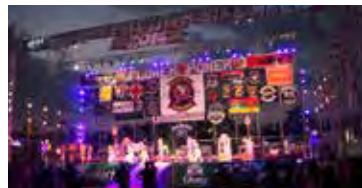


Thailand

A castaway on Koh Mak; the ladyboys of Bangkok; Samui's lush Lamai neighbourhood



COLOUR CRUSH
(clockwise) Bo Sang; Underwater weddings; Chiang Mai flower festival



THAI FIESTA
Pattaya Bike Festival (left and above left); Chiang Mai flower festival

BANGKOK

Festive season

Four not-to-be-missed festivals across Siam this January and February

PATTAYA

PATTAYA BIKE WEEK 13-14 February

One of the largest such gatherings in Asia, this annual celebration of all things two wheels draws thousands of bikers from throughout the world, with some flying in from the US and Europe, while others drive up from Singapore and Malaysia. Along with the hogs, the week includes music, stunt riding, and a huge closing party. facebook.com/burapabikeweek

CHIANG MAI

BO SANG UMBRELLA FESTIVAL 15-17 January

This festival celebrates the skills of the umbrella makers of Bo Sang, outside of Chiang Mai, who have been hand-making parasols, fans and lanterns for more than 200 years. Made out of silk, cotton and paper, they are painted with intricate floral designs, reflecting the nature that still surrounds this picturesque village. tourismthailand.org

KRABI

TRANG UNDERWATER WEDDING 14 February

Exactly what it sounds like – couples come from far and wide to tie the knot under the warm waves of the Andaman Sea. After planting a 'tree of love' in the Thung Khai Botanic Gardens, participants take part in a traditional Thai wedding ceremony, before donning scuba gear and heading underwater to say "I do", as best they can. tourismthailand.org

CHIANG MAI

CHIANG MAI FLOWER FESTIVAL 6-8 February

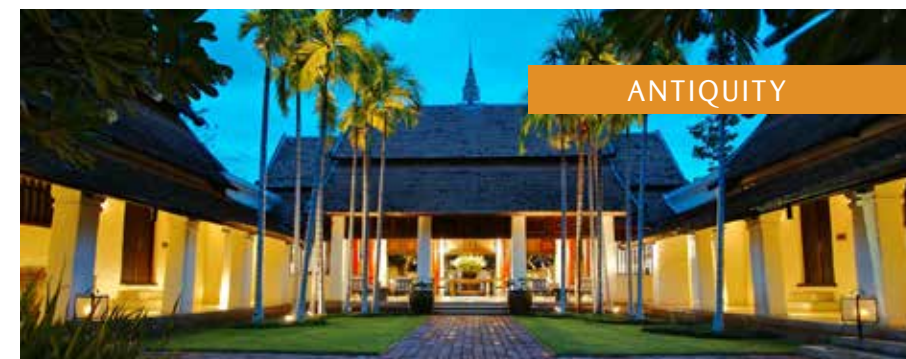
See Thailand's northern capital in bloom at this colourful annual event, which features a flower float parade and Miss Chiang Mai Flower Festival beauty contest. The best place to take it all in is the Suan Buak Haad park on the southwest corner of the old city, where flowers and miniature trees are judged. tourismthailand.org

TEXT: CLAIRE KNOX, THOMAS STURROCK, BEK VAN VLIET, SIMON OSTHEIMER, AMY ARMAN

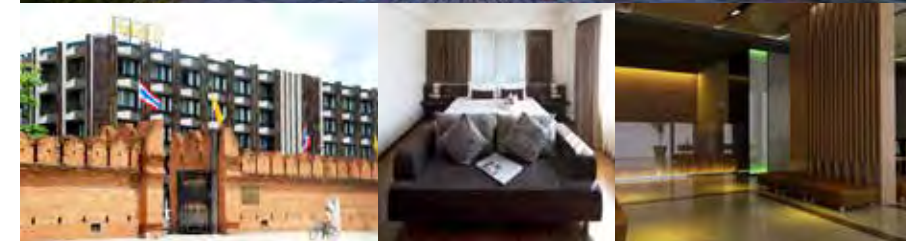
Downtown

CHIANG MAI

Inside this city's ancient, crumbling brick walls one can find some pretty lush – and centrally located – boutique hotels.



ANTIQUITY



Part of the charm of Chiang Mai is its 700-year-old old city: winding alleyways full of street-food vendors, shophouses, gilded wats and small art galleries. Many of Thailand's big cities were once surrounded by grand walls and moats, but Chiang Mai is one of just a few where such structures remain mostly intact. Tours of the old city usually start at the majestic east-side Thapae Gate, restored in the 1980s. This historic entrance to the city was said to give good luck to those that just lived behind its walls. A good reason, then, to stay at **Hotel M** (hotelmchiangmai.com). Tucked just behind Thapae, you'll find spacious and modern rooms, affable staff and a fabulous position close to the lively night market. Further west, just by the Suan Dok gate and the Wat Phra Sing temple, rests

the plush 25-room and suite **Rachamankha hotel** (rachamankha.com). Wander through Secret Garden-like courtyards (architect Ong-ard Satrabhandhu was inspired by the area's historic Chinese architecture and landscaping), past the pool to traditional Lanna dwellings. Rooms are full of gorgeous Chinese antiques and bright blooms, while the restaurant serves up excellent northern Thai and Burmese cuisine. Chiang Mai is home to some of Thailand's greatest artists and is adored by art aficionados the around the region. **De Naga** (denagahotel.com) hotel, also just by Thapae Gate, sports a lovely gallery with paintings, finely woven textiles, silverware and Thai crafts. The hotel is just as delightful: trees dripping in pretty lanterns and gardens full of twisting naga sculptures mean you don't forget you're in Thailand's verdant far north.

MARKET MAYHEM
Rachamankha's zen courtyards (top); Hotel M (below)



Get on the boat



Now in its 12th year, the Phuket International Boat Show has become one of the major events on the Asian marine calendar. We asked director Andy Dowden what makes the event, from 8-11 January so popular

Why was the festival founded?

In 2003 the then Singapore Boat Show was declining and Phuket was growing rapidly and was the obvious location in the region for a marine lifestyle show.

Why can people expect when they visit?

A spectacular in water display with yachts ranging from 8m to 35m, luxury lifestyle exhibits including

Rolls Royce and Aston Martin cars as well as marine equipment. A highlight will be the Custom Line Next 112 – the largest yachts in the show with all the major brands displaying yachts from 20m upwards

What makes Phuket such an attractive destination for yachties?

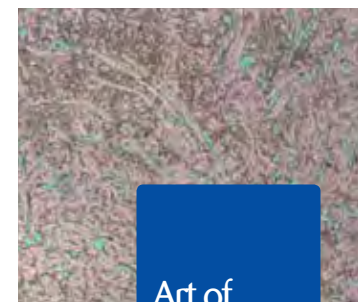
There are thousands of unspoiled tropical islands within cruising

distance from Phuket. Clear waters and coral abound. The island boasts four top class marinas and a wealth of experienced service companies at affordable prices.

What is your ideal sailing experience?

I spent seven years living and sailing on my own boat before deciding Phuket had the potential to become the hub it is today. I was able to

experience nearly every part of the world, taking my home with me. Anyone who has a holiday home on the island has the opportunity to enjoy a great lifestyle with a boat. We have three major regattas in Phuket each year, and these days most of my sailing is done racing, whilst zipping out to a secluded beach is best done with a power boat when time permits. phuketboatshow.com



BANGKOK

The latest exhibitions to hit the capital



ADLER SUBHASOK GALLERY

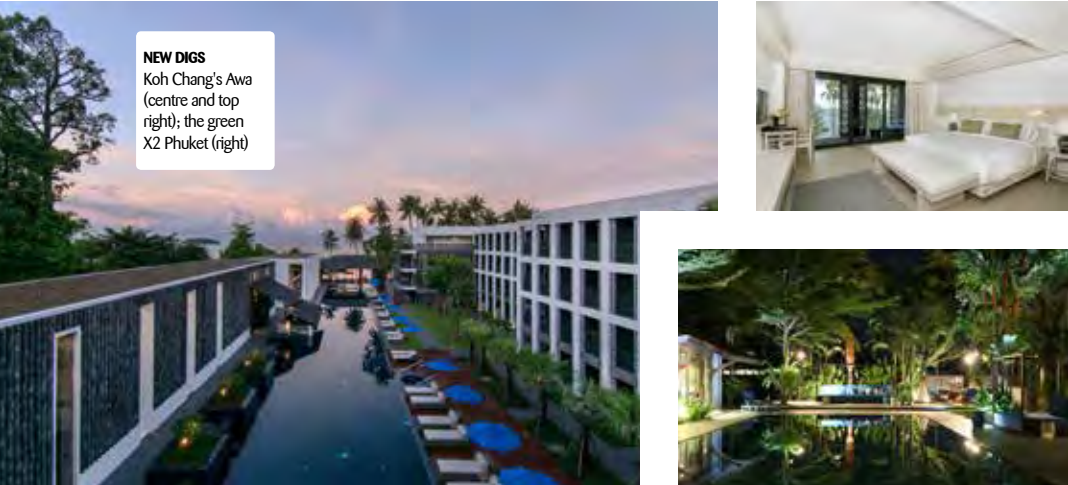
Opened last March, this rather striking two-floor contemporary gallery on Sukhumvit Soi 33 showcases some of the hottest Thai and international artists of the moment. That's thanks in part to its partnership with Parisian gallery Adler, which boasts connections to Helmut Newton and David LaChapelle. Until 8 February the work of Thailand-based Japanese artist Shimizu Soichiro is on show. His textured paintings, layered and full of dimension, explore duality: yin and yang, light and shadow, life and death. facebook.com/adlersubhashokgallery

GI CONTEMPORARY

Sathom art space H Gallery has just opened the doors to GI Contemporary on the ground floor of luxury Ratchaprasong shopping mall Gaysorn. Opening the space is "Pastorale", the latest work of acclaimed Chiang Mai artist Mit Jai Inn. It's a striking, metaphor-rich set of swirly, smudged abstract paintings that look at the relationship between country and city; traditional and modern. It's also site specific: Ratchaprasong is where "red-shirt" protestors created a blockade in 2010 in order to protest their disenfranchisement. Until 31 January. hgallerymbkk.com

TOOT YUNG

The latest offering from hip Ekkamai art space Toot Yung is a residency by Amsterdam-based street artist Daan Botlek. The artist was in Bangkok in 2013 for the successful Bukruk street art festival. After his December residency (there are plans to paint several walls in Chinatown and Sukhumvit) he'll have a solo exhibition of prints, drawings, paintings and other objects from 17 January to 14 February. Before this, a collection of Thai painter Tawan Wattuya's latest series of dreamy, compelling watercolors is on display, dubbed "Dek Oey Dek Dee". tootyunggallery.com



NEW DIGS
Koh Chang's Awa (centre and top right); the green X2 Phuket (right)



