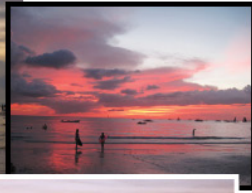


TOP 40



1 Sunset
Most Breathtaking View

Perhaps, the most memorable memento of Boracay is the sunset viewed from the White Beach, which keeps everyone in awe with the sky changing colors as the sun readies for its final bow.



Two Seasons' Mojito
Best Cocktail

BarLo, the hotel's in-house bar concocts the best mojito in the island by blending (not just crushing and grinding) the mint sprigs with sugar, lime juice, light rum and ice, making it the perfect cocktail to beat the heat.



3



Tirta Spa's Secrets of Egypt
Pampering at its Finest

You're in for a royal treat with an experience recreating beauty treatments in ancient royal baths. The first phase starts with a foot spa, followed by a hair and scalp massage and lastly, an exotic organic herb body polish. Afterwards, find yourself wrapped in a mixture of rose and jasmine before being ushered into a blissful Viomy shower. Then, channel Cleopatra and soak in a milk bath, perfumed by hundreds of flower petals. To conclude the treatment, find yourself wrapped in a mixture that ensures complete contentment. Light meals of sweets and teas are served between treatments. Lasts four hours and costs \$269 / P13,420 per person.



4 Nami's Champagne Brunch
Best Luxury Lunch

Who would say no to this? A bottomless champagne glass paired with Manami's salpicão – superb tenderloin cubes sautéed with roasted garlic and served with refreshing apple slices and fried sweet potato. Enjoy all this and a 180-degree vantage point of Boracay. Champagne brunch available from 10am to 2pm.



5 Astoria Boracay's Half Submerged Sun Loungers
Best Poolside Treat

At the center of the resort is a 20m lap pool, with a side deck where one can lay on half-submerged sun loungers. The pool area is surrounded by a teak wood deck with creatively shaped crescent loungers that seem to float in mid-air. At the other end of the pool is what appears to be a modern sculpture – the pool shower! This wonderfully functioning piece of art, plus the 244 hanging fishes have become one of the most photographed items at the resort.



7 Discovery Shores
Best Service

Ranked #14 by Travel + Leisure, Discovery Shores has distinguished itself for the combination of innovative amenities and services, superior culinary offerings that reflect global inspirations, and most of all, a service that combines efficiency and the time-honored graciousness of Filipino hospitality – service that's all heart.



6 Shangri-La Boracay Resort and Spa's Private Jetty
Most Convenient Way to Arrive (in Style!)

It is the first deluxe resort in Boracay to have its own private jetty, which brings a whole new level of luxury. Before the 16-minute ride to the resort on Shangri-La's private speed boat, guests are ushered from the airport to an exclusive lounge, where they are offered cold towels and a welcome drink. The boat ride offers panoramic views of the island.



8 Kasbah
Destination Dining

Kasbah offers a sensual feast amidst an exotic Moroccan souk vibe within a relaxed beach setting: atmospheric lighting, low silver tables, vibrantly colored oversized sofas and cushions accompanied by couscous, tagines and cocktails. The Lamb Tagine, Fish Tagine Gsaouri (a specialty from the beautiful coastal city of Essaouira) and Cream Dory White Fish with potatoes and bell peppers are must-tries.

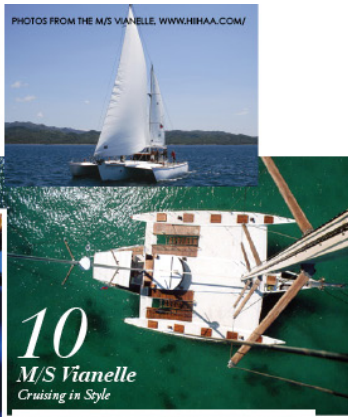




9 Real Coffee & Tea Café

Best Breakfast

Their dishes aren't exactly local, but, the hearty set of tuna pesto omelette, French toast and brewed coffee is the best way to start your day. Find Real Coffee's nipa hut setting tucked inland near Station 1.



10 M/S Vianelle

Cruising in Style

Bring your Boracay experience to a whole new level by cruising with the M/S Vianelle Trimaran yacht, which can be rented for a day or a few hours at sunset and whose deck can accommodate about 40 people. Enjoy drinks and yummy hors d'oeuvres served onboard; hook up your iPod to the boat's speakers. Perfect for engagements, intimate weddings or that jet set party you've always wanted to throw.



13 Courtyard Bistro's Rockefeller Oysters

Seafood Indulgence

The ultimate aphrodisiac: freshly harvested Aklan oysters baked with Hollandaise, topped with bacon, mozzarella & Parmesan will make any mouth water.



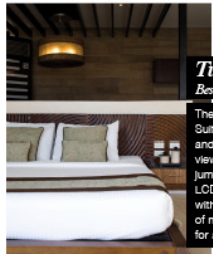
14



Boracay West Cove

Best Sea Cliff View

This charming cove offers a private retreat for adventurous travelers and couples looking to experience a scenic, unique and peaceful Boracay. Breathtaking sea cliff room view, unrivaled bedrock architecture and VIP speed boat transfers complete one's holiday get-away.

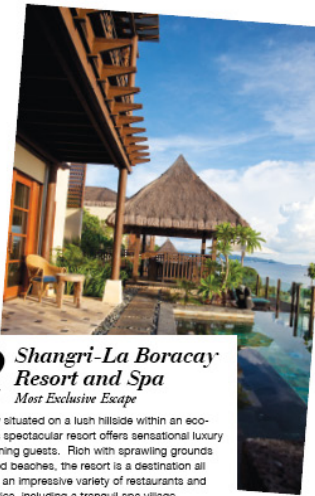


11

Two Seasons' Suite Heaven

Best Private Party Venue

Their 47sqm Presidential Suite, also known as Suite Heaven, is equipped with a private veranda and its own 16sqm infinity pool with a spectacular view of the white sand beach. Luxurious duvets, Jumbo rain shower, bar sink with wine rack, a 32in LCD TV and a Bose Lifestyle entertainment system with a iMusix System stored with up to 200 hours of music make this suite the ultimate party place for a small group of friends.



12 Shangri-La Boracay Resort and Spa

Most Exclusive Escape

Dramatically situated on a lush hillside within an eco-reserve, this spectacular resort offers sensational luxury to its discerning guests. Rich with sprawling grounds and secluded beaches, the resort is a destination all its own with an impressive variety of restaurants and leisure facilities, including a tranquil spa village.



15 Mandala Spa's Hilot Trilogy

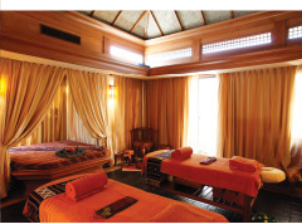
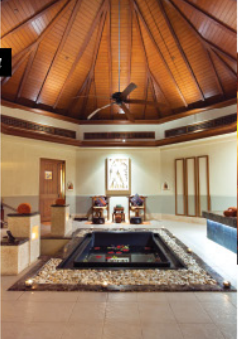
Best in Holistic Wellness

Hilot, a Filipino therapeutic treatment, restores balance to your entire body by improving circulation and allowing one's energies to flow. This thorough head-to-toe massage combines with Dagdagay foot treatment and Bentosa.

16 Chi, The Spa

Indulgent Spa Village

Located on a rocky peninsula looking out over a private bay, the 6714sqm detached spa village complex is designed to be a sanctuary within the Shangri-La Resort. Facilities include deluxe villas for half- or full-day use and smaller suites for hourly treatments. A spa pool is set within the landscaped gardens, an ideal place to relax after a treatment or yoga session. Chi offers a host of treatments based on Chinese and native Philippine healing concepts.



17

Real Coffee's Calamansi Muffins

Best Pasalubong (present)

Every bite of these moist and tasty lemon flavored cakes is a joy to eat. Bring home a box or two to share with family and friends.



20

Footzee's Best Foot Massage

Walking back and forth the beach can be quite tiring. Nothing beats Foot Reflexology by Footzee's, conveniently located near Budget Mart in D'Mall. The massage lasts a good 76 minutes.



