

The background of the cover is a photograph of ancient stone ruins, likely in Cambodia, with several tall, tiered towers. A large palm tree stands prominently in the center-right. The sky is clear and blue. The magazine title 'Astram' is written in a large, blue, stylized script font with a white outline, and 'JOURNEYS' is in a bold, gold, sans-serif font below it.

Astram

JOURNEYS

MCI (P) 014/11/2024

FEBRUARY – MARCH 2025 VOLUME 18 ISSUE 7

**The
Foundations
of Seim Reap**

**Tanzania's
Emerald Season**

**Sabah's Spectacular
Scenery, Culture & Golf**

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ANGKOR WAT, SEIM REAP, CAMBODIA
FLOYD COWAN PHOTO

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- Robertson Quay Hotel
- Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Beach Road



WINNER OF THE MPAS TRAVEL MEDIA OF THE YEAR 2018 - Bronze
WINNER OF THE MPAS TRAVEL MEDIA OF THE YEAR 2016

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IRENE MILLAR

The travel bug bit Irene at a young age. Family weekends she was whisked away to explore the Scottish beaches, mountains and market towns that were a world away from suburbia. Corporate life scratched Irene's itchy feet, initially driving around scenic Yorkshire before taking up a regional role in SE Asia. Irene enjoyed a brief stint in the USA with regular visits to Canada and Mexico before returning to SE Asia. Working with hotel managers as a consultant, trainer and auditor in sustainable tourism, when this movement was in its infancy, was a dream come true. Now, Irene loves sharing the stories of people in the travel industry making a positive contribution to their local environments and communities through sustainable tourism.
X



FERDINAND (FERRY) DE BAKKER

Ferry, vintage 1948, is an adjunct lecturer at Nanyang Technological University's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information as well as co-head and principal investigator of NTU's Management Issues in Strategic Communication Lab, Centre for Information Integrity and the Internet (IN-Cube). He had a 20-year-long career at the public relations firm Burson-Marsteller, most recently as CEO of its European and Asia-Pacific operations. He has written for various publications on education, corporate communication and lifestyle topics in The Netherlands, the UK, France and Singapore.





Every Generation Has a Lust for Travel

Every Generation travels in its own ways, and people travel for their own reasons but there are those who believe that technology will shape the way people will make their travel decisions, writes **Floyd Cowan**.

A media release entitled: Agoda Unveils Five Gen Z Trends Set to Shape the Future of Travel in Asia is about Agoda's survey that discovered "... Asian Gen Z," is "... a generation that finds inspiration in the digital realm, embraces spontaneity, and values shared experiences. The survey highlights the unique ways travellers aged 18-27, more commonly known as Gen Z, are shaping the future of travel in Asia with a fresh perspective, not only by influencing travel trends but also by setting the stage for future generations to explore the world in innovative ways."

A release from WiT with the headline 'The Middle East: Set To Shape The Future of Travel' has similarities: Fahd Hamidaddin, CEO of Saudi Tourism Authority, believes the travel industry is on the verge of a transformation driven by AI and the entry of tech giants like Google, Amazon, and Netflix, which will leverage their data and personalization capabilities."

Recent generations have been an inspiration for the next generation to travel. As I am not a Gen Z my influences were and

are different than Gen Z's. Tik Tok is not part of my life but, according to the survey, is highly important to Gen Z. A lot of my yearn to travel came from books. Not necessarily travel books though I was influenced by travel writer, Paul Theroux and his *The Great Railway Bazaar*. Peter Flemming went on amazing, difficult travel adventures that he wrote about. Peter is the older brother of Ian Flemming – author of the James Bond novels. More recently I found Harold Stepen's *Who Needs a Road?* to be an amazing and inspirational travel book. Harold is Robert Stedman's uncle. Robert does wonderful writing for *Asian Journeys* in his regular column and travel articles. Check out Zamboanga–The Town that Time Forgot on P64 and see if you don't find yourself wondering how you could get to the Philippine city.

My grandmother inspired me in many ways. Especially when she told me the story of how she left Ireland for Canada. Her sister was to sail the next morning from Dublin to Canada, and she went upstairs to her bedroom to say goodbye. She found her sister alone in her room crying. "I don't want to go," she wept. My grandmother said, "Okay, I'll go." She packed a bag and caught the ship in the morning. My grandmother seemed fearless.

My parent's generation is known by some as the 'Silent Generation' a term coined by Gerald Nachman in his book *"Sucker Punch: The Hard Left Turn in American Comics"*. Tom Brokaw dubbed them as *The Greatest Generation*, a term I prefer. This generation suffered through the Great Depression and lived through WWII. My parents travelled for different reasons. My father went to England, France and Italy, on a Fam Trip provided by the Canadian Army. My mother never left western Canada, but she loved to travel.

Irene Millar mentions in her bio on the Contributor's page that she got the travel bug from being whisked away on family weekends to explore the environs of Scotland. My experience was similar, but obviously not in Scotland that I have yet to get to.

The Agoda release states: Gen Z embraces spontaneity. Hmm, I wonder what my grandma would have to say about that.

Five subjects Agoda focused on were:

1. TikTok inspiration: Social media is the new travel guide
2. Spontaneous spirit: Last-minute bookings on the rise

3. Traveling in tandem: Partnered adventures take the lead

4. Cost-conscious journeys: Spending habits align across generations

5. Wanderlust unites: The desire to travel transcends generations

Despite differing preferences in where different generations find travel inspiration, when they book their travels, and who they go with, the desire to explore the world is universal. Nearly half of Gen Z and Millennials plan to embark on 1-3 trips this year, while a third are aiming for 4-6 adventures. This shared wanderlust bridges generational gaps, proving that the love for travel knows no bounds.

On point 5 we are in complete agreement, but as the publisher of a print magazine, I needed to know more about how this survey was conducted as it pumped Tik Tok's tires and print didn't even get a mention. The very patient Khin from the Agoda PR team replied to my email questions. She noted: The highest number of respondents came from Millennials, followed by Gen X, Gen Z, and Boomer generations.

I followed up with a question about the choices respondents were given. Khin replied: "For the question around where they get their travel inspiration, we also provided the following (in addition to Tik Tok) response options:

- Google searches
- Movies, TV shows, or books
- Facebook
- Tour agencies or travel agents
- AI tools like ChatGPT
- Other

Respondents therefore had the option to fill in other sources of inspiration if they were not reflected in the response options above. Print/magazines were not mentioned in the responses we received for the 'other' write-in option."

Obviously digital is dominant, but print is not as dead as some people would like us to believe.

Floyd Cowan
Editor-in-Chief

The Foundations of Siem Reap

Floyd Cowan visited Siem Reap, Cambodia, site of the extraordinary Angkor Wat, and where there are many Foundations working to alleviate the challenges the country is facing.

Siem Reap, Cambodia is well-known for the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Angkor Wat. The 12th century temple complex known as the "Temple City," is just ten minutes away, making it perfect base for catching the sunrise or sunset, which are popular things to do.

Wat & More

While most visitors come to see the amazing ancient Khmer city that sprawls over 162.6 hectares there are a growing number of attractions in Cambodia's second largest city. In addition to the Royal Gardens and Residence there is food, drink and night life and more.

There have been changes in Siem Reap since my previous visit seven years ago. Like that trip, this one was sponsored in part by Seim Reap Shinta Mani Angkor - A Bensley Collection Pool Villas, and now AirAsia Cambodia. Like that trip, the focus was to be on the Shinta Mani Foundation and the many good things it does to help local people.

New Direct Flights

AirAsia Cambodia started operations on May 2, 2024, and added the Singapore - Siem Reap route on November 9, 2024. Almost as new is the one-year-old Siem Reap International Airport that celebrated its first birthday in October. The Departure area is particularly beautiful with the centre piece being a large gold colour Angkor image and above it a cathedral like glass ceiling.

Son was waiting for me outside Arrivals. He introduced himself and said he was my Personal Butler. He would seldom be far away during my four-day stay in the opulent Shinta Mani Angkor - in the Bensley Collection Pool Villas wing. Seriously opulent, it has a long narrow pool that I did a few paddles in. A sumptuous king-sized bed, open air rain shower and second level lounge make this suite the perfect liveable. Son drew my attention to the well-stocked drinks cooler. I was being pampered.

Welcome Welcome

It was Itinerary Lite for the afternoon and evening. I had time to settle in and photograph the room. Son arrived with a tray of snacks and a glass of bubbly. A very nice welcome.

Across the street a 'Welcome High Tea at Kroya' awaited me. Shinta Mani's 115 rooms are divided into three sections. I sat on the restaurant's veranda with its black and white

stripes, with high ceiling fans and swing tables. When the tray with the scones and tartlets arrived I dived in before I thought to take a picture. Photographed or not, there is a wide selection, and a number of teas and coffee to choose from.

Charming Charm

Though Tuk Tuks will take you anywhere you



wish to go inside the city for US\$2.00, I took a walk around Siem Reap before dinner. I was reminded of its easy charm. Traffic, though it can come in torrents, is not usually heavy. Divided by the laconic man-made Siem Reap River that lays lazily between bike and jogging paths, the mostly grid layout creates few challenges to finding your way around.

A city of craft shops, shophouses, sweetshops. Hairdressers, massage and nail spas. Manikins dressed in dress boutiques. Pub Street grows more colourful as night slides in and Central Market wakes up early in the morning. I passed busy restaurants offering Mexican food, Khmer and cuisines from



SIEM REAP SHINTA MANI ANGKOR



SON, MY PRIVATE BUTLER





baby, it helps her..." she points to a vein in the back of her hand. "I don't know the English. And makes her strong. It helps her..." she puts her hand on the small of her back.

Tenderloin. With egg. Jasmine rice with crushed cashews.

The beef is more tender than the night. The egg is runny.

Dessert looks like a flower, the petals made of chocolate. She pours on a liquid. When I break the dome, it disappears and smoke comes out. It gets a lot of hits on Facebook.

everywhere. Tablecloth restaurants, cafes and bars. Street food and street markets abound. Paintings, Buddhas, statues standing, eyes peering petulantly at the world.

I returned to Shinta Mani at 6.00pm when I was scheduled to have cocktails at the recently renovated Bensley Bar and Gallery with Benjamin Lehmann, General Manager. Unfortunately, he was in Phnom Penh and couldn't make it, so I enjoyed the bright, clean ambience alone with my glass of wine, before I went to Kroyo where an incredible Khmer dinner was served.

Tasting Menu

Argentina Malbec. My red for the meal. Crushed red ant. She assured me that was correct.

A little bit spicy and a little bit sour, the waitress told me. Try a little bit. If you don't like it...

Fried. A little spicy. Not so much.

Seems a bit lemony.

Soup. Could smell it before she set it on the table. Beef, red peppers many things, but not too spicy. Full of flavours.

I don't know why but I ate all the red ant.

Maybe to get revenge on the one that bit me on my little finger in Kelantan.

Another waitstaff clears the dishes. I ask her why people eat ants. "When the lady has a

Bushy Tailed

At 1:00am I woke feeling very heavy from the tenderloin dish I had polished off. I thought, do I really want steak and egg for breakfast? I'd never had steak and eggs for breakfast, which is why I choose them when Son showed me the menu. When I woke at 6:30 I messaged Son and asked for muesli - but didn't cancel the steak and eggs.

I woke quite clear-eyed and immediately awake. I wonder if it was all that natural Khmer food I had for dinner. Is there something in crushed red ants that I am not aware of? Actually, is there anything in crushed red ants I am aware of? I felt energetic.

Breakfast was designed to float in the pool, but I would have to get in with it. I decided to eat in my room where I could work at the same time. Unlike you, when you visit, you will be on holidays so you can chill and eat at your leisure wherever you like.

Neat and Prey

I was pretty full when I got in the SUV, with Tye behind the wheel, and Neat Chhunnin Assistant Managing Director, Shinta Mani Foundation, next to me in the back seat telling me all about the Foundation and her role with it. Ms Chhunnin explained that Neat is her father's name.

I'd been to the village seven years ago and I was interested in seeing what differences there were. The first change was how we got to the village. The District Governor had reopened a road so that people driving from Seim Reap could get more quickly to the villages, near Khar Sanday.

The reason the road had been closed is because it passed through part of the Angkor Wat complex. We passed several temples and Khmer ruins. I took advantage of this when we returned, stopping for pictures. We could view them from the road but couldn't enter without a ticket.

Improving Lives

Chhunnin explained Shinta Mani Foundation's commitment to improving the lives and economic conditions of people in the communities where Shinta Manti operates. Son is a beneficiary of the program. "I went to Sala Bai Hotel & Restaurant School and was in House Keeping. I moved to Shinta Mani in 2016."

By hard work and smarts she worked her way up. Like her mother, she is a smart cookie. "When my mother was young the Khmer Rouge came to her village. They told 25 people to read a book. They all read the book, and they were taken away 'for further education' which means they were killed. My mother pretended she couldn't read, and she was the only one to survive."

Fully Paid

The cost of the one-year program at the Shinta Mani School of Hospitality, which opened in 2004, is fully paid for. "This includes the student's accommodation, food, books and material. And they get a stipend, so they don't have to worry about anything. Son went through the program and then he went on to graduate from university."

For 2025 there will be 35 students. To date more than 300 students have graduated from the school. "They are interviewed three times before they are accepted. They want to determine if they are hard working and smart enough to do the work. And they want to make sure that it fits their interests."

Creating Local Business

We passed green rice fields flat as a chessboard with stately palms standing at the fringes like Kings and Queens. We slowed down as we

went through a commercial strip. "The District Governor," Chhunnin explained, "designed this to make business for local people."

Businesses such as restaurants, drinks kiosks, craft stores – lots of woven products and various locally made items. We stopped on the return trip and one fellow hounded me from the moment I stepped out of the car. He had a bongo drum and called out \$50.00 Singapore dollars. Smart enough to ask someone where I was from. By the time I was returning to the vehicle he was down to \$20.00 but I still wasn't buying. I am trying to declutter, not add more.

Water & Wells

We turned down a red dirt lane that went a short distance to Prey Village. It was the same place I'd been to those many years ago. It looked the same but different. There were now more, and better, homes.

"They are uneducated people," Chhunnin stated. "Before we came here the people would take water from that slew for drinking," She pointed to the field. "The children would get sick. We put in a well. Now they don't get sick from bad water."

The mother went to a pump and pumped. Clean water streamed out. "Vorn Vannak and her children lived in this hut." It was as basic as you could get. Roof and walls that didn't even come snug to the ground. Inside was a dirt floor. "Snakes would come in and sleep in the hut."

No Room for Snakes

Next to it was a new home, not exactly a mansion, but raised up so neither snakes nor rain or rats would come in. It was a distinct improvement. The water and the toilet were important developments for improving their health.

"What the Foundation does," Chhunnin filled me in, "is equip the people in need with the necessary tools to break free from poverty. Our commitment also extends to environmental preservation and conservation, ensuring the communities we serve can sustainably coexist with their natural surroundings."

A Success Story

A nearby family was doing very well in their natural surroundings. With seven children they had been living in a house that only had a roof. The kids would sleep in the yard. "The Foundation supported them with a pig farm. In 2017 they were given two pigs, and they did so well that the number of pigs grew and were sold bringing in much needed income. They were so successful that they were able to build their own large home." No one sleeps in the yard anymore – unless they want to.

The school, a short distance away, was clean and bright, but none of the 130 children who study English were there. The students attend another school in the morning before coming to the Prey English Centre for their

lessons. "We feel it is important for their careers to speak English. If they can't, they won't go anywhere." So important that the Foundation provides everything. Often, they have to teach the parents and the children how important education is. For the generation that lived under the Khmer Rouge it must be difficult to accept.

Growing Numbers

From small children up to 18 years old attend classes. "The demand is growing that we need to add one more classroom."

To date, guests who stay at the Shinta Mani have sponsored over 1,000 piglets, 10,000 sets of school supplies, 3,900 bicycles, 1,700 water wells, and 120 homes. They have provided dental care to over 16,000 students, and seen 297 hospitality professionals graduate from the program.

On the way back Chhunnin buys snacks for her colleagues. I told her that my wife loves mangos, and she said they are out of season right now. She promised me green mangos I could take for her. After a great morning, we parted company and I didn't see her again. The promised mangos were waiting for me the morning I left.

Khmer Tonic

I enjoyed a wonderful lunch of Caesar Salad and fish and chips in Baitong, the poolside Shinta Mani restaurant. At 3:00pm I crossed



NEAT CHHUNNIN AND VILLAGER



PREY ENGLISH CENTRE

THE SHINTA MANI FOUNDATION PROVIDED THE PUMP FOR THIS FAMILY





the road to the Khmer Tonics Spa where an appointment had been booked.

This sanctuary of well-being offers treatments based on traditional Khmer healing rituals. They use chemical-free, organic products that distill the therapeutic power of natural ingredients. The team warmly welcomed me and presented the oils I could choose from. The rooms are spacious and quiet, no distractions as you enjoy the tensions being eased out of you.

Morning Market

In the morning Chef Paou and I walked through the market as he introduced me to the ingredients we would use for the Cooking Class. The market swims with fish, some still alive, fresh vegetables, tropical fruits in season, herbs and bags of nuts and spices. Eager buyers. More eager sellers. Villagers, sitting on the floor, hawked veggies, fish and fruit they gathered from around their homes in the countryside. It is a truly delightful energetic place.

I found the cooking class perhaps the most enjoyable I've done. It wasn't just that I danced to the beat when I pounded herbs and spices. Chef Paou said his mother did that when she cooked for the family. Not only did we make fish and beef dishes, but we made a dish, from banana leaves, using toothpicks. Chef Servat and I made Bird's Eye, the same confection, a sticky little ball, Chhunnin had bought for her colleagues.

Talented Rodents

Noted my itinerary: Visit the cuddly Apopo life-saving mine-clearing rats. I had never heard cuddly and rats in the same sentence before, but I was assured they were. Son and I took the resort Tuk Tuk to the Visitor Center, about 10 minutes from Shinta Mani.

I've been aware of the problem with mines in Cambodia since my first visit to the country in 1993. Writing about the Canadian Peacekeeping Troops that were part of the UN Force helping transition the country into peacetime I came to a country that was like a punched out fighter, trying to get on his feet. Hanging out with the Canadian soldiers I managed to get myself on a trip from Phnom Penh to Kampot on the south coast. The trucks were carrying mine warning signs. I believe I saw them in the film we watched after our

meeting with Ratana, who is four years old and weighs 1.3kg. The signs in the APOPO Visitor Center are all new.

Explosive Explosives

Between the 1970s and 90s when war ravaged the country six million landmines were planted and the USA dropped 26 million bombs, 15 - 20% of them didn't explode. Finding them has been a monumental task.

APOPO is an acronym from Dutch which in English is Anti-Personnel Landmines Detection Product Development. APOPO is a global non-profit organization that researches, develops and implements detection rats technology for humanitarian purposes such as clearing landmines and detecting tuberculosis. APOPO has Belgian roots with headquarters in Tanzania and more operations in Angola, Azerbaijan, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe.

Giants in their Field

The rats, African Giant Pouch Rats from Tanzania, have a great sense of smell and they are larger than most rats, though a lightweight compared to the capybara. From the earliest age they are held by humans and so become used to being with people. They are trained to find bombs through their sense of smell and banana as a reward when they find the target. It takes one year to train them. Their lightweight is important as they can stand on a place where an unexploded ordinance is buried and not set it off. They are also fast and can clear an area in 30 minutes that would take four days to do with a metal detector. Dogs could sniff out bombs, but their weight could set them off.

They are retired when their skills start to diminish, around the age of five or six. They are then kept in the retirement home on the grounds.

Most of the visitors seemed to really enjoy meeting and holding them. Lots of pictures taken and lots of questions asked. To help pay for the program, in addition to taking the tour, you can make donations and buy souvenirs in the gift shop.

Acrobatic Circus

At 6:00pm I was on my way to PHARE Acrobatic Circus that started at 7:00. It was about as far the other way from Shinta Manti as APOPO was

the other way. It was billed as “an incredible performance with an amazing story.” A billing it lives up to.

When we arrived at the entrance Son introduced me to a guide. It was a bustling place with phalanx of buses and hordes of people going to see the show. XX told me that the Circus got its start on the Thai – Cambodia border in a refugee camp.