It's in the detail

These three new hotels have been lauded for their attention to design

BANGKOK

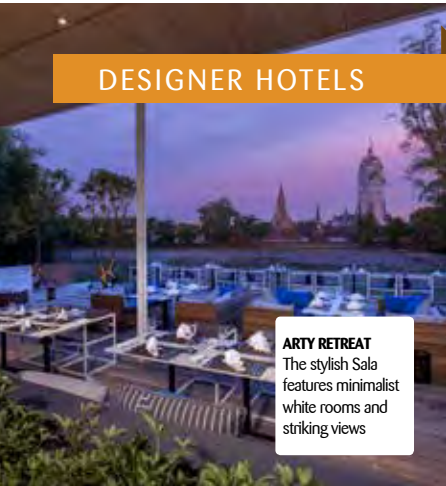
SALA AYUTTHAYA

With just 26 rooms, this luxurious boutique property sits on the bank of the Chao Phraya river in the heart of old Ayutthaya, a UNESCO World Heritage site north of Bangkok. Directly opposite is Wat Phutthaisawan, an ancient temple built in the 14th century by King Ramathibodi I, the founder of the city. For the best views of the temple, check into the duplex suite, with a private deck that opens up directly onto the water. [salaresorts.com](#)

PHUKET

X2 PHUKET OASIS VILLAS

Based on a traditional Thai family compound, this collection of seven villas located behind one



DESIGNER HOTELS

ARTY RETREAT
The stylish Sala features minimalist white rooms and striking views

of Phuket's longest beaches – Bang Tao – surrounds an emerald green pool, and a large house where groups can socialise in the living space, complete with games room. While you're welcome to rustle up dinner yourself, housekeeping and an onsite butler are at your beck and call, making it a perfect blend of privacy and luxury. [x2resorts.com](#)

KOH CHANG

AWA KOH CHANG

It wasn't so long ago that Koh Chang was considered a backpacker destination, with simple wood huts and full moon parties. Today, it's increasingly awash with luxury resorts muscling in on the former hippie haven. Located on Kai Bae Beach on the west coast, and with 119 rooms, the Awa is the largest hotel on the island, and it has a pool to match – a 1,200 square metre behemoth which staff refer to as the 'River'. [awakohchang.com](#)

What's on

BANGKOK

January heralds the arrival of the cooler climes in Thailand. Head outdoors to these two events

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

Over the last year, popular foodie bazaar Spring Epicurean Market has proven just how enthusiastically organic Bangkokians are. Held on the lawns of stylish, eco-conscious eatery SpringSummer, scores are heading here for lazy picnic brunches and to stock up on artisanal goods and “superfoods” sold by independent producers every last Sunday of the month. Find Flower Power's organic trail mixes, Mediterranean-style salads by Polpa (we like the quinoa with beetroot and mackerel salad), hearty Columbian empanadas from Carla's Cucina and Neighbor's Granola (created by Ian Kittichai's assistant Max Wittawat) **8am-1pm**; [facebook.com/springepicureanmarket](#)

BANGKOK SYMPHONY

Continue picnicking in style in Bangkok's vast, verdant Lumpini Park. Over four months (until 1 February), the Bangkok Symphony are holding free weekly concerts here as past of their Concert in the Park series. The orchestra have been playing here for two decades now: a fun mix of Thai and Western classics, pop songs, Broadway ballads with a few kitsch medleys thrown in. It's always held at the Sala Bhirom Bhakdi gazebo near Salasin Road. They kick off at 5:30pm every Sunday, but recent concerts have seen around 2000 people – mostly families – flock there, so get in early. Admission is free. [bangkoksymphony.org](#)





BANGKOK

Shoptalk: Rotsaniyum

This whimsical boutique in Phra Nakorn channels Narnia's icy White Witch and is a treasure trove of delicate lace, ruffled fairy-tale gowns and exquisite furniture

Designer Thita Kamonetsawat (known as Khun Gib) began selling trendy t-shirts in 2008 at Bangkok's hipster weekend market Chatuchak with designer husband Pongsak Kobrattanasuk. A year later, they had their own store and the brand soon became a favourite amongst the city's fashionistas. They've now got a boutique at Siam centre but it's the bewitching Samsen Road flagship that really impresses. The artsy couple

have fine credentials – she with an Art History major and he with a degree in Fine Arts. Khun Gib has a penchant for white; snowy and silvery is now the label's signature. "I'm inspired by classic noir films and Bangkok. Here, we have a wonderful brew of local sources and materials, global creativity and great multiculturalism," she says. "Rotsaniyum means 'personal taste' in Thai. You can find lace in many places but the Rotsaniyum lace has art and style, it's in another dimension." rotsaniyum.com

- 1 Cropped lace blouse, THB3,590
- 2 "Full-structured" skirt, THB2,790
- 3 Oversized lace dress, THB6,990
- 4 White fur slippers, THB4,290
- 5 Lace maxi-skirt, THB5,590
- 6 Layered maxi-skirt, THB8,890
- 7 "See-through" camisole, THB1,790
- 8 White fur lace-up boots, THB8,290
- 9 Pleated skirt, THB7,990
- 10 White fur lace-up boots, THB8,290
- 11 "Two faces" midi-skirt, THB4,290
- 12 Lace tee, THB2,790
- 13 Cape dress, THB5,990



KOH CHANG

Weekender: Koh Mak

Koh Chang’s southern neighbour offers a more independent, free-wheeling travel experience. This privately owned island sustains itself economically via coconut and rubber tree plantations; tourism here is sleepy and undeveloped

1 HIT THE WATER

Swimming is a must – the ocean is warm, calm and impossibly clear, especially off main beach Ao Kao. Rent a kayak and paddle over to the small island of Koh Rayang where a private bungalow resort ([rayang-phurin.com](#)) allows day visitors for THB100 per person. Park yourself on a sun lounger on the sand or snorkel around the entire island. On the way back to Ao Kao try to spot the nine underwater elephant sculptures standing on the sea bed, part of a project called Art for Ocean.

2 ISLAND-HOP

While the beaches of Koh Mak don’t offer much coral, there’s a dive spot called Koh Wai 20 minutes away by speedboat. Another worthwhile

side-trip – especially if you have kids – is Koh Kradat, a 10-minute long-tail boat ride from Koh Mak’s eastern coastline. The main attraction of this tiny, rustic dot of an island is its deer population, who are tame and happy to be hand-fed and photographed.

3 RIDE AROUND THE ISLAND

The best way to explore Koh Mak is by motor scooter or bicycle, which you can rent from most resorts. The concrete roads are in good condition, but there are plenty of unpaved roads on the map as well, some of which lead to secluded beaches, some to fantastic lookouts.

4 SUNSET DRINKS

For the best sunset views, head to Banana Sunset

Bar ([bananasunset.com](#)) on the southern peninsular or go to Koh Mak Resort ([kohmakresort.com](#)) – a modern, three-star property that offers sundowner cocktail specials with wide, beautiful views across the bay.

5 GO GOURMET

For an island this size, there’s a surprisingly rich array of great food. A clutch of German expats ensure Euro cuisines are well-represented and the island’s eco-consciousness manifests in lots of good organic grub. For a seafood BBQ, try Baan Chai Lay on Ao Kao beach or head to the island’s most famous restaurant, Koh Mak Seafood, near the ferry pier. Swiss Sawasdee, La Dolce and Food Art Hut are also great Western options.

BANGKOK

Are they or aren’t they?

Bangkok is renowned for its katooley (ladyboy) cabaret scene. We’ve rounded up four of the best

THE PLAYHOUSE THEATRE

Watch extravagant burlesque queen Niracha, who joined the glamorous Playhouse troupe 12 years ago after leaving school, belt out Tina Turner ballads with her coterie. Niracha insists egos are mostly kept in check. “Our boss insists we work as a team. He doesn’t want divas,” she says. “There’s only room for one diva and that’s him.” [playhousethailand.com](#)

CALYPSO BANGKOK

Asiatique is an upscale shopping and entertainment precinct on the banks of the Chao Praya River, built on the site of a refurbished shipping yard. It’s also home to the Calypso Theatre and its lively cabaret ensemble, which includes a Thai Elvis impersonator and a ‘Japanese classic’ involving a line-up of geishas dressed in ostrich costumes. [calypsocabaret.com](#)

BROADWAY BABE

Kristen Rossi has been performing her one-woman show, a mixture of burlesque, show tunes, vaudeville and cabaret, all over Bangkok for several years and currently has a regular Wednesday night gig at the Ashley Sutton designed Bangkok Betty. [broadwaybabeasia.com](#)

SIAM NIRAMIT

This stage show combines vast sets with colourful costumes in an epic tale about the history of Thailand. The story takes in the ancient Lanna Kingdom, the Khmer heritage of Isaan and the former capital in Ayutthaya. [siamniramit.com](#)



IMAGES: BEK VAN VLIET

CHIANG MAI

Why I live in Chiang Mai

Celebrated Indian-Thai artist Navin Rawanchaikul is a man of intrigue. The Guggenheim-exhibited artist talks to Fah Thai about his heritage, why he travels and why his work is rooted in Thailand



Navin Rawanchaikul likes questions. In one of his acclaimed earlier works, his conversion of a taxi into a mobile gallery questioned the very notion of what art and art making is. “What is the meaning of local and foreigner?” he asks us. “My name Navin has Indian origins yet is also a Thai name. I grew up asking myself, 'Am I local or an outsider?'”

Rawanchaikul, who kaleidoscopic works include sculpture, painting, performance, photography and film, posed this question in 2009’s epic Places of Rebirth, inspired by his first visit to Pakistan where his ancestors hail from. Of Indian descent, he was born and works in Chiang Mai, holds Japanese permanent residency and spends part of the year in Fukuoka. The painting, which tells the story of his family’s migration to Thailand, was purchased by the Guggenheim; the next year Rawanchaikul was awarded the national Silapathorn citation from the Thai Ministry of Culture.

This obsession with identity may explain why he founded the Navin Party, which was a way to find and unite Navins of all nationalities and races, including Indian TV comedian Navin Prabhakar, a Texas-based Ska band called Navin’s Thermos, and NaVin wine from Slovakia.



“In 2008 I went to New Orleans with a friend. I didn't know much about the city, so I Googled it, and then thought I should see if anyone called Navin lived there. When we came across jazz musician Narvin Kimball, we were intrigued by his story, and decided to look him up after we landed.” Sadly, when they arrived, Navin was told that the jazzman had died in Hurricane Katrina. “We met his wife and manager, and learned all about his fascinating life [Kimball was a founding member of the city’s famed Preservation Hall Jazz Band]. We also discovered that because of Katrina he hadn’t been given a proper funeral – so we decided to hold what they call a 'second line'”. And so, on November 1, 2008, a jazz march was held through the French Quarter, with Navin walking hand-in-hand with Kimball’s daughter, flanked by huge celebratory paintings he had made for the occasion.