19

Swirl's Frozen Kefir Best Morning Upper

Kefir is a cultured, enzyme-rich food filled with friendly micro-organisms that balance your "inner-ecosystem." More nutritious and therapeutic than yogurt, it supplies complete protein, essential minerals, and valuable B vitamins.



21

Cyma's Ouzo Liquor and Char-broiled Lamb Chops
Tastiest Greek Cuisine

Offering a unique, enticing and fun dining experience where people can come together, Cyma celebrates flavor and life! Opa!



18

Loco Frio Most Fun Drink

The Philippines' and Boracay's first frozen cocktails-to-go offer the fastest and coldest drink with reusable insulated tumblers for maximum preserved coolness. The lime margarita is most recommended.



22

Erus Hotel Most Stylish Room Interiors

Although located in Station 3 and away from the fine white sand beach, Erus is reminiscent of boutique hotels with its neo-French/mid-century elegance room interiors, making one's stay at the hotel quite a luxurious one.



23

7 Stones Adventure Junkie's Haven

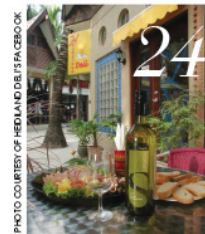
Near Boracay's water sports scene in Bulabog, 7 Stones is a spacious resort frequented by surfing aficionados. 7 Stones has been one of the major sponsors of the 21st Neil Pryde Boracay International Funboard Cup, the region's longest running kitesurfing and windsurfing event.



24

Heidiland Deli Best Gourmet-to-Go

Heidiland Delicatessen offers a wide array of fine food and an extensive selection of wines from France, Italy, Spain, Australia, Chile and South Africa, to name a few. Find exquisite hams, cold cuts, sausages, smoked delicacies and dozens of cheeses plus a variety of chocolates from all over Europe and Australia in the well-stocked display chillers.



26

Jogging by the Beach Best Afternoon Workout

Jogging is most practical way to keep in shape while in the island, best done just right before the sun sets.



25

Stand-up Paddle Surfing Best Morning Workout

This starts with using a one-bladed paddle, whilst standing on a normal length surfboard. Maintaining your balance can be quite tough, making this sport the perfect morning workout.



27

You C1000 Vitamin Drink Healthiest Drink

Originated in Takeda, Japan, this citrus drink is packed with 1000mg of Vitamin C in liquid form easily absorbed by the body. Other benefits include calcium absorption booster and increased stamina. It is available at Erus Hotel, E Mall and leading supermarkets in Metro Manila.



28 The Courtyard Bistro's Corona beer and Hungry Man's Burger

Best Combo Meal

The Courtyard Bistro is an intimate gathering place, offering an exquisite al fresco dining experience with a scenic ocean view for those looking for a quaint and cozy corner to chow down a good burger and beer.



30

Alta Vista de Boracay

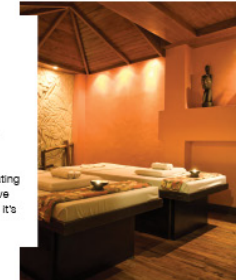
Biggest Condotel Community

The complex on the north side of Boracay features al fresco dining, an infinity pool, a spa, a viewing deck, game rooms and recreational zones, and even barbecue sites. There is also a family room with a loft. The pool has magnificent views of the Fairways and Bluewater golf course and the surrounding countryside.

29 True Food

Most Exotic Food

A favorite of locals and visitors alike, True Food Boracay Restaurant serves excellent curries prepared by an Indian chef. Rogan josh (lamb cooked in yogurt and tomato) is highly recommended; chana ki dal and mushroom dopaiza are among the popular vegetarian dishes.



31 Mandarin Spa's Mango Butter

Most Refreshing Spa Treatment

An intensive moisturizer, mango butter has softening and regenerating properties to the skin. Its protective effect against UV radiation makes it a natural sunshield.

32 Zuzuni's Saganaki Pasta

Heartiest Meal

Zuzuni's pasta, made of sautéed prawns in tomato pomodoro sauce with feta cheese and tossed with spaghetti paste, is a perfect hunger buster. The combination of the sweet and spicy sauce with the olive oil leaves a tangy taste that will definitely keep you coming back for more.



33

Tropic Café's patatim

Certified Hit

It's somewhat surprising to encounter a Filipino-Chinese dish on the island, let alone one that's not seafood. But this tender stewed pork knuckle in sweet hoisin sauce will surely get mouths watering and is definitely a must try. Tropic Café is inside Boracay Tropic, located in Station 3.



34 Don Vito Ristorante Italiano's

Best Family Restaurant

Abundant with fresh seafood, pasta and breads everyday, the aromas from the woodfire oven-baked pizzas and freshly grilled sea fare playfully waft through the restaurant's doors that open out into the Sulu Sea.

36 Zipline at Fairways

Best Scenic Thrill

Beginning above the tenth hole at Fairways & Bluewater and landing on the beach below, with an elevation of 80ft above sea level combined with a cable length of 300m and a slope of 90 degrees, Zipline Boracay guarantees a spectacular view on top of an adrenaline rush that will keep one wanting for more.



35 Ultimate Frisbee

Best Recreational Activity

Catch the beach fever by throwing and catching Frisbee with your friends or with the island located along the stretch of the White Beach. In fact, The Boracay Open Asian Beach Ultimate Tournament, an ultimate frisbee event, has been held annually since 2003, usually during summer.



37 Parasailing

Most Exhilarating Activity

Ascending into mid-air lasts for 20 minutes... definitely spine-tingling!



38 Paraw

Best Way to Explore the Island

Similar to a proa, paraw sailing is one of the island's most popular pursuits, and a great way to explore the many beaches and snorkel sites around Boracay, as well as neighboring Pansy and Carabao islands.



40 Boracay's 30 Beaches

Beach Goes' Heaven

39 Ariel's Point

Most Adventurous Activity

Exude that devil-may-care attitude and jump off the cliff at Ariel's Point without hesitation, and climb back up to the cliff feeling invigorated and ready for more. The thrill is undeniably addictive.

Some still unexplored, Boracay Island has 30 beaches; seven of them include the ever-famous White Beach, which stretches to four kilometers of fine sand. Up north is the Diniwid Beach with several self-catering beach houses in the area. Baling Hai is next to Diniwid on the western shore, sitting between two rocky cliffs. In the northernmost tip of Boracay and famous for white seashells, Puka Beach faces the Sibuyan Sea. Ilig-Iligan Beach, on the other hand, features caves and fruit bats. Bulabog Beach is on the other side of the White Beach and is the ideal venue for water sports. Lastly, Carabao Island, right across Puka Beach is said to be the "next Boracay" with its fine white sands.



	7 Stones Boracay Suites	Alta Vista de Boracay	Astoria Boracay	Boracay West Cove	Discovery Shores	
LOCATION	Bulabog Beach, Baling Hai (Boracay's East Coast)	Near the village of Yapak (island's northwest coast)	Station 1 (beachfront)	Diniwid Beach	Station 1 (White Beach)	
DESCRIPTION	Equipped with designer furnished apartments and rooms, the hotel offers nothing less than the luxury and exclusivity of a home away from home. The family suite has its own Jacuzzi and outdoor terrace.	Located on a four-hectare prime property on the hillside, its elevation presents a breathtaking, postcard-pretty view of the surrounding sea and mountains regardless of where one is. Alta Vista has lots good for a family of six.	Astoria offers a zesty vibe with colors aqua, teal, lime green and sophisticated gray (definitely eye-candy) in their rooms and suites. The lobby pavilion and pool area side center stage with 244 pieces of stylized argel fish that appear to be swimming into a "wave" wall.	This charming bedrock resort sits on a cliff in a scenic and peaceful part of Boracay - Diniwid. The villas are brilliantly constructed on top of a very old rock formation, making it very private, tranquil and a perfect romantic getaway.	Ranked among the Top 15 hotels in Asia, this first upscale resort in Boracay is famous for its top notch facilities, stunning beachfront location and most especially their impeccable service. One interesting feature just outside one of the restaurants is the 14m high waterfall that cascades from an infinity pool complemented by a pool bar.	Discovers among the Top 15 hotels in Asia, this first upscale resort in Boracay is famous for its top notch facilities, stunning beachfront location and most especially their impeccable service. One interesting feature just outside one of the restaurants is the 14m high waterfall that cascades from an infinity pool complemented by a pool bar.
NUMBER OF ROOMS	25 rooms	500 rooms	30 rooms	12 rooms	88 rooms	
EAT/DRINK	7 Notes Cafe and poolside bar	Cafe Vista	Wave Cafe and Bar Restaurant, Sunset Bar	Cristobal Bar	Indigo, Platino, Sands Restaurant, Quikboard Bar	
PRICE	Doubles from \$100 / P5000	Doubles from \$70 / P3600	Doubles from \$154 / P7700	Doubles from \$210 / P10,500	Doubles from \$300 / P17,500	
CONTACT	7stonesboracay.com, +632 813 7740, +6336 288 1801	altavistadeboracay.com.ph +632 810 2072, +6336 288 4001	astoriaboracay.com, +632 910 0057, +6336 288 1111	boracaywestcove.com, +6336 288 4279	discoverystonesboracay.com, +632 720 8888, +6336 288 4500	
SHERYL SAYS...	Spending time at the poolside bar is a must!	Acquire a piece of property at Alta Vista and have some noted celebrities as neighbors	Boracay's newest addition is indeed trendy, hip and trendy.	The long climb up to the resort is definitely worth it. Tip: get into a speed boat and enjoy the cliff view from the sea	Best location ever! Pure and utter bliss!	