When the camp was closed and the Cambodians returned home, they went to Battambang where their work in the camp grew into a vocational training school. The association was formed in 1994 by nine young men who were greatly assisted by an art teacher using drawing classes as therapy. He taught poor, socially deprived and troubled youngsters in Battambang. They founded an art school and public school offering free education. A music school and a theatre school were next and, finally, the circus school. Today, more than 1,200 pupils attend the public school and 500 go to the schools.

Siem Reap Moves

Not many people watched the shows in Battambang where few tourists go. They moved to an open area in Siem Reap and over the years it has grown so popular that now they have a purpose built theatre. It was totally sold out. They have different programs and the night I was there it was about village life. Through their incredible acrobatic skills they enthralled the audience. Some leaned forward, watching in amazement.

In the picture where the young girl is on her knees, arched with the man on her back she actually lifts both arms off the mat, so such is totally supporting his weight. I wasn't quick enough to get the picture, but I'm sure you do. The troupe was extremely quick, as they hurled themselves about and did amazing stunts. All

with great skill and humour. This is one show you should not miss when you visit Siem Reap.

Foundational Support

Once again, you can support the schools simply by attending the show. And you can donate directly to the Foundation, or do some retail therapy – for them, not you – by purchasing souvenirs.

In the morning before sunrise, I was at the lobby saying goodbye to Son. The hotel's limousine drove me through the awakening city, energetic people jogging along the laconic river, the sun not yet above the horizon. Out into the flat fields where an enormous hot air balloon slowly lifted itself into the brightening sky. Deep red, the sun shot rays at us. Slowly, an unseen hand, or was it the thin clouds, squeezed the liquid orange across the horizon until the sun was a pale yellow in a promising morning.

In four days in Siem Reap I learned of three foundations working hard and working smart to improve the lives of the disadvantaged.



PHARE ACROBATIC CIRCUS



PHARE ACROBATIC CIRCUS



BOMB SNIFFING RAT

POCKET GUIDE

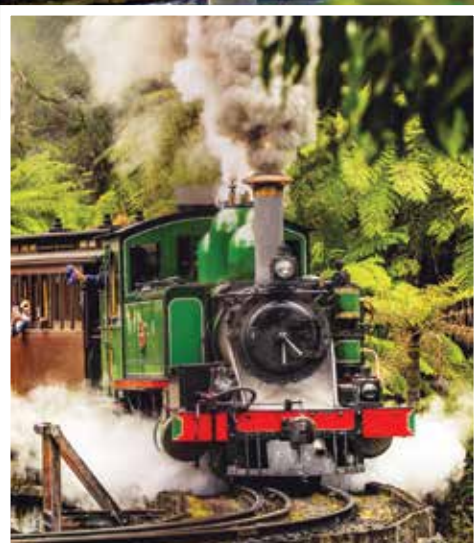
Shinta Mani Angkor
 Junction of Oum Khun & 14th Street,
 Siem Reap, Cambodia
 T: +855-63-964-123
 E: angkor@shintamani.com
 W: shintamani.com

The APOPO Visitor Center
 Tours are \$10 per person
 Private tours are available

Trapeang Ses Village
 Kouk Chauk Commune
 Koumai Road
 Siem Reap 171253
 Cambodia (Map)
 E: visitor.center@apopo.org,
 T: +855 81599237/+855 61799237
 W: apopo.org

Phare, The Cambodian Circus
 Intersection, Ring Road south of Sok San Road
 Siem Reap
 Cambodia

Administrative Office
 #B41, Ung Oeun Street
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 Tropeang Ses Village, Sangkat Kork Chork
 Siem Reap City, Kingdom of Cambodia
ticketing@pharecircus.org
 T: +855 (0) 92 225 320
 T: +855 (0) 15 499 480
 W: pharecircus.org



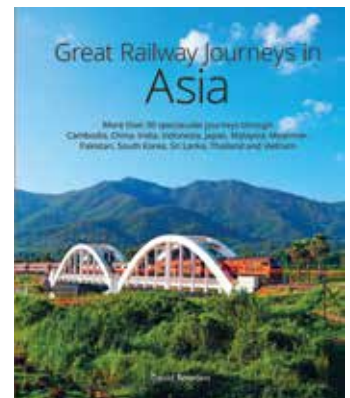
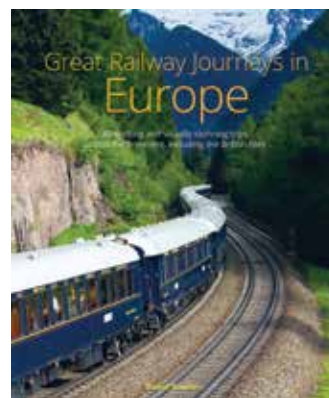
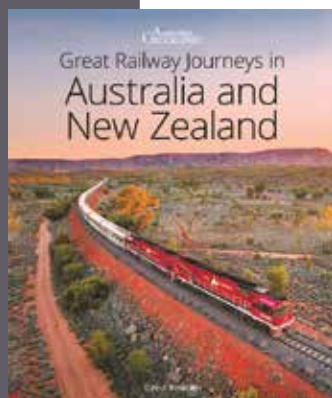
GREAT RAILWAY JOURNEYS

Travellers are rediscovering the joy of rail travel, and new and faster rail routes are opening up the world.

Intrepid rail traveller David Bowden set out years ago on a mission to travel on the world's great railways. His adventurous journeys through Asia, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand are documented in three exciting books. They make essential reading for global travellers and armchair adventurers planning their next journey. Each book of 160 pages lists numerous train journeys, all illustrated with stunning photos, maps, and details on how best to enjoy the journey.

Great Railway Journeys in Australia and New Zealand, *Great Railway Journeys in Asia*, and *Great Railway Journeys in Europe* are published by John Beaufoy Publishing (www.johnbeaufoy.com) and distributed in Singapore and Malaysia by Pansing Distribution (E: infobooks@pansing.com).

David Bowden is also the author of several books in the Enchanting Series published by John Beaufoy (Enchanting Singapore, Enchanting Malaysia, Enchanting Vietnam, and more).



Thailand's Hua Hin, south of Bangkok, beckons and, as **Greg Hackett** discovers, getting there is half the 'fun'.



On the Road to Hua Hin



How to travel from Thailand's capital, Bangkok, to the coastal Royal city, Hua Hin? There is the car option: boring; the train option: confusing; or the bus option: an adventure!

Bus out of Don Mueang

At Don Mueang Airport, my partner and I take the A1 bus (30 baht US0.86) for the one-hour journey to Mochit Central Bus Terminal, where the luxurious coaches depart for tourism destinations such as Hua Hin. I ask the staff at the first ticket window outside the station, who wave me away, ask at the next window, where I'm directed to inquire at the ticket counter inside. I ask a security guard who also points to the interior ticket counter, go there and staff tells us to go back the way we came to the original outside ticket windows - hey, I am an Aussie but I am not a boomerang! Eventually we have some joy as a kindly man wearing a retired soldier's "Royal Thai Army" T-shirt

escorts us back to where the airport bus had dropped us off; he points across the main road to a well-hidden 'private bus' station.

We haul ourselves and our big suitcase over a pedestrian bridge (trying to cross the road on foot might contravene the "reasonable precautions" clause in your travel insurance policy?? Haha!), and two more "the bus to Hua Hin please?" inquiries later, success! We pay 540 baht for three tickets (for two people, and one suitcase charged as a third person). The staff urge us to hurry and get on the bus.

Hurry Why?

So, we hurry ... and wait in an aging 'VIP' minivan - with the engine idling to run the aircon on full, as it fills with passengers. Some climb in, rummage about for space, stow their bag, settle in, then are told to change to a different bus. An hour later, every seat is occupied, and we finally depart. The engine revs, the gears grind up to fourth, and we sprint - to an abrupt stop on the clogged overpass.

Twenty minutes later the traffic is flowing freely, and we are truly on our way. It is a pleasant three-hour drive, as I drift in and out of sleep under a seriously kick ass, rotating, circular roof aircon the likes of which I've never seen. If you are not in a hurry, consider this bus option; it adds an extra layer of experience to your holiday.

Grab an Alternative

The return trip in a Grab car booked 24 hours ahead cost 2,000 baht for two of us - and the big suitcase - and took four hours with one pit stop. If travelling as a couple, consider the price advantage in hiring a car compared to multiple ticket purchases; though more carbon emissions.

Hua Hin is a perfect foil to well-known Pattaya; in some ways they are a mirror image of each other. Hua Hin is located on the western peninsula of the Gulf of Thailand, with

Pattaya almost parallel on the eastern side.

Both are home to 'coined up' foreign retirees. Hua Hin has a busy night life but not with Pattaya's intensity of, shall we describe it as, "commercially driven, street-level amatory ardour". Pattaya has much more to experience if you venture beyond the main strip of bars and adult shows, but that's a topic for another story.

Convenience in Central

We stayed several kilometres south of Hua Hin's 'central market' area. In hindsight, I'd choose accommodation more central where everything is within walking distance. Hua Hin's beach is long, continuous and clean; the local traders are keen but not in your face; tourist prices are reasonable; the green taxi truck songthaews (a pick-up truck with two rows of seats in the back) plying the main road costs 15 baht and is super convenient, though it stops at 9:00pm, probably to avoid intoxicated passengers!

Explore plenty of temples (Wat Khao Noi has a statue of the Hindu god Ganesh), sightseeing spots, Night Market, local markets, modern plazas, and the ubiquitous Walking Street. (It is entertaining though sedate compared with Pattaya, Patong, Patpong, Sukhumvit etc). Cicada Market has al fresco dining though beware: all purchases are via paper coupons which state, in very, very small print, that they are good only for the day of issue. No good the next night!

Beautiful Vineyards

Take a Grab (please don't drink and ride a motorbike) to Monsoon Valley Vineyard, a world-class, picturesque setting of vineyards, bush vistas, shaded seclusions and a cooling breeze, with a restaurant and facilities to please even the most discerning traveller.

If I am to choose one word to describe Hua Hin: Relaxed.

Wandering Through the World of Naga

This 12-day fly-drive journey took us from Singapore to Suvarnabhumi International Airport Bangkok, from there we drove for 12 days in northeast Thailand finally ending the journey back in Bangkok covering 2,700 miles and visiting 10 out of 20 provinces of the Esan region. This is Part III of the story. The first ran in the October November 2024 issue of Asian Journeys and the second part is in the December – January 2025 issue.

WAT PA PHU KON



By Day 8 of this 12-day fly-drive trip in northeast Thailand we had enjoyed stunning scenery, explored fascinating landscapes, enjoyed excellent food and met many interesting people. Chris Ng of Uncle Chris Driving Holidays was at the wheel. For many years Chris has done his own car drive tours. Christy, from TEATE, had moved into the front passenger seat allowing me to stretch out in the back seat.

Green-Minded Tourism

Ms. Parichat Suntharak (Au) Vice President of TEATA explained that TEATA is a group of green-minded tourism entrepreneurs who promote the conservation of the ecosystem. On this trip

they have been recording the amount of gas used, collecting our garbage and estimating our greenhouse gas emissions using TEATA's App for 'Net Zero Carbon Tourism'. The ZERO CARBON application has been developed to enable tourism and MICE industry operators to assess their greenhouse gas emissions and carbon offsets from tourism activities, aiming for net zero carbon neutrality.

As mentioned, we'd seen many spectacular scenes, but we started this day with one of the best. The 78km morning drive from Amanta Hotel took us to Wat Pa Tak Saeu, perched on a ridge overlooking the Mekong River. The temple wasn't the reason we'd come. It was for the view. Our itinerary stated: "Challenge

yourself by walking on a clear glass skywalk overlooking the Mekong River." The view was spectacular whether or not you were up to walking on the glass platform that extends out six metres over the edge. This was Thailand's first glass skywalk, constructed almost 20 years ago.

While the wat wasn't what we were there for I took a moment to check it out. I found it somewhat interesting with its many steps up, and the colourful Naga guarding the staircase. Images of Naga appeared almost everywhere we went.

Attractions Seen and Unseen

From there our convoy of five white cars weaved 53km through the hills clad in lush green forest to Wat Pa Phu Kon. Listed as one of the "Unseen in Thailand attractions" it is situated on a hill where you have very 'seen' views over the lumpy verdant land we'd just driven through.

Wat Pa Phu Kon is in the Na Yung-Nam Som National Forest Reserve at Ban Na Kham Yai, Tambon Ban Kong. The temple took shape when some Buddhist monks realized the benefits of nature and watershed forests. These forests were being gradually degraded and they wanted to follow in the footsteps of the late King Rama IX (the father of the current king) in preserving the forests. They got permission to use a piece of land within the Reserve to build the Wat, a peaceful place suitable for monks to practise meditation and mental development.

Buddha's Story

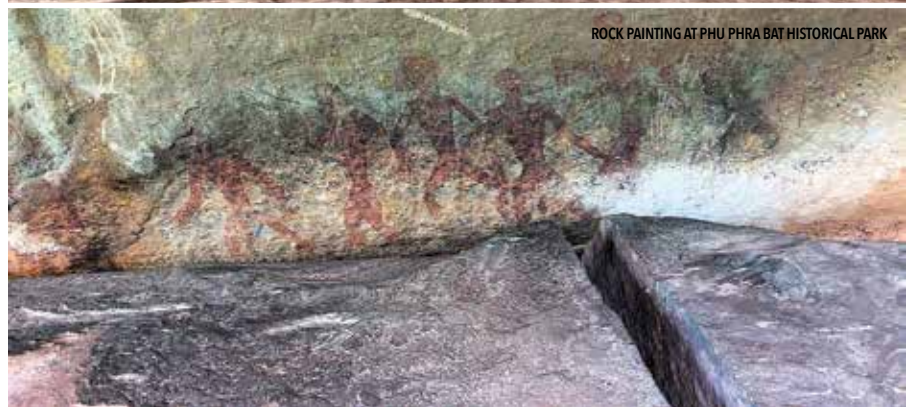
The temple's main hall, surrounding pavilions and buildings are of Thai architectural design. The hall has three entrances and encloses a 20m long reclining white marble Buddha. Here are spectacular decorations of the Buddha's teachings, with 22 panels of copper relief around the walls depicting the Life and Ten Birth-stories of Buddha.

It is a photographer's delight, and if you visit it might help you with your own mental development.

After lunch we continued on to Phu Phra Bat a historical park in Ban Phue District, Udon Thani Province. The Park was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site on July 27, 2024, shortly after our visit. It now has the name



HO NANG USA



ROCK PAINTING AT PHU PHRA BAT HISTORICAL PARK



BAAN CHIANG ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE

"Phu Phra Bat: Witness to Sema Culture of the Dvaravati Period." The park's distinguishing features are unusual rock formations shaped by wind and water, creating a fascinating landscape. There are large boulders perched on smaller ones. Religious shrines have been constructed around them.

Lady Usa Rocks

We meandered around a small part of the park's 1,200 acres appreciating the formations, some of which look like mushrooms. Ho Nang

Usa, (Lady Usa) one such rock, is associated with a legend about a protective king, his beautiful daughter and a fellow who wanted her hand – and I assume the rest of her body. The king confined his daughter to live in a small room built into the stone tower to keep her away from the Prince. Despite this, Usa got a message to her suitor, and they eventually got married in defiance of her father. There are longer and other versions of this legend.

There are several shrines with Hindu and Buddhist influences. Wat Phra Putthabaht



PHRA MAHATHAT KAEN NAKHON

Bua Bok being the most significant as it has a sandstone Buddha footprint. Continuing our walk in the park, lead by a local guide, we were taken to see ancient paintings in red of animals and in another area human figures. They are very rudimentary images, but I found it fascinating to see these 3000+ images made by man.

Moroccan Unique

Unique, at least in this part of the world, is the Amman Unique Hotel. The 4-star hotel is done in Moroccan style with all the interior decorations a blend of modern amenities and traditional Moroccan design elements. One night there was not long enough. We were on the road early the following morning. On the half hour drive we passed old wooden buildings and stretches of rice paddies under leaden skies. But the weather didn't dampen the spirit and energy at Wat Pa Dong Nong Tan which was abuzz with visitors.

The Underworld of Naga

It is believed by villagers that this area is a passageway connecting the human world and underworld used by Naga. Au told us: "As we are now in the Mekong region, you will immerse into the local belief of Naga which we believe inhabits the Mekong River. Naga



AMMAN UNIQUE HOTEL

is not just a creature from folklore but plays a large part in the mythology of Buddhist faiths. King Naga shielded the Buddha from a storm with its many head. The Naga is regarded as a guardian to deter bad spirits and bad luck."

Traffic wardens directed us to parking spaces near the entrance. This complex, with its rows of stalls selling many things but mostly religious items, was swarming with visitors. Over the top of rooves to my left was a tall, thin golden Buddha, but we went right. We passed between a tall, freshly painted green and gold seven headed Naga baring its teeth and continued along the path between its the body.

Monks kept to the edges, uniformed police stood in the middle of the path staring at the stream of devotees to make sure they didn't do anything untoward.

A Naga Offering

Leslie, Managing Director of Big Rallye, carried a large offering of leaves shaped into Naga. Such items are sold along the paths. There was a sense of anticipation and excitement in our group as we made our way to a shrine where the offering would be passed to a monk.

People put baht bills in the offerings. As we waited our turn Au told us that there was an



WAT PATAK SAEU GLASS SKYWALK



“Challenge yourself by walking on a clear glass skywalk overlooking the Mekong River.”

ancient settlement in this area and this is the habitat of Naga. After presenting the offering, and having group photos taken, we continued along the path that circled a giant fig tree.

Win the Lottery

Devotees looked for lottery numbers in the tree, meditated and prayed to win the lottery. On the ledge of a tiled pool people placed coins, standing up – not laying flat. This symbolizes prosperity and the coins are offerings to spirits and deities. It's also a way to show respect to the monarchy, as coins bear the image of the Thai king. On the way back to the car I bought a small metal Naga with nine heads. It now sits on the top shelf of my desk.

After spending the morning walking it was time for a most welcome break. At Fleur de Sol we soaked our feet in rock salt water. Not only did the spa refresh our feet but our minds as we got a break in the hectic schedule. For lunch we had Sea Bass with the local salt giving it a special flavour. Maybe my feet tasted just as good.

After lunch we drove on, stopping at Café Kwai Thai where we enjoyed excellent coffee.

A Dog's World

The attraction at Ban Chiang was the ancient pottery that had been found in this area. The important pieces reside in the local museum. There we learned that there were three eras of

pottery with each newer era becoming richer in colour and more elaborate in design.

To make us more than observers we went to a large workshop filled with pottery. We got to make our own cups. As I was about to finish mine it fell apart. Everyone else was already on to painting their masterpieces. I was given an unpainted finished cup. I was encouraged to do a pattern like the local motifs. I was discouraged because I knew I would only mess it up. So I did my own simple pattern of vertical somewhat straight stripes. It came out okay. Doing one craft was not enough. We got to make bead bracelets. They had baskets filled with colourful beads of various sizes and shapes based on ancient designs.

The people were ahead of their time as they were the first to domesticate animals – the dog is a symbol of this area – and to domesticate rice. Here they also led the way in metallurgy, pottery and rice farming. They were both hunters and gatherers. You can do an ox cart tour of the town but make an appointment as the cow is very busy.

Quirky Quality

It was a 165km drive to Khon Kaen, Thailand's fourth largest city, where we checked into the Ad Lib Hotel, one of the best hotels we'd stayed in during this trip. It was also a bit quirky. From the ground floor the elevator didn't take you to the floor your room was on but up to the lobby,



POTTERY AT BAN CHIANG

then you crossed to the other side where you descended to your floor. I searched that floor for an elevator that would take me directly down to the first floor. Couldn't find such an apparatus. I had to go back up to the lobby and take the other elevator down.

On the lobby level there was a very upmarket restaurant and here the buffet breakfast was enjoyed with great views over the city. Our breakfast was at both Ad Lib – the management wanted us to experience their excellent breakfast – which I was happy to do – while Au and her team had us going to Ban Heng Restaurant a Michelin Guide recommended restaurant where the excellent orange juice stood out with a very good meal.



CHOKCHAI FARM



Tuk Tuk Tuk

Breakfast was followed by a Chi Tang May Tuk Tuk city tour beginning with the interesting nine-tiered pagoda, Phra Mahathat Kaen Nakhon. I climbed to the top floor where it was like a local museum with baskets and pots and household items such as a manual sewing machine and lots of Buddha images, some with Naga.