So why does he call Chian Mai home? “Here, the traditional arts still blend well with contemporary lifestyle, and – unlike in big cities – the community bond remains strong, which is one of the major themes that tie together my work. Of course, it helps that the city is also surrounded by nature as well as having rich culture and fantastic food.”

navinproduction.com

Local tips

BANGKOK

“My tip here is food. I love Thai food - I love anything traditional but I love to see people take it to another level. I come from New York City so I like the neighbourhood joints. I love Soul Food on the corner of Thong Lor. I love seafood and oysters - the whole oyster thing has blown up in Bangkok as well. There’s now a culture for good seafood in Thailand. Dan Koh of Sea Truffle, he imports fresh uni and Irish oysters and creates fun pop-up restaurants in Ekkamai.” - *Daryl Scott, founder of CHI Ultralounge*

“Bangkok is a charming monster, and even after 14 years I am still exploring new areas. My new fascination is digging into the history of old Chinese shrines – Chieng Kong Shrine in Talat Noi, and the Chao Mae Kuan Imm Shrine. I spend time talking with locals about their stories and the history of the surrounding villages. My favourite restaurant right now is a little street-side place on Soi Dinso across from city hall. Some of the best *tom yung goong* in the city.” - *Dan Fraser, co-founder and director of Smiling Albino adventure tours*

KOH SAMUI

Caught in a moment

1:45pm
Koh Tao, Gulf of Thailand

“I’m holding the float line looking back at the tropical island. There is a slight swell at the surface. I focus on my breath, relax and feel my heartbeat slow down in preparation. I tune out the distant long-tail engines and the chatter of fellow

free-divers fresh from the depths. One last gulp of air and I descend the line. The world is again quiet. Without the complication of heavy scuba equipment and techniques, I glide effortlessly into the deep blue. Reaching the end of the float line, I sit and watch the life aquatic in awe.
– Diving fanatic Tony Arman, Koh Samui. [apneatotal.com](#)

LIFE AQUATIC

Until 28 February the Bangpakong River is home to the Kham Dolphin Festival. Visitors flock here to get a glimpse of rare Irrawaddy species. Don't miss the famous sea bass served at local restaurants.





KOH SAMUI

My Samui

Perhaps Thailand’s most internationally renowned D.J., Nakadia has played sets to crowds of almost 10,000. Now based between Berlin and Samui, the effervescent musician talks to Fah Thai ahead of her hectic three-month Asia tour

How has Samui changed over the years?

I was born and grew up in Khonburi in the east of Thailand. I moved to Samui in 2002 when I started Djing. In the past 13 years Samui has changed a lot! Ten years ago tourists were mostly on a budget – today Samui is very stylish and a bit of a celebrity destination. Every time I land at the airport I feel like I’m arriving home.

What inspired you to start Djing?

On my first visit to Europe in 2002, I went to a German club and saw a girl rocking it out on the turntables. I decided it was for me and took some turntables back to Thailand. I then moved to Samui and started practicing. Koh Samui is a very popular holiday destination for music industry professionals, so eventually some of them heard me play and invited me to their clubs around the world. Without Samui my career would not have been possible.

Tell us about Samui’s music scene?

When you are on a tropical island, there is no better place to party than the beach! No indoor club can provide the feeling you get being next to the sea. We had some years when most of the parties happened on Koh Phangan and Samui was a bit forgotten. But since 2013 Samui clubbing has developed, with more variety and better quality bringing savvy clubbers to the island. Bangkok on the other hand is developing so quick that it’s hard to keep up – it’s the clubbing capital of South East Asia.

What food to you indulge in on Samui?

Seafood! I eat fish just about every day I am on Samui. My favorite spot for a great meal is the family-run Mitra in Chaweng for excellent, cheap street food and seafood. For a more luxurious affair, I’d recommend Ocean 11 in Ban Rak. It’s hard to find but worth making the effort.

Top three spots on Samui for a top night out?

For a great night out Chaweng is the place to be. My favorite place is Cha Cha Moon, a stylish club on the beach with deep house and techno tunes. Only a few metres away on the main road, Solo Bar offers party action every night while the late night meeting point is Sound Club – a super modern Ibiza-style club that thousands can pack into.

And where do you go to relax?

My favorite ‘secret’ beaches are located between Chaweng and Lamai. I love the bay of Chaweng Noi – the beach is a bit difficult to access but this is the best place to swim. The most romantic beach for me is Coral Cove Bay. When I want to spoil my body, I go to Eranda Spa at the north end of Chaweng. Surrounded by beautiful trees this is a little paradise within paradise.

Where do you spend your day off on the island?

My sets normally start at 12am and end a lot later. Afterwards the place to go would be Sound Club. Sunday is normally my day off and I like to go for an afternoon drink at Secret Garden in Bar Rak. Each week they have live music played by some great bands, there is a delicious BBQ and a chilled atmosphere right on the beach. For me it’s the perfect place to wind down after a busy weekend.

Nakadia will play in Singapore, Bangkok and around Asia throughout January and February with a weekly Tuesday night gig beachside at Chaweng’s Cha Cha Moon. nakadia.com



KOH SAMUI

The two of us

Ralph Beale and his team have been teaching muay thai on Samui since 1989. For Beale, this popular form of Thai boxing is a way of life – he’s worked tirelessly over the years to promote the sport as a cultural tradition and he’s now at the forefront of a bid for it to be recognised as an Olympic Sport. Tawatchai Budsadee, or ‘Lucky’, moved to Samui as a child. He’s one of Thailand’s best-known fighters and an admired trainer. [lamaimuaythaicamp.com](#)



RALPH: “We’ve known Lucky since he was a child and it’s been a long road. Naturally, a fighter’s emotions are up and down and it’s not always easy. Lucky is worth it. He’s very skilled technically and expresses himself well with guests of all ages. Not all fighters can teach so he’s lucky and that’s why we call him that – he can articulate techniques he has perfected, helping others to learn . We also call him this because he’s like a Samui cat: he’s got nine lives and always bounces back. Most people start watching muay thai moves on Youtube and then realise there is so much more to learn. They come to our camp to work with experienced Thai trainer. I have always loved Samui and its natural environment. It feels like home. People new to Asia complain about the infrastructure, but I remember power cuts and candles when I was growing up in London. It’s progressing [here] and that is what counts.”



LUCKY: “I knew I wanted be a muay thai fighter when I was five-years-old. My father took me to a fight and made me believe I could do it. After he died, I had to move on to Koh Samui. I soon met Ralph and he helped take care of me. I was 11-years-old and didn’t have any food – or money – and he helped me to go to school and live my dream of being a professional muay thai fighter. I trained and worked hard and have now travelled all over the world competing in England, Germany, Poland, Scotland... and that’s in many ways thanks to him. Now I train the guests. I believe it is my job to make everyone relax, have fun, get fit and enjoy this sport. My favourite thing about living on Samui is the mornings here. I wake up extremely early and take the guests running on Lamai beach. It’s tough but everybody loves it.”

KOH SAMUI

Breakfast club

Samui boasts a bevy of topnotch eateries, acclaimed hotel restaurants and tasty Thai street food fare. What better time to feast on the island’s culinary delights that the island’s breezy mornings? Here are three different breakfasts to try

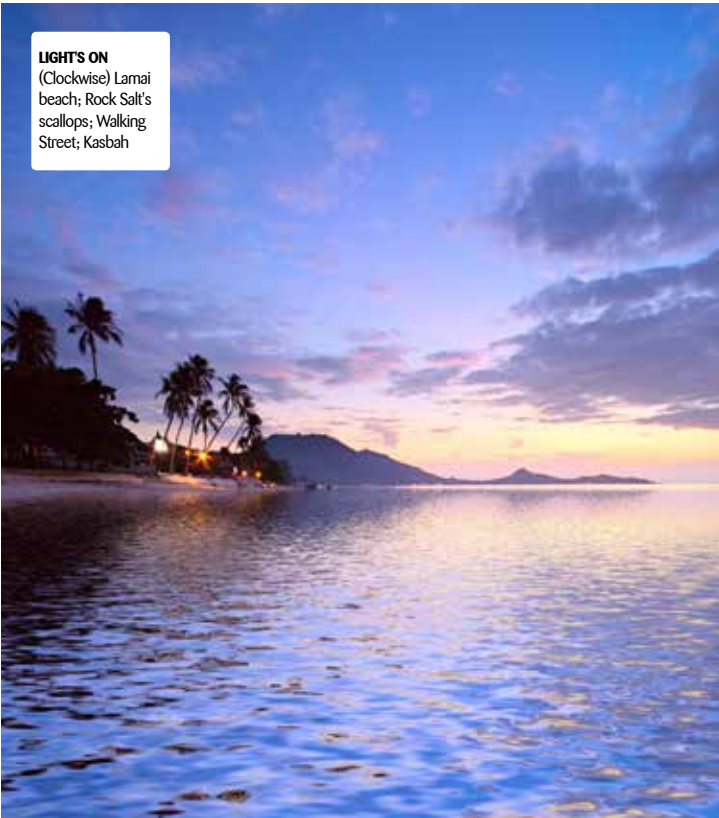


GOURMET DELIGHTS
Sala Samui steps up to the grand hotel challenge by offering an extensive à la carte breakfast menu, mixing things up with a smaller menu of changing ‘daily delights’. A highlight at Sala is the pan fried chorizo-infused brioche that comes topped with a runny, slow-cooked duck egg and sweet tomato jam – delicious. For the sweet tooths there are mango, mint and chocolate crepes with fresh coconut and Thai basil. The breakfast buffet also includes spicy *somtam*, Vietnamese pho and shavings of cured cold cuts and European cheeses. [salaresorts.com/samui](#)

LOCAL COMFORT
Don’t ever miss a bowl of Thai breakfast staple *jok* (rice porridge). Similar to Chinese-style congee, this soothing, hearty rice soup is made of short-grain rice cooked until it achieves a thick consistency similar to oatmeal. *Jok* can be served with pork meatballs, shrimp or as a simple vegetarian option. You may be offered an egg and extra ginger and parsley to add spice. If you wake up early on Samui, you can see *jok* stalls around the island, packed with locals enjoying a quick breakfast before work.

HEALTHY OPTION
For a very virtuous breakfast, June’s Art Café in Bophut has you sorted from 9:30am every day. It’s all about whole foods, superfoods and the healthy options here. Vegans can replace eggs with scrambled tofu and there are gluten free alternatives to the delicious whole-wheat loaves June bakes. [juneartcafe.com](#)

LIGHT'S ON
(Clockwise) Lamai
beach; Rock Salt's
scallops; Walking
Street; Kasbah



KOH SAMUI

Neighbourhood Guide: Lamai

With its powder-white beach, gentrification has swept over this former backpacker town – Samui’s second biggest – and it’s now flush with plush hotels and stylish eateries.