	Erus Hotel	Fairways and Blue Water Resort Golf and Country Club	Nami	Shangri-La Resort and Spa	Two Seasons
LOCATION	Station 3	New Coast, Bulabog	Diniwid Beach	Boracay Yapak	Station 1 (beachfront)
DESCRIPTION	Rooms are designed for the most discriminating taste. For the edgy and extreme, they offer a modern pop room with Ferrari red, black and white furnishings. Classic and sophisticated accommodations such as the modern baroque and country rooms are also available.	Fairways and Blue Water Resort is home to the exclusive communities in Boracay. There are three concrete in the resort namely, The Lodgings, The Villas on the 9th (Yabak), Sofis, Maria and Margarita, and Balahara.	Nami is an escape from the crowd. It is perched on a verdant cliff in a secluded cove of palm trees, with its restaurant overlooking the sea.	Located in the northern part of Boracay, this resort and spa is located in a very private tropical destination, with 219 rooms, suites and villas in a classic-yet-contemporary style infused with local cultural influences. Shangri-La has 300m of pristine beachfront and 12 hectares of grounds.	Named after the country's two distinct seasons (wet and dry), this beachfront resort has Zen-minimalist and tropical urban furnishings. Dip in the fresh water adult and kiddie pool at the back portion of the property or stroll along the pathway to and from the restaurant and pool, and enjoy the 20m-long hot pond.
NUMBER OF ROOMS	22 rooms	400 rooms	12 rooms	219 rooms	34 rooms
EAT/DRINK	Spinals	Al Andaluz (Spanish cuisine), Lateralza Bar and Anahaw Bar	Manami Restaurant (Filipino and European)	Vitana (Jint), Sinra (seafood), Pina (Iskara), Celo (Jint), Solera Bar (Tapas), Non Bar	Bacio (Euro-Asian) and Sky Bar
PRICE	Doubles from \$60 / P3200	Doubles from \$210 / P10,500	Doubles from \$183 / P9150	Doubles from \$340 / P17,000	Doubles from \$195 / P9000
CONTACT	erusboracay.com, +6336 288 3442	fairwaysbluewaterboracay.com, +632 633 1393, +6336 288 5067	namiaboracay.com, +632 489 8907, +6336 288 6753	shangri-la.com/en/property/boracay/boracaysort, +6336 288 4988	twoseasonsboracay.com, +632 413 5003, +6336 288 4384
SHERYL SAYS...	I highly recommend their Modern Classical room. If you're feeling a bit 'adventurous', request for the Baroque room with only a glass panel separating the shower and sleeping areas.	There are so many activities to enjoy in Fairways, such as Ziplines, ATV/Buggy rides, horseback rides and of course, golfing.	Manami's bottomless champagne brunch is a must-try!	Perfect for honeymooners and those really wanting to get away from the bustling city life	Staying in Suite Heaven's private infinity pool overlooking the famous White Beach is such an amazing treat!

where's the After-Party?

How modernism, infrastructure and city culture are affecting and redefining Boracay's natural ecology and what needs to be done to help save the island

Today, the island is seeing an influx of a different breed of visitors whose concept of island living includes sporting bronzed bodies and getting sweaty over adrenaline pumping water sports. This new breed of tourists flock to the island to enjoy leisure activities usually confined to highly urbanized cities - all-night parties, live bands and bottomless booze. Now they have an excuse to party half night.

As expected, this invasion has resulted in many environmental disasters, foremost of which is the loss of vital forest cover in exchange for concrete forests, some of which mainly try to blend in with a landscape that's disappearing by trying to look natural.

Wetlands contribute a lot to an island's ecosystem. It is considered to have one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems and is home to many animals, including birds and amphibians.

In mid-2007, then Environment Secretary Lito Alarcon proposed that a moratorium on new constructions be implemented in the island. On October 2007, the local government of Malay, Alvar, who has jurisdiction over the island, passed the moratorium, which took effect from January 2 to July 2, 2008.

Despite this moratorium, new buildings continue to rise, which prompted Alarcon to threaten to sue then Malay mayor Cleonor Cawaling for dereliction of duty.

The non-stop development in the island resulted in the migration of many skilled workers from the mainland, some eventually deciding to establish permanent settlements. Based on the 2000 Census, 12,003 of the 24,519 residents are workers and visitors on the mainland who have decided to maintain permanent residence on the 10.32sqkm island. Now, if you include the 8001 daily visitors based on data from the Department of Tourism, the number of people in the island, on a daily basis, is alarmingly choking its natural ecology. In fact, the overcrowding of the island alarmed environment officials who

are now urging for studies to be done on the environmental and ecological situation of the island.

One disadvantage to the environment when there are more people concentrated in a small space is the likelihood of water contamination due to waste, particularly human waste. This is why from time to time the island would have its share of E. Coli scum. Officer-in-charge of the newly established environment office on the island, Merlene Abonca said that E. coli may be normally present in large bodies of water, especially those near a settlement. An indication that there is an abnormally large number of E. coli is the increasing number of vegetation along the shoreline. This indicates that the waters are rich in nutrients, mostly due to human waste.

Sea grass remains abundant on the shores, which the locals refuse to remove, claiming that this is the reason for the island's powdery white sand. Luckily, the white sands of Boracay is not because of sea grasses whose nutrients are derived from human fecal matter, rather they are made of ground up corals and coral debris owing to the strong winds that occasionally visit the island.

Other forms of waste that come with the influx of tourists would be garbage, particularly plastic that the thousands of people visiting the island produce from buying bottled waters or famous tropical drinks. It is not enough that the local government regularly activates volunteers to pick-up pieces of garbage along the shore as island trash continues to pile up without the proper solid waste management.

Perhaps the urgency in protecting the island treasures from overdevelopment and over-tourism is best described by Alarcon's statement in a QMA News report: "Boracay Island is a national jewel that needs our full protection. The government should take the lead to ensure its sustainable development, not only for this generation but more importantly for the next generations of Filipinos."

In the end, the protection of the island's natural resources rests on the hands of the locals. Should they want to make their livelihood sustainable, then they should take an aggressive stance and concrete steps in making sure the precious resource can be enjoyed for years to come. **BY RICHIE T. SALGADO, PMP**

En Route

An insider's guide to Boracay



156 SPACE



Boracay

The island's well-guarded secret from the 70s boasts of fine white sand, glorious sunsets and now, a rapidly growing community. Here are 40 fantastic ways to enjoy the island as we unveil the beach's true colors and pave its way back to innocence

produced by **SHERYL SONGSONG**
photography **PAOLO BUENDIA AND ROB CHAN**

Introduction
Anyone can marvel at the gleaming water and powdery sand – all of which seems almost unreal. For weary travelers and vacation-seekers, there is nothing like being hoisted over to the calm, turquoise water and taking a stroll on the quiet streak of white sand – the island's beauty spot. By now, tourists and locals alike have mastered a universal reaction to the island: some oohs and aahs followed by eyes rolling heavenwards. The designing of one's dream is complete.