Tuk Tuks then stopped at a Chinese Temple which the guide told us was the cultural centre, the soul and the mind of the community. Across the street there were three temples where we were given candles and joss stick to present as offerings.

Return to Khoa Yai

At 1:30 we continued our drive south to Khoa Yai. It was not only a long drive, (303 km) it was a slower drive as we were hit by a voluminous

rain storm. All our drivers were experienced, and they were unfazed by the terrible conditions. As usual, when we stopped for gas and toilet break, they were all in good humour. We got coffee or hot chocolate or cold drinks and snacks and continued on.

At the lobby the hard-working Te, owner of Pen Lao where we'd had lunch at the beginning of the trip, was there to welcome us. Dedicated to promoting tourism in Khoa Yai she greets important visitors when they arrive in the district. The rooms at Hotel Labaris Khoa Yai are spacious. I particularly liked the glassed in bathroom.

The Rabbit Cafe

In the expansive dining room where we enjoyed meat for dinner. Different types of sausages and chicken wings and much more. In the morning, we toured the grounds, centre



of the hotel's sustainable efforts. There is a kid's playground and a garden where many things are grown for use in the hotel. And a stream runs through it. Before we hit the road we enjoyed a cold drink in the whimsical Rabbit Café.

Charming Chokchai

At noon we pulled into the parking lot of the very popular Chokchai Farm, one of the largest dairy farms in Asia. Dr. Chokchai Bulakul founded the farm in 1957 and grew it into the sprawling tourist attraction you see today.

We had an active morning beginning with cowboy performances in a small circular arena. Lots of lassoing, whip cracking, horseback riding and acting like cowboys. The milking demonstrations are very popular, and you can milk a cow if you have the desire. There is excellent ice cream and milk produced here.

Sheep & Flowers & Steaks

You can explore the 8,000-acre farm via tractor-pulled carriages or in your own vehicle. There are sheep you can feed and fields of flowers you can photograph. The museum tells the history of the farm, cowboy heritage and the Dong Phraya Yen forest. The owner, who has now passed away, had a large collection of cars and airplanes – and even a helicopter. Not only could he drive a car, he could fly planes as well. When he was 16 years old Dr. Chokchai flew the Albatross. He travelled to the USA to become an Air Scout. His collection of classic and vintage cars exceeded 200.

We had a very good lunch – most of us had steaks at Chokchai Steak House.

At 1:30 we departed for Bangkok but had the first delay on the last leg of our excursion. An accident had traffic stopped or moving at a crawl on the main freeway. We cut off the highway and took a side road that may have saved us some time.

Chinese Ambience Thai Style

"The Sukosol Hotel, Bangkok affords guests a luxury hotel experience balancing contemporary elegance with Thai hospitality and style at superb value," is how they describe themselves on their website. The hotel was opened in 1990 and was originally known as the Siam City Hotel. It has a charm that predates that with its extensive art work and

various Chinese collections throughout the lobby area and main floor. There is something solid and convincing about it.

Our last dinner was at Marie Guimardepina. Marie Guimar was a Japanese-Portuguese lady who introduced Portuguese-influenced desserts like Thong Yod (Golden Drops) and Foi Thong (Golden Threads) to Thailand during the Ayutthaya period. But don't expect to find either Ayutthaya recipes or Portuguese fusion at this restaurant.

Flavours Intense

"We specialize in exquisite fine dining, our perspective is to focus on the freshness and local ingredients such as Nam Prik, Prik Kaeng," we were told. "Our food ingredients are all freshly cooked with organic materials and we do not use any MSG. Every dish is prepared from scratch here in the kitchen. The important thing for us is to use local, chemical-free ingredients and make everything here. We use both curry paste and various seasonings to achieve freshness and the intense flavour."

The dishes did have an intense, distinctive flavour. Well worth a visit to the 28th floor.

As we had dessert William reviewed the trip, asking our thoughts on the various places we visited were. A very nice way to wrap up what had been a long, sometimes intense flavourful journey.



WILLIAM FEEDING A COW

POCKET GUIDE

TEATA (Thai Ecotourism & Adventure Association)

organised the itinerary.
W: www.teata.or.th

Wat Pa Phu Kon

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W: watpaphukon.org

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W: ammanuniquehotel.com

Ad Lib Hotel

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E: khonkaen@adlibhotels.co
W: adlibhotels.co

Chabaa Barn Esan Vintage Restaurant

facebook.com/chabaabarn

Baan Heng Restaurant

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FB: facebook.com/baanheng

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Destination Dates

BUNURU FESTIVAL COWARAMUP, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

February 22, 2025



The Undalup Association presents the Bunuru Festival at Pioneer Park in Cowaramup on Saturday, 22 February 2025, from 12:00pm to 5:00pm, celebrating Wadandi culture and community on Wadandi Boodja. This family-friendly event invites the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community to come together, share stories, learn new skills and enjoy an exciting line-up of entertainment featuring some of Western Australia's best Indigenous talent. The line-up of musicians includes Lexyanna, Stellar Moon, Boox Kid and Maatakij. Corroboree for Life will perform a cultural dance with didgeridoo, Gerry Matera from Gather Foods will lead a Bush talk yarn, and MC Ingrid Cumming will conduct a Noongar language lesson. A collaborative live art mural with Hope Perth will be created during the festival, and there will be workshops and activities. Stalls will showcase Indigenous wares and art.

W: danjookoorliny.com.au

Suzann Victor: Constellations

STPI, Singapore

On-going to March 2, 2025

STPI presents Constellations, by Singaporean artist, Suzann Victor. The exhibition comprises over 20 new artworks inviting viewers to explore the nuanced possibilities of printmaking through light and shadow and to create their own

secondary light-prints on the gallery walls. Her latest poetic and tactile series offer a reappraisal of our very own embodied encounters with the phenomena of light, space and materiality, where art is seen as



Mardi Gras Sydney Australia

February 14 – March 2

Experience Sydney's most vibrant celebration of love and diversity with 80 spectacular events spanning three incredible weeks. From dazzling parties and community gatherings to thought-provoking talks, this year's festival promises an unforgettable showcase of pride and unity.

W: mardigras.org.au



much as it is discovered, sensed and felt. The works return us to physical experience and spatial experimentation – an antidote to an age dominated by digitally-mediated experiences. Highlights include The Image Stammers I and II, Afterglow and Obsidian Moon, where Victor manipulates transparent acrylic discs to produce intentional effects of "printing" light and shadow on the wall, which become immediately remarkable to the viewer. The artist's method of Tension-Printing on the acrylic discs enhances our awareness of worlds hiding in plain sight.

T: +65 6336 3663
E: stpi@stpi.com.sg
W: stpi.com.sg

Bintan Regatta 2025

Bintan, Indonesia & Singapore

April 18 to 20, 2025

This thrilling sailing event is brought to you by Bintan Resort Cakrawala and the Changi Sailing Club. Open to all keelboats in IRC, PY, and multihull classes, the regatta promises fun and fair competition with up to six races spread across two days. Sailors of all skill levels are welcome, and the stunning sea views of Bintan make it an event to remember. The weekend will include a Welcome Dinner on April 18 and a Prize Presentation and Closing Party on April 20, adding a festive touch to the racing



action. Registration closes on March 31, 2025, and the entry fee covers meals, event shirts, and berthing at Bandar Bentan Telani. *W: bintan-resorts.com*

Xpress Beach Tennis Cup

Boracay, Philippines Sports Tourism

On-going to April 27, 2025



Get ready for a thrilling Beach Tennis showdown! The Boracay Racquet Sports Club PH, in collaboration with the Philippine Tennis Association, brings the inaugural Xpress Beach Tennis Cup to Boracay. Featuring fierce competition from top players across the globe—including the Philippines, Japan, Australia, Thailand, and Italy—this event promises to be an unforgettable sporting spectacle. Boracay has long been a hub for beach sports enthusiasts, but with the first Xpress Beach Tennis Cup, the island is taking it to a whole new. The pristine sands of White House Beach Resort, Station 1 – making it a truly international sporting spectacle. *W: xpress.ph*



Bill Bensley Four Seasons Hotel's Art Space by MOCA Bangkok

On-Going to April 20, 2025

Celebrated architect, designer and artist Bill Bensley, will return to the Four Seasons Hotel's Art Space by MOCA Bangkok with an extraordinary rotating art exhibition with three separate collections, between 10 January and 20 April 2025. Bensley's latest collections, filled with vibrant works inspired by his travels across 11 countries, is dedicated to supporting environmental conservation and educational programs in Southeast Asia. Bensley's commitment to philanthropy takes center stage, with each exhibition earmarked to fund initiatives benefiting communities in Cambodia and Laos through the Shinta Mani Foundation.

W: shintamanifoundation.org

Destination Dates

Seeing Forest

Singapore Art Museum, Tanjong Pagar Distripark

On Going to May 18, 2025



Returning from Venice, this exhibition by interdisciplinary artist Robert Zhao Renhui invites visitors to immerse themselves in the multifaceted life of Singapore's secondary forests—overlooked forests regrown from deforested land due to human intervention. Drawing on nearly a decade of research, Zhao encourages audiences to look beyond our familiar cityscape and uncover the complex ecosystems that shape our natural environment. Catch the full assemblage of videos and sculptural installations presented in Venice, transforming SAM's gallery space into an enveloping, forested zone filled with sounds, sights and stories that convey the richness of secondary forests. Through Zhao's captivating scenes of these in-between spaces, spot sambar deer that escaped from the local zoo in the 1970s, Japanese sparrowhawks pausing for a drink and a wild boar giving birth in the forest next to the artist's apartment.

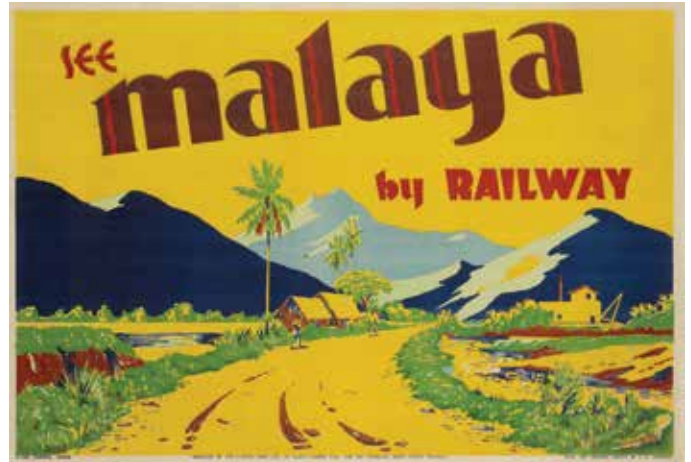
W: singaporeartmuseum.sg

Marvel at the picturesque and nostalgic depictions of well-loved scenes of everyday Singapore and magnificent landscapes from around the world at *Becoming Lim Tze Peng*. National Gallery Singapore presents its first solo exhibition on Singapore's oldest living and active artist, Lim Tze Peng, featuring over 50 works curated from Singapore's public art collections, the artist's personal art collection and rare archival materials. Visitors can look forward to tracing the artistic evolution of the 103-year-old artist, with works dating back to 1946 and as recent as 2023. Delve into

Singapore Stories: Pathways and Detours in Art

National Gallery Singapore

On-Going



the compelling stories behind Lim's bold and expressive ink works, including the invention of his own distinct style of calligraphy, 'hu tu zi', also known as 'muddled calligraphy' or 'muddled characters'.

www.nationalgallery.sg/BecomingLimTzePeng

HADESTOWN Theatre Royal Sydney, Australia Dates in February & May

The acclaimed musical phenomenon *HADESTOWN* by singer-songwriter Anais Mitchell and director Rachel Chavkin will premiere at Theatre Royal Sydney

in February 2025 and Melbourne's Her Majesty's theatre in May 2025. 'Big, beautiful and emotionally blasting' (The Guardian UK), *HADESTOWN* is the winner of 8 Tony Awards® including BEST MUSICAL and the Grammy Award for Best Musical Theatre Album. Seen by three million, streamed by over 350 million and adored by fans all around the world, this is "Your next musical theatre obsession" (Vogue).

<https://hadestown.com.au/>





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If you are looking for a fantastic wilderness adventure enjoy it even more by taking part in Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge's heli experiences.



Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge Launches Awesome New Adventures

(Vancouver Island, Canada) Baillie Lodges, a growing portfolio of luxury lodges renowned for setting benchmarks in premium experiential travel, announces that its remote outpost, Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge on Vancouver Island, BC, celebrates a quarter-century of operations this year. To celebrate, the 'luxury summer camp' has rolled out a range of new helicopter (heli) experiences in time for the 2025 season, taking Canadian wilderness adventures to new heights.

Nature's Playground

The 2025 season kicks off on May 22, promising five months of generously inclusive luxury and incredible adventures for guests in nature's own playground where black bears forage shoreside, whales, seals and sea otters enjoy the region's network of waterways and bald eagles soar overhead.

The Experiences Guide has been updated to time with the 2025 season and offers a full





introduction to the range of signature, optional and bespoke experiences available for guests at Clayoquot.

Cold-Water Immersion

The cold-water immersion mindfulness experience, which takes place in the Bedwell River, has been reformatted as a one-hour sunrise 'glacial plunge' due to popular demand, and is included on guest itineraries as a signature wellbeing experience.

New on the heli experiences menu (at an additional cost) are two new alpine adventures, plus four new coastal-themed itineraries, while a 15-minute one-way heli pickup from the Ursus Valley hike is called the River Run.

Lake Day Heli Experience

The new Alpine Scenic heli tour is a 30-minute taster flight, offering a wonderful aerial perspective of the Vancouver Island wilderness. Best enjoyed at sunset, the tour lifts off for an exhilarating flight through valleys and soaring over the Mount Mariner Glacier with views spanning across Strathcona Provincial Park.

Also in the mountains, the new Lake Day heli experience whisks guests away to a remote

lake deep in the wilderness. Guests enjoy the ultimate picnic spread, plus hiking and aquatic sports to be tailored to preference. The Lake Day adventure is ideal for a family or friends travelling together.

New Itineraries

Heading to the coast and a chance for incredible encounters with the marine landscape and its wildlife, the new heli itineraries include:

Coastal Scenic – a 30-minute taster exploring Vancouver Island's ruggedly beautiful ocean coastlines.

Island Picnic – a half day tour exploring the wild islands dotted around the ocean and spotting wildlife.

Sea Caves - Fly north via heli to discover remote sea caves, explore inside the caves, finding sheer rockfaces, tidal pools and cool pebbled beaches.

Walk the Wild Side - fly to the wild Vargas Island and follow an 11km trail along a cultural route of the First Nations Ahousaht people who have gathered medicinal plants and seasonal foods over centuries.

Riding a Wave

Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge General Manager Sarah Cruse said she was delighted to present the new experiences of the incredible Vancouver Island wilderness just in time for the celebratory 2025 season. "We're so incredibly fortunate to be in the heart of Mother Nature's playground here at Clayoquot, and we're always looking to innovate our experiences program to offer guests more unforgettable ways to encounter our magnificent wildlife and landscapes," Ms Cruse said.

"We're riding the wave of our Three MICHELIN Keys award late last year, and we're so excited to be celebrating our silver anniversary in 2025! It's going to be a special season ahead," she said.

POCKET GUIDE

E: reserve@clayoquotwildernesslodge.com
 W: clayoquotwildernesslodge.com
 T: +1 250-266-0397

While movie-goers are buzzing about the dazzling “Emerald City” in the new *Wicked* movie, there is a real-life version of this enchanting green paradise: Tanzania’s “Emerald Season.”



Enjoy Tanzania’s Emerald Season



From November to April, during the country’s rainy season, Tanzania transforms into a lush, verdant wonderland. Think rolling green plains, dramatic skies painted with colour, and wildlife flourishing in their natural habitat—a scene as magical as anything on the silver screen. Often overlooked by travellers seeking a winter escape, this is a season that blends cinematic grandeur with raw, untamed nature, offering an experience unlike any other—and here’s why:

A Canvas of Emerald Green

From the Serengeti’s endless plains to the vivid Ngorongoro Highlands, the rains transform Tanzania into a painter’s (and photographer’s!) dream. The landscapes burst into striking shades of green, dotted with wildflowers,



and the air feels fresher, crisper, and full of possibility for adventure and sightings. This is Tanzania at its most photogenic—a natural masterpiece that elevates every moment, from golden sunsets to misty morning drives.

Unparalleled Wildlife Encounters

Contrary to popular belief, the rainy season doesn't hinder wildlife viewing—it amplifies it! Visitors to Tanzania during the “Emerald Season” can witness predators taking advantage of the migration's calving season, with thousands of baby wildebeest and zebras finding their legs. Birds in dazzling breeding plumage swoop across the skies, creating a symphony of life. What's more, with fewer vehicles, travelers can experience these awe-inspiring moments in serene intimacy.

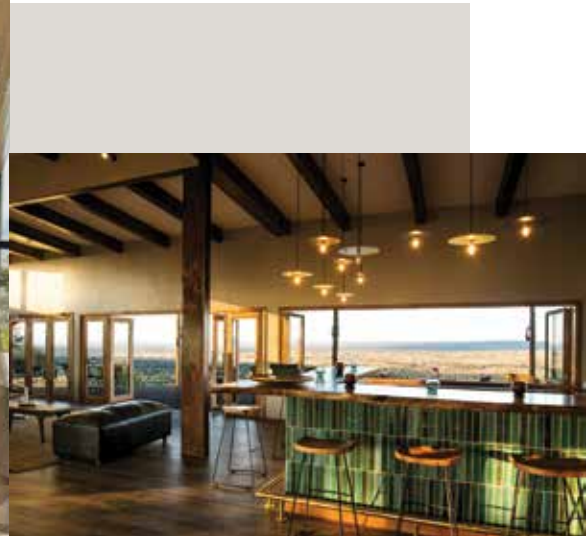
The rains bring fewer crowds, leaving visitors with prime access to Tanzania's iconic parks, lodges and camps. Game drives feel like private expeditions, and cultural encounters with Maasai communities become even more personal. Who doesn't want a safari without the hustle—a chance to connect with the land and its people on a deeper level?

A Romantic Safari, Reimagined

Picture sundowners under cloud-painted skies, cozy nights in luxury accommodations, and the rhythmic sound of rain and wildlife. The rainy season's tranquility offers the ultimate romantic escape—untouched, authentic, and a safari experience like no other.

While the Emerald City is a fantastical place of enchanting, mythical beings and colours, Tanzania's “Emerald Season” brings its own array of extraordinary

“Picture sundowners under cloud-painted skies, cozy nights in luxury accommodations, and the rhythmic sound of rain and wildlife.”



creatures to life—but here, the remarkable creatures, vivid landscapes and magical allure is entirely real. For those looking to immerse themselves fully in Tanzania’s “Emerald Season,” Lemala Camps & Lodges offers an exceptional collection of eco-conscious lodges, villas, and classic tented camps. Perfectly positioned to showcase the beauty of this vibrant time of year, visitors can choose from:

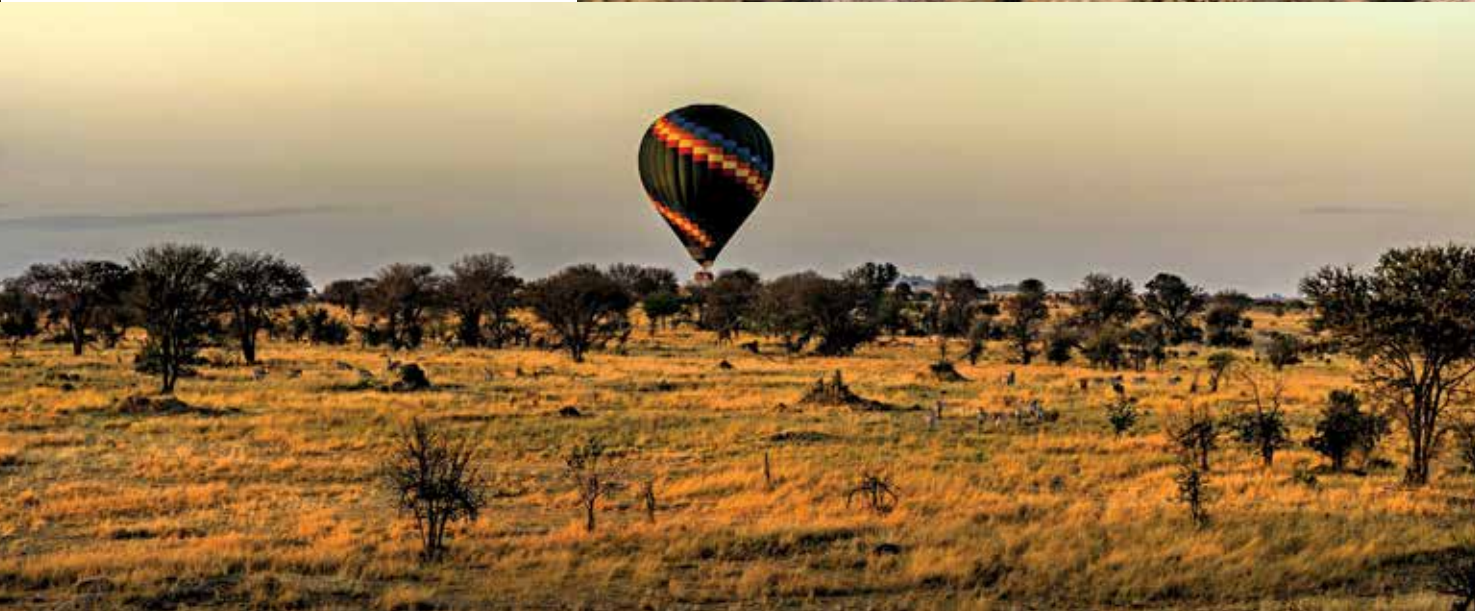
Lemala Kuria Hills Lodge, Northern Serengeti: Set in the Northern Serengeti’s Wogakuria Hills, Lemala Kuria Hills Lodge is nestled among granite boulders and verdant kopjes.