KASBAH MARRAKECH RESTAURANT AND LOUNGE

At this Moroccan eatery, atmospheric tea lights and the intense Majorelle cobalt-blue design evoke the medinas of Marrakech. Take a culinary tour through north Africa’s rich flavours: there’s an array of aromatic tagines – we rate the slow cooked lamb with saccharine, caramelised prunes and apricots and the fish stewed in chermoula and cumin served in clay pots. Cap the meal off with a palate-cleansing pot of mint tea. ***kasbah-marrakech.com***

SAMUI HEALTH SHOP

One of Lamai’s best-kept secrets is the Samui Health Shop, inside the Lamphu Health Café and stocked to the brim

with all things organic, superfood-y and sustainable. Come here for hand-made souvenirs, all-natural soaps and health supplies. Thai owners Best and Benji serve up wholesome salads, surprisingly tasty raw desserts and virtuous veggie juices in all hues of the rainbow. ***samuihealthshop.com***

WALKING STREET

Enjoy the bustle of Lamai’s weekly market, locally dubbed the *Lamai Jai Dee* or ‘walking street’. From 4pm every Sunday the main road between the market and the bridge is closed for traffic and the street fills with vendors selling cute handicrafts and tourist nick-knacks along with the enticing waft of food cooked up at smoky street carts. This is the place to sample wok-tossed

pad thai, grilled seafood and sweet, sticky Thai desserts along with great live music. ***Lamai Beach Soi 4***

ROCK SALT

This new restaurant at Crystal Bay Yacht Club Beach Resort is helmed by UK chef David Lloyd. His training ground in Michelin-starred London kitchens is obvious in the innovative, organic Brit cuisine dished up at Rock Salt. On Sundays, Lloyd serves up delicious lamb and suckling pig roasts and seafood banquets but in the mornings be sure not to miss the signature salt beef hash – home-cured brisket, onions, potatoes, egg and hot sauce. Located in picturesque Thong Takian Bay, Rock Salt has a beachy tiki bar atmosphere. ***rocksaltsamui.com***

Cafe Culture

KOH SAMUI

We review two of Samui’s cosiest cafés, hand picked for fresh, buttery pastries and great coffee

VILLA CHOCOLAT

For exquisite hand-made Chocolate truffles and a dose of European culture, visit this elegant tea-room which doubles as a ballet school. Belgian-owned, the coffee is strong and a favourite of expats. So too are the Chantilly swans, truffles and gooey fondant chocolate cake. Jazz and ballet classes are given by former ballerina Isabelle Ponet. Find this little oasis by turning off at the Wat Samret temple between Hua Thanon and Nathorn. ***33/2 Moo 2 Tambo Maret, Lamai, Samui.***

FRENCH BAKERY

Your next croissant is never far away thanks to Le Fabrique’s two French boulangeries on the island. Lamai’s outlet is the more bustling of the bunch but we prefer the quainter Chaweng café – a cosy and comfortable alternative to the soulless coffee chains in the area. Set up your laptop with free wifi and munch away on a crunchy, warm baguette. ***facebook.com/lafabriquesamui***



KOH SAMUI

In the mood for love

Both loved and loathed around the globe, Valentines Day can be a fun time to revel in romance and all things kitsch. Fah Thai asks one of Samui’s top wedding planners, Jacqui Ashley, to reveal the best spots for sweethearts



A SPA IN THE CAVES

“A visit to Tamarind Springs day spa would be the ideal start for a romantic Valentine’s Day treat. The spa is set in lush tropical gardens and offers the ultimate in privacy for a couple’s pampering session. Start with a steam package and spend the day together relaxing in the rock pools and herbal steam caves. Follow this with a soothing massage and you will leave feeling relaxed, refreshed ad loved up.” tamarindsprings.com

A PRIVATE CRUISE

“I can’t think of anything more romantic than to sail from Samui to the Angthong Marine Park atop the deck of a luxury yacht like the Naga. It’s here you can really indulge – think lots of champagne and a lunch prepared by a private chef. The crew really understand the need for privacy. Stay overnight in a traditional teak cabin and enjoy a romantic candle-lit dinner under the stars or sail back into Samui as the sun slips away.” boutiqueyachting.com

DINING IN THE TREES

“Inside lush, luxury eatery at Anantara Lawana resort each of the treetop dining platforms offer complete privacy for couples to enjoy an intimate, moonlit meal overlooking Samui’s shimmering seas. It’s not just the setting that is spectacular – the menu (think fiery curries and fresh seafood cooked with lemongrass and other Thai herbs and spices) is award-winning Cap it off with a romantic walk on the beach – bliss.” awana-chaweng.anantara.com



UP THAT HILL

Take in pristine jungle, secret waterfalls, villages, coconut plantations and loads of tropical flowers on a hike along Samui’s Maenam trail. The 11km walk starts above Maenam beach and weaves down south to Lamai. It takes three hours but you’ll be rewarded with striking views



KOH SAMUI

Gallic flair

Picasso, a newcomer to Maenam’s dining scene, has already been selected as one of Thailand’s top new eateries by *Tatler Thailand*. The petite French bistro features a small menu by chef Cyril Ichac with a focus on hearty French cuisine. Favourites so far have been classic dishes like a *tournedos charolais* (a beef dish from Burgundy served with saffron rice) and an osso bucco bourguignon with slow-cooked veal so tender it falls off the fork. picassosamui.com

KOH SAMUI

Creative cocktails

Super-stylish Chaweng boutique hotel The Library joined the ranks of some of the world’s most innovative resorts when it snared Design Hotel listing. Perched outside on Chaweng Beach Road is the hotel’s tapas and cocktail bar, Drink Gallery. It’s a lavish space, with baroque chandeliers and a communal dining table. They’ve recently launched a range of fun new cocktails. “My Thai” is a Siamese take on the Polynesian classic, made with rum, Triple Sec, almond syrup, pineapple juice, bitters and Thai chilli. Just as fabulous is the “Sherbet Dose and Salmon in a Blanket” a gin, fresh orange juice, lime, vanilla syrup and bitters potion served alongside tasty salmon rolls. thelibrary.co.th

THE GUIDE

Myanmar

Mandalay's jesters; Myanmar's off-the-radar ancient sites; the best shopping in Yangon



Relic hunters

In June, three little-known ancient cities became the first Myanmar sites to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, beating established attractions such as the temples of Bagan. Sri Ksetra, Beikthano and Hanlin were major cities during the Pyu era, a thousand-year period that ended with the rise of Bagan in the 11th century

Gaining recognition on the list isn't an easy feat – there are less than 1000 sites inscribed worldwide. The three sites reveal the Pyu Kingdoms that flourished for over 1,000 years between 200 BC and 900 AD. The partly excavated landmarks sit in vast irrigated terrain in the dry zone of the Ayeyarwady River basin and palace citadels, burial grounds and early industrial production sites have all been unearthed. Despite their historical significance, the Pyu Ancient Cities remain largely unexplored by both travellers and archaeologists – all the better for having the sites all to yourself.

TEXT: THOMAS KEAN AND DENE-HERN CHEN; IMAGES: WORLD MONUMENTS FUND



SACRED STONE
Ancient brick edifices, bas reliefs and sculptures of the Pyu Kingdoms

DID YOU KNOW?

Launched in 2013, the Yoma Yangon international marathon returns on 11 January. While Yangon's flat topography will no doubt please many entrants, you can expect competition from buses, cars and bicycles – in addition to the thousands of competitors.

YANGON

SRI KSETRA
About five hours northwest of Yangon near the town of Pyay, Sri Ksetra is the largest and most accessible of the three Pyu cities. Its centrepiece is the Bawbawgyi Pagoda, a cylindrical stupa that served as a prototype for the early pagodas at Bagan, but other highlights include the Rahanta cave temple and the remains of the city walls. These walls encompass more than 1400 acres – unlike Bagan, Sri Ksetra contained paddy fields within its city limits, enabling it to withstand extended sieges.

NAY PYI TAW

BEIKTHANO
The smallest but perhaps best excavated of the three sites, Beikthano receives just a handful of foreign visitors – the Ministry of Culture recently estimated the number at a few dozen a year. Its proximity to the capital Nay Pyi Taw, however,

makes it a fascinating day trip. Unlike Sri Ksetra, the majority of Beikthano's residents lived outside the city walls, and no evidence of Buddhist influence has been found to date. The city grew from the 1st century BC to 5th century AD, when its palace was burned to the ground by an invading army, likely from Sri Ksetra.

MANDALAY

HANLIN
Evidence of human settlement at Hanlin has been traced back more than 4000 years, but it wasn't until the first century AD that it became a prominent Pyu city – the largest until surpassed by Sri Ksetra around the 8th century. Several hours north of Mandalay, it is strategically located on fertile plains between the Ayeyarwady and Mu rivers. Artefacts from the area – silver coins, gold necklaces, pottery and stone inscriptions – are housed in a small site museum, while skeletons lie in situ in an excavated cemetery.



Shop 'til you drop

Myanmar's exciting mix of history and culture make exploring antique shops a fun way to step back in time. In Yangon, unearth traditional handicrafts, century-old teak furniture and colonial-era ephemera

AUGUSTINE'S ANTIQUES

Augustine's has been the go-to for antiques in Yangon since it was established way back in 1978. While prices have risen in recent years due to demand from the growing number of expats, you can still find bargains among the furniture, lacquer ware, wooden statues, porcelain, and silver, brass and copper objects.

No 23(a) Attiyar St, Thirimingalar Rd, Kamaryut Township

NANDAWUN MYANMAR GEMS & HANDICRAFT CENTRE

Rather than antiques, Nandawun specialises in new, but aged handicrafts, most of which are made in small workshops in Mandalay – find everything from marionettes and wall hangings to jewellery. The upstairs of this renovated mansion also features antique books, although most are for display only.

Corner of Ahlone and Baho roads, Ahlone Township

U HMAT GYI

Run by the friendly Ko Aung, the modest-looking shopfront at U Hmat Gyi hides a treasure trove of antique furniture, some more than a century old and nearly all made from prized teak. All purchases are tastefully restored

and delivered in just a few days.

Yankin Road, near the corner of Maegin Road, Yankin Township

BOGYOKE AUNG SAN MARKET

The city's main market is home to a number of antique shops, with everything from old swords to kerosene lanterns. A clutch of them also sell ethnic minority fabrics that you are unlikely to find outside remote villages in Chin or Kachin states. **Bogyoke Aung San Road, Pabedan Township**

CHARLIE

This ramshackle shop near the bustling Shwegonedaing Junction is jam-packed full of colonial- and socialist-era artefacts. The many gems include stacks of 78s records from Burmese artists (as well as the gramophones to play them) and a cabinet full of vintage camera equipment. **No 17, Kabar Aye Pagoda Rd, Bahan Township**

CHINDITS FURNITURE

While the furniture and other wooden objects at Chindits are new, they are all made from reclaimed teak – much of it taken from demolished colonial-era buildings. Chindits combines history and sustainability together with quality craftsmanship. **burmachindits.com**

MANDALAY

Hot plates

Despite being Myanmar's second-largest city, trendy bars and restaurants have always been thin on the ground in Mandalay – but that is slowly beginning to change. Here are two new establishments leading the charge

GINKI KIDS

The original incarnation of this drinking den is located close to Yangon's Golden Valley and comes festooned with '90s grunge and Beatles posters. Ginki has now made the trip north to Mandalay and it's proving just as popular with expats and locals as the original. The menu is almost identical – Thai, Chinese and a smattering of Western and Indian dishes – but the setting is a little more flash. The drinks – cold beer and zesty cocktails, best enjoyed in the garden – are as cheap as ever. Expect to pay the equivalent of just a few dollars. **Corner of 71st and 28th streets**

BISTRO AT 82ND

Under the leadership of former Strand Hotel chef Renato Buhlmann, this fine eatery has raised the bar for European fare in Mandalay quite a few notches since it opened six months ago. Despite the high-end cuisine – expect to find truffles, chorizo or gourmet polish sausage on your plate – Bistro at 82nd (pictured below) has a comfortable atmosphere and is reasonably priced for the quality of the grub, much of which you won't find elsewhere in Mandalay. Drinks have not been overlooked – for a special treat, try the homemade ginger beer. **82nd Street, between 30th and 31st**



Myanmar's Funnymen

This comedy troupe provided fascinating insight to Myanmar's political past. After the death of one member, the remaining duo have vowed to keep the show going strong

Consider a Burmese joke from the 1950s: A very ill man goes to see the doctor. The doctor says that he has the flu and prescribes him a shot. However, the syringe is filled only with water and the horrified patient questions his diagnosis. “No problem,” the doctor assures him. “I have a license to kill, just like the military government.”

