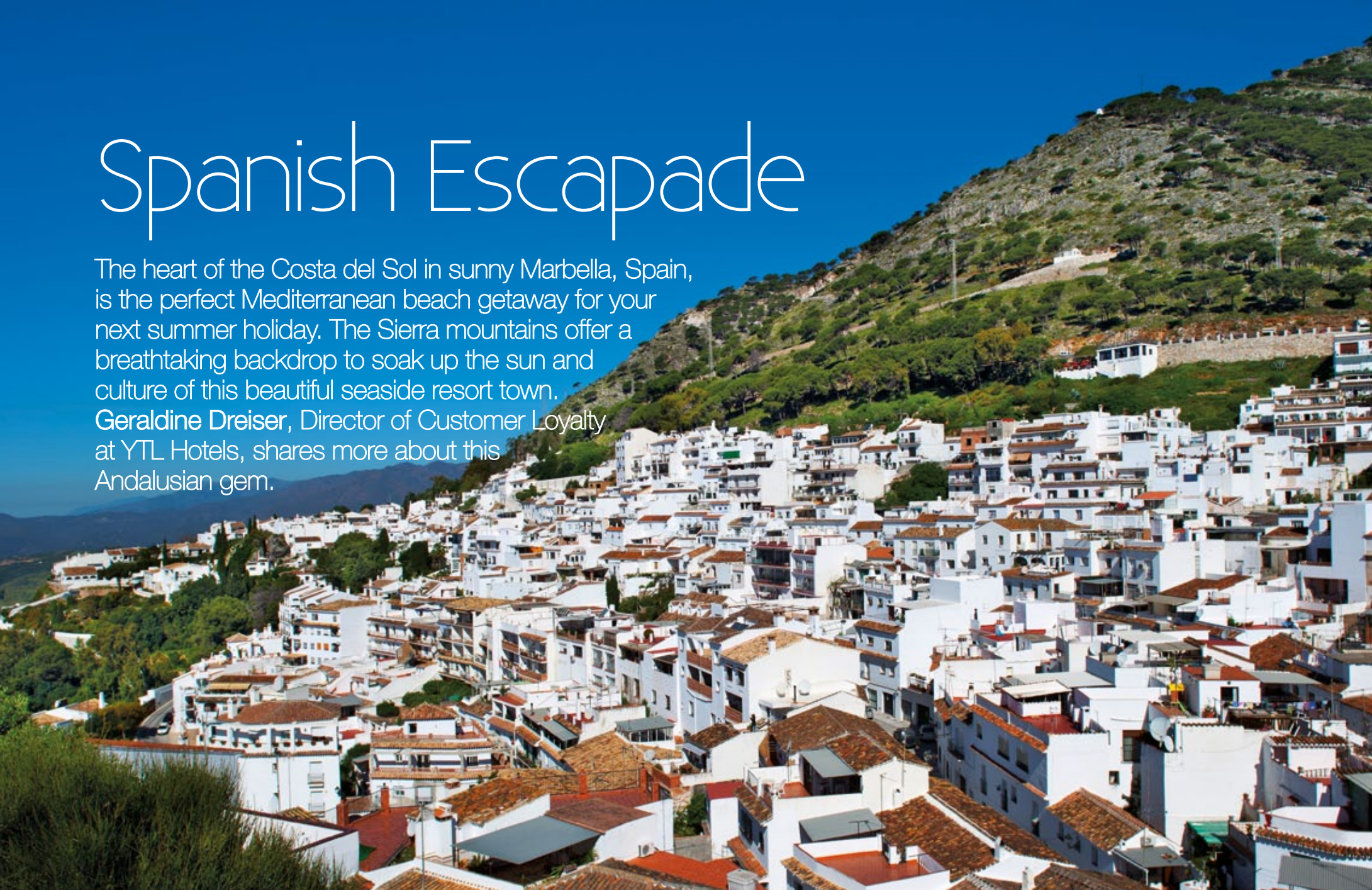
Dégustateurs (OMGD) is a specific section of the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, specialising in and concentrating on wines, spirits, liqueurs and crafted beverages. It was founded in Paris on 2 September 1963 and is an integral part of the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs. Its goal is to promote the enjoyment, appreciation and knowledge of fine wines, quality spirits, beers and mineral waters from around the world.

2008: The Chaîne officially registers a charity – the Association Caritative de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs – to expand its role and activity in the world of food by way of launching programmes in the field of social development aimed at nourishing and improving the living conditions of the needy, particularly children.

Source: www.chainedesrotisseurs.com

Spanish Escapade

The heart of the Costa del Sol in sunny Marbella, Spain, is the perfect Mediterranean beach getaway for your next summer holiday. The Sierra mountains offer a breathtaking backdrop to soak up the sun and culture of this beautiful seaside resort town. **Geraldine Dreiser**, Director of Customer Loyalty at YTL Hotels, shares more about this Andalusian gem.