The lodge’s 15 glass-fronted suites feature private plunge pools, outdoor showers, and sweeping views. During the rainy season, the Serengeti bursts to life with exceptional wildlife viewing without the crowds. Between game drives, unwind by the infinity pool, indulge in spa treatments, and savor gourmet cuisine. Lemala Kuria Hills delivers a serene, exclusive safari experience, blending natural beauty with world-class luxury.

Lemala Nanyukie Lodge, Eastern

Serengeti: Located in the heart of the Eastern Serengeti, Lemala Nanyukie Lodge is home to 15 elegant tents with private plunge pools and panoramic views of the rain-soaked savanna. Visitors can witness the Serengeti's rich biodiversity, big cats and other iconic species, with half the crowds. From thrilling game drives and walking safaris to bucket-list worthy hot-air balloon rides, Lemala Nanyukie Lodge blends exclusivity with adventure, where nature takes centre stage.



Lemala Mpingo Ridge Lodge, Tarangire National Park: Perched on an elevated ridge overlooking the Tarangire River, Lemala Mpingo Ridge Lodge offers an exquisite blend of luxury and wilderness in Tanzania's sixth-largest national park. Renowned for its iconic baobab trees and vast elephant herds, Tarangire comes alive during the green season, with lush landscapes and vibrant wildlife activity. The lodge's 15 luxurious tented suites feature private plunge pools, outdoor baths, and sweeping views, providing the perfect retreat. Guests can enjoy thrilling game drives, night safaris, and cultural visits, or some R&R with spa treatments.



Karuizawa's Musée Ando à Karuizawa

Ferry de Bakker revisits Karuizawa, a historic, cultural Japanese village that is not to be missed.



There is also the sad story of the 1923 dual suicide of Japanese poet Takeo Arishima and his lover Akiko Hatano. Finally, Karuizawa is featured prominently in Junichi Watanabe's magnificent 1997 novel *A Lost Paradise*. At the time, the book caused a sensation in Japan and Goodreads describes it well: "This tale of extramarital sexual obsession and all-or-nothing love struck a deep chord in Japanese readers." A book not to be missed.

John Lennon and Yoko Ono

There is a larger variety of hotels today as well, as new ones have opened their doors. This time we selected the very comfortable Marriott Hotel. We checked out other accommodations, such as the traditional Mampei Hotel, which opened in 1894, and which counts John Lennon and Yoko Ono among its many famous guests. They visited Karuizawa quite a few times in the late 1970s and stayed in the hotel's Room 128.

The luxury apartments at the Hoshinoya Resort, the Prince Hotel and Le Grand are highly recommended. To summarize, Karuizawa is a unique, tranquil town to visit for a few days or a few weeks, as there is so much to see and do. Margaux Barbier, wrote a compelling story about living in Karuizawa, its history and many current attractions that was published on-line in June 2023 in Medium (medium.com).

Yasushi & Megumi Ando's Dream

The main reason I returned to Karuizawa was to visit a new museum that opened in October 2022. The Musée Ando à Karuizawa is dedicated to the artist Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita. The museum's collection consists of some 200 works by this remarkably talented, yet very controversial – first Japanese, then French – citizen. But... more about Foujita later.

Let's first focus on this private museum. Situated close to the town's train station, it was created by Yasushi and Megumi Ando,



In its August-September 2019 issue, *Asian Journeys* published my article *Karuizawa, an Atas Place*. I loved visiting this historic, affluent village that boasts no fewer than six excellent modern art museums and, arguably, more international than Japanese restaurants. It was time therefore, after five long years, to return to Karuizawa. It's an easy place to get to from Tokyo, as the Shinkansen takes only an hour and 15 minutes to get there. Fortunately, it is not yet overrun by tourists and the ones who were there this time were mostly Japanese. Today, it boasts an even larger number of international restaurants than it did in 2019 and many of the world's cuisines are represented, including Spanish, Italian, Australian, French, Sichuan, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese and Thai.

An Attractive Resort Town

This Nagano-district resort town is getting more attractive all the time, but it also has a particularly interesting past, including having been one of the so-called post towns on the famed Nakasendo Trail.

Karuizawa was where, in 1957, then-Crown Prince Akihito fell for literature graduate Michiko Shoda, whom he met on a tennis court in an encounter that came to be known as the 'love match.'



“ The Musée Ando à Karuizawa is dedicated to the artist Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita. ”

who started acquiring works by Foujita some 20 years ago and have built a collection of over 200 of his watercolours, prints and oil paintings. In 2018 they decided to share the collection with interested art lovers and their dream was to have them exhibited in an intimate, relatively small, museum that feels like home. Have they succeeded? Yes, absolutely! You feel very comfortable the minute you enter the building.

The Architect Firm d/dt Arch

After careful consideration, Mr and Mrs Ando selected d/dt Arch to design the museum. This Tokyo-based architect firm, established by Yasumi Taketomi and Kei Iwata in 2001, describes its vision as "creating a better society and culture through architecture" and its values as "to endeavour to understand and comprehend our clients' needs, execute creativity, pursue quality in both design and functionality." It is worth taking a look at the firm's website, as you will discover its architects have designed and completed a large number of stunningly beautiful projects.

Colour in Your Life

The architects, known to always work in close collaboration with their clients, first studied past and current residences of the Ando's and, as a result, created a courtyard and used bricks imported from the UK, where they had formerly lived. These are a main feature of the front of the museum. Different colours were used to paint the walls. This reminds me of Dutch architect Carel Weeber, who did the same when he designed De Schie, a large-scale prison in Rotterdam. Asked why, he responded "the prisoners like to have a little colour in their lives."

Yaketomi and Iwata also took inspiration from a chapel in France, designed by Foujita and the artist's last home, Maison-Atelier Foujita. Another interesting aspect of the museum is its logo and how variations of it are used in different rooms and spaces.

Tokyo to Paris

The artist Tsuguharu Fujita, later known as Léonard Foujita, was born on 27 November 1886 in what is today, Shinjuku, Tokyo. The family moved to Kyushu a few years later, but in 1892, following the death of his mother, they moved back to Tokyo. Foujita developed an early interest in art and started painting at an early age. When he was 19, he enrolled in what is today the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music. The young painter graduated in 1910 and married Tomiko Tokita a year later. She was to be the first of his five wives. In 1913, he moved to Paris and became an overnight sensation. He quickly developed friendships with two other Japanese artists living there and through their connections became part of the art scene that included Braque, Satie, Picasso, Modigliani, Bonnard and Léger, to name just a few giants of paintings, sculptures and music.

Tomiko, Fernande, Youki & Madeleine

Around 1916 he ended his relationship with Tomiko and the following year, met, and 13 days later, married Fernande Barrey, a painter and model. She was instrumental in Foujita's success, and he started to focus on self-portraits, nudes, still lifes and, a bit later, cats in a distinctive style of mixing Western painting and Japanese graphic art.

In 1924 he divorced Barrey and five years later married Lucie ('Youki') Badoul. The following years saw Foujita travelling a lot. He first went back to Tokyo, then returned to Paris via Hawai'i, San Francisco and New York. When Youki left him, Foujita met and travelled to Latin America with a new love, Madeleine Lequeux. They stayed in Rio de Janeiro for four months, then moved to Buenos Aires and later Mexico.

Back to Japan

In 1933 Foujita returned to Japan, where he would stay until 1949. Madeleine unexpectedly died in 1936 and soon after





Foujita married again, this time to Kimiyo Horiuchi. They would remain together until his death in 1968. He decided to support the Japanese war effort and produced a vast oeuvre of, often very large, paintings celebrating Japanese bravery in success and defeat. This may have been the right thing to do at the time, but once Japan had lost the war, he was suddenly viewed with disdain and by many as a war criminal. Being ostracised in his own country led him to decide to leave Japan for good.

He returned to France, announced never to leave that country again, changed his name from Fujita Tsuguharu to Léonard Foujita, married Kimiyo, obtained French nationality and converted to Catholicism. He designed and

decorated his own chapel and lived peacefully until his death. Immensely talented, Foujita has always been and remains a controversial individual, due to his personality, style and, obviously, his role during World War II.

His widow, Kimiyo, decided to open both the chapel and their home to the public. His paintings have long been hard to find in any museum worldwide, but more recently the Akita Museum of Art and now the Musée Ando à Karuizawa exhibit large collections. Also, in 2014, Kimiyo's heirs bequeathed more than 2,300 works to the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Reims.

POCKET GUIDE

Manpei Hotel
W: mampei.co.jp

Hoshino Resorts
W: hoshinoresorts.com/en

Prince Hotels
W: princehotels.com

Le Grand Karuizawa Hotel & Resort
W: legrand-karuizawaresort.jp/en

Musée Ando à Karuizawa
W: musee-ando.com/en

d/dt Arch
W: d-dt.co.jp/en/

Akita Museum of Art
W: japan.travel/en/spot/1828

Musées de Reims
W: musees-reims.fr/fr/musees/musee-des-beaux-arts
W: musees-reims.fr/fr/musees/la-chapelle-foujita

The Foundation Foujita
W: fondation-foujita.org/en/the-maison-atelier-foujita/

Sabah Tourism Golf Challenge and Leisure Tour

If you are an avid golfer Sabah has first rate courses that are challenging and beautiful and for those who don't like to hit the links there are many other things to do writes Jenny Tan.



The inaugural Sabah Tourism Golf Challenge was held at Sabah's most popular golf courses - Nexus Golf Karambunai, Sutera Harbour Golf Club and Dalit Bay Golf & Country Club from December 5 to 7, 2024.

Exceptional Setting

Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah, is the gateway to UNESCO World Heritage site Kinabalu Park, with the tallest mountain in Malaysia – Mount Kinabalu. The Malaysia province has beautiful landscapes, spectacular sunsets, tribes with long histories, rich cultures and delectable local cuisine. It is popular for both relaxing vacations and adventurous outings.

Asian Journeys was the only invited media to experience the first ever Sabah Tourism Golf Challenge and was given the opportunity to explore attractions in Tuaran, an hour's drive from the city centre and renowned for sensational sunsets, beautiful nature and tribal heritage.

AirAsia Moves

My two-hour and 30-minute AirAsia flight took off late morning and arrived at 2:00pm. We set off for Shangri-la Rasa Ria, next to Dalit Bay Golf & Country Club in the Tuaran district where the alluring sunset, cool evening breezes and the welcome dinner awaited.

The next morning, gathering at 4:45am in the hotel lobby, we took the specially prepared breakfast box and set off with the golfers to Sutera Harbour Golf Club well in time for the 7:30 tee-off. There are five golf courses in Kota Kinabalu and of these, three golf courses were chosen for their exceptional landscapes to enhance the golfers' experience.

An Open Challenge

Enjoying the challenges and individuality at Nexus Golf Karambunai, Sutera Harbour Golf Club and Dalit Bay Golf & Country Club, more than 100 golfers from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Korea, along with eight promising junior golfers from Sabah Golf Association, participated in the three-day event.

The Challenge was open to all amateur golfers in a team of four with valid USGA,



World Handicapping System of 24 below for men & 36 below for ladies. The mode of play was system 36, Stableford points, played for three rounds of 18 holes on each of the three golf courses. The team with the best three scores, based on Stableford points for each round, won the top prize where the total golf challenge prizes were valued at US\$22,500.00.

Unique Links

The Sabah Golf Challenge started at Nexus Golf Karambunai, designed by world-renowned American golf course architect, Ronald Fream. It is located within walking distance from Nexus Resort & Spa Karambunai. The international championship par 72, 18-hole golf course is unique with nine holes on the South China Sea with mesmerizing sea views of the pristine sandy white beach while the other nine holes have tropical rainforest as a backdrop and views of Mount Kinabalu at Hole 12.

On the second day, golfers teed off

at Sutera Harbour Golf Club, designed by Australian Graham Marsh where the 6316-meter championship golf course is the only golf course in Sabah with 27 holes aligned with different views at each of the three courses by the Lake, Heritage and Garden.

Easy Access

At Hole 24, the 330m par-4 on the Garden Course beckons with sandy forefront and the ocean extremely close to the undulating green. Located conveniently near the Kota Kinabalu City centre and just a short drive from the airport, it offers the fastest access to one of Sabah's most popular golf course.

The last day was at the 18-hole championship golf course – Dalit Bay Golf & Country Club, wholly owned by the Shangri-la group. Designed by Australian Golf Architect, Ted Parslow, who is known for creating strategic challenges and aesthetic beauty with a focus on environmental sustainability. This golf course's 400 tropical acres are bordered by the Tambalang and Mengkabong rivers,

is especially popular as golfers can enjoy the expansive million dollar view of the South China Sea, Mount Kinabalu and the Borneo rainforest at Hole 11.

Complimentary Service

The beautifully landscaped golf course is just a minute from Shangri-la Rasa Ria Resort with Ocean Wing Suites and Garden Wing Deluxe Seaview rooms. Complimentary buggy service makes it easy to get around the resort and golf course.

Step into the bright and airy main lobby and head straight out to the lovely swimming pool and the beach. Unwind at the spa or wine and dine at the resort's six restaurants. The resort is especially popular with honeymooners, couples, golfers and families. The Ocean Wing Junior Suite is well appointed with a king size bed, day bed, dining area and an expansive balcony equipped with a lounge sofa and a jacuzzi for two, overlooking either the swimming pool or the South China Sea. The ala-carte semi-buffet breakfast at the Oceano



Modern Grill seems like a delightful array of choices with an alfresco sea view dining area but due to time constraints, I wasn't able to personally enjoy it.

Terrific Tuaran

If you have time, or are not there for the golf, the Rasa Ria Reserve is a natural coastal tropical rainforest where you can trek and experience the flora and fauna, home to rare birds, butterflies, indigenous wildlife, and the endangered, protected pangolin.

Nestled at the foot of magnificent Mount Kinabalu, the 64-acre reserve is a habitat where

visitors can explore the hiking trails and learn more about the delicate habitat and the local culture and heritage. We had a short tour around Kota Kinabalu, stopping at popular sunset viewpoints at Shangri-la Tanjong Aru Resort and Signal Hill for photos before heading back to Tuaran.

Borneo Ant House

Inspired by an ant's underground world, walk through the wooden door to enter a tunnel into Malaysia's first underground ant sculpture gallery and where the biggest ant sculpture in Malaysia resides. As you enter the Ant Nest,

stop at the walls lined with 463 'crawling' ants handmade replica sculptures and then go into the Cultural Gallery that showcases Sabah's four ethnic groups – Bajau, Dusun Lotud, Iban and Bidayuh. The Sword Gallery's collection are symbols of great power from the headhunters of Borneo. Bajau and Dusun Lotud make up the majority of the population in Tuaran.

The last door opened up to the outdoor areas where there are traditional houses, and a secret tree house. Meet Sulcata the tortoise, or enjoy the canopy walk. Take a break at the local cafe, souvenir shop then take the zipline that will swish you down to the exit of the Ant House in a jiffy. If zip lines aren't your thing then take the steps.

Tembara River Cruise

Cycling through Kampung Serusup gives the opportunity to experience local life. Hike through the mangrove forests, kayak or sail down the Tembara River. Board a traditional catamaran or motorboat and cruise leisurely to the sand bar to watch the sensational sunset by the South China Sea. As you return to the jetty enjoy the magical fireflies display by the shore.

After a local homecooked dinner by the jetty, we arrived back at Shangri-la Rasa Ria for the night.



Bajau Sama Cultural Centre

Sabah is home over 30 ethnic groups and more than 200 sub-ethnic groups. The rich heritage and customs of each tribe is unique to Sabah, illustrating different ways of life and culture. In Tuaran, the Bajau and Dusun Lotud indigenous community share their customs and culture through local cuisine, handicrafts and festivals.

The opening of the Bajau Sama Cultural Centre was officiated by the 16th Chief Minister of Sabah, The Honourable Datuk Seri Panglima Haji Hajiji Haji Noor. The history of the Sama Bajau community was unveiled at the cultural gallery.

Cowboys of the East

The Bajau Sama warriors are known as Cowboys of the East for their expertise in horse riding and horse culture. You can find traditional costumes, both ladies and gents with horse patterns and motifs elaborately hand embroidered.

Vivid primary colours red, blue, yellow and green are used for hand embroidered traditional Bajau Sama costumes, headgear and hand woven products such as baskets and food covers, handicrafts, hand made machetes with carved motif, musical instruments and items for festive celebrations.

The Bajau Sama community is one of the wealthier tribes with an extensive collection of antique brassware, bronzeware and copperware, often passed down as heirlooms and as part of dowries as a show of wealth.

Elaborate Weddings

Weddings of the Bajau Sama tribe, that can last up to a week, are an elaborate affair. The couple arrive in an Usungan – a horse drawn carriage beautifully decorated with colorful embroidered textiles and flags. The wedding party wears intricately hand-embroidered costumes.

Just above the wedding bed musical instruments are set up. A modern creative chandelier centrepiece was created specially by the Sabah Art Gallery using bubu (fish traps) and duang (food basket) to showcase Bajau Sama's historic craft, illustrating the importance of preserving of Bajau tradition and culture.

Dress up in traditional Bajau Sama Wedding costumes for a photoshoot at the traditional wooden houses built on stilts that were homes for farmers and fishermen. Shop for ethnic accessories and souvenirs.

Prize Presentation

After a quick lunch at Dalit Bay Golf and Country Club, we headed back to Shangri-la Rasa Ria by buggy and went for a hotel site tour.

The evening ended with Sabah Golf Challenge prize presentation and gala dinner for golfers. The Golf Challenge was supported by the Sabah's State Ministry of Tourism,

Culture and Environment, Sabah Trade Tourism Office Singapore (STTOS) and Sabah Tourism Board (STB), and was organised by XMultisport. Lato-Lato A won the team event.

The next morning started at 5:00am to depart for flight check-in. When you take an AirAsia flight, do a pre-order at least 24 hours before the departure to get the Santan combo meal of your choice. The Pak Nasser's Nasi Lemak, a true taste of a Malaysia



local breakfast, is very popular. AirAsia flies daily from Singapore to Kota Kinabalu.