Such gallows humour is typical of a trio known as the Moustache Brothers, an activist-comedy troupe based in Mandalay. Myanmar was ruled for five decades by an authoritarian military regime – with freedom of speech severely restricted, Lu Maw, his cousin Lu Zaw and Moustache frontman Par Par Lay became well-known for pointed political satire. Coupled with songs and dances, the Moustache Brothers toured their variety show across upper Myanmar's festivals and celebrations in the 1950s.

“The army always gave us warnings,” Lu Maw recalls. “But the order goes in one ear, and comes out the other like water off a duck's back.”

Par Par Lay, a fervent supported of Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy leader of Myanmar's opposition party, would serve three jail terms between 1990 and 2007 for his jokes at the military regime's expense. Lu Maw believes that Par Par Lay's health was never the same after his second



stint in prison in 1996, when he was sentenced with hard labour. The beloved comedian later suffered kidney disease and passed away in August 2013.

“My brother was very brave,” Lu Maw says. “It was hard labour that killed him.”

Today, Lu Maw and Lu Zaw keep the show going. Lu Maw had already honed the show into a two-man act during his brother's prison terms, yet Par Par Lay is continually referenced throughout the performance, giving the sense that his spirit is always near. Armed with a love for idioms and puns, Lu Maw now cracks jokes comparing the current civilian government with the previous military regime. “Nowadays, there's only one good job where there is good money,” Lu Maw says,

donning a police hat during a recent performance.

“That's why we don't call this a hat; we call it a donation box,” he cracks, with a pearly grin.

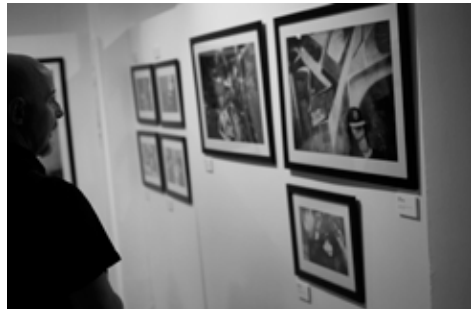
The performance is staged nightly in an intimate space at their home, which is cluttered with nostalgia from the trio's travelling hey-days. The perseverance of the two remaining “brothers” has a pay-off, said Lu Maw. “The government can't touch us. We are hot potatoes [because] journalists and tourists come to see us.”

The Moustache Brothers and their family also educate tourists on traditional Burmese culture, and provide some insight to modern Myanmar. “One hour sitting here, you will know everything that happens here,” Lu Maw says, winking impishly.

TEXT: DENE-HERN CHEN / MAIN IMAGE: MICHAEL BUCKLEY; SMALLER IMAGES: GETTY AND DENE-HERN CHEN



ARTISTRY



YANGON

Downtown: Capturing Yangon on film

The recent relaxation of censorship and a blossoming arts scene has inspired many to take up the craft of photography and, importantly, given them an outlet for their work

In December 2012, expat photographer Matt Grace opened the city's first documentary photography-focused gallery, Witness Yangon Documentary Arts Space, to support budding photojournalists through workshops and exhibitions. Renamed Myanmar Deitta, it has just opened in a newly renovated colonial-era building in downtown Yangon. *Fah Thai* talks to Grace about the country's photographic talent:

What is the underlying purpose of Myanmar Deitta?

Everything we do is "storytelling" – it could be documentary, photojournalism, but it's always got to have a story behind it. The whole idea is to get

people together who are working in photography, film, and visual and print journalism, so the more people we can have in here sharing the space, the more connections we can make. The original project [Witness Yangon] has grown during the year it's been open. We've hosted workshops, film screenings, and it's built up so much that we needed to be downtown and find a larger space that's more specifically catered for what we want to do. Deitta is a Pali word that basically means to witness something.

Besides the aesthetic appeal, why downtown?

In order to make it financially sustainable we need people coming into the gallery all the time, maybe having a small coffee shop, selling prints. Basically we want foot traffic – tourists, freelancers, people working in downtown – to be able to drop in. Our first exhibition will be as part of the Yangon Photo Festival in February.

As well as hosting exhibitions, training is a big

focus for you. Are young photographers really looking at documentary photography as a possible career path?

I think it's still not yet widely seen as a career choice but there are a lot more chances now to find work. It's generally people who are interested in the visuals of photography, maybe have gotten hold of a camera and enjoy taking pictures, but they have more of an analytical mind and taking pictures is not enough, they want to go further.

With no formal training schools, how do they learn?

I really think that exposure is how people become interested. I mean, there are no libraries here, the internet connection makes it difficult to look at photos online and there aren't photojournalism magazines. So things like exhibitions, where people can go along and see this work and find out about photographers and the stories, I think that's a really important thing for Myanmar if it wants to develop young artists and that's what we want to do here *deitta.org*

THE GUIDE

Cambodia & Laos

New boutique hotels in Phnom Penh; Temple camping road-tested; Vientiane dished up



CITY GUIDE
Artist Anida Youe Ali tells us what inspires her about her hometown, Phnom Penh.

CHECK IT OUT

Until 20 January Ali's Buddhist Bug (left) will be on show at Siem Reap art gallery 1961; after this she will head to Singapore for a live performance at the Malay Heritage Centre, wriggling out from Sultan Mosque. the1961.com



PHNOM PENH

My city

Anida Yoeu Ali is one of Cambodia's most internationally successful artists and "political agitators". She is first generation Muslim Khmer, born in Cambodia and raised in Chicago.

"I moved here, to live, in 2011 –and founded the artist-run media lab Studio Revolt – but I actually came to visit for the first time in 2004 at the age of 30. I discovered a culture rich in arts, music and dance. Instead of thinking about the near decimation of Khmer arts [in the wake of the Khmer Rouge genocide], I felt something wondrous was emerging. That trip in 2004 changed my life. There's a palpable energy here and it's the young generation that is propelling Cambodia forward.

"At the heart of my work is an interest in developing stories that exist outside of conventions. The Buddhist Bug [one of Ali's most enigmatic projects] is a creation inspired by a personal inability to reconcile my diasporic identity and a fascination with Buddhism alongside my upbringing as a Khmer Muslim woman and an

attempt to capture a quickly changing Cambodian landscape.

"Phnom Penh is an international city with a small town feel. I am living and working here because the city has inspired so much of my work. My projects, often ambitious in scale, can be realised here at a nominal cost. It makes me feel like my dreams are attainable. I love the riverfront area, the tuk tuk rides, the fresh markets and the extremely friendly people. For most of the year the sky is a perfect blue hue with some of the most amazing cloud formations I have ever seen! I do not enjoy the chaotic traffic or monsoonal floods.

"I always take my visitors on a daylong tour of the art scene here. I usually begin with the National Museum then walk along the 'commercial' gallery lane on Street 178 up to Romeet

Gallery. I have lunch at Java Café to see the latest exhibition there. On the same street as Java, I will take them to the Reading Room inside the Documentation Center of Cambodia. Around the corner from there, we swing by Meta House then go across the street to SaSa Art Projects inside the crumbling White Building. Along the way pick up a cold drink from a local street-side stand – either a sweet iced coffee or sugar cane drink. The final stop would be in the archives at either Bophana Audiovisual Resource Centre [founded by director Rithy Panh]. In the evening, the FCC Mansion behind the famous riverfront FCC bar is a perfect pit stop for drinks, lounge music and a walk through the remnants of some gorgeous colonial architecture, or we head to Eclipse Sky Bar in the Phnom Penh Tower for terrific vistas." studio-revolt.com

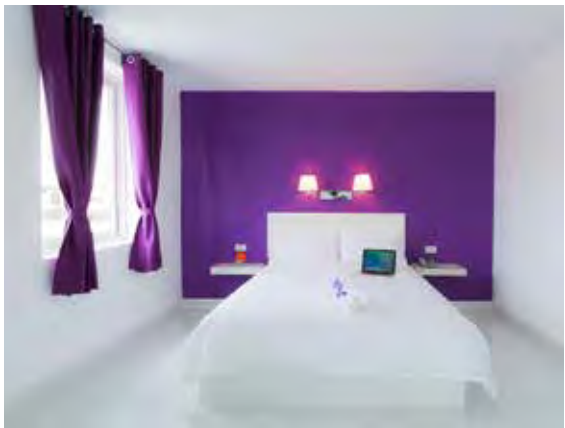
TEXT: CLAIRE KNOX; PRINTS: ANIDA YOEU ALI, DIGITAL C-PRINT, 2014



PHNOM PENH

Designer digs

A flurry of new boutique hotels have opened in Cambodia's rapidly developing capital. Here are three of the best to try



TEAHOUSE

With a nifty location just behind the magnificent Independence Monument and boutique-filled Street 240, this new 52 room tea-themed hotel sports a gorgeous ruby-red foyer and dining space, spacious and sleek rooms and a pretty lush slate swimming pool. Connected to the very popular Plantation and Pavilion hotels, the Teahouse's hook is that they host – you guessed it – afternoon tea sessions each Saturday with 30 varieties and buttery French pastries. Rooms from USD\$44-118. theteahouse.asia

SANGKUM

Just over one year old, this lovely renovated 1960s villa features a modernist design typical of the swinging, post independence hey-day of the adored late King Father Norodom Sihanouk. Rooms, which start at USD\$55, come decked out in vintage and Art Deco furniture, 1960s Cambodian film posters and other retro touches. There's a leafy garden and pool to relax in and it's located in the old French Quarter, close to Wat Phnom temple and excellent tapas bar Doors. Sangkum.com

ZING

Opening its doors in December, this new hotel boasts a bird's eye view of the colourful Art Deco Phsar Thmei (Central Market), which you shouldn't miss for sweet iced coffees, steaming bowls of *kuy tiev* (an aromatic pork noodle soup served for breakfast) and great people-watching. Zing is a very comfortable and affordable (rooms start at USD\$25) per night) base to explore the central part of town. Minimalist white rooms are lifted with violet feature walls and textiles kh.hotelzing.net

Tomb Raider

SIEM REAP

"Yes, the majesty of Angkor Wat can certainly hold up against the scores of travellers you need to share it with but to explore Angkorian-era temples without the crowds, head to the majestic, 12th century ruins of Banteay Chhmar, a World Heritage Site. We set off early from Siem Reap town, travelling through lush green rice fields and arrived at the temple's sandstone walls just in time for a lunch of tasty Cambodian classics like *bai sach chrouk* (barbequed pork and rice) and *samlor macho trey* (a sweet and sour fish soup) – ample servings soon burnt off as we channeled our best Lara Croft and climbed inside the crumbling walls. As the sun began to slip away, we returned to find out tents pitched alongside ancient bas-reliefs depicting epic battle scenes. It was the perfect spot to watch the sky turn into a gorgeous swirl pinks and oranges over a few glasses of red wine. For me, the biggest surprise came inside the tents, which came with carpeted floors, super-soft beds and full bathroom facilities – this was far from roughing it! Khiri works with nearby villages and the interaction with the friendly locals was a highlight. The temples are a daily part of life for them and I loved waving hello to people weaving through our campsite en route to the nearby town and playing with local kids in one of the moats. I woke at dawn to the sound of chanting monks – the whole experience felt like a dream, but a brilliant dream." – Jenny Penas, *Fah Thai* photo editor. khiri.com