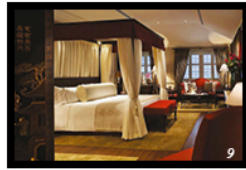


**HOTEL GUIDE SPECIAL
SEXIEST
BEDS**

Mr & Mrs Smith, the boutique hotel specialists with an expert eye for stylish holidays is turning 10. With the help of Smith's team of undercover hotel hunters, they've tried and tested THOUSANDS of beds, stayed in historic buildings, purpose-built eco lodges, designer beach retreats and even came to uncover the most stylish and seductive stays across the world. While Mr & Mrs Smith hotels vary in style, price and place, what they all have in common is a sense of romance, character and an element of mischief - the perfect places to be led astray. There's 52, but here's 10 of their favorite beds in the whole world.



6 HIP, HISTORIC VILLA IL SALVIATINO IN FLORENCE 7 MODERN DECADENCE AT BLAKES HOTEL IN LONDON 8 ELEGANT ARABESQUE SUITES IN NOIR D'IVOIRE IN MARRAKECH 9 CONTEMPORARY ELEGANCE CHIC AT CAPELLA SINGAPORE IN SINGAPORE 10 COLONIAL SAFARI STAY AT ROYAL MALEWANE IN THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

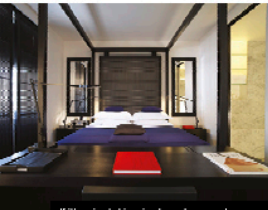


For the complete list of Mr & Mrs Smith's 52 Best Beds, visit mrandsmrsmith.com/52-bestbeds



1 THE CHARMING DESIGNER DEN AT CROSBY STREET HOTEL IN NEW YORK 2 LUXE WORTHY VIEWS AT SOUTHERN OCEAN LODGE, KANGAROO ISLAND 3 SLEEK SEA-KISSED SANCTUARY ALILA VILLAS SOORI IN BALI 4 HERITAGE MODERN HAVEN THE SIAM IN BANGKOK 5 LAVISH LEFT BANK BOUDOIR IN L'HOTEL, PARIS

hotel guide



If it's oriental-inspired modern opulence that floats your boat, head to the Anantara Hempel-designed La Suite West in well-bred Baywater. Opened in August last year, this retreat in a listed building has chef Victor Garvey (of Copenhagen's Noma fame) at the helm of the forward-thinking restaurant. Doubles from US\$219.00



It's 175 years since Brown's, London's first hotel, opened in 1837. Redesigned by hotel guru Olga Polizzi, each room blazes with British good looks – this is unquestionably one of London's top city stays. Doubles from US\$466.00



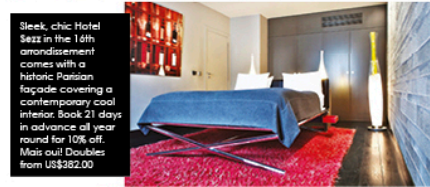
Just off the Champs-Élysée, Hotel Keppler is an imposing Haussmannian townhouse on the outside; inside, designer Pierre-Yves Rochon has signed off a sophisticated meeting of high-society modern style with camped-up classicism. Riddled with alcoves, plastered with frescoes and dotted with intriguing artefacts, the hotel has an air of opulence. Book a month in advance for an exclusive 10% off, including breakfast, from now until the end of August. Doubles from US\$498.00

A TALE OF TWO Cities

After 10 years of travelling the world in search of the best boutique boltholes, the hotel experts at Mr & Mrs Smith have discovered 10 the classic haunts of Paris and London that top the charts for city breaks in Europe



Apertivi, the light bites you're presented with as soon as you pull up a pew, are one of the many things we love about Italy. Back in Blighty, we say grazie to Britain, opposite Hyde Park, where the March bar launched its own version of the fast Mediterranean treat. So, roll up and raise a toast to la dolce vita, cocktail and antipasti anyone? Doubles from US\$562.00



Stylish, chic Hotel S&Z in the 16th arrondissement comes with a historic Parisian façade covering a contemporary cool interior. Book 21 days in advance all year round for 10% off. Mid-out Doubles from US\$382.00



With delightfully mismatched interiors by designer India Mahdavi, Hôtel Thourmeux sits in the most cultured patch of Paris. It's eccentrically beautiful throughout, but its Michelin-starred, design-your-own-menus cuisine is the main attraction. Doubles from US\$249.00

A LOVE OF LONDON



For a dash of gourmet gastro in the center of the city, Mr & Mrs Smith's newest tip is the tranquil Grazing Goat. Tucked away behind Marble Arch, there are just eight rooms; despite their central location, each is styled with lashings of countryside character. Doubles from US\$254.00

The Ampersand Hotel in South Kensington made its debut last summer. Boutique luxury in London doesn't get much more accomplished than this: the interior design (and the cocktail menu) is inspired by the surrounding museums, with references to botany, music, geometry, ornithology and astronomy. What better way to prompt discerning discourse à deux? Doubles from US\$290.00



The first hotel project of fashion icon Marjolaine Marziola, La Maison Champs Élysées showcases her fine eye for all sophisticated style and playful sense of humour. The dominant colours are black, white and grey, but there's no doom and gloom here – the theatrical design is too amusing for that. Outrageous couture, a tranquil terrace and fine French food make this our top tip for a fab chic Parisian retreat. Doubles from US\$542.00

A PASSION for Paris



After a flâneur's foray through the streets of Paris, there's nowhere better to wind up than Hôtel Daniel. This breathtakingly beautiful hotel in Paris is a feast for the eyes, a delicate confection of exotic Eastern motifs, 18th-century Chinoiserie and specially commissioned fabric and wall coverings. Doubles from US\$242.00

Mr & Mrs Smith is a boutique travel specialist with an expert eye for stylish holidays. Each property is visited personally, reviewed anonymously and regularly reassessed, so they know they offer the best hotels and properties in the world.

For bookings or further information visit www.mrsandmrs.com or call the Mr & Mrs Smith Travel Team on +44 (0) 8446 9371.

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BELOW PROBABLY THE SHAPLEST OF ALL THE ROOMS, THE DELUXE ROOM BEDS ARE TRULY COMFORTABLE. RIGHT: PAY HOMAGE TO THE OLD MASTER—SURELY THE COMIC PRINT BRINGS BACK CHILDHOOD MEMORIES. FAR RIGHT: THE LOBBY, FLAMBOYANT WITH DETAILS THAT CREATE A VISUAL FEAST.



UTTERLY Surreal!

Staying at *The Luxe Manor* is like living out an Alice moment—an adventure to remember!

WRITER, SHERYL SONGSONG PHOTOGRAPHER, KERWIN KAISER YU

Over the top. Surreal. Elusive. The Luxe Manor (pronounced as 'deluxe manor') makes jaws drop upon entering its lobby through the unassuming facade fronting the busy Kimberley Road in Tsim Sha Tsui. Managed by GR Leisure Concept Ltd., a Hong Kong based hospitality group, this stylish, surrealism-inspired boutique hotel boasts of 153 guest rooms and six thematic (and mind blowing) suites; Dada, the property's bar and lounge; FINDS, the iconic Nordic restaurant; and GE Gastronomy Extra Ordinaire. Hotel guests, hold on tight. The story of The Luxe Manor's distinct accommodation, dining and drinking outlets is just unfolding.

Inspired by Spanish architect Antonio Gaudí, the lobby, with its copper and gold finishes, is entered through a door with bells installed in it (to make a sound when opened—something Feng Shui), a waterfall and crystal lighting. This symbolizes a gateway to the mystical world of surrealism. Unlike most hotels, this main entrance is found on the right side of the property; and as mentioned earlier, there is an alternate and understated entrance found on the main street to easily locate the hotel. Designed by Kactus DESIGN, the flooring in the lobby is mosaic, patterned after a unicycle, large clock and compass, which represents a distortion of time and space. The custom-made 'Old Master Q Chair' is the center of attention, dedicated to the legacy of Joseph Wong's famous Old Master Q comic series. With its unique mix and match of accent pieces as well as dark tones of magenta, gold and black, the lobby is an interesting homage to the old and new.