BAJAU SAMA CULTURAL CENTRE TRADITIONAL HOUSES

POCKET GUIDE

Sabah Trade and Tourism Office Singapore (STTOS)

W: SabahTradeTourism.com.sg

AirAsia

W: AirAsia.Com

Sabah Golf Challenge

W: Xmultisport.com

Nexus Golf Karambunai

W: NexusResort.com/en/golf

Sutera Harbour Golf Club

W: SuteraHarbour.com/golf-sutera

Dalit Bay Golf & Country Club

W: DalitBayGolf.com.my

Shangri-la Rasa Ria Hotel

W: Shangri-la.com/kotakinabalu

Rasa Ria Reserve

W: RasaRiaRserve.com

Riverbug Asia

W: Riverbug.asia

New Ferry Route Links Johor Bahru with Bintan

(Bintan) A new ferry route between Pasir Gudang Ferry Terminal in Johor Bahru and Bandar Bentan Telani Ferry Terminal in Bintan Resorts has been launched. This new route offers a convenient option for visitors looking to explore



Bintan Island and Johor Bahru. In just 1 hour 30 minutes, travelers make the crossing. "This new route not only allows Malaysians to experience the beauty of Bintan but also opens up an opportunity for the people of Bintan to explore Johor, renowned for its shopping malls, theme parks and delightful cuisine," said Prakash Nair, General Manager of Operations at Bintan Resorts. Initially, the ferry will operate every weekend with departures from Pasir Gudang Terminal at 0930hrs (Malaysia Time) and from Bandar Bentan Telani Ferry Terminal at 1600hrs (Indonesia Time). Tickets can be purchased at the ticket counters at both terminals.

An Unforgettable Murder Mystery Cruise on the Swan River

(Swan River, Western Australia) Step aboard the River Bells for a captivating dining experience where intrigue meets stunning river views. Hosted by the internationally renowned murder mystery company, Cluedunnit, these immersive cruises blend the excitement of live theatre with the joy of solving a mystery, all while enjoying a delicious three-course buffet dinner. Set against the backdrop of the iconic Swan River, you'll step into another era and meet a cast of intriguing characters dressed in authentic period costume. As you work with your fellow diners to unravel the clues, uncover secrets, and solve the crime, expect twists and turns at every corner. Whether it's a chilling winter tale or an exotic Egyptian adventure, each cruise delivers a unique storyline filled with suspense and entertainment.

E: info@cluedunnit.com.au

T: 0450 511 945

W: cluedunnit.com.au/perth-river-cruises



Pure Snorkelling has an exclusive permit allowing guests to experience the site's extraordinary coral cover.

W: puresnorkelling.au

New Great Barrier Reef Boat Launches in Cairns



(Cairns, Australia) A purpose-built \$1.5 million vessel has launched in Cairns giving visitors the opportunity to see the Great Barrier Reef on a half-day snorkelling tour to a site that has not been visited for almost five years. Pure Snorkelling is a joint venture between two Cairns family-owned reef operators who have more than 60 years' combined experience showcasing the

Great Barrier Reef. Passions of Paradise's Alan Wallish said they are launching the new brand with a 40-seat boat built in Cairns. "Many visitors do not allow enough time to see everything they want and are looking for half-day options so their holiday can start as soon as they land," he said. "Pure Snorkelling has four 350 horsepower engines enabling it to reach the outer Great Barrier Reef in less than an hour providing more than two hours of snorkelling time on the five-hour afternoon trip." Our primary destination will be spectacular Briggs Reef, 24 nautical miles southeast of Cairns, where

WHAT'S NEW

New Sailors Grave Brewery, Dunetown, Rises in the East

(East Gippsland, Australia) Renowned Victorian brewers Chris and Gab Moore of Sailors Grave Brewing are expanding to new premises with the opening of Dunetown, a farmhouse-style brewery between Marlo and Cape Conran on Victoria's East Gippsland coast. The new site hosts an expanded and upgraded brewery built on land owned for generations by Gab's family. Dunetown – as with Sailors Grave – takes its name from the sea shanty village that



existed at Cape Conran until the 1980s. The centrepiece is a stunning bar that pays homage to the classic Australian public bar, handcrafted by local artisans Hutt Built and Axiom. With 16 beers on tap, including a four-tap LuKr side-pour system imported from the Czech Republic specifically for lagers, visitors may experience the majority of Sailors Grave beers straight from the source. The selection ranges from their core offerings to more adventurous brews, complemented by a curated Gippsland-produced wine list and a small cocktail menu.

T: 0437902230

E: gab@sailorsgrave.net / chris@sailorsgrave.net
sailorsgravebrewing.com



Vietnamese Artist Sketches Portraits at Alma Resort

(Cam Ranh, Vietnam) Alma Resort Cam Ranh welcomes acclaimed Vietnamese artist Bui Van Quang to craft portraits of guests. Priced at VND 300,000 per pencil portrait, the resort is offering portrait sessions every Thursday at Alma Garden from 8:00am-10:00am and Alma Food Court from 12:00 -1:45pm. Renowned for his authentic paintings depicting customs, traditions and the daily lives of Vietnamese people through his use of the country's rich and vivid colours, Mr Quang is a local artist who has produced many works highly regarded by the national and international art communities. He has won a plethora of awards, with his works showcased in exhibitions nationally and internationally.

T: +84 258 399 1666

E: info@alma-resort.com

W: alma-resort.com

The Peninsula Hong Kong Adds Four New Bentley Bentaygas



(Hong Kong) In keeping with its half-century-long tradition of providing superlative transportation for its guests, The Peninsula Hong Kong has introduced four bespoke Bentley Bentayga Extended Wheelbase (EWB) Azure SUVs to its fleet. The new cars join the hotel's already-legendary collection – which includes 14 Rolls-Royce EWBs Phantoms and a magnificently refurbished 1934 Phantom II. "The acquisition of these vehicles is a momentous occasion for The Peninsula," said Joseph W.Y. Chong, Regional Executive Vice

President, Asia. "Not only does it align with our legacy of offering the finest available transport to our guests; it also reflects our dedication to providing them with unparalleled experiences at every turn." Extras include handheld remote devices for climate control, seats and lighting, as well as a massage function in the middle rear seats; additionally, a heads-up display showing speed and maps add both convenience and entertainment during rides.

www.peninsula.com

West Air Launches New International Route



(Singapore) From December 25, 2024, West Air has launched a new Lhasa ⇌ Chongqing ⇌ Singapore international route. An Airbus A319 will make three round-trip flights per week operating on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, departing from Lhasa at 17:40, arriving in Chongqing at 20:30, departing from Chongqing at 22:50 (23:00 on Mondays), and arriving in Singapore at 03:55 the next day. The return flight operates on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, departing from Singapore at 04:55,

arriving in Chongqing at 09:40, departing from Chongqing at 12:20, and arriving in Lhasa at 15:20. All times are local. Following the implementation of the China-Singapore Mutual Visa Exemption Agreement in 2024, Ordinary Passport Holders can now embark on a "just-go" journey. As a friendly neighbor of China, Singapore has no time difference, year-round summer temperatures, and excellent infrastructure.

W: p.westair.cn



Transylvania's New Hotel of Ice Now Open

The remote Hotel of Ice is perched in the mountains at 2000m and is only reachable by cable car. It's a musical theme this year, with sculptures of instruments and famous classical composers from Beethoven to Mozart. The Hotel of Ice has 12 standard igloo rooms and its very own restaurant. For those wanting to warm up with a drink and even a dance, there is also an Ice Bar which serves drinks in, you guessed it,



Empowering Stays with Purpose

(BALI, Indonesia) Arkamara Dijiwa Ubud has introduced the "1% - Stay for Smiles & Trees" program, a unique initiative that merges its commitment to hospitality with social and environmental responsibility. Through this program 1% of bookings made directly on its website is allocated to support local charities and environmental projects. This initiative reflects its belief that true prosperity and well-being come from giving back to the community and the natural environment. The program allows each guest to make a meaningful impact on the Gianyar community. Contributions from direct bookings are used to support reforestation projects, planting trees in critical areas and combat climate change. The program provides essential funding to social foundations in Gianyar, offering vital care, resources and opportunities to children in orphanages and foundations supporting children with disabilities and autism.

T: +62 361 982367

W: dijiwasanctuaries.com/at/arkamaraubud

ice glasses. The temperature in the Hotel of Ice is typically around -2 degrees with professional sleeping bags and cosy bedding provided. Enjoy the Winter Park's various winter activities from snowshoeing, sledding and even a lift which pulls you up the slope in a rubber ring, which you slide back down in!

T: +44 2071014061

E: info@untravelledpaths.com

The Future OF Food Series



TEST KITCHEN SEMINARS

20 Jan • *Sourcing the Future of Food*

10 Feb • *Stretching the Future of Food*

24 Feb • *Sustenance in the Future of Food*

6 PM to 8:30 PM

📍 Synthesis Creative Data House

FUTURE OF FOOD SYMPOSIUM

17 Mar • 2 PM to 8 PM

📍 New Bahru

📷 [@SYNTHESIS.PARTNERS](#) [@KITAFOODFESTIVAL](#)
WEBSITE FUTUREOFFOOD.KITA.SYNTHESIS.PARTNERS

KITA PROMO CODE:

FUTURE20KITA

synthesis **KITA**
FOOD FESTIVAL

New Wine & Gin in the Year of the Snake

It's the start of a new year and I'm excited to share more with you about a new wine bar in the east, gin appreciation workshops at a distillery in the west, and a Year of the Snake cognac edition, writes Justine Moss.

Brass Lion Distillery

If you enjoy a drop of gin and also fancy making your own, then head to this distillery, founded by Jamie Koh, for an immersive gin making session in their Gin School. The four-hour session includes a welcome cocktail and a guided gin creation session with the distillers.

You'll also get a chance to check out the various botanicals from their herb garden and lab, before you concoct your own recipe to match your own preferred flavour profile.

There's also a Tasting Room (bar) where you can order an array of drinks and superb light bites to enjoy regardless of whether you attend the Gin School. In addition, the Gin Garden is open on the weekends, and here you are welcome to bring along your pet and enjoy a G&T or two. It's a lovely, peaceful place to hang out and enjoy some exceptional Brass Lion gins.



40 Alexandra Terrace, Level 2
Singapore 119933
Ph: +65 6954 0602
<https://brassliondistillery.com/>



L'Or de Jean Martell Zodiac Edition - Assemblage du Serpent

As we head into the Year of the Snake, Martell is celebrating with their release of L'Or de Jean Martell Zodiac Edition - Assemblage du Serpent in a stunning Baccarat crystal decanter. Martell Cellar Master Christophe Valtaud

has cleverly selected very old eaux-de-vie from past Years of the Snake, combining them with the original blend. Each bottle consists of over 1,400 eaux-de-vie from Cognac's four finest terroirs

It's a rare masterpiece with a strictly limited release of 500 individually numbered bottles. Each bottle is priced at SGD \$14,888.00

Visit <https://www.martell.com/en-ww/> for more information.



The Winery Gourmet Bar

This is a lovely space to hang out with friends and family or even entertain clients or those visiting from overseas. In addition to the medieval-themed dining space, there are two private dining rooms as well as a walk-in retail cellar featuring over 150 exceptional wine and whisky labels.

These include the Macallan 30 YO Sherry Oak and Dalmore King Alexander which has been matured in six different types of casks.

The kitchen is helmed by Chef Zoel Chung, and he and his team have created a stellar selection of starters, mains and desserts such as the Signature Gambas al Ajilo, the Hamachi Ceviche, Poulet Farci à la Perfection (Slow Cooked Stuffed Chicken Breast); 36 Hours Lamb Shoulder and Chocolate Mille-Feuille.

However, if you just want to go and sample some wines or whiskies, there are a number of wine promotions during the week including the Wine Buffet Mondays - two-hour free-flow of select sparkling, white and red wines at \$38 per person; Wine Wednesdays: select any two bottles from a special wine list for \$88; or the Daily Tasting of Single-Malt Whiskies (25 varieties) starting from \$3/dram. Available from Monday to Friday from 3pm onwards, and Saturday & Sunday from 12:00pm onwards.



907 E Coast Rd
#01-03 Springvale
Singapore 459107
Tel: +65 9643 3188

SINGAPOREAN CLASSICS MAKING WAVES IN LITTLE INDIA

In this issue, Justine Moss highlights a Chinese seafood restaurant serving Singaporean classics, a refreshed community café in the heart of Little India and a new Mexican taqueria making waves at Esplanade. Bon Appetit!



◀ Diamond Kitchen

This Singaporean seafood restaurant has been around since 2012 and is located both in the Marine Parade and Buona Vista areas. I recently had the chance to try its menu and was totally overwhelmed by their amazing dishes which are packed full of flavour.

On the menu is a selection of some of the freshest seafood delivered daily as well as hearty and comforting wok-fried classics.

Their crab dishes include chilli, black pepper, and salted egg as well as the Diamond Gan Xiang Crab with its traditional Malaysian curry-based gan xiang sauce. Two other favourites were the Salted Egg Sotong - tender squid coated in a light, crunchy batter and the Champagne Pork Ribs consisting of baby back ribs in a caramelised champagne-based marinade.

Grab family, friends or colleagues and share a few of these superb dishes.

Marine Parade
5000F Marine Parade Road, Laguna
Park Condominium, #01-22/23,
Singapore 449289
T: +65 6448 0629

Buona Vista
87 Science Park Drive #01-01 Oasis
(Previously known as Science Hub),
Singapore 118260
T: +65 6464 0410



onions, pork, and beef, topped with a fried egg and served with potato waffles; Danish Chicken Tartelette and the Laksa Prawn Pasta: a fusion dish that marries local spices with Scandinavian-inspired culinary flair.

Says Rubina Tiyu, Founder of TA Community. "As we reopen our doors, our goal is to create a space that feels like home – a place where community thrives and cultures beautifully intersect."

594, Serangoon Road
Singapore 218208
tacommunity.sg

▲TA Community Café

Located in Little India, TA Community Café, which prides itself as a hub for connection and inspiration, recently reopened with a refreshed menu as well as a collaboration with The Fabulous Baker Boy. The result is a diverse menu blending Scandinavian flavours with

creative twists in addition to a daily selection of cakes. And the Café has also expanded its retail offerings to include a curated selection of unique spirits and homewares.

On the menu, some highlights include the Pyttipanna: Swedish hash with potatoes,



▲Tomatillo Mexican Food & Bar

The fabulous 'Christmas at Home' bundles Chefs Daniel and Tamara Chavez recently added to their portfolio of Spanish and Peruvian restaurants with the opening of Tomatillo.

Serving a selection of tacos, nachos, tapas, beers, cocktails and mocktails, the space consists of an outdoor terrace, alfresco dining area, indoor hall and an intimate ceviche bar.

Highlights include the Super Veggie Taco made with grilled asparagus, baby corn and a mushroom mayo with Pico de Gallo; the Taco de Jaiba featuring crispy soft-shell crab with cabbage, tomato onion salsa, habanero mayo and mango; Chilli Con Carne, Chilangos, Salsa Roja and Guacamole Nachos and the Mariachi Wings, Calamares Chipotle, Tostadas de Pulpo tapas. It's well worth a visit to get your Mexican fix.

8 Raffles Avenue
#01-11 Esplanade Mall
Singapore 039802
www.tomatillo.sg

Flying in the Face of the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Ken Hickson weighs up newsworthy pieces of eight impacting aviation and air travellers.

Maybe we should change the title of this column to Up in Smoke, as we've seen massive out of control fires in Australia and California early in 2025, destroying thousands of hectares of valuable forest, engulfing properties of all shapes and sizes and killing a lot of people in the process.

This despite having dozens of firefighters Up in the Air in specially equipped aircraft, pouring hundreds of gallons of water trying to contain the spread of flames and smoke.

Spanish Coins

Let's chronicle "Pieces of eight" – Spanish coins cut to become the first globally adopted currency and associated with the fictional pirate Long John Silver – but we'll "pirate" the term to match up with eight newsworthy items on our flight path:

First is the fire-dousing, water-bombing role of aircraft. Historically this involved World War II and Korean War-era bombers in the aerial firefighting fleet in America and elsewhere in the 1950s, but since then newer and purpose-built tankers – fixed wing and helicopters – have come into play. In Australia, the National Aerial Firefighting Fleet comprises 150 contracted aircraft ranging from Large Air Tankers to helicopters and light fixed-wing planes.

Second is the horrifying crash involving a JeJu airline Boeing 737-800 at South Korea's Muan International Airport at the end of 2024, killing 179 people, after the pilot issued a mayday distress call. There are many questions about the disaster that have perplexed aviation experts, including Geoffrey Thomas, the editor of aviation website 42,000 Feet, who pointed to "a series of cascading errors and problems". Making it even more difficult for the air accident investigators is that the two recovered black boxes failed to record the aircraft's final four minutes.

Third is news of Australia's light aircraft safety record tumbling in 2024 when 27 people died in 20 light aircraft crashes across the country. The new year didn't start well with three fatal light aircraft disasters in the first ten days.

Fourth ranking goes to the recent announcement of another search in the depths of the southern Indian Ocean for the so-far unfathomable disappearance of Malaysian Airlines MH370, which happened in March 2014, scheduled to fly from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, China. Ocean Infinity's latest search over 15,000sqk off the coast of Western Australia will resume under a \$70 million 'no find, no fee' agreement with the Malaysian government.

Fifth is about aerial searches at sea of a different sort. Over the past decade, more than 2,000 foreign fishing boats have been caught operating illegally in waters off Australia's northern coastline stretching from Western Australia's Kimberley region to Queensland's far north. Covering more than 33,000sqk, the protected coastline is patrolled by aircraft from the Australia's Border and Defence Forces. The main no-go area is the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ), an 8-million-sqk area enveloping Australia between 3 and 200 nautical miles offshore.

Sixth sense is what's needed to prepare for strikes - threatened and actual – which affect air travellers in Australia and elsewhere in the world. IATA tells us that air traffic control-related delays in Europe doubled in 2024 compared to 2017. Many delays were due to strikes. At the start of 2025, Italy's air traffic controllers went on strike. Australia had more than its share of strikes in 2024, with Qantas engineers and Sydney airport plane refuelers featuring prominently. Even firefighters are known to walk off the job. A year ago, United Firefighters Union of Australia threatened strike action impacting 27 Australian airports,

claiming there was a shortage of aviation fire and rescue firefighters, which was putting air passengers at risk.

Seventh heaven is reserved for Australia's Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), which continues to show – after 96 years – what good can come from the skies. Commonly known as the Flying Doctor, it provides emergency and primary health care services for those living in rural, remote and regional areas of Australia who cannot access a hospital or general practice due to the vast distances of the Outback. Besides providing quality medical treatment on the ground, RFDS use dedicated aircraft to transport patients to an appropriate hospital for treatment. In 2023/24, 32,949 Australians were flown by its expert medical, nursing, and aviator teams.

Eight piece of good news concerns Australia's new charter for airline customers whose flights are delayed. Airlines will be required by law to give a full refund and assistance in booking a new flight under the aviation charter of rights being introduced by the government. Under the plan, if a flight is delayed by more than three hours for reasons within the airline's control, such as crewing or maintenance issues, customers can receive a full refund within 14 days. This doesn't go as far as some would like. In Europe, passengers whose flights arrive at their final destination delayed more than three hours are entitled to between €250 (A\$485) and €600 (A\$1,165), depending on the distance of the trip. Longer delays mean passengers can opt to be fully refunded within seven days.

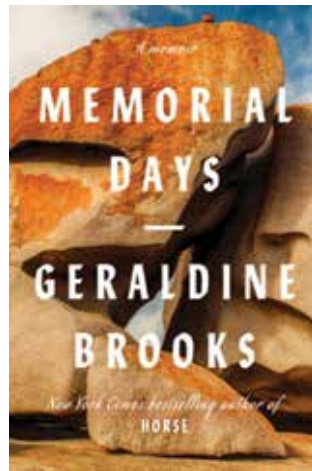


All's Well That Ends Well

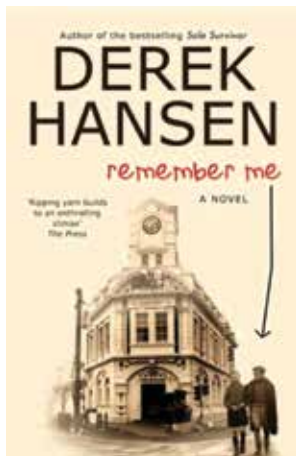
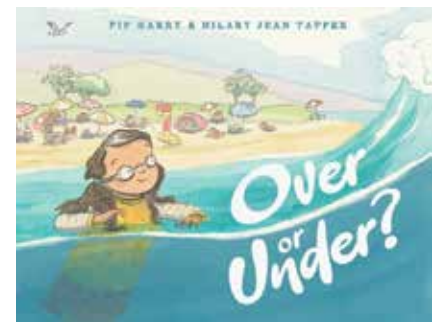
Not many of Shakespeare's plays ended so well, but I must admit what I prefer for my reading – books that have a happy, satisfying or satisfactory outcome. I think the four authors featured with their latest books, have met those criteria, writes **Ken Hickson**.