What's
New:
Shopbop

CREATION NATION
Pop-Up Angkor's
cute and quirky
goods; Hanger
44's custom-made
moto (below right)

Cambodia has seen a spate of exciting new
boutiques and design-driven projects recently
open shop. We spotlight two stylish new
ventures in the Kingdom



SIEM REAP

POP-UP SHOP ANGKOR

This fun, brand new boutique is the brainchild of Ingrid Quinn, who arrived in Siem Reap in 2001 working with Doctors without Borders. She works with a small team of local designers and craftspeople, only producing in small quantities to ensure good quality and even better working conditions for the local women creating the wares. Find funky, Scandinavian-style cushions (we love the eye-catching fruit ones), fun Angkor-inspired textiles and other quirky souvenirs ranging from USD\$10-200 – even Hollywood starlet Marissa Tomei is a fan, praising Quinn's “gorgeous prints”. facebook.com/popupshopangkor



PHNOM PENH

HANGER 44

It's all about the fixie bicycle in Brooklyn and Brunswick but in Cambodia it's the purring, bespoke motorcycle *en vogue*. Hanger 44 – a hybrid hipster bar, motorcycle showroom and boutique – is the latest edition to the flurry of trendy bars that have recently sprouted in Bassac Lane. Only open in the evenings, it's the showroom for Moto Cambodge who specialise in bespoke motorcycle creations. There's a chic industrial fit-out to go with your espresso martini but the showstealer is the black and chrome “sculpture” strung up. Don't stop at ordering your own shiny custom made 1975 Honda – also pick up fair-trade leather wallets, wristbands, key rings, surfie t-shirts made by Tonlé and old school bell helmets. facebook.com/motocambodge

LUANG PRABANG

Pachyderm party

Laos hasn't been dubbed 'the land of a million elephants' for no reason – the moniker harks back to the ancient 14th century Laos kingdom of Lan Xang, when people believed the creature would bring great wealth to their country. Ever since the animal has been sacred to Laotians and it's become the country's national symbol. For two days in February, more than 80,000 ele-adoring Laotians, expats and tourists flock to Sayabouly province for the country's annual elephant festival, which aims to raise awareness of the protection of the endangered Asian elephant – highly susceptible to the illegal logging and poaching industries. This eight-year-old event, founded by NGO ElefantAsia, sees colourful elephant

processions, village home-stays, Buddhist ceremonies, outdoor films and music performances, fireworks and lots of revelry. This region of Laos has the largest population of pachyderms nation-wide; on the second day, local mahouts round them up for a day of education sessions and the crowing of Elephant of the Year. 17-19 February; festival.elefantasia.org



VIENTIANE

Shoptalk:
Ministry
of Silk

This airy, bright atelier showcases some of the best, locally produced silk garments you'll find in the city. If you're struggling to choose from the floaty evening gowns, printed Mandarin blouses or mod mini dresses, have your own outfit custom-made. The three-year-old boutique has proven a hit with tourists eager to see traditional, detailed fabrics and textiles reimagined into modern designs – so much so that founder Pany Saignavongs has just announced plans to open flagship stores in the UK this year. ministryofsilk.com



VIENTIANE

Dished Up

The piquant Laotian dishes that Vientiane is famous for are pretty special. But if you’ve spent days gorging on tasty pork larb and spicy salads you might be hankering for some western fare. Here’s where you can find it

ACQUA

This swish Italian eatery brings an epicurean’s la dolce vita to Vientiane – think fresh lobsters and oysters, spaghetti pomodoro, gnocchi with chicory, cured meats, Italian ricotta and fresh, emerald green pesto. All of the staples are made from scratch in-house, from the pasta to the bread and even the ice cream. Imported, however, is the Beluga caviar from the Caspian Sea, the Australian grass-fed beef tenderloin (smothered in a red wine jus and served with crunchy rosemary roast potatoes) and an excellent selection of European wines. The daily buffets are a steal: salads, warm and cold antipasto platters, a main, dessert, drinks and coffee for just 88,000kip (USD\$11). Watch the dedicated chefs at work through the large window into the kitchen. [facebook.com/acqua.laos](https://www.facebook.com/acqua.laos)

LE SILAPA

Francophiles should head to Le Silapa for quality Gallic cuisine with an Asian twist. Upstairs from the popular IBeam tapas bar, there’s lots of white linen, polished floorboards, high ceilings and birdcage lights. It’s been on the radar of discerning locals for some time and firm favourites are staples like foie gras, hearty French salads and casseroles, but we think the changing specials that come with a Laotian twist are more exciting – think roasted Atlantic scallops with a zesty lemongrass emulsion, zucchini and Chinese cabbage; a Tilapia fillet doused in a creamy curry and corn mousseline and topped with fresh coconut and mint; and a sinfully-good, oozing mid-cooked chocolate with salted butter caramel and a hibiscus flower coulis dripped over it. Délicieux! [facebook.com/lesilapavientiane](https://www.facebook.com/lesilapavientiane)

CHOCDEE CAFÉ

This venue is the country’s first Belgian beer bar with over 100 ales and Belgian specialties like a Flemish beef stew and *moules frites* – mussels and crunchy fries to dunk in your sauce of choice. Owner Vincent Wirtgen is rather proud of his white beer selection along with the range of famous Trappist beers in the fridge – there’s Orval, Rochefort and Chimay amongst others. A favourite of locals and expats in Vientiane has been the fruity Kriek beers, perfect in these tropical climes. Inside, it’s just like your favourite Euro pub, with a wide bar, chunky wooden tables and walls lined with kitsch Tin Tin murals. The best part though is the balcony overlooking the mighty Mekong. It’s become a popular spot to relax listening to jazzy tunes and, as the sun slips down, some 70s rock classics. chokdeecafe.com



BEST BURGER

?????????ROSS-
QUOTE TO GO IN HERE
ION THE BURGER
JOINTon
label-Vickteerut. The
clothes here are more-
relaxed but adhere-
to designer-Teerut-
and brand-director-
Pang-Sudhinaraset’s-
penchant for clean,
minimalist lines and-
cuts. At this new Ari-
Soi 2-boutique you’ll
find lots of denim-
and casual crisp-
white, tailored-shirts,
linen playsuits, flared-
trousers and super-

Best in
show

VIENTIANE

Lush Vang Vieng boutique hotel, **Riverside Boutique Resort** has just scooped up the award for Asia’s Best Design Hotel at this year’s World Boutique Awards – the first time a Laos hotel has received such an award. The resort, a plush but relaxed 34-room beauty flanking the Nam Song River– has also been selected to become part of the esteemed *Conde Nast* Johansens collection of luxury hotels, a reference guide for independent travellers. We think it’s down to the gorgeous gardens, detailed furnishings, understated service and the *piece-de-resistance*: a huge rectangular pool which overlooks the striking limestone karst formations the region is famous for. Joining it on the list is Vientiane’s Greenpark Boutique Hotel. riversidevangvieng.com



THE GUIDE

Singapore & Kuala Lumpur

SG alive with the arts; the sultriest jazz clubs; KL two ways

NEW BEDS IN TOWN
(Clockwise) Hotel
Clover the Arts;
Villa Samadhi;
Adonis Hotel

SINGAPORE

Unique boutiques

Boasting concepts custom-made for interior-design magazine spreads, a clutch of striking smaller hotels have opened their doors in the Lion City

VILLA SAMADHI

Set to open its doors in March, this grand, elegantly restored colonial home in Labrador Nature Reserve offers guests the chance to step back in time. The design concept? All things heritage: four-poster beds, plantation chairs and teak furniture adorn the rooms. There are also slick electronics, Wi-Fi and private plunge pools to keep up with the times. Take tea in the library, play pool in the bar or sit back and enjoy jungle views from the terrace. samadhiretreats.com

ADONIS HOTEL

There are 16 tastefully minimalist rooms and three suites – with “photographer”, “artist” and “explorer” as their themes – in this refurbished shophouse near the Raffles Hotel. Their whitewashed brick and putty walls have a soothing, muted colour palette. Included in the price of your room are access to a fully stocked minibar, Wi-Fi, breakfast, afternoon cocktails and snacks at the hotel’s café. hoteladonis.com

HOTEL CLOVER THE ARTS

Local artists have splashed this fun, comfortable boutique hotel’s 44 individually-styled rooms with modern, vibrant murals. Expect quirky touches like the story of a cat that unfolds in each floor’s lift lobby and a jungle waterfall that cascades down the back of the building. When you’re ready to venture out, Clarke Quay’s nightlife and Chinatown’s dining options are right on your doorstep. hotelcloverthearts.com

KUALA LUMPUR

Daytripper: Selangor for kids

On the fringes of KL, the state of Selangor is filled with plenty of parks, reserves and sports centres. Here are three Selangor spots perfect for a family outing

FOREST RESEARCH INSTITUTE MALAYSIA

A half-day spent hiking through this lush, 486ha rainforest, near the popular Batu Caves, offers kids the chance to let off steam. The Canopy Walkway is the standout feature. Four sturdy, 150m-long wooden plank walkways are suspended at a height of 30m, allowing for splendid views and giving youngsters the opportunity to safely access their inner giants. frim.gov.my

rock climbing and bouldering skills or watch human geckos navigate over 400 routes from a safe distance at the café. camp5.com

PIN JUNCTION BOWLING CENTRE

Visit this big, bright and modern 24-lane bowling facility to enjoy a bit of old-school kegling. Bumper lanes are available for the little ones. pinjunction.com.my

IT’S A HIT!

Keep your eye on the ball at this rooftop batting centre that’s the first of its kind in South-East Asia. Choose from baseballs or slightly larger softballs and start swinging. hit.com.my

CAMP5 CLIMBING GYM

This massive, state-of-the-art indoor climbing facility (pictured below) is Asia’s largest. Brush up on your



TEXT: ARWEN JOYCE

KUALA LUMPUR

Our city, two ways

Experience contrasting sides of KL: a night owl and an early bird show us their hometown as the sun sets and rises

NIGHT OWL

Fierce, flame-haired lifestyle blogger, personal fitness trainer and social media community manager Jessica Tan (thejessicat.com) has been writing about style and nightlife in Kuala Lumpur for the past decade. Here she shares her tips for a great night on the town and the tiles.



EARLY BIRD

Jin Lim is half of the Ean & Jinnyboy morning disc-jockey team at Hitz FM (hitz.fm), as well as a popular YouTube video producer – his channel has 56 million views. Being part of the morning crew means a 4am start, so naturally Jin knows where to go to kickstart the day with a jolt of *kopi*.