THE LUXE MANOR
39 Kimberley Road,
Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong
Tel: +852 3763 8888
@theluxemanor.com

LEFT: DOOR KNOCKERS ON THE 12TH FLOOR ARE PRETTY UNIQUE—HERE'S ONE OF THEM. ABOVE: THE MOSAIC FLOORING ADVISES GUESTS TO 'GET LOST IN TIME' WHILE STAYING AT THE HOTEL. OPPOSITE PAGE: LIVE OUT A 'TRUMBEVIA MACHINERY' IN THIS GARDEN-INSPIRED MEETING/ EVENTS ROOM.

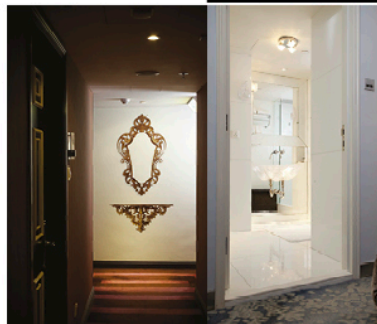
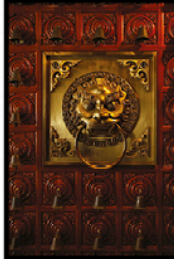


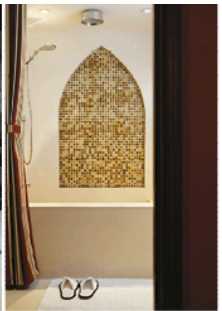


Opulent as it may seem, the thematic suites on the 12th floor give guests an experience like no other. Clever designs by David Buffery and Aedas Interiors truly give the wow factor, starting with 'Liaison'. A bespoke round bed (that would probably make some eyebrows raise) with Venetian-inspired furniture give off a romantic flair. "It's bound to put anyone in the mood," says the hotel staff. The 'Safari,' on the otherhand, receives a Middle Eastern luxury experience under the desert stars (yes, there are lights blinking on the ceiling), complete with a retractable tent and Turkish bath. Up for a glacial night? The 'Nordic' is decorated with ice-like furniture. Check out the uber cool bathroom sink (pun intended). The 'Mirage,' meanwhile is the icing on the cake as it brings surrealism to the next level. This suite has fake doorknobs, *rompefoi* walls and drapery, a clock that moves backward, faux finishes and furniture pieces and accessories that look like they're about to fall.... what a sensory overload! It's such an interactive experience that guests should try at least once.

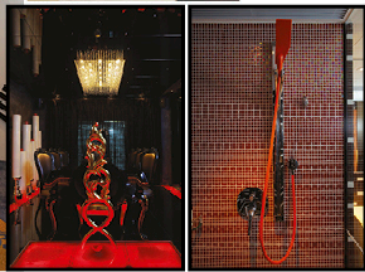
Meanwhile, the other guest rooms are as equally exciting (and beautiful) as the suites, but in a more subdued manner. The kitchen features continue in-room: there's a faux fireplace below the flat screen TV with a gilded frame on one wall, and this style continues above the bed, where you'll see hand-painted picture frames that give an old-world feel. Although the deluxe room is a bit small, it's comfortable and equipped with a marble bathroom and rainshower. Exclusive privileges are also complimentary for deluxe room guests to enjoy: mini bar and buffet breakfast at FINDS; 15 to 50% discounts on beverages and food at Dada; a souvenir snap with framing taken anywhere in the hotel during your stay; intimate turndown amenities with a personalized card and delicate homemade pantry; deluxe Gilchrist & Soanes collection of antioxidants-rich botanical bathroom amenities from the UK; and free shoe shining, pressing and dry cleaning for one suit or item. What a treat!

ABOVE COOL AND COMFY OVER AT THE MIRAGE BEHIND THE LOBBY'S HUGE ENTRANCE DOORS REFLECT A BIT OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE CULTURE. BELOW, FROM LEFT THERE'S NOTHING SMALL ABOUT THE HALLWAYS & LUXE MANOR; THE ONE AT MIRAGE, WHICH IS REMINISCENT OF A GIANT ICE CUBE; MORE COLOR AND DETAILS AT THE HALLWAYS OF THE LUXE MANOR OPPOSITE PAGE ARE YOU WONDERING IF THIS IS REAL HARRY BOOK THE ROOM TO FIND OUT





LEFT THE TURKISH BATH FOUND IN THE SAHARI; BELOW, FROM LEFT THE CHEF'S TABLE COVER THE DARK AND DEVILISH FUNCTION ROOM; A MERGER OF MATERIALS—STONE, METAL AND PLASTIC—IN THE SHOWER AREA OF MIRAGE



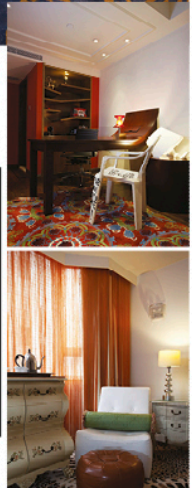
It's common for hotels to have function rooms, but The Luxe Manor brings it to a whole new level by carrying the allure in the suites to its three private rooms. Each room is special in its own way: One is inspired from the heavens with lush white curtains resembling angel's wings. The ceiling offers the illusion that angels are stepping down from above. The second room contrasts the aforementioned, with its dark and devilish features reminiscent of a scene from the film 'The Devil's Advocate.' The fiery, lava-like flooring seems to broil when stepped on. This room is also considered the chef's table—with exclusive views of the open kitchen. The third and last room is dreamy and forest-like—its relaxing vibe is immaculate and fresh with foliage covering the walls and ceiling of the room. Aren't all these so theatrical?

Moving on to gastronomic delights, the cleverly named FINDS (an acronym for Finland, Iceland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden) is the only Nordic restaurant in the Pearl River Delta. Celebrity chef Jukka Sorva takes the helm in the kitchen and comes up with signature dishes such as Salmon in Six Ways, Nordic Seafood Platter and Daim Parfait Dessert, just to name a few. One of the desserts, the white chocolate cornflake clusters with muesli sprinkled with raspberries and yogurt ice cream on the side, is absolutely an amazing treat! Please do try it. The restaurant is green and sustainable, offering vegetarian dishes and a wide range of seafood options. Located on the first floor, the interiors of FINDS is fun and relaxed, resembling a colorful Nordic summer using Paul Smith and Missoni fabrics.

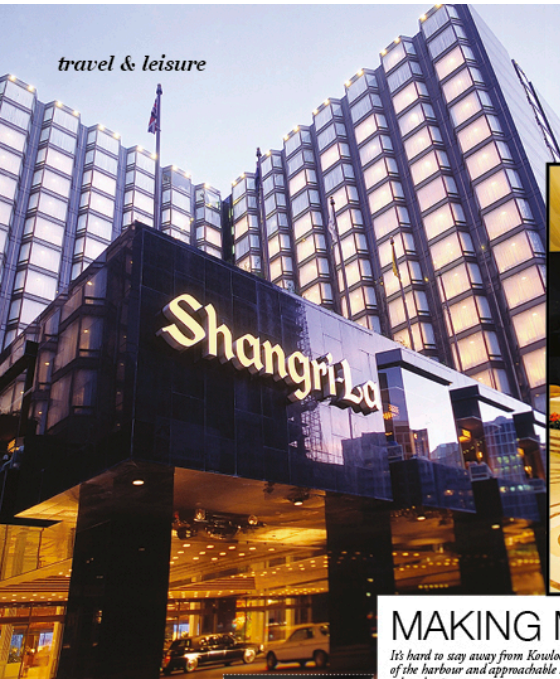
As if the eclecticism of this boutique hotel hasn't reached its quota, one may find himself at the whimsical Dada Bar + Lounge. It is inspired by the Dadaism art movement of the early 20th century—where nothing is quite it seems. The space is a visual extravaganza—oversized chairs, thrones, heart-shaped seats with wings, and a bar with silver horses and a lion "ready to jump out." They will keep you in good company in addition to the live band performing every Friday and Saturday night.