Geraldine Brooks is a former foreign correspondent, and prolific producer of historical fiction bestsellers. I have read most of them: *A Year of Wonders*, *People of the Book*, *Horse*, *The Secret Chord* and *March*, as well as a well-thumbed copy of her autobiographical work *Foreign Correspondence*. So, I really want to read her latest personal story. Described by Penguin as "a spare and profoundly moving memoir," **Memorial Days** is about a larger-than-life man, Geraldine's husband and fellow writer Tony Horwitz, as it "exquisitely captures the joy, agony and mystery of life." I'm looking forward to a review copy and the book's launch

in February. Meantime, more from the publisher: www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/722841/memorial-days-by-geraldine-brooks/

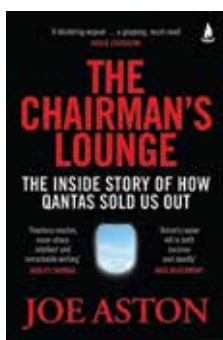


Pip Harry, once Editor of ANZA magazine in Singapore, is now based in Sydney and has produced a very timely and inspired work, **Over or Under?** An important work for all travellers and beachgoers young and old. Described as "a beautiful picture book," incorporating the work of award-winning illustrator Hilary Jean Tapper, it has swimming lessons subtly woven into the story. It came out in time for the Australian summer, when those unfamiliar with the ocean get into trouble in the water. Besides being an established Australian author with many books to her credit, Pip is a competitive ocean swimmer, who has taught her daughter a few tidal tricks. Get it from your local bookstore or go to the publisher: www.hachette.com.au/pip-harry-hilary-jean-tapper/over-or-under



Derek Hansen, best known for his 1993 novel *Lunch with the Generals*, was born in England, raised in New Zealand, a resident of Australia's Sunshine Coast for some time, is now in Sydney. Having been enthralled by his four "Lunch" books – one became a highly rated movie entitled *Tea with Mussolini*, starring Judi Dench and Maggie Smith – I couldn't resist borrowing his 2007 book **Remember Me** on a recent homestay. Set in Auckland, it's about a twelve-year-old boy who writes an essay and inadvertently uncovers a wartime secret that unleashes a chain of events, tearing apart a close

community. And it does have a satisfactory ending! If you can't find it at your local library or bookstore, go to: www.qbd.com.au/remember-me/derek-hansen/



Joe Aston's first book, **The Chairman's Lounge**, is described as "an explosive work of narrative non-fiction." After twelve years at the Australian Financial Review, where he transformed its Rear Window column into a celebrated, feared and must-read property, Aston embarked on a year-long campaign of investigative commentary on Qantas. He spells out what brought on the early retirement of chief executive Alan Joyce in November 2023, egged on by angry customers,

customer service at the airline and the decision to illegally sack 1700 people. I bought it as a Christmas present for myself from Kmart, but I'm sure you'll find it at bookstores all over Australia. Otherwise go to publisher: www.simonandschuster.com.au/p/Joe-Aston-The-Chairmans-Lounge/19509

regulators and frustrated investors. The book also raises questions about the way Qantas wields power in Canberra, the breakdown in

I Could Live Here

Ken Hickson, who recently relocated to Australia from Singapore, combines looking for a new home with exploring the environs.



Sometimes we need to put on a different hat when we travel. Are we tourists or intended new residents to the place we are exploring with intensity? Or are we just following a dream?

Residential Dreams

Many long years ago, when on a school trip from my New Zealand hometown to Christchurch in the South Island, we visited the seaside suburb of Sumner. I think I was close to 12 years old and distinctly recall saying to one of my school mates: "I could live here!"

Twenty-plus years later, when transferred to Christchurch by my television news boss, my "residential dream" came true. I rented a large house on The Esplanade, Sumner Beach, with a clear view of the sandy spot I stood on all those years earlier.

It didn't end there, as it was at the same seaside location where I met M, who became my wife. Our wedding was in our Sumner home – a former Catholic convent – and we lived there until moving to Singapore in 1983.

History Repeats

Why am I telling you all this? Because in recent months we've been going through a similar experience of exploring places with family and friends, old and new and settling into a new place, which we can now call home.

We landed in Brisbane but quickly joined family in northern New South Wales, best known for its very popular Byron Bay. The Northern Rivers region is blessed with dozens of small market towns, white sandy beaches, connected waterways and very green fields – lots of countryside – productively used to grow many useful products, including sugar cane.

From Tourist to Resident

Brunswick Heads was our first port of call and while we've been there before, this time we found more places to check out, including a very friendly Services Australia/Centrelink office, which is essential if you are planning to go from 'tourist' to 'resident.'

While we didn't make the time to visit them all, we were told that the small community of Brunswick Heads has 'a quality mix of cafes, restaurants, specialty shops, accommodation and a variety of activities to cater for families, couples and the most discerning visitors.'

Fortunately, we could come and go as we had private transportation on tap from our Ocean Shores home-stay hosts – David and Jerusha – who have done this sort of thing for us on previous visits, but this time they were able to take us through the 'residential process' for longer term stays.



Visiting Attractive Towns

Over two weeks we were able to visit attractive towns in the region. We were particularly taken by Mullumbimby – nicknamed ‘Mullum’. Impressed with its historic buildings, we also enjoyed many views of a very prominent peak, which turned out to be Mount Chincogan.

Occasionally we strayed into neighbouring Queensland while on our Northern Rivers sojourn. Here are some of the places we enjoyed:

South Golden Beach – a pleasant walk from our Ocean Shores location – has one of the longest white sandy beaches on the east coast of Australia. Popular for sunbathing, swimming, surfing, jogging and collecting driftwood.

Robina – an important railway junction and shopping centre over the border on the Gold Coast – was the place to get our Go travel card, enabling rail and bus trips costing all of 50 cents a time! A large discount pharmacy was visited too.

Burleigh Heads – known as an upmarket residential community by the sea – has the largest secondhand goods warehouse we’ve ever seen. Run by the very charitable Endeavour Foundation, it’s positioned alongside a rubbish dump, so enables those with furniture and effects in good condition to leave them there. We were able to pick up a few particularly useful household items for a song!

Logan – equi-distance from the NSW border of Tweed and Brisbane – has some big warehouse-like shops, including Ikea, where we selected some suitable furniture, to be delivered in kitset form to be kindly assembled by willing and capable family members.

Eureka Village, Wynnum – we returned to visit this pleasantly green and friendly Brisbane suburban village to see if they had a suitable spot for a long-term stay. As we had previously visited this residential community for seniors in February 2024, we were delighted to find they had room for us – in the form of a self-contained ground floor apartment with a balcony. The rest of the journey had the added purpose of equipping ourselves with what new homebodies needed.

Manly – less well known than its Sydney Harbour namesake, it does have one of the biggest boat harbours we’ve seen anywhere. After two short visits there as about-to-be-

residents, we found the Manly Harbour Boat Club, which was selected as ideal for a pre-Christmas family lunch. Not only that, but we were also easily persuaded to become social club members. No boat involved, but we’ll be back for F&B and the view, beyond the boat harbour to Moreton Bay and North Stradbroke Island. Close by is the added attraction of the Groundhog Social Cafe on the Esplanade.

Wynnum Plaza – whether for tourists or new residents, this is one of the choicest and closest shopping centres around. It’s where we made beneficial use of KMart, ChemPro (pharmacy), Coles, Woolworths, yes, even Optus, PC Choice (computer shop), and Specsavers, for a new pair of sunglasses with reading lens, plus a free eye test. It also has an ideal local café/restaurant – Taste Aroma – which has become an ideal meeting place for friends and neighbours.

Mayfair Village – another nearby shopping centre has the added attraction of an excellent restaurant where we went with new neighbour Stewart. May’s Thai has a wide selection of food and flavours from Thailand. And very good value for money. Good to know we can access genuine Asian fare close to home.

Wynnum Central – has a wonderful Library where we encountered friendly and efficient staff, along with a great selection of magazines and books. This well-established township in what’s called Brisbane’s Bayside has a ‘hidden gem’ in the form of the Little Gnome Bookshop. Besides book browsing (and buying) you can also sit comfortably inside or out to enjoy coffee and snacks. Around the corner, we discovered a delightful Vietnamese café offering delicious rice paper prawn rolls and other Southeast Asian delicacies. The town also has more Op-Shops – second-hand charity outlets – than any place we’ve been to in Australia or New Zealand. A full range of medical/health services are available.

Brisbane Central – getting to and from the centre of Queensland’s capital city is no real problem using public transport. Buses leave from our village gate hourly to take us to Wynnum Plaza where we can get a 227 bus all the way into the city. Alternatively, we have a choice of four railway stations in the Bayside area. For our first Central visit to meet up with Singaporean Tey – visiting the city for a conference – we arrived by train and



tested a very pleasant café called Sage on Ann, conveniently located close to the station. For our second city trip – by bus all the way – we had meetings with two old business friends. With Grant we enjoyed coffee in the very pleasant surroundings of 300 Queen Street, while with David we had a light lunch – and a long chat – at Jimmy’s in the Queen Street Mall.

Kangaroo Point – it’s there before you cross the Storey Bridge to get to Brisbane Central and was easily accessible by bus (227), so we could meet up with Jason Ross (Wood Central) in his home/office territory. The most convenient meeting place for us was Hotel Pineapple, which advertises itself as ‘serving up the good times since 1864’. We certainly appreciated the historic timber building, inside and out, as we discussed all the important issues and opportunities involved in writing and publishing stories about wood and the built environment. The food and service were very up to date. We’ll be back for more.

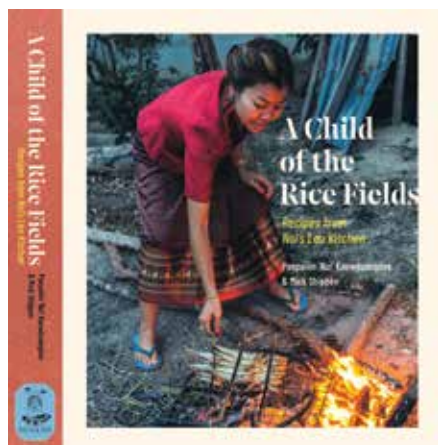
Travel Responsibly

In keeping with The Art of Travel philosophy – remember to Travel Responsibly for the Environment Art and your Dreams (TREADability) – we reminded ourselves every step of the way that the primary purpose of all this traipsing around was to find and settle into a place we could call home.

We made sure we enjoyed the journey – which we got to call ‘our mission’ – that included plenty of F&B stops and buying a lot of readily available fruit and vegetables. We’ve mentioned already many pleasant establishments – hotels, cafes, and restaurants – we unearthed on our way, fairly sure that many we will return to.

But we did reach our destination. Our Eureka. Eureka Village, Wynnum. Our new home.

I’m sure many readers come across places they discover when travelling which prompts them to say, “I could live here.”



If you are into regional ethnic foods or Lao food in particular than you are sure to become a devotee of recipes from Noi's Lao Kitchen.

When Noi opened her restaurant, Doi Ka Noi, almost a decade ago, she quickly gained a reputation as one of the country's most talented and knowledgeable cooks with a passion for showcasing Laos' incredible diversity of dishes and ingredients. Her small, weekly changing menus highlighted seasonal and regional ingredients, many foraged, such as different varieties of bamboo, vegetable ferns tops, wild ginger flowers, mushrooms, "Lao caviar" or weaver ant eggs, and much more.

Exotic Flavours of Laos

The recently published book, *A Child of the Rice Fields: Recipes from Noi's Lao Kitchen*, makes a significant contribution

Laos' Child of the Rice Fields

to safeguarding the landlocked nation's culinary heritage. It stands as the most important and comprehensive book on Lao cuisine – a treasure trove of flavours that remain little known, even within Southeast Asia. Shortlisted in two categories in the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards Vientiane, Laos, 25 November 2024 Noi is delighted to announce the publication of her first book, *A Child of the Rice Fields: Recipes from Noi's Lao Kitchen*. It stands as the most important and comprehensive book on Lao cuisine – a treasure trove of flavours that remain little known, even within Southeast Asia.

The book has been shortlisted in two categories, 'Asian' and 'Food Heroes' in the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards which will be held in Lisbon, Portugal in June 2025. This will put Lao cuisine in the spotlight on the global stage!

Captivating Photos

Beautifully designed, visually stunning and self-published, the 480-page book includes an overview of the country and culture, extensive ingredients and techniques sections, and more than 120 of Noi's recipes. The text and recipes are supported by more than 400 vibrant photographs of every recipe, as well as stunning images of ingredients, people and places in Laos.

With chapters including Khao Sao – Breakfast, Kin Lin – Appetizers & Light Bites, Jaew – Dips, Sauces & Pastes, Tam – Pounded, Ping – Grilled, Goy, Laab, Yam – Salads, Mok – Wrapped & Steamed, Oua – Stuffed, Som – Soured, the book's recipes are detailed, enticing, and authentic. Many of them regularly appear on the weekly changing menu at Doi Ka Noi.

Authentic Dishes

Lovers of exotic flavours can learn to make classic Lao dishes such as ping gai tam mak hung, barbecued chicken with spicy papaya salad and mok pa nahm kong, as well as lesser-known dishes such as oua hua si kai, lemongrass stuffed with pork, glass noodles and herbs, and gaeng mak mee sai gadook sin

moo and young jackfruit soup with pork ribs.

Born in an off-grid subsistence farming community in Khammouane Province, central Laos, as a child Noi was taught to cook by her grandmother. Until now, her recipes had never been written down. As such, this book is not only a tribute to her late grandmother, it also makes a significant contribution to safeguarding culinary heritage in a country where traditional recipes and ways of eating are being threatened by changing lifestyles, a loss of knowledge and outside influences. "My grandmother's gift to me," Noi says, "was a deep understanding of my food culture, and the belief that the tastiest Lao food is home-cooked, unhurried and shared with family and friends. The dishes I prepare every day of my life are a tangible memory and a celebration of my love for her. By sharing my recipes in this book, I hope to raise awareness of my country's wonderful cuisine."

Many Shared Meals

A Child of the Rice Fields: Recipes from Noi's Lao Kitchen is a collaboration between Noi and her English husband, writer-photographer, Mick Shippen, who has lived in Southeast Asia for 25 years.

Mick says, "This book is the result of many shared meals and conversations, and countless hours working together in the kitchen to faithfully document Noi's inherited recipes. The astonishing thing is that we have only touched the surface of her incredible knowledge."

Mick's previous books include *The Traditional Ceramics of Southeast Asia*, published by the University of Hawaii Press, which is considered an authority on the subject.

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Silk Road Express Launches Exclusive Train Cruise across China



Train enthusiasts can now enjoy luxury trips throughout China on Silk Roads 'Train Cruises'.

(Shanghai) The meticulously crafted "Silk Road Express" by the railway cultural tourism expert "Train of Glamour" was launched December 18, 2024 embarking on journeys through China. This luxurious international tourist train has begun a four-month "Train Cruise of China," starting in Xining. The journey includes stops at celebrated locations such as Xi'an, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Huangshan, Wuyishan, Kunming, Chongzuo, Xingyi, Chengdu, and more, offering train enthusiasts an unparalleled opportunity to explore the wonders of China.

Many Distinct Experiences

The Train Cruise of China offers two distinct experiences: a 2-day, 1-night micro-vacation and a 4-day, 3-night short-haul series. Aligned with the slogan "The Train Is The Destination", the micro-vacation caters to travelers seeking the convenience of remaining onboard throughout their journey.

Guests board in the afternoon, enjoy a sumptuous dinner, and retire to their private cabins, disembarking after breakfast the following day. During their stay, travelers can indulge in special onboard activities including afternoon tea, cabaret shows, cocktail parties, jewelry sessions, art lectures, gourmet tastings

and spa sessions. Further enhancing the experience are amenities such as karaoke and mahjong rooms, with a dedicated team of train butlers providing round-the-clock service.

Glamours Micro Vacations

Train of Glamour describes the micro-vacation series as a versatile choice for those looking for an innovative staycation, a romantic getaway, or a festive celebration.

The 4-day, 3-night short-haul features a more engaging itinerary, offering a variety of activities beyond the train. Among them, the Tour of Double Cultural Heritages in East China, navigating from Shanghai to Wuyishan and Huangshan, and back, and the Tour of Scenic Spots in Guizhou and Guangxi, which connects Shenzhen or Guangzhou to Chongzuo, Xingyi and Kunming. These tours uphold the high standards of the Train of Glamour, with vacation ambassadors providing attentive, family-style service throughout.

More Options to Come

The Silk Road Express initially rolled out on July 6, 2024, featuring a 15-car configuration with 38 deluxe cabins, each equipped with private bathrooms. Its inaugural route, the Qinghai-Gansu line, offered a 5-day, 4-night round trip from Xining to Dunhuang. As of October 10, 2024, the train began offering the Traveling Around Southern Xinjiang, with options for a 6-day, 5-night journey or an extended 9-day, 8-night adventure.

This launch signifies a progressive step by Train of Glamour to diversify and enhance their offerings, enabling more train travel enthusiasts to delve into China's vast landscapes and experience the boundless charm of domestic railway cultural tourism within a short timeframe.

Looking ahead, Train of Glamour plans to continue its tradition of innovation by introducing more high-quality, unique, and popular tourist train offerings.

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Tour Sultan Ibrahim Stadium

A tour of Johor's Sultan Ibrahim Stadium will take you into most areas of the award-winning stadium where fans are seldom allowed to go.



Tours of some of the great football stadiums in Europe and around the world are possible, but you don't have to go far from Singapore to visit one of the most beautiful stadiums in this region. Not far from the Second Link is Sultan Ibrahim Stadium owned by the Crown Prince of Johor, Tunku Ismail Idris and named for his father Sultan Ibrahim ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, the current ruler of Johor and the King of Malaysia.

A Passion for Football

The Crown Prince is a passionate football fan and has been instrumental in the club's success and development. The Crown Prince wants the team to be world class. He attends every game and gives the team a pep talk. There is a camera that allows him to observe what is happening in the home team's offices and dressing room.

The stadium is in Iskandar Puteri, Johor, Malaysia and is the home ground for Johor Darul Ta'zim FC, the 'Southern Tigers' the most successful team in the Malaysia Super League. It has won the Super League championship ten years running, something none of the other 13 teams in the league have accomplished. In the current season they have won 17 out of 18 games, drew one, lost none and have scored 64 goals with just 7 against.

Award Winning

The Stadium won the "Stadium of the Year 2020" award that is determined by a public vote and recognises the best football stadium completed in the previous year. The stadium's unique design, inspired by banana leaves, and its state-of-the-art facilities, contributed to

this achievement. The stadium has a seating capacity of 40,000.

A Standard Tour is approximately RM60 (S\$21.00) for a one-hour guided tour. Tours are available on Fridays to Sundays, with slots at 11:30am, 2:00pm, and 4:00pm. A Hummer Tour is available for RM30 (S\$11.00). The Hummer limousine glides around the stadium one and a half times.

The Tour Begins

Michael, who has long worked at the stadium, was the guide for our large group. Starting outside the stadium he took us to the entrance for the Royal Family, the entrance for Royal guests and the entrance for VIPs.

Michael told us the stadium, funded by the Sultan, and only used for football, is estimated to have cost MYR200 million (S\$61.5 million) spans 140,000sqm with a total built area of 70,000sqm. There are 4,000 parking spaces and public transportation stops near by.

Tight Security

We entered through the doors the home team uses. Security is very tight, ensuring nothing is brought into the stadium. "They arrive three hours before game time and are welcomed by two air hostesses from Malaysian Airways. The away team has an entrance on the opposite of the stadium." The plaques and signs were all in the colour gold because, "Gold is the colour of champions."

We were lead through the halls to the Champions Lounge. On match day, 20 of the 35 players are told who will play that day. There are two dining rooms that can accommodate 50 people. Food is prepared by Double Tree

Hilton. The players have a light meal before the game and a heavier meal after. There is a prayer room adjacent to the dining rooms.

Warming Up

We went through a tunnel to the warmup room that is equipped with 11 bikes and various equipment for stretching. In the physio room there are three massage beds, a cold bath and a sauna that seats eight. We visited the locker room and the manager's office.