“Grab dinner on **Jalan Alor**, where hawker delights and exotic seafood dishes serve up a gastronomic adventure tour of Asia. Once you’re full to the brim, head to **Changkat Bukit Bintang**, a street where desserts, drinks, music and mingling take centre stage, and raise a glass of wine or two with local urbanites and visitors. Even when the clock strikes midnight, this Cinderella has no plans to head home and you shouldn’t either. Grab a taxi to South-East Asia’s most renowned name in clubbing: **Zouk**. This megaclub pays tribute to star DJs and all forms of electronic music so let your hair down and hop between all five zones, breathing in the eclectic music.”



“I spend my weekday mornings behind a microphone so on the weekends I love meeting friends for a more leisurely breakfast in my neighbourhood. **Restoran New Apollos** (Jln USJ 4/6B) in Subang Jaya, a suburb to the west of Kuala Lumpur, is my favourite local coffee shop for *kopi* and noodles. Otherwise, you can find me working on scripts at any number of coffee shops in **SS15**, Subang Jaya’s main business district, which is one of the most popular places to hang out in the Klang Valley. **Empire Shopping Gallery** is also nearby and has coffee shops galore, including **Tous Les Jours** (tlj.com.my), a French-inspired Korean bakery.”

Note perfect

Head to these sophisticated, secreted-away jazz bars for mellow sounds, cosy settings and top-drawer drinks

SINGAPORE

SING JAZZ CLUB

Patrons close their eyes and let smooth grooves wash over them at this intimate club dedicated to syncopated rhythms and improvised melodies. An elegant red curtain backing the stage is a bold design touch but doesn’t take the focus off the main event – stellar performances by local and international acts. singjazzclub.com

SINGAPORE

BTWENTYEIGHT

Turn down an alley to find this whisky-focused basement jazz speakeasy. The stylish décor includes lots of leather and glossy wood. Thursdays feature a rotating line-up of vocal talent, on Fridays the B28 quartet plays bebop and hard bop and on Saturdays the Hammond Organ Trio belts out classic blues and edgier modern jazz tunes. www.btwentyeight.com

SINGAPORE

THE BLACK SWAN

The upstairs lounge at this exquisite art deco establishment hosts Singapore’s own homegrown jazz-soul-funk quintet, The Steve McQueens, every Tuesday night. The combination of great live music, well-crafted cocktails and tasty tapas and sharing plates makes this venue a top date-night pick. theblackswan.com.sg

KUALA LUMPUR

NO BLACK TIE

KL’s premier jazz club and gastro-bar has been pulling in top-notch performers and live music lovers since it was opened by Malaysian classical pianist Evelyn Hii in 1998. The wood-panelled, double-height stage makes for killer acoustics and the club serves up solid food and drinks for patrons on the floor. noblacktie.com.my



SINGAPORE

Art of the city

Creativity sweeps across the island-state in January

PEEK-A-BOO
The theme of this year's Fringe Festival is Art and Loss



ART STAGE SINGAPORE

South-East Asia's flagship art fair returns to the Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre from 22-25 January. Works from 29 countries and 130 galleries will be on display, with the majority hailing from Asia. artstagesingapore.com



SINGAPORE ART WEEK

Aligned with Singapore Art Week 2015, Super 0 Openair is an all-day boutique pop-up art, design, performance and music festival. It's slated for 17 January at a secret location. Follow #superoffthegrid for clues. super0.sg



M1 SINGAPORE FRINGE FESTIVAL

Taking "Art and Loss" as its theme, the festival runs from 14-25 January and features performances that explore topics ranging from an immigrant's take on the American dream to modern isolation. singaporefringe.com



What's new

SINGAPORE

The latest openings for epicures

SOUTHBRIDGE

The latest addition to Singapore's ever-growing rooftop bar scene can be found atop a refurbished shophouse on the Boat Quay riverside. The setting is unpretentious and the views of the city are unforgettable, especially when enjoyed with cocktail in hand. Try a Sex on the Quay (pictured, left), a mix of Earl Grey-infused vodka, mango, raspberry and sugarcane, while slurping up selections from the impressive oyster menu. southbridge.sg



FOC

The buzz surrounding chef Nandu Jubany's new venture on Hongkong Street has much to do with its playful décor – a vintage motorcycle hangs over the front door and giant white plaster heads are suspended over the communal dining tables – and infectious, straight-from-Barcelona spirit. The Michelin-starred chef's tapas – some classically Spanish, some with an Asian twist – pair beautifully with Dario Knox's cocktails. Booking is essential. focrestaurant.com

Gig guide

SINGAPORE

CATS

Andrew Lloyd Webber's classic musical, which brings TS Eliot's whimsical poems about felines to life, hits the Marina Bay Sands Grand Theatre stage this month. Timeless songs, fabulous sets, striking costumes and entrancing choreography have made *Cats* a global favourite for over 30 years. From 9-25 January. marinabaysands.com/CATS

SINGAPORE

LANEWAY FESTIVAL

Melbourne's original indie music extravaganza, the St Jerome's Laneway Festival, has proven such a hit that it's held throughout Australia. In 2011, Singapore was added to the list. Line-up highlights this year include folk duo Angus and Julia Stone, indie rockers Little Dragon, quirky songstress St Vincent and the angelic-voiced, local act .gif. 24 January. lanewayfestival.com

SINGAPORE

KUALA LUMPUR

MICHAEL BUBLÉ

Grab your girlfriends – the blue-eyed Canadian crooner and four-time Grammy Award winner's global tour comes to the Lion City on 16 January and to KL on 27 January.



HOT TIP Throughout December, hawker stalls across Malaysia will take part in the Street Food Festival, celebrating contributions from various ethnic communities.

THE GUIDE

Hong Kong

Styln' city tour; Best of K-town; Hot new restaurants

CATCH OF THE DAY
Seared scallops with fresh herbs at Catch on Catchick

TASTES OF THE TOWN
Kinsale's outdoor dining and cheese plate; bouillabaisse at Bistro Du Vin

Neighbourhood guide: Kennedy Town

As K-Town comes of age with its brand sparkling new MTR station, the once predominantly local suburb has transformed into something of a foodie hub, making an exciting new hunting ground for those seeking a different vibe

BISTRO DU VIN

Pop in for deliciously earthy French dishes within this eclectically tiled, postered and momento-ed space. The wine cellar at the back of the restaurant is wonderfully distracting and the menu spans all your favourite French dishes like rillettes, bouillabaisse, coq au vin and tarte tatin. facebook.com/Bistroduvin.hk

CATCH ON CATCHICK

This mini-sized, Aussie-run restaurant is a delight, whether you swing by for weekend brunch to sample Harissa butter eggs with chorizo, lunch

for a pint of prawns or a dinner of Barramundi. catchoncatchick.hk

KINSALE

Inspired by his favourite part of Ireland, Irish Cathal Kiely created Kinsale as a haven for family-friendly comfort food. The spacious interior is a great pit stop for grilled scallops with black pudding, the Kinsale Shellfish Pie and warm apple and sultana crumble. kinsale.com.hk

MISSY HO'S

The easily-missed, no-name door hides a bijou dark bar that mixes distressed

walls with old Hong Kong style birdcages. Their cocktail menu includes the spicy Chili Chow, which you can marry with the miso cod tacos. Later in the night, the swing is dropped into place and the atmosphere really takes off. castelloconcepts.com

TIVO

A sophisticated newcomer, knock back a cocktail, the Tivopolitan is a watermelon Cosmo, then sample some sharing plates like the fresh burrata or garlic chilli prawns and finish with the spiced butterscotch pudding. facebook.com/tivokt

Events

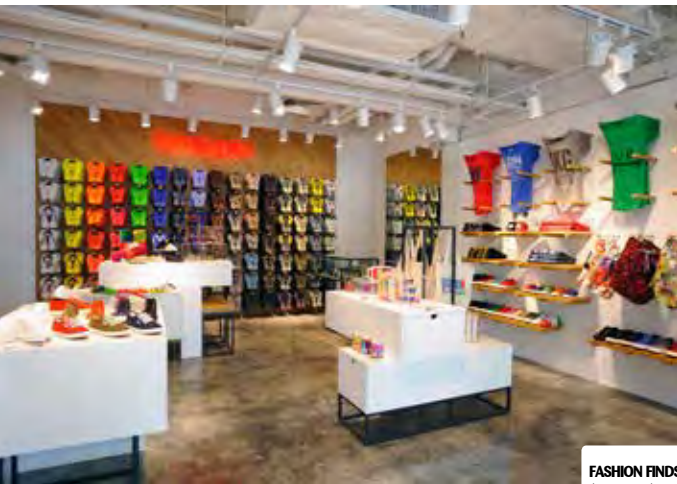
Happenings not to be missed

After the excitement of Christmas is over, take the kids to see the musical adaptation of **The Gruffalo**, which runs from 15 to 18 January at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Described as "Monstrous Fun!" by *The Daily Mail*, it's a modern classic with life lessons for the little ones and plenty of laughs for adults. hkapa.edu

It's goodbye horse, hello goat, as the **Chinese New Year** roars another year by. While the 19th is the official day, in Hong Kong the 15-day festivities include TST's outdoor street party and Night Parade of performers, flower markets, fireworks over Victoria Harbour and the most packed-out horse racing all year. discoverhongkong.com

Yogis should take note of visiting guru **Kina MacGregor's** Power of Ashtanga classes scheduled from 27 February to 1 March at Pure Yoga. With motivating names like Fearless Backbends and Burn, Baby Burn!, you'll be starting the new Chinese Year with maximum energy. pure-yoga.com

TEXT: CATHARINE NICOL



FASHION FINDS
(Clockwise) Lovers & Friends; Mr. Blacksmith; Kapok; Shanghai Tang



Insider haunts



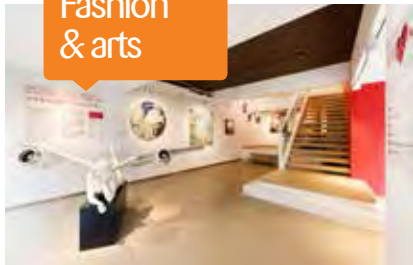
Hong Kong-based stylist Sam Roseman has worked in the fashion industry all his life. Currently posted as GM of Havaianas, he offers the ultimate tour of his adopted 'hood

“Sheung Wan is the new west, so head straight for Square Street to pick up a **Void** (*squarestreet.se/collections/void-watches*) timepiece, and if those feet are tired from walking check out their super comfy Gram shoes too. Stroll past Man Mo Temple and down the stairs through Cat Street market to check out **Hipster** (*website TBC*) for some curated vintage. Make a quick detour to bright concept shop **Lovers & Friends** (*electricsekk.com*), full of lifestyle accessories like Havaianas, on your way to the district’s best dim sum at **Dim Sum Square** (*88 Jervois St*). Head to **Wan Chai** to the start of Star Street and eat, drink and shop your way through the maze of hidden boutiques. Pay close attention to **Kapok** (*ka-pok.com/webshop*) who serve up the coolest in street culture cuteness. For the boys, don’t forget to visit **Club Monaco**’s

(*starstreet.com.hk/eat-drink-belclub-monaco*) atmospheric, dedicated menswear store while the real hipster in us all secretly enjoys the pretentious minimalism of the **Monocle Shop** (*1-4 St. Francis Yard*). Sit down and fuel up at **Sift** (*siftdesserts.com*) for their cupcakes and then live a homeware-lover’s dream at **Mr. Blacksmith** (*mrblacksmith.hk*) across the road. Of course it’s all about the bling-bling in **Central** with brands galore, but don’t go mono, go multi at **Lane Crawford**, **Joyce** and **D-mop** (*lanecrawford.com, joyce.com and d-mop.com*). Keep it Chinoise and head to **Shanghai Tang**’s (*shanghaitang.com*) new Duddel Street maison and don’t forget to grab some of that famous **Yung Kee** (*yungkee.com.hk*) goose on your way.”