After all that's been said, do you think this hotel is another flight of fancy, or are you ready to capture your imagination? Pack your bags, book a night or two, and get ready for your 'Alice in Wonderland' adventure. **SPACE**

ABOVE ALL ABOARD! A DINING AREA THAT GIVES YOU THE ILLUSION OF BEING IN A TRAIN RIGHT? NO, THE ROOM WAS NOT VANDERBILT. IT'S PART OF THE CHARM OF MIRAGE BELOW FINDS IS DEFINITELY A MUST-TRY RESTAURANT BOTTOM RIGHT: THE WINE BAR AREA OF THE DELUXE ROOM OPPOSITE PAGE THOSE AREN'T REAL CLOTHES HANGING; BUT IT'S PRETTY AWESOME THEY'RE THERE, RIGHT?



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MAKING MEMORIES

It's hard to stay away from Kowloon Shangri-La. If floor-to-ceiling views of the harbour and approachable staff don't make a good hotel stay, then what does?

WRITER, SHERYL SONGSONG

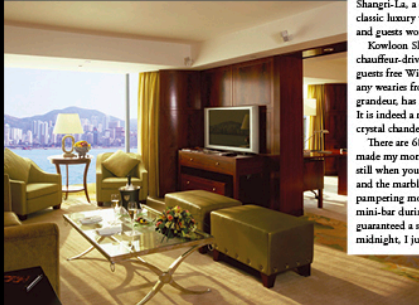
There's a line of high-gloss hotels in Hong Kong, but to some, there's one that they call home whatever part of the world they may be. The Shangri-La chain of hotels is a household name, an illustrious brand in the hotel industry. And when given a chance to stay in one of them, you jump at it. Such is the case in Kowloon Shangri-La, a dreamy hotel located in the trendy Tsim Sha Tsui East, redefining classic luxury without being stuffy. It's their service that makes people come back, and guests wouldn't want it any other way.

Kowloon Shangri-La offers a regal experience to guests, starting with its chauffeur-driven limousine service from the airport to the hotel, which provides guests free WiFi as well as refreshments and an in-car massage to help fight any weariness from long flights. The lobby, clad in Italian marble with touches of grandeur, has an old world feel that is glamorous and comfortable at the same time. It is indeed a multi-sensory treat with fresh flowers, a live harpist and pianist, and crystal chandeliers reassuring guests a lovely stay.

There are 688 guestrooms, and I am lucky to have a Harbour View Room that made my mornings (and nights) more pleasant than usual. Time does seem to stand still when you gaze at the harbour view. Rooms are very spacious, well-equipped, and the marble bathroom is so beautiful and relaxing. It's nothing but quiet, pampering moments in-room, while I sip my tea and savor light snacks left at the mini-bar during turndown. If you haven't slept like a baby in months, you are guaranteed a sweet slumber in their cozy and snug beds. Arriving at the hotel almost midnight, I just melted between the softest pillows and duvet.

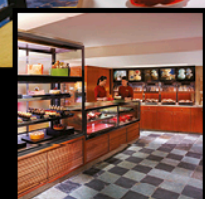
ABOVE UNDISPUTED ELEGANCE OF THE CLASSIC FACADE OF SHANGRI-LA KOWLOON BELOW ENJOY THE HARBOUR VIEW AS YOU LOUNGE INSIDE YOUR ROOM TOP RIGHT THE SIGHT WELCOMES YOU AS YOU ENTER THE HOTEL. FRENCH OPIUM PAINTS THE ICONIC MURAL SERVES AS YOUR BACKDROP WHILE STAYING AT THE LOBBY LOUNGE

KOWLOON SHANGRI-LA
64 Mody Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui East
Kowloon, Hong Kong
Tel: +852 2721 2111
shangri-la.com/hongkong/
Kowloonshangri-la





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT GET YOUR CANTONESE FOOD-FIX AT THIS MICHELIN-STARRED RESTAURANT; THIS JAPANESE RESTAURANT HAS ROOMS YET ORGANIC THEMES THAT MAKE GUESTS CURIOUS ABOUT ITS DESIGN; THE GREAT MURAL IN THE LOBBY'S BUILT INCANDESCENT; SNACKS ON THE GIG COURSE OF CAFE KOOL.



Just like scenes in a movie, I find myself having a wonderful time the next day, thanks to the wide-range of restaurants made available in the hotel. Lunch was at the Michelin-starred Shang Palace, and I ate Cantonese food with so much gusto. Appetizer was a plate of Steamed scallop dumplings, Roasted pork belly and Steamed shrimp dumplings. Up next, the baked bamboo charcoal noodlet and sliced abalone in cheese sauce served in mini pumpkin is truly an unforgettable dish. Lastly, my favorite walnut pastry caps off the meal. If all this doesn't make your mouths water, there are other restaurants to choose from. Japanese Nadaman serves kaiseki dinners; Italian Angelini offers the freshest Italian menu; and Tapas Bar allows you to enjoy new world wines and international tapas. In the spirit of Shangri-La's famous buffet spreads, complimentary international breakfast is served daily at Cafe Kool; and you can grab your favorite signature Shangri-La snacks over at Deli Kool.

Open since 1981, guests will never forget Kowloon Shangri-La's attention to detail. From simple reminders of what day it is (check out the elevator carpets, changed daily to reflect the day) to the more intricate elements that make Shangri-La what it is... (How could one forget the delicate fountain with Mosaic interior, custom-made carpeting with swirling fans design, and the enchanting two giant murals depicting the mythical valley of Shangri-La made by British artist Malcolm Golding?) These are worth marveling about for a long time.

They say that for any establishment, being in a good location is everything. Kowloon Shangri-La has got it all covered. Great location. Beautiful hotel. Excellent and warm service. What more can you ask for?

Before leaving, please look for the butler, an old man who's been in service at the Shangri-La longer than most of its corporate staff. He'll be the one with the biggest smile wishing you a safe journey. Shake his hand; it will keep you warm for the rest of your life. *SPACE*



LEFT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE RELAXING INDOOR POOL. MIDDLE THIS IS DEFINITELY THE MOST ELEGANT WAY TO ENJOY THE HARBOUR VIEW TOP SHANGRI-LA KOWLOON GUARANTEES GUESTS MORE THAN JUST A COMFORTABLE STAY-IN-ROOM WITH ITS LUXURIOUS AMENITIES AND SURPRISE GOODIES

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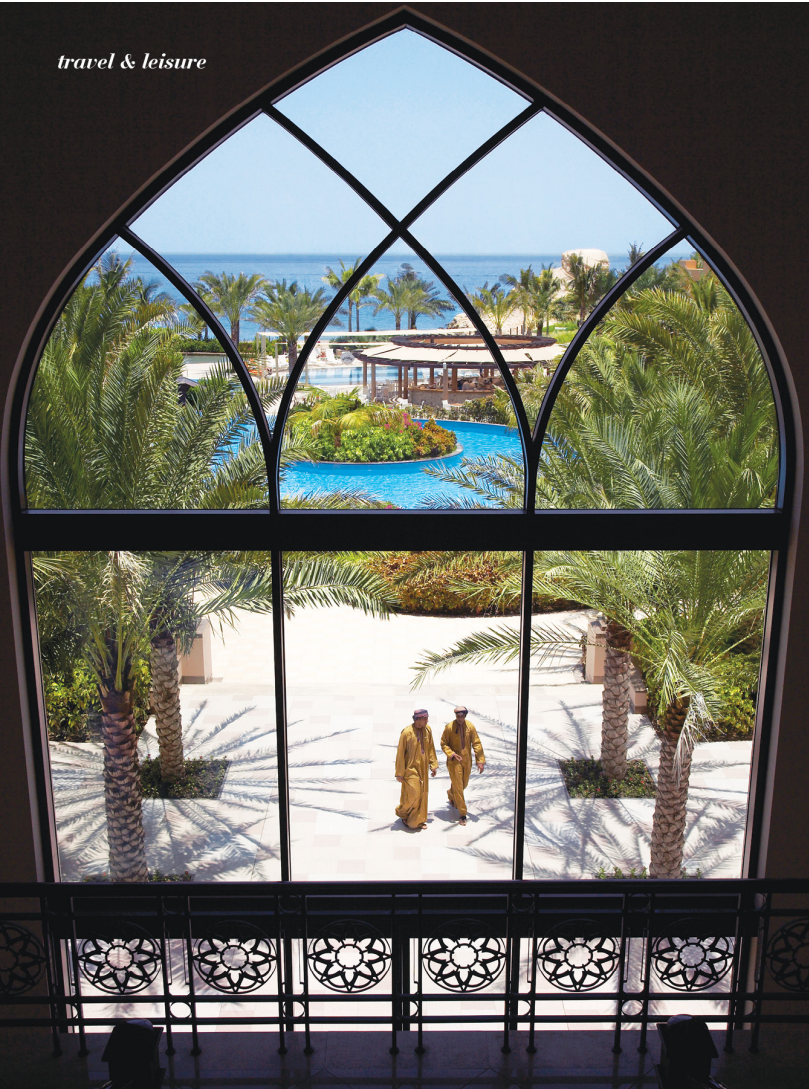
CATCH the Wave