Down the tunnel we walked to where the players enter the stadium. The turf is Zeon Zoysia, which was first used in Brazil and is also used at Singapore's National Stadium. Michael was very protective of the turf, warning us to keep off it and not to step on the crest at the edge of the pitch.

Medical Care

We returned inside to visit the Medical Room, where both players and fans can be treated for serious medical emergencies.

Except for the camera and overhead projector, the visitors' rooms are identical. There are some differences that are designed to give the home team a psychological advantage. As the visiting team enters the stadium the first thing they see is the glass case holding the Super League trophy JDT has won so many times with the words on its pedestal: "Your Dream. Our Reality."

Tickets

You can purchase tickets at the ticketing counters at the stadium. Tickets to football matches can only be purchased on-line.



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Preserving Cultural Heritage

Irene Millar advocates that when you are planning a trip consider including a destination that embraces the positives of sustainable tourism.

What is it about travel that ignites our curiosity and longing to explore far off lands? Many years ago, for me, travel was a means of escape from work and dreary winter weather to relish freedom from life's daily grind while basking in the sun. Travel now is so much more than meeting the basic need of defrosting in warmth and sunshine. It is a gateway to discovery, learning and an appreciation of life and its many different perspectives.

More to Sustainable Tourism

As my own relationship with travel has evolved, so too has sustainable tourism. Emerging in the 1990's sustainable tourism was in many ways still in its infancy when I began working in this area 17 years ago. Hopefully today we have all progressed

beyond equating sustainable tourism with replacing plastic straws with a more environmentally friendly option. While this, and a myriad of other criteria hotels are required to achieve to attain sustainability certification, is certainly a vital aspect in enhancing overall tourism standards, it is not the heartbeat of what makes sustainable tourism exciting, inspiring and life changing.

At its core, sustainable tourism aims to minimise negative impacts to tourism destinations and accentuate the positive impacts. It's easy to identify negative impacts, many of which have featured in press and media in recent years. Stories of inhabitants being priced out of their local communities as a result of homes being converted into Airbnb's. Damage to the natural environment and wildlife by inappropriate tourists' behaviour. Overcrowding of popular





destinations by those seeking a photo in an Instagram setting. Negative impacts, by their nature, create a downward spiral ultimately resulting in either an unauthentic travel experience, or worse, the destruction of what was once a place of magic.

Tangible Benefits

On the positive side, sustainable tourism has the ability to create tangible benefits for local communities and environments, and at the same time, provide a unique and unforgettable travel experience.

Given the abundance of choice for travel destinations, how do you choose those championing sustainable tourism? Look out for three main indicators of positive sustainable tourism when making your selection.

Waste to Income

Stefan Phang, Global Director, Sustainability & Creating Shared Value at Solenis provides a great example of job creation, the first indicator, through his waste to income strategies. His programmes working with hotels to upcycle waste soap, linens, rigid plastic and coffee grinds have to date created jobs for some of societies most deprived communities supporting over 2000 families across 54 countries.

Reviving Lost Culture

Smiling Gecko Farmhouse Resort and Spa in Cambodia also creates a wide variety of employment opportunities for the local community. In addition, Hannes Schmid, Founder of Smiling Gecko, introduced me to an inspiring example of preservation of cultural



heritage, the second indicator. Immersing future generations in Cambodian culture lost during civil conflict. Smiling Gecko is restoring pride in Cambodian culture and heritage through education programmes encompassing the teaching of the Khmer language and history and infused with the music and food unique to Cambodia.

Keep the Forest Standing

Also in Cambodia, Cardamom Tented Camp, which has the slogan, 'Your Stay Keeps the Forest Standing' is a fantastic example of wildlife preservation and landscape restoration, the third indicator. Willem Niemeijer, CEO of YAANA Ventures shared with me that the Camp's primary purpose is to generate sufficient funds, through sustainable tourism, to cover the costs of a team of forest rangers who protect the forest surrounding the camp from loggers, poachers and wildlife traffickers. This small team of rangers is making an enormous impact to conservation in the forest with the endangered clouded leopard now recovering from illegal poaching.

Each of these examples, and there are

many more I have been privileged to share, highlight the positive impact being created by passionate individuals harnessing sustainable tourism to improve their local communities and environments.

Be Selective

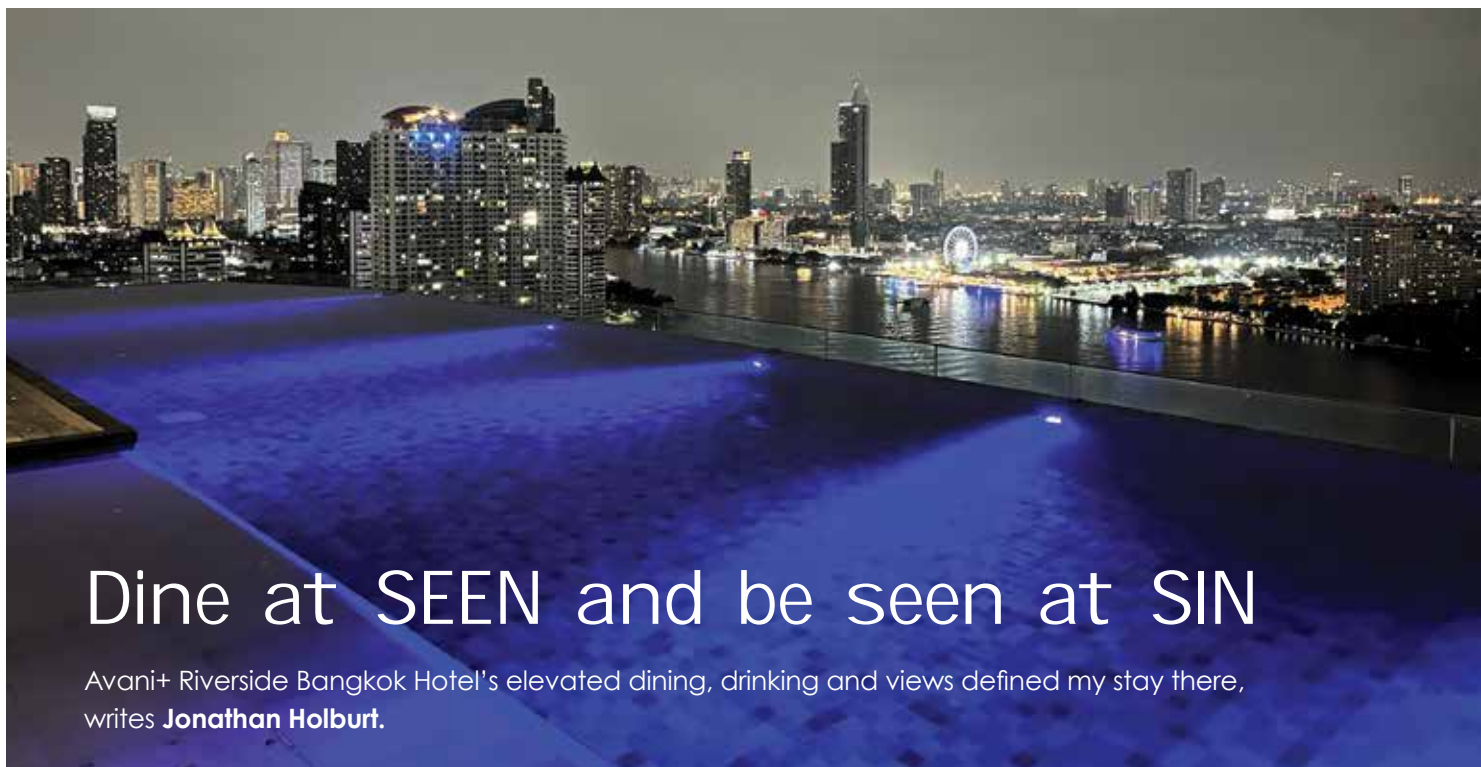
As you plan your travel for this year and beyond, consider including a destination embracing the positives of sustainable tourism. One where you are benefiting the communities and environment you visit, whilst gaining a unique experience and memories that will last a lifetime.

You can learn more about sustainable tourism and its criteria here: <https://www.gstcouncil.org/what-is-sustainable-tourism/>

Discover more about each of the examples of people and places harnessing sustainable tourism opportunities with positive impacts:

Solenis - <https://www.solenis.com/en/sustainability/social-responsibility/creating-shared-value-programs/>

Smiling Gecko Farmhouse Resort and Spa - <https://farmhouse-smilinggecko.com/>
Cardamom Tented Camp - <https://cardamomtentedcamp.com/>



Dine at SEEN and be seen at SIN

Avani+ Riverside Bangkok Hotel's elevated dining, drinking and views defined my stay there, writes **Jonathan Holburt**.



My dinner at SEEN started with the appropriately named cocktail, Shaman. More magical portion than a cocktail, it mixed Remy Martin 1738, Michter's US 1 Kentucky Straight Rye, Cinzano Rosso, Cacao, Cynar, Sandalwood and tobacco. I sipped it while drinking in the view of the Chao Praya River and Bangkok's jewel-like nighttime skyline.

Necklace of Lights Visible from SEEN

Bangkok is known for its street-level delights: from Chinatown food stalls to shops and shopping malls that invite you to step in from the sweltering heat of the sidewalks to the cooling comfort of air-conditioned retail therapy.

The Avani+ Riverside Bangkok Hotel, though, defines itself with its views of Bangkok's nighttime necklace of lights. My 26th-floor meal was an aerial tour of uplifting South American and Asian cuisine by star chef Oliver da Costa. The SEEN group of restaurants started in Sao Paulo, followed by outposts in Lisbon, Rome, and Nice, and now Bangkok and Koh Samui.

Japanese Mystery Box

My meal arrived on my palate with a delectable wagyu beef carpaccio with arugula, pesto

sauce, and pecorino. Bewitching mussels in a spicy bisque sauce, with scallions and a lemon wedge, followed. I took a well-needed breather before being served the Japanese Mystery Box with dry ice providing a veil of mist that gradually revealed its treasures, from salmon sashimi to tempura to Hamachi with fish eggs. The dishes were so layered and nuanced that I found myself pulled from the view of the river to the equally compelling view of the food I was eating. I finished with chocolate caviar: Belgian chocolate mousse, cherry compote and chocolate crunch with hazelnut ice cream.

To recover, I sauntered over to the infinity pool with the infinite view of the city. The pool's startling sapphire blue colour jumped from the water to my consciousness. Yes, that Shaman cocktail was well into my bloodstream by now.

Found Lost & Found

Too young a night to retreat to my room, I ambled over to the Lost & Found Club. Located on the third floor of the next-door Riverside Plaza, it's also part of the Avani +. Designed by Australian Ashley Sutton, who created Bangkok's atmospheric Iron Fairies in Sukhumvit and Maggie Choo's in Silom, Lost & Found looks like a decrepit spaceship from a high-concept sci-fi movie. Think of the spacecraft in Aliens.

High-energy drag performers ignited the club's vibe so when I left it was a retreat to my riverside suite with its panoramic, almost IMAX-like view of the Chao Praya River. Even the bathtub has a view and the hotel-provided bath bomb was a bomb along with the MALIN+GOETZ toiletries. A good soaking sent me off on a long, deep sleep.

Memorable Meals AM to PM

Breakfast at Avani+'s Skyline restaurant is a mixture of dishes that are good for you and those that aren't. To recover from the night before, I started with a healthy avocado toast with a revitalizing shot of orange, carrot, and ginger juice. But that soon gave way to Thai noodles. And who can resist coconut ice cream in the morning? I couldn't. And didn't.

For lunch, I dined at the Spice & Barley restaurant. Avani+'s Chinese restaurant was awarded best-designed restaurant in the brasserie category at the LIV Design Hospitality Awards. The Patrick Keane and Enter Projects Asia space uses swirling floor-to-ceiling rattan sculptures, a giant mural of an imperial concubine and a gold-tinted colour scheme to communicate a luxurious visual embrace. My chicken clay pot lived up to the high expectations of the setting.

After lunch, I had a pastry pick-up at The Pantry. The tarty lemon tart with coffee in the light, airy space was a chilled way to spend part of an afternoon and gather steam for what promised to be a long evening ahead.

On Bangkok's Thon Buri Side

The Avani+ Riverside Bangkok Hotel is located on the Thon Buri side of the Chao Praya River. Getting to the main part of Bangkok is easy: an hourly ferry runs from the next-door Anantara Riverside Hotel to the Saphan Taksin Skytrain

station, where all of the city is accessible. On the Thon Buri side is the ICONSIAM mall – massive with literally all you could ever want. There's also Wat Arun, the Royal Barges National Museum and the Thonburi Canals that give a glimpse into an all-but-vanished traditional Bangkok life.

SIN was sublime

In the evening, I strolled down a long, narrow corridor flanked by ribbons of red light to be greeted by a hostess who escorted me into the theatrically expansive 27th-floor rooftop bar and club, SIN. The effect of emerging from the narrow corridor into the outdoor area gave me a sense of "Wow." I found out later that was the design intention. As someone who loves Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture, it's a technique he frequently used in the homes he designed. I may have dined at SEEN the evening before, but now it was time to experience SIN.

With a table overlooking the river but not far from the bar, I was able to savor the view and experience the bar. For a kick-off, I had the Forbidden Nectar cocktail: Michter's Kentucky Straight Bourbon, miso, caramel yogurt, carrot, and creamy bourbon. The drink was so complicated I imagined that the mixologist needed a chemistry degree to make it. With a cocktail that sublime I didn't need rose-colored glasses to see the world in a more optimistic light.

SIN's Sinfully Good Dishes

My dinner soon followed. The starter piqued my tastebuds: scallop crudo with yuzu vinaigrette, yuzu gel, coriander oil and Kaluga caviar. Following was a more substantial open-faced sandwich –bluefin tuna, smoked tuna, fresh summer truffle mayonnaise, shaved truffle, and uni from Hokkaido on a crispy

brioche. Just one more dish to round out the meal: wagyu Miyazaki beef A5 grade, bulldog sauce, and a sprinkling of Kaluga caviar on a brioche. No exaggeration: the best food I've had in a bar ever. It's not only the view that is stellar at SIN.

SIN's atmosphere is somewhat otherworldly. Overlooking the elliptical-shaped bar and expansive terrace in an immense oval-shaped alcove with a giant golden "S," a headphone-wearing DJ in a sleeveless purple gown presided over the eclectic, pulsating music and stylish crowd like a Mount Olympus goddess.

Sip to Savor Cocktails at SIN

Which brought me to my evening's second cocktail. Given the bar's name, the Midnight Sin was that moment's go-to cocktail: Remy Martin 1738, Jameson Black Barrel, cacao nibs, cacao husk, coconut cold brew, PX. I like to sip to savor my cocktails, and this was a drink I hoped would never end.

Bangkok is hot and humid. But at that hour and that elevation I was cooling down fast. A few sips from a cocktail at SIN and Bangkok is transformed into a serendipitous and serene place. A cocktail bar doesn't get better than that. And neither does a hotel stay like the one I had at Avani+ Riverside Bangkok Hotel.

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Sea Change at Berjaya Langkawi Resort

David Bowden enjoys the sunsets, takes a walk in the jungle and luxuriates in the Berjaya Langkawi Resort.

There is something invigorating about a kaleidoscopic sunset, a brisk sea breeze, dining in the open over the water and beside a dense tropical rainforest. It had been a while since I'd experienced such an atmospheric setting that Pahn Thai Restaurant at the Berjaya Langkawi Resort offers.

Rainforest Escape

My three-day escapade began at Seletar Airport for the short private charter flight on Berjaya Air direct to Langkawi International Airport. The ATR72-500 aircraft arrived in the radiance that is Langkawi, and within 20 minutes, I was relaxing in the resort, admiring its coastal beauty.

I'd booked a three-day, two-night interlude 'Fly Me Away - Rainforest Escape' package,

with sun loungers, a sunken bathtub with sea views, and privacy curtains. The spacious room has natural detailing such as wooden floors and earthy tones, while the outside was also timber with a terracotta-tiled roof, making it blend into its rocky coastal location. I especially enjoyed the complimentary minibar with daily replenishments. Villas extend up the hill through the forest, and with a total area of 34ha, there was a sense that it was me and nature, despite numerous other guests in the 412-room property.

Rainforest Setting

Signs in my villa advised me to keep the doors closed because of the mischievous monkeys. At all times, at the resort, I was reminded that I was a guest in the surrounding ancient



which included accommodation, return flights, transfers, daily breakfasts, and discounts on food and beverages. It all sounded perfect for a weary urbanite seeking an escape from the city.

Water Villa Mini Bar

I opted for two glorious nights in a premium suite perched over the waters of the Andaman Sea with partial views towards the setting sun. It featured a generous open-sided verandah

rainforest that extended to the waterfront.

This was brought home when I joined a 7:00pm nature walk with Iqram, the resort's resident naturalist. As our small group gathered, the sun had already receded beyond the horizon, so I was sceptical about the wildlife we might see in the dim light of dusk.

However, within minutes, we were in the forest admiring a troop of docile Dusky Leaf Monkeys. I was immediately impressed with

our guide's breadth of knowledge and clarity of communication. His banter was engaging and informative, with just enough detail to maintain interest with the multilingual group.

Extraordinary Colugo

As the light dimmed, our guide's spotlight scanned the forest, and being his home turf, he knew all the hiding places for sightings, such as a bat colony sheltering beneath a palm frond and a Plantain Squirrel scampering up a rainforest emergent.

While concentrating on my footing in the semi-darkness, a shrill of excitement rose above the distant humming of cicadas as a Colugo glided into sight. Iqram was as excited as us, as sightings of this elusive nocturnal rainforest animal are rare. As I admired the cat-sized mammal, a female and her young joined the male adult. In our hour's walk, we chalked up another eight Colugos, which the guide claimed was extraordinary.

Indulgent Interludes

While the nature walk was a highlight, there were numerous indulgent moments that made my stay at the Berjaya Langkawi Resort so relaxing.

Guests can dine in one of several restaurants, with the over-the-water Pahn Thai my favourite. Complimentary breakfasts are served in two outlets, with Dayang Café having a more comprehensive breakfast buffet selection than the quieter, sea-facing Beach Brasserie. Oriental Pearl serves excellent Chinese food with an emphasis on vegetarian dishes. Being a duty-free island, beverages are priced pleasantly low compared to Singapore.

Concealed Taaras Spa

The most relaxing time at the resort was my hour-long massage at Taaras Spa, concealed amongst the rainforest beneath towering trees. It was suggested I arrive early to make the most of the spa's sauna and steam room, which are complimentary for spa users. Several therapies were on offer, but I opted for a deep tissue massage and was glad that I did as the masseur probed and prodded aching neck and shoulder muscles. Afterwards, I relaxed by the rainforest pool shaded by the forest canopy.

There simply wasn't enough time to participate in all that the resort had to offer,



including countless watersports, off-site excursions, tennis, and other land-based recreational activities.

Nearby Attractions

The resort extended over the remote westernmost part of Langkawi's main island but is close to attractions such as Langkawi Cable Car, Oriental Village, Telaga Tujuh waterfall, Telaga Harbour and Skytrek Adventures. However, I found so much to do at the resort that I didn't feel the need to venture outside. Berjaya Langkawi Resort delivered a most refreshing sea change and made a perfect venue for me to get close to nature.



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Berjaya Langkawi Resort

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David Bowden is the author of two books on Langkawi, *Enchanting Langkawi* and *Blue Skies Travel Guide Langkawi*.

David Bowden immersed himself in the charming French colonial ambiance of The Anam Mui Ne in southern Vietnam.

Some resorts have the capacity to surprise their guests every so often. Despite having checked The Anam Mui Ne website prior to my visit, I wasn't fully prepared for the experience and was immediately impressed when I arrived at this delightful beachfront property in southern Vietnam.

Indochina Indulgence

The Anam Resort Mui Ne (there is a sister property to the north in Cam Ranh) is situated along the Mui Ne (pronounced moo nay) beach strip just north of the fishing town of Phan Thiet. Phan Thiet is well-known as a major

source of the all-important nuoc mam, or fish sauce, which is used in almost every facet of Vietnamese cooking. Some two decades ago, Mui Ne was recognised for its tourism potential, and now the resort precinct fronts a 10km stretch of beachfront. The Anam only opened in 2023, but in its short history, it has already received numerous accolades, including the Best Beach Resort in Asia and Best New Resort in Asia.