The old town of Mijas in Costa del Sol, Andalusia, Spain.



History & Culture
Marbella offers the perfect landing point to explore the neighbouring historic towns of Mijas and Ronda, both easily accessible by car. In Mijas, you can discover the Plaza de Toros, an old bull ring built in 1900.

Old is Gold

Not just a seaside resort town, Marbella retains its historic charm in the Casco Antigua or Old Town. Stroll along the cobbled stone lanes to the Orange Square where you'll find the Chapel of Santiago, dating back to the 15th century. The orange square is also a perfect spot to take a break from sightseeing, and indulge in some *churros*, a fried dough pastry-based snack accompanied with hot chocolate dip.



Bijou Heaven

When in Marbella, stay at the MUSE Casa Marbella One and Two, 9 and 6 bedroom luxury villas set in the El Madronal area. Each Mediterranean-style residence exudes a rustic charm and comes resplendent with a private pool and sprawling lush grounds overlooking the gorgeous landscape of the surrounding mountains and Andalusian sea in the distance.



The Tapeo Trawl
 Synonymous with Spanish cuisine, you can't visit Marbella without trying **tapas**. It's the delightful dish to enjoy in the heat of the day or the relaxing coolness of the summer nights. A favourite of mine is *gambas pipil*, which comprises sizzling prawns in garlic sauce, best taken with rustic bread. Savour from a wide variety of cold and hot tapas often featuring fresh seafood ingredients, paired with a glass of Tinto de Verano, the perfect summer drink.

Rice is Always Nice
 Another Spanish favourite, **paella** is a rice dish featuring a medley of beautiful spices like saffron and the freshest local seafood. Fact – *bomba* rice is often used in the making of paella, its unique quality is its ability to absorb more broth than other rice varieties, lending more flavour in each bite.



When in Spain, it would be a sin not to indulge in copious amount of paella and tapas – all to be washed down with Tinto de Verano, the perfect summer drink.





Seaside Splendour

Puertos Banús is a marina in the south-west of Marbella, harbouring some of the biggest yachts in the area. Enjoy a spot of shopping amongst the multitude of international luxury boutiques or take in the sights at one of the many cafes – you may even spot a celebrity or two.



From bars, beach clubs and restaurants, Puerto Banús' offerings make it a top summer spot.



Geraldine Dreiser,
Director of
Customer Loyalty
at YTL Hotels.



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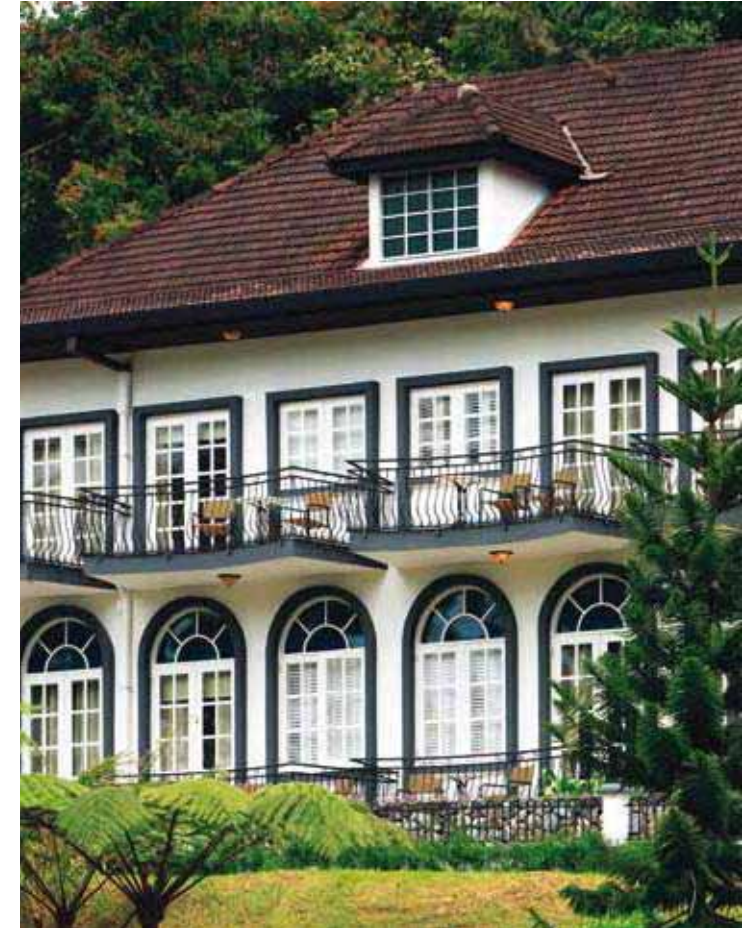
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REGARDED AS THE CRADLE OF MALAYSIAN HISTORY, EXPLORING MALACCA IS LIKE STEPPING BACK IN TIME, WHEN THE PORT-CITY USED TO WELCOME SPICE TRADERS, SULTANS AND WARRIORS FROM BYGONE DAYS. SOAK UP ALL THE MAGIC AT THE MAJESTIC MALACCA, ONE OF THE CITY'S FINEST HOTELS WHOSE STRUCTURE DATES BACK TO THE 1920S AND WHOSE INTERIORS ARE A REFLECTION OF THE CITY'S FINE PAST. WWW.MAJESTICMALACCA.COM