Often overlooked for its larger and better known neighbors, Oman is now one of the most sought after destinations with a distinct scenery where mountains, desert and sea meet. Ripe for discovery, editor in chief Sheryl Songsong shares her experience at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah a resort for sunbathing and spas while in pursuit of Arabian nights



THE LOOK OF BARR AL JISSAH: THE AL BAHARI ARCH opposite PAGE THE AL HUSH HOTEL LOBBY





Growing up here, I've never been in this part of the Sultanate. Uphill, I drove past the Muttrah district, the old city of Muscat. I bear witness to a scenic view of limestone, mountains and Gulf of Oman and I am very much in awe. As I enter the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa, I've never seen such lovely textures and colors collide so beautifully. Seeing this rugged mountain backdrop and Oman coastline in front of me marks the beginning of my Moorish-inspired retreat.

The Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah is a three-hotel luxury resort, a first for both Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts and even for Oman, situated in 124 acres of land only 20 minutes away from Muttrah and 45 minutes away from the international airport. The property comprises the exclusive Al Husn (The Castle), Al Bandar (The Town) and the family-oriented Al Waha (The Oasis). All 640 rooms and suites overlook the Sea of Oman, providing guests with 500 meters of beach.

Night was falling when I check in at Al Husn, which offers highly personalized service. It feels like reliving a "Carrie moment," entering a scene from the movie *Sex and the City 2* as I step inside the high dome lobby with butlers and staff greeting me. To my left, I notice the concierge and reception areas, and to my right, a lounge area offers plush seating with free-flowing Omani coffee and dates. My first steps inside are so memorable: the architecture is inspired by historic Omani forts reflecting a fusion of Moorish design in the style of Alhambra, with Portuguese influence at the helm. Just before I hop inside the elevator, one of the main highlights of Al Husn's architecture, the central courtyard, winks at me. It has been deliberately left empty with only a fountain and lighted palm trees dotting the area. It serves as a simple reminder of what I can't wait to explore the moment the sun rises tomorrow.

A 56sqm deluxe sea view room with terrace is home until the following day. The bathroom is distinctively designed with sliding glass panels, which will allow me a good view of the sea while luxuriating in the bath.

The hotel takes care of the warm, little details that promise a comfortable stay: a welcome note, some Frankincense, drinks and Omani sweets. I enjoy these treats as I watch the sun set while noticing how serene the whole property is. My visit coincides with the Holy Month of Ramadan, a time of spiritual reflection, fasting and worship for the Islam community. Even though I wasn't Muslim, this is indeed a special time for me to rest, reflect, reconnect and rejuvenate. And, there's no better place to do this than in Shangri-La.



LEFT: AL HUSN HOTEL SUITE BALCONY VIEW ABOVE THE AL BANDAR BEACH TOP LEFT: GUESTS OF THE AL HUSN HOTEL HAVE EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO ITS COURTYARD TOP RIGHT: THE AL BANDAR LOBBY AND CHANDLER OPPOSITE PAGE: THE AL WAHA HOTEL LOBBY VIEW



LEFT CHILTHE SPA PRODUCTS FAR LEFT SHAHRAZAD MOROCCAN RESTAURANT ENTRANCE BELOW CHILDREN AT THE OMANI HERITAGE VILLAGE



As the evening presses on, I learn that Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah has a total of 20 dining options, from poolside snacks to specialty and fine dining restaurants: Lebanese, Moroccan, Italian, Middle Eastern, Indian, Asian and South American. I am instantly mesmerized by the Shahrazad, an award-winning Moroccan restaurant that features authentic cuisine and nightly live entertainment. With so many options, I dine with my family at the Bait Al Bahr situated in between Al Waha and Al Bandar hotels. It serves a range of mouth-watering seafood dishes (my mother's favorite), cooked and grilled fresh as you order. For appetizers, we have king prawn tempura and cold teriyaki salmon noodles. Our main course included a plate of pan-fried sea bass, ravioli of goat cheese and braised kingfish, and for dessert, the dark chocolate and hazelnut fudge is most recommended. The staff is quick to offer a buggy ride back to Al Husn, but I prefer to walk on the pebble pathway with the soft sound of waves crashing keeping me company. It's quite a long walk back, but perhaps the most serene I've experienced in a long time. It is the perfect way to end the day and get ready for a good night's sleep.

My suite awaits. The cool temperature inside contrasts with the desert warmth outdoors, and I welcome this respite. I begin to unpack utilizing the spacious walk-in-closet and enjoy a quick shower using the Loccitane Verbena line conveniently provided by the hotel. The bed is definitely comfortable and all I remember is looking at the Moorish fretwork and bedside lamp above me as I doze off to sleep.

At 7:30am the following day, I am first to arrive at the Sultanah for breakfast. I find it so amusing that guests are truly on vacation mode and didn't bother coming down early for breakfast. Named after the first Omani ship to sail in America, Sultanah's architecture resembles this ship, meant to look like it was docked by the beach. There is an attractive water feature outside this restaurant, which creates the impression of being at sea. Marina, the server that morning, is so accommodating and quickly offers me a strawberry smoothie, lime and berry palate cleanser and cappuccino to begin my meal. Eggs Benedict, Turkey ham, and a bowl of mixed berries energize me for my morning tour, and while I thought the food couldn't get any better, I am offered some hot food from the kitchen, a small serving of steamed kingfish and eggplant. Being the sweet tooth that I am, I helped myself with a few pieces of Arabic sweets to cap off my breakfast. This is definitely a morning meal fit for a king (or queen), and I leave the restaurant with a very happy stomach.



LEFT PRIVATE MARINA ABOVE AL BANDAR SIDAS & QURAYAT FUNCTION ROOMS BELOW AL HUSN HOTEL MAIN ENTRANCE

While guests staying at Al Husn are welcome to enjoy the facilities of the entire three-hotel resort, the services and facilities at Al Husn are for the exclusive use and enjoyment of guests staying in the hotel. With its spectacular setting and outstanding facilities created to the exacting specifications of Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, Al Husn has set new standards of service in Oman. It's nice to know that guests of Al Husn can enjoy the exclusive use of a dedicated private gym offering state-of-the-art equipment, a private beach and bar, infinity pool, a library and a separate early check-in or late check-out lounge. All rooms are provided with butler service and all Al Husn guests are encouraged to take advantage of daily afternoon tea at the lobby lounge, complimentary iPod rental with personalized music selection and complimentary selected beverages from their in-room minibar.

My tour begins with Al Bandar, which means "The Town." The architecture is inspired by old Muscat, featuring buildings of varying heights and a variety of ornate balconies. The five-star deluxe property provides 198 guestrooms, each offering a minimum of 45 sqm of space and a balcony with views of the garden, sea or swimming pool. A true representation of its name, Al Bandar has a selection of food and beverage outlets that cater to all guests' dining preferences: Al Tanoor, an award-winning restaurant serving Middle Eastern and international cuisine buffet style with live cooking stations; The Capri Court is an elegant restaurant that offers traditional Italian cuisine; Tapas, located on the Sablah, features al fresco dining and serves Mediterranean and Asian tapas as well as Oriental mezze; The Piano Lounge, a stylish cocktail bar with an outdoor terrace overlooks the Sablah. Circles, on the other hand, is a poolside café, which serves refreshing cocktails and mouth-watering pizzas, salads, pastas and other snacks. Lastly, the Long Bar, features an extensive wine list with indoor and outdoor seating. (Traveler's tip: Wine bars are covered up and closed during Ramadan in observance of the Holy Month of reflection and fasting).