What impressed me on stepping into the lobby was that it looked like it had been there for many years, indeed, way back to the French colonial era. Black, white and powder blue

geometric tiles extend throughout the public areas and into the guestrooms, while local art ensures guests know they are holidaying in Vietnam. In other areas of the hotel, evocative black-and-white photographs reinforce this sense of place.

Restive Rooms

Grand premium rooms are the ones to choose, as they are well-equipped and furnished, with many facing the garden. The verandahs are spacious and encourage guests to relax here with a good book or a cool beverage. While views of the ocean were limited, the



The Anam, Heritage Ambiance in Magical Mui Ne

The Anam only opened in 2023, but in its short history, it has already received numerous accolades, including the **Best Beach Resort in Asia and Best New Resort in Asia.**

lush tropical gardens provided privacy and tempered the tropical heat. The room interiors have a warm ambiance with expanses of walnut-coloured timber.

I appreciated the Nespresso machine, the high-pitched wooden ceiling with a fan and the free-standing tub in the bathroom. The fast wi-fi and extensive selection of international channels on the smart television kept me in touch with the outside world.

Delicious Dining

Indochine Restaurant and Grill is the main restaurant and where breakfast is served (7:00am to 10:00am). The buffet breakfast is possibly one of Vietnam's finest, with an enticing selection of local delicacies, fresh local fruit, pastries, breads, cheeses and sliced jamón. At other times the offerings are mostly Western comfort dishes (steaks, pasta, salads, pizza and seafood) although there are some Vietnamese dishes. Promotional set lunches and dinners are offered to entice guests to stay in-house rather than visit one of many restaurants lining the main street in front of the hotel.

Lang Viet Restaurant and Bar is decorated like a traditional village house with colourfully tiled floors. Further architectural authenticity is provided by the timber-lined interior and the subtle lighting. Diners can also choose to dine on the covered verandah overlooking the beach. The menu includes Northern, Central, and Southern Vietnamese cuisines and includes inviting dishes such as jackfruit salad, Hokkaido scallops and grilled sun-dried calamari.

Saigon Bar was my favourite haunt. A few metres from the beach, it is pleasantly cooled by sea breezes and ceiling fans. A Vietnamese

craft beer, Rooster IPA, hit the right spot on more than one occasion. The lobby bar offered a similar range of drinks in a more formal setting.

Fanciful Facilities

Subtle lighting throughout the landscaped gardens and atmospheric candles are lit at dusk. The spa, of five treatment rooms, features Sothys of Paris organic products in some treatments.

While in the district, guests can visit local attractions such as Sealinks Golf Course (the resort offers packages), the ancient Po Sah Inu Cham Towers, Red Sand Dunes, Fair Stream and local fishing villages. Not surprisingly, watersports are popular here, with kite surfing just one of several sports that adventurous guests can attempt.

The resort offers services and facilities that will appeal to both families and couples, and being a boutique property, there is rarely a sense of overcrowding. Some ground-floor rooms offer plunge pools, with privacy created by strategic landscaping. Monsoon rains can affect the quality of any visit to this part of Vietnam, although even during that season (June to September) the rain shouldn't upset most holiday agendas.

Easy Access

An expressway from Ho Chi Minh City now means Mui Ne is just a three-hour drive away. Some guests choose to arrive via train via Binh Thuan Station on the main north-south line. This railway makes an excellent way to explore the country for travellers seeking a little adventure in their Vietnam holiday. Some trains continue down the branch line from Binh Thuan to the Phan Thiet terminus.



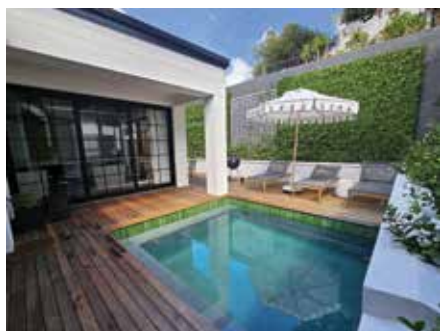
POCKET GUIDE

The Anam Mui Ne
18 Nguyen Dinh Chieu
Mui Ne
Binh Thuan
Vietnam
T: +84 252 628-4868
W: theanam.com

Kate Webster checks into the Cape Cadogan Private Residence and finds a new way of travelling.



Cape Town's Luxe Hideaway



Cape Town has long been a favourite of mine – a vibrant city on the southern tip of Africa where dramatic Table Mountain looms over streets brimming with creativity, culture and culinary delights. On my recent visit, though, I found myself experiencing the city from an entirely new perspective: the luxurious Cape Cadogan Private Residence. Tucked into the leafy Kloof Street Neighbourhood, beneath Table Mountain's watchful presence, this elegant escape proved to be the ultimate retreat for multigenerational travel.

A Private Oasis

Arriving at Cape Cadogan, I was struck by the residence's effortless blend of heritage charm and contemporary sophistication. The property is a vision of Cape Dutch architecture with a distinctly modern twist – think high ceilings, expansive windows, and tastefully curated interiors. The residence feels like a home, but not just any home: it's the kind you might find on the pages of a glossy design magazine.

Privacy is the residence's hallmark, and for a family or group travelling together, it's a gift. We had the entire space to ourselves – a sprawling sanctuary of en-suite bedrooms, cosy communal areas, and outdoor spaces made for lingering. It's an ideal setup for groups who want to spend time together without being on top of each other.

Mornings with a Personal Touch

As someone who values a slow start to the day while travelling, having a private chef on hand to prepare breakfast was a revelation. Each morning, I woke to the tantalising aroma of freshly brewed coffee and sizzling bacon wafting through the residence. The dining table was set beautifully – a small but significant detail that made us feel utterly spoiled.

Our butler, yes, the Residence comes with your own private butler, made sure every morning unfolds seamlessly. He arranged bespoke breakfasts for each member of our group, catering to dietary preferences and whims alike. Whether it was fluffy omelettes with local cheese or bowls of vibrant seasonal fruit, every dish was a culinary masterpiece.

Designed for Togetherness

The Cape Cadogan Residence is perfect for multigenerational travel. It offers ample

communal spaces to enjoy each other's company – from the sun-drenched lounge to the shaded courtyard – but also allows everyone to retreat to their own private quarters for quiet moments. For our group, which spanned three generations, this balance was key.

Evenings were spent lounging on the terrace with a glass of South African wine, recounting the day's adventures while the younger ones splashed in the pool. With Cape Town's iconic landmarks just minutes away – the buzz of Long Street, the verdant trails of Table Mountain and the Atlantic Ocean's sparkling shoreline – the location couldn't have been more convenient for day trips and explorations.

A Tailored Experience

What truly sets Cape Cadogan apart, though, is the personalised service. The team made it their mission to cater to our every need. They handled everything, from arranging transportation to recommending the best local eateries and booking experiences like a sunrise hike or a scenic drive through the Cape Winelands.

Having a private residence gave us the flexibility to design our own itinerary without the rigidity of hotel schedules. We dined in when we felt like staying in and ventured out when the city's vibrant energy beckoned.

The Verdict

Staying at the Cape Cadogan Private Residence is more than just an accommodation choice; it's a way of life – a luxurious, stress-free base that enhances the beauty and allure of Cape Town itself. For those considering a trip to South Africa, especially with a group or family, I can't recommend it highly enough.

Cape Cadogan offers the kind of exclusivity and comfort that turns a holiday into something truly unforgettable. From mornings with a personal chef to evenings spent under the African sky with loved ones, every moment feels like an indulgence – and isn't that exactly what a holiday should be?

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South African Airways

W: flysaa.com

MORE Family Collection Cape Cadogan Private Residence

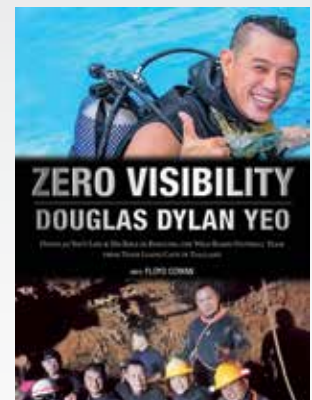
W: more.co.za/residences/cape-cadogan-residence



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Zamboanga—The Town that Time Forgot



Robert Stedman takes a look at the fascinating historic Philippine city but doesn't necessarily recommend you go for a visit.

Situated at the southwestern tip of the Philippine island of Mindanao, on the eastern shore of the Moro Gulf and the Celebes Sea, the port has been the scene of endless historic naval battles and skirmishes over the last four centuries. Time has not changed this waterfront. All sorts of vessels make up the harbour: Trading vessels from the Sulu Islands, contraband vessels, rusted freighters, passenger ferries from up north, cruise ships, private yachts, government launches and patrol boats, and colourful sailing craft from as far as Borneo.

The Battle Continues

In the afternoon, drinking a cold San Miguel in a street café, and looking out at ships at anchor is like watching an old-time movie. And here on shore you witness the people of Zamboanga. Christian Filipinos who bear Chinese-Malay features but answer to Spanish names. There are the Moros, the Muslims from the Sulu Islands—a proud race who continue to resist authority from the Manila government. They fought the Spaniards, they fought the

Americans, and they continue to do battle against the Philippine Military. Some of the most colourful of these tribesmen from the Sulu are the Badjaos, often called sea gypsies.

Zamboanga is exciting. At first appearance it's the old-world architecture, which is part Spanish and part American, and added to this is the Oriental touch that makes it so unique. The parks, central plaza and the fort are direct copies from Spain, although they came 400 years ago; the government buildings are American from the days when General "Black Jack" Pershing was governor, and the oriental influence reigns from the Muslim Moros who built the mosques and sail the colourful praus up and down the straits.

Fort Pilar

The Badjaos were the first people to call the place Zamboanga, or land of the fragrant flowers. In 1635, the Spanish moved in, kept the name, and fortified the town against possible attack by the Portuguese, British, Dutch and the Sulu pirates. They built a fort and named it Fort Real Fuerza de Nuestra Senora del Pilar de Zaragoza, which, thankfully, was shortened to just Fort Pilar. It was captured by the US cavalry in 1899 and held by the Japanese in 1942. The ruins still stand today.

The strongest American influence is seen in the massive, grey-stone City Hall located in the city centre. Its enormous gates were designed so that a company of mounted cavalry could ride through six abreast. The building was originally constructed to serve as Provisional Army headquarters and as quarters for staff officers. It was completed in 1907 whereupon General Pershing occupied the building as his residence until he was transferred back to the USA in 1912. A number of American military officers received their early training in the Philippines, from MacArthur to

Wainwright and Eisenhower. They all at one time or another made mention in their writings of the Provisional Headquarters building in Zamboanga.

Raucous Waterfront

Many of Zamboanga's attractions are its streets, crumbling walls, cafes and the raucous waterfront. The waterfront has no equal in Asia. Morning is the best time to visit, especially the market, where a dozen races come to sell their wares which includes everything from fish to fruit to flowers. Here, where the Sulu trading boats and freighters tie up, there is a large berthing area behind a wall called the "Barter Traders." Most of the goods behind the barbed wire fence are contraband, smuggled in from Hong Kong and Borneo. It's fun to walk through the area but there's not much to buy as a tourist.

She Sells Seashells

Zamboanga also has one of the biggest seashell markets in South East Asia. The blue and emerald-green seas of the Philippines abound in giant clams, black and finger coral, turtles and shellfish of varied hues and sizes. Fishermen as well as Sulu traders bring them to Zamboanga.

Many travellers are leery of visiting the southern Philippines because of the disturbances between the rebel Muslims and the central government. It's a condition that has existed for 400 years and it's one that's likely to continue. I can't recommend visiting the Sulu Islands to the south or venturing inland on Mindanao itself, but Zamboanga is relatively safe. Still, if you do want to visit, check with the tourist office in Manila first. The government doesn't want to lose any tourists and won't encourage anything that isn't safe.

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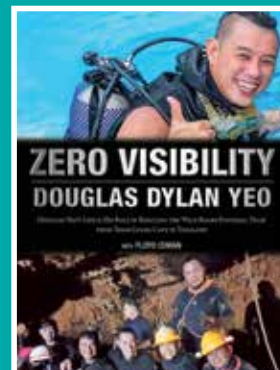
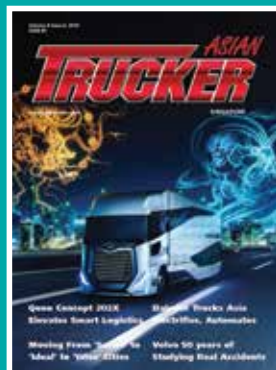
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W : SozoClinic.sg



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W : ChiLongevity.com

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W : OrchardScottsDental.com

Biological Age Optimisation at Chi Longevity

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Glowing TwentyFive Gorgeously with PIXI Beauty

Swedish brand PIXI beauty celebrates its Silver Jubilee with a 25th Anniversary collection and limited edition products.

Look gorgeous with Glowin' TwentyFive limited-edition silky radiance powders with a luminous treatment infused with Vitamin E and Coconut Oil to soften and nourish and Mica for its light-diffusing magic, hydrating, radiating and glowing your skin.

Gently sweep onto cheekbones, brow bones, or collarbones for a radiant, lit-from-within finish. Glow into the new year with - PeachGlow, RoseLove, SunKissed or SuperGold.

Limited edition products include Ultimate Beauty Kit 7th Edition, Hand Hero, Makeup Brush Collection, new



shades for Liquid Fairy Lights and Mattlast Liquid Lips.

Award winning popular bestselling products includes Glow Tonic, Rose Oil Blend, Hydrating Milky Mist, On-the-Glow Blush, BeautifEYE, DetoxifEYE, +Hydra Lip Treat, Lip Glow and Overnight Glow Serum.

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and Nicotinamide Mononucleotide (NMN), a cellular energy precursor and antioxidants, the formula promote energy metabolism, hydration, healthy skin and reduce sun damage.

Popular products from the multi-award winning health supplement brand includes Probiotic 75 Billion, Joint Collagen, Super Lutein, Vitamin-C 1000mg, Premium Skin Food Collagen and Premium Deer Placenta Fresh.

W : HolisticWay.Com.sg

Skin Renewal with The Ordinary

Growth factors occur naturally in the body to support the skin's repair process, slow down aging, help to regenerate the skin cell turnover of collagen, elastin and hyaluronic acid to achieve firming, lifting, and smoothing of the skin.

The high concentration formula of next generation growth factors - EGF, IGF, and TGF in The Ordinary GF 15% Solution helps to support the skin's renewal of natural elastin to reduce fine lines and wrinkles, regenerate the appearance of skin by supporting skin density and minimizing visible wrinkles while promoting skin firmness, elasticity and smooth skin texture.

This peptide solution can be used daily and recommended not to use in the same regimen as exfoliating acids or direct vitamin C products.

The Ordinary best sellers include Hyaluronic Acid 2% + B5 Hydrating Serum, Niacinamide 10% + Zinc 1% serum, Glycolic Acid 7% Exfoliating Toner, Natural Moisturizing Factors + HA and Multi-Peptide + Copper Peptides 1%.

Try the new bodyline - Natural Moisturizing Factors + Inulin Body Lotion, Salicylic Acid 0.5% Body Serum and Niacinamide 5% Face and Body Emulsion.
W: TheOrdinary.Com





Blossom with Aimer CHUANG

The new Aimer CHUANG Spring Opening Ceremony collection captures the essence of spring. The contemporary classic pieces are in blue, lilac, neutral, grey, black and white tones. The Round Neck Vest Bra can be worn on its own as athleisure wear or paired with the Silk Print Waist Vest or Skirt, Woven Lapel Shirt, Floral Lapel Jacket and Bonded Pencil Trousers for refined sophistication. Ideal

for travelling, the lingerie and clothing collection offer versatile looks for different occasions, optimising luggage space. The luxurious Aimer intimate and apparel brand includes Aimer Women, Aimer CHUANG, Aimer Men and Aimer Kids, featuring collections from Luxury Silk, Milk Fiber, Algea to Skin Friendly lines available at Takashimaya. W: Aimer.com

Ski Ready with Rab Equipment

The No. 1 outdoor brand in the UK founded by Scottish mountaineer Rab Carrington is the choice for ski holidays and adventure tours. The Diffuse GTX Jacket features three layers of GORE-TEX fabric for maximum weather protection, high waterproofing and windproofing, breathability design and suspended insulation for warmth. The helmet-compatible wired and stiffened peak hood helps protect your face from rain

and snow. Sleeve articulation and dual-sided mitt friendly rear hem adjustment allows for better fit and freedom of movement. Diffuse pants with durable kicker patches, reinforced crampons hem and knee articulation provides extra protection. The zip and snap closure give easy access to boot buckles. Available at Singapore Ski Snow Academy at Marina Square. W: Rab.equipment



American Tourister X AirAsia Funseekers Collection

Bold, practical and functional - the American Tourister X AirAsia Funseekers Collection is designed to withstand the rigors of travel and add playfulness with stylish accessories. The expandable Spinner with TSA008 lock gives easy access with book opening, laptop

compartment, increased packing space with Plentivol. Duosaf Security Zipper and Optimov™ Shock Absorbing Wheels for smooth travel. The compact Crossbody case has an antimicrobial interior lining for travel essentials, featuring a detachable aircraft seatbelt-inspired shoulder strap and custom

luggage tag charm Floatie for fun travel spirit. W: AmericanTourister.com.sg



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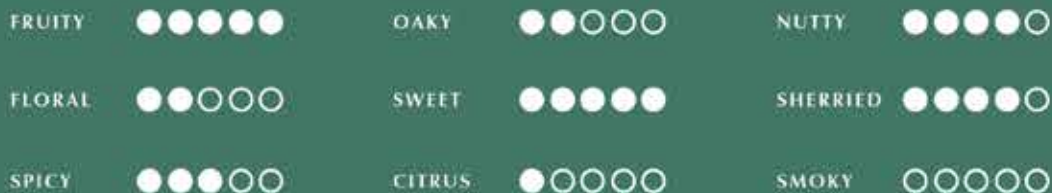


TASTE PROFILE

COLOUR: Polished Mahogany.

NOSE: Orange peel, rich chocolate and caramelised ginger, with bursts of honeysuckle, buttercream and brandied dark cherries.

TASTE: Butterscotch, grilled honeycomb and Brandy snaps, followed by blood orange, poached pears and cinnamon butter, with crystallised ginger and chocolate gâteau.

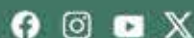


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YOUR DREAM HOLIDAY HOME IN THAILAND



Dreaming of having a holiday or retirement home in Thailand? This spacious 3-bedroom pool village is a dream come true at just

\$320,000 SGD



Located in southern Thailand, just north of the resort city of Hua Hin, it is close to beaches, golf courses, shopping and a great variety of food that ranges from markets to street food to five-star restaurants. There are many quality local and international restaurants.

At 165sqm the 3 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms can comfortably accommodate you and your guests. The outdoor area is 181sqm and there is parking for 2 vehicles. It is part of a project in Cha-Am, Phetchaburi and was completed in September 2017. You can buy this villa for a base price of \$320,000 SGD (\$1,940 SGD/sqm).

Eden Gardens Features

- Communal Pool
- Communal Gym
- Clubhouse
- 24H Security
- CCTV (Video Surveillance)
- Car Parking
- Communal Garden Area

Discover the satiated relaxation and enjoy quality moments Eden Village, a modern classic pool villa lifestyle in a quality community where you can enjoy mountain views and natural landscapes situated in the heart of Cha-Am. The project has been styled in a modern design, offering a wide range of facilities and premium furniture that provides the best experience to the residents. The house features a spacious living area consisting of a living room and a Western kitchen with an open-plan dining area and there is an outdoor kitchen as well. Partly furnished. Guesthouse with ensuite, ideal for your guests looking for complete privacy. It offers a living room set with coffee table. There is a large, beautiful garden around the saltwater pool.

Located a couple of minutes to golf courses it is very convenient for shopping. It is walking distance to 7/11, a supermarket and restaurants. Just a 5-minute drive to Makro and 400m to the beach it is perfect for holidays or retirement. There are several large shopping malls in nearby Hua Hin.

Eden Village is located at 1415 Chonprathan Sai Tai, Cha-Am, Cha-Am, Phetchaburi. It was developed by Loma Ma Company limited and consists of only 59 well-constructed units.

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