ITS NAME ALREADY CONJURES UP IMAGES OF OLD WORLD ELEGANCE AND OPULENCE. LOCATED IN KUALA LUMPUR'S DOWNTOWN GOLDEN TRIANGLE BUSINESS DISTRICT, THIS LUXURY HOTEL IS CONVENIENTLY LOCATED TO UPSCALE SHOPPING, DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT. IT ALSO BOASTS OF ITS OWN AWARD-WINNING SPA WHILE GOURMETS WOULD BE HARD-PRESSED TO FIND BETTER CANTONESE CUISINE THAN AT LI YEN, ITS FINE DINING CHINESE RESTAURANT. WWW.YTLHOTELS.COM

LOCATED RIGHT ALONG BUKIT BINTANG ROAD IN THE HEART OF KUALA LUMPUR, THE JW MARRIOTT IS IDEAL FOR ALL TRAVELLERS. FROM BUSY EXECUTIVES TO FAMILIES WISHING TO SOAK UP THE CITY'S SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND WORLD-CLASS SHOPPING, THIS WELL-PLACED HOTEL WITH ITS EXTENSIVE RANGE OF FACILITIES IS UNDOUBTEDLY THE PERFECT CHOICE. WWW.YTLHOTELS.COM



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WWW.HILTONNISEKOVILLAGE.JP

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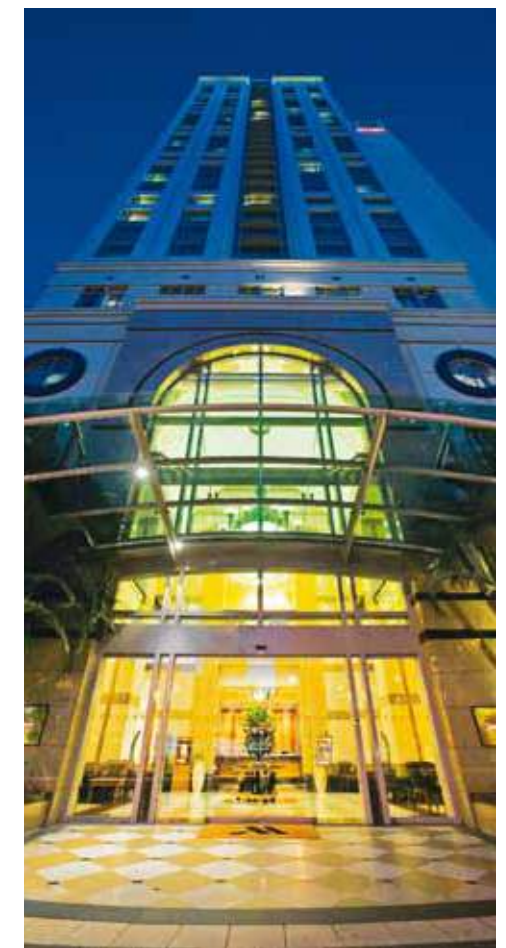
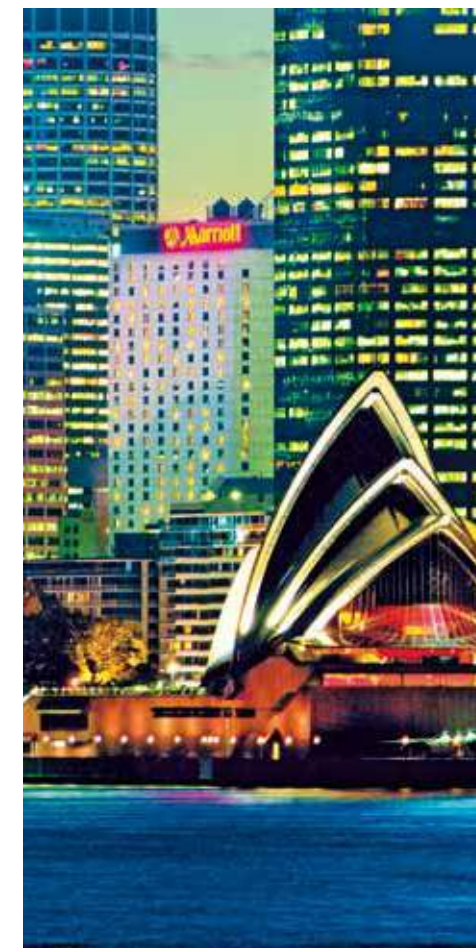
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