RIGHT GUESTS CAN GO FOR A CAMEL RIDE AT THE BEACH (RIGHT) ABOVE AL HUSN HOTEL LOBBY LOUNGE FAR RIGHT CHILTHE SPA HAMBAMA





LEFT ONE OF THE WATERSPORT ACTIVITIES, KAYAKING ABOVE THE ART OF HENNA TATTOO TOP A LITTLE BOY TINKERING WITH ONE OF THE SILVER PRODUCE AT THE OMANI HERITAGE VILLAGE BELOW BAIT AL BHAR



LEFT SUDAMANI, THE RESTAURANT REMINISCENT OF THE FIRST OMANI SHIP BELOW LEFT FABRIC LOOMS AT THE OMANI HERITAGE VILLAGE RIGHT OMANI DOORMEN WEARING THE KHANJAR, A TRADITIONAL DAGGER OF OMAN, WHICH IS A SYMBOLIC WEAPON WORN AS A CENTER BELT BY OMANI MEN



Nestled at the foot of a mountain range, I request to drive by the vehicular access to the Al Waha (meaning 'the oasis'), which has been made possible by a fabricated tunnel. Its architecture is traditional Dhofari, from the southern region of Oman. Al Waha is regarded as the family hotel offering a wide range of facilities for families and children, such as a children's club, air-conditioned indoor and outdoor play area featuring an old Omani dhow, a toddler's pool with a rubber-cushioned flooring, a pool for older children in the shape of a water mushroom, and babysitting services.

I'm whisked off to my favorite area in the resort, Chi, The Spa at Shangri-La. Here, they introduce a blend of Chinese and Himalayan beauty and well-being rituals and for the first time at Chi, Omani and Middle Eastern healing practices and architectural features are incorporated into the spa experience. There are 12 luxurious private spa suites and villas in a secluded, village-like setting with lush gardens. Each has a private bathroom and vanity area, shower, bath and relaxation area, and an outdoor garden court complete with sunbeds and outdoor showers. In addition to signature Chi treatments, locally grown frankincense is incorporated in essential oils and clays providing a Middle Eastern sensory experience in the form of facials, body wraps, scrubs, bath oils and soap. The four-house signature Exotic Serenity Ritual is a must try. The treatment starts off with a fragrant bath enhanced with frankincense and a sandalwood scrub followed by a rose wrap, and finishes with a frankincense and rose petal bath, full-body massage and facial. To say that the experience is heavenly is an understatement. You will leave the spa toned, soft and relaxed, as if healing hands just brought you back to vitality.

I spend the rest of the afternoon lounging at the 100m private beach at Al Husn, walking around the property exploring on my own and skipping lunch altogether to feast on afternoon tea, which was served at 3:45 in the Sultanah Restaurant. Afterwards, I head to the Omani Heritage Village, where well-preserved local culture and architecture blend into a remarkable landscape. I see the *falaj*, a traditional water management system, and also view local artisans at work demonstrating traditional craftwork such as *khajar* and silver making, henna tattoo decoration and pottery. Before sundown, I go for a camel ride at the beachfront and my last stop is at the Al Mazarr Souk and art gallery. It's nice to see modern works from local artists and photographers. I buy a kafian as a remembrance of this souk and I look forward to wearing it back in Manila.

Night has come once again and I spend my last few minutes in the resort by the beach, feet up, trying to memorize the salty smell of the air. The butler signals my father's arrival, ready to drive me back to the city. I bring with me Shangri-La and memories of dramatic mountains, vast deserts, deep blue waters and imposing forts. I will never forget this place. When you come here, neither will you.

From Sinbad the Sailor to the Queen of Sheba, Oman embodies the true essence and mystique of Arabia.

As I drive back to the city, I'm already thinking about returning. I am counting the days... **SPICE**



OVERSIZED CHESS PIECES, WHICH YOU CAN PLAY WITH AT THE BEACHFRONT LEFT SEA TURTLES AT THE BEACH ABOVE AL HUSN HOTEL ARCHES OVERLOOKING THE INFINITY POOL BELOW SEA VIEW ROOM AT AL HUSN



ABOVE LEFT AL WAHA HOTEL BALCONY VIEW ABOVE RIGHT AL BANDAR SOUK ORNAMENTS RIGHT AL BANDAR HOTEL PIANO LOUNGE



HOTEL GUIDE

SYDNEY & SURROUNDS

What's hip, chic and comfy as recommended by Mr & Mrs Smith

Mr & Mrs Smith is a boutique travel specialist with an expert eye for stylish holidays. Each property is visited personally, reviewed anonymously and regularly reassessed, so they know they offer the best hotels and properties in the world.



ESTABLISHMENT HOTEL



QT SYDNEY



MEDUSA



BELLS AT KILLCARE



SPICERS VINEYARDS ESTATE

LOCATION

5 Bridge Lane
Woodford NSW 2778

49 Market Street
Sydney NSW 2000

267 Darlinghurst Road
Darlinghurst
NSW 2010

107 The Scenic Road
Killcare Heights NSW
2257 (Central Coast)

555 Hermitage Road
Pokolbin NSW 2320
(Hunter Valley)

DESCRIPTION

You can drink, dine, dance and sleep at the Establishment Hotel, an achingly hip everything-under-one-roof design destination in the heart of Sydney's buzzy business district. The owner's concept is a big, glam food-and-drink emporium with a host of experiences to choose from, each one captivating and unique in its own way, with a luxe, party-tastic atmosphere.

Sexy, sassy and stylish, QT Sydney boutique hotel has her party shoes on and is ready to dance. This super-central design diva is carved out of the historic State Theatre and Gowings department store buildings, blending Gothic, art deco and Italianate architecture with quirky-but-cool interiors. Door gals dressed in saucy uniforms, buzzy drinking and dining, and a hip day spa? We're smitten.

In the heart of Sydney's happening Darlinghurst district, luxury boutique hotel Medusa is both a tranquil chill-out zone and the ideal launch pad for getting the best from the city. With vibrant rooms set around a pastel-pretty courtyard and reflection pool, it's stylish and intimate, with in-the-know staff who'll ensure you're plugged into local hotspots on arrival

Bells at Killcare takes the best of country, coastal and city chic to make a boutique bouillabaisse which is part hotel, part chef-hatted-restaurant, part private retreat. Stefano Manfredi brings New Italian heartiness to the kitchen, while classic Australia awaits on the surf beaches and walking trails of the surrounding Bouddi National Park, just 90 minutes north of Sydney.

Set among a patchwork of grapevines and kitchen gardens, Spicers Vineyards Estate hotel in the Hunter Valley ticks all the boxes for a romantic weekend away, thanks to its noted restaurant, world-class wine cellar and cozy communal areas.

WHAT TO EXPECT

A multi-tasking pleasure palace in Sydney's glamorous CBD

A theatrical temptress in Sydney's happening heart

A colorful contemporary setting in a Boho urban village

Classy seaside chic in graceful Central Coast gardens

A vine romance modern manor house

NUMBER OF ROOMS

31 rooms, including two penthouse suites

200 rooms, including 19 suites

17 rooms, including 10 Deluxe, two Premium Deluxe and five Grand

25, including nine suites and two two-storey cottages

Eight suites

EAT/DRINK

Est., run by renowned head chef Peter Doyle

Gowings Bar & Grill, helmed by head chef Paul Eason under the creative direction of Sydney restaurateur Robert Marchetti

A Tavola sports sleek communal tables and a tasty Italian menu just a short walk from Medusa

The grand main dining room, overlooking the gardens, is the spiritual heart of Bells at Killcare

Chef Mark Stapleton's Restaurant Botanica

PRICE

Double rooms from AU\$217 (around US\$225 / Php9000)

Double rooms from AU\$345 (around US\$358 / Php14,600)

Double rooms from AU\$195 (around US\$203 / Php8250)

Double rooms from AU\$318 (US\$330 / Php13,450)

Double rooms from AU\$271 (US\$281 / Php11,460)

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