Fashion & arts



New art gallery **Erarta**, fresh from St Petersburg (as well as London, New York and Zurich) has opened on Hollywood Road to bare the contemporary Russian soul to all in Hong Kong. The opening show, called *Game Changers*, includes over 20 artists spanning mosaic, collage, sculpture and video art. erartagalleries.com/hong-kong

As the temperature drops it’s the perfect time to be selling hats. **Helen Kaminski**’s Pacific Place pop-up shop will be showcasing master craftsman Garry Bishop, who has created hats for productions like *The Great Gatsby* and *Moulin Rouge*. helenkaminski.com

Fresh from Paris Fashion Week, fashion meets interiors meets Hong Kong luxury in the new **Paul & Joe by Madura** collections at MADURA’s Hong Kong Maison, Central or Boutique Showroom in Sheung Wan. Of the two collections, one is Quintessentially British, influenced by hunting and game sports, the other a romantic fantasy called Midnight Garden. madura.hk



SLEEP IN STYLE
(Above) Offerings at new gallery Erarta; Paul & Joe by Madura collection



THE GUIDE

South Asia

Dhaka's secret Aladdin's cave; a fashion editor's Mumbai market tips; Maldives for history buffs



CURATED COOL
(Clockwise) Dixit's "Red Quilt"; "Minarets" from Chobi Mela; Kala Ghoda



State of the art

The best of the region's fests for arty types

MUMBAI

KALA GHODA ARTS FESTIVAL

Lovers of all things handmade, rejoice. This February, the city's artsy district, Kala Ghoda, turns into a pedestrian-only zone for this kaleidoscopic, week-long extravaganza under the stars. Check out installations created by some of India's leading artists, making sure to swing by the festival's laid-back sunset musical performances and open-air film screenings. You'll also find a bevy of stalls showcasing cool, independent designer fashion and handcrafted goods, sustainable products, pop-up cafés operated by Mumbai's leading eateries and more. **7-15 February; kalaghodaassociation.com**

DHAKA

CHOBİ MELA VIII

This photography festival – the first such event in Asia – is possibly the largest exhibition of its kind in the world, with over 23 countries taking part in 2013. The theme of this year's eighth instalment is "intimacy" – a complex term in South Asia – so the event is bound to be evocative and provocative. One of the many distinguishing features of the Mela is its outreach and travelling exhibitions, which bring internationally acclaimed work to far-flung communities. Last year saw the exhibits travel to village playgrounds and market places. **23 January-5 February; chobimela.org**

MUMBAI

MEMORY OF RED

The quilting process is often about stitching together more than just thread; textiles are laced with memory and legacies. In this exhibition at Colaba's Art Musings gallery, artist Smriti Dixit takes swatches of cloth, quilts and other wonderfully textured fabrics and stitches them together with things others might simply throw away – scraps of old material, plastic price tags, old saris and even shiny relics. The end result is "Memory of Red", an impressive body of work awash in rich hues and shapes, one that references rebirth and renewal. **16 January-8 February; artmusings.net**

Sugar rush

MUMBAI

These Indian baking wizards offer delicious sweet treats

Marzipan may conjure images of oma's baking but **Nordic Kandie** (marzipan.com) makes art out of old-school almond candy. The luxurious European brand recently opened for business in India and its pastel marzipan pops are a genuine delight, with flavours like cherry, lychee and peanut butter. Add cinnamon and nutmeg for added Indian spice.

Waffles are so last century, too, so grab yourself a waffle stick instead at Mumbai's new indie eatery **Waffle House** (wafflehouse.co.in). Choose from an array of flavours. There's salted caramel, of course – a hipster stalwart – but our favourites are the apple cinnamon and chocolate ganache-dipped sticks.

Virtual bakeries are clearly *de rigueur* in Mumbai. **The Cupcake Factory** (facebook.com/cupcakefactoryindia) is the proof in the pudding. Open for only a few months, it's already one of the city's most popular virtual bakeries. Its secret just might be that perfect buttercream frosting: light, airy and not too sweet.

TEXT: RITU SOM (MUMBAI, DHAKA) AND SARAH HARVEY (MALDIVES)



EDITOR'S PICKS
Rajani is an avid fan of railway station markets (top left) and Chor Bazaar

MUMBAI

Market hopping

Grazia India's fashion director Ekta Rajani steers us through the best markets across Mumbai

RAILWAY STATION MARKETS

"Mumbai's lifeline is the complex network of local railways carrying millions from one end of the city to the other. Each station has a dedicated market on its doorstep and they exist in pure, organised chaos. My mum would grab my hand tight and navigate the rush of officegoers on the platforms. From fresh produce, flowers and fabrics to the best sari blouse tailors in India, phone cases, magazines – you name it, it's found here."

CHOR BAZAAR

"From genuine to fake antique furniture and old Bollywood memorabilia, Chor Bazaar is

an aspiring interior designer's greatest find. The contrast of some pretty luxurious wares with a run-down street environment will blow your mind. But the thrill of finding that special piece will have you going back for more. We hire props for shoots here."

MANISH MARKET

"For a long time, any imported product you fancied could be found here. Until a recent fire burned it to the ground, you could buy fake designer watches, sparkly and synthetic anything and Chinese imports. It's now in a swankier new building but is still the go-to place for everything fake, China-made and trendy."



DHAKA

Good as gold

We take a look inside the city's famed Tati Bazaar

Tucked away in a nondescript, crumbling corner of the city, this is Dhaka's own Ali Baba's cave. Tati Bazaar is a gold market where the goldsmiths are more exciting than the bling. Bangladeshi jewellery workmanship is the stuff of legend – it's incredibly fine, intricate and unfortunately a dying art. The market opens at 9am so head there to visit the workshops and watch a dull nugget being transformed into a detailed gold butterfly brooch so fine, you'd think it was made of silk.

New watering holes

MUMBAI

A bevy of edgy new bars have sprouted across Mumbai

PLEASE DON'T TELL

This hipster speakeasy bills itself as a secret bar but it's made not-so-secret by the fact you're encouraged to call and reserve a table. Still, the location is pretty cool, sequestered away behind a betel leaf seller in hip Kamala Mills in Mumbai's Lower Parel. Find a fire-engine red phone at the discreet front door, dial five (that's the password) and you're in. Double points for the Odd and Rummy, an icy, potent mix of rum and coffee and the Mid-East-inspired tapas. [facebook.com/PDTMumbai](#)

COLABA SOCIAL

Perched on Colaba Causeway behind the Taj Hotel, this is a space essentially created for white-collar freelancers and consultants who need a desk. But come 5pm – and Friday lunch hour – it's one of the most raucous spots around. Try the nerdy Reaction, a drink served in a beaker with a syringe filled with vodka. [Socialoffline.in](#)

BAR STOCK EXCHANGE

If you're in the 'burbs, drop into this slick new drinking den in Andheri district. The drinks here are stock-exchange friendly, where rises and falls in the costs of shares are extended to the prices of drinks. The drink that's trending the most becomes the most expensive. It makes for an exciting evening, where your bill will certainly surprise you – fingers crossed, in a good way. As for bar bites, try the fish tikka or panko-crumbed prawns. [barstockexchange.com](#)



MALDIVES

History hunters

This resort-studded region boasts an intriguing heritage

PRETTY PICTURE
Anantara Kihavah's villas are ultra luxe but the resort also has great history

LOAMA RESORT

Spearhead of a “cultural renaissance”, the soon-to-open Loama Resort at Maamigili puts the focus on all things cultural. Traditional crafts adorn the villas while artisans are on hand to demonstrate mat-weaving, lacquerwork and rope-making with coconut husks. The ancient remains of Buddhist baths and wells have been unearthed for guests to marvel at and there’s also a museum. [loamahotelsandresorts.com](#)

ROYAL ISLAND

Taking languorous baths was a popular pastime in the Maldives long before the inception of luxury resorts. In the 13th century, aristocrat Fas Badavin was famed for her love of soaking in stone baths (the archaeological remains have endured). It was also a favourite big-game fishing haunt of the king at about the same time. Adorned with banyan trees, the island is rich in folklore. [royal-island.com](#)

ANANTARA KIHAVAH VILLAS

Contrasting with this resort’s high-tech amenities and lush infinity pools is the fascinating history of the island of Huravalhi. As guests stroll down shady jungle pathways they’ll see stone wells dating back hundreds of years, just one reminder of the days when the island was inhabited by a community of Maldivians. There are also small rows of carved headstones softened by centuries of weathering. [anantara.com](#)

Breakfast of champions

MALDIVES

Dive in and try three of the most popular morning meals among Maldives locals

MAS'HUNI ROSHI

Eternally popular with tourists and locals alike, *mas'huni* is a mild blend of tuna, coconut, chillies, onion and lime juice. Tear off pieces of *roshi* (very thin tortilla) to Hoover it up. Mas'huni comes with an egg and a steaming cup of sweet tea or coffee.

KULHIMAS

Kulhi means hot in the local language and *mas* means fish, so there’s a warning in the name itself: this dish is only for the adventurous eater. Tuna is enveloped in a fiery, dry blend of chilli and curry spices. It’s eaten wrapped up in roshi. A cup of sweet tea can ease the kick of this powerful dish.

RIHAAKURU

This dark, sticky paste resembles Vegemite and rather like the famous Aussie spread, you’ll either love it or loathe it. Made by boiling and reducing tuna fish with salt, it’s served with rice or roshi. There’s also a fried version made with onions and chilli called *thelulirihaakuru*.

MALDIVES



Ray of light

Fishes of the Maldives *is the go-to marine-life guide used by dive centres since 1998, with 702 local species listed. The re-launched 2014 edition is hot off the press and co-author Tim Godfrey tells Fah Thai more about this underwater paradise*

Why the update?

With advances in things like DNA sampling, some fish names and images needed to be updated. So many people come here to see the sharks and rays, so we decided to do a whole new section on them. In the new edition, there are 15 species of shark and 16 species of rays .

Any surprises while doing research?

I was surprised at how many shark and ray species had been photographed in the Maldives: two guitarfish, a giant guitarfish and the bow-mouthed guitarfish. There was a pelagic thresher shark photographed in the far south and a large, rarely-seen small-eye stingray in the central atolls that behaved more like a manta ray.

Which sharks and rays are common?

Grey reef sharks, whitetip reef sharks, blacktip reef sharks and whale sharks are the most common sharks along with manta rays and stingrays. We don’t know a lot about the life history of sharks – their nursery years in lagoons, seagrass beds and mangrove swamps. We’re also seeing how populations are recovering since the whole Maldives was declared a Marine Protected Area. [Fishesofthemaldives.com](#)

