

Going Places

FEBRUARY 2024



Old-world charm meets bold new tastes in

Ho Chi Minh City



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FEBRUARY 2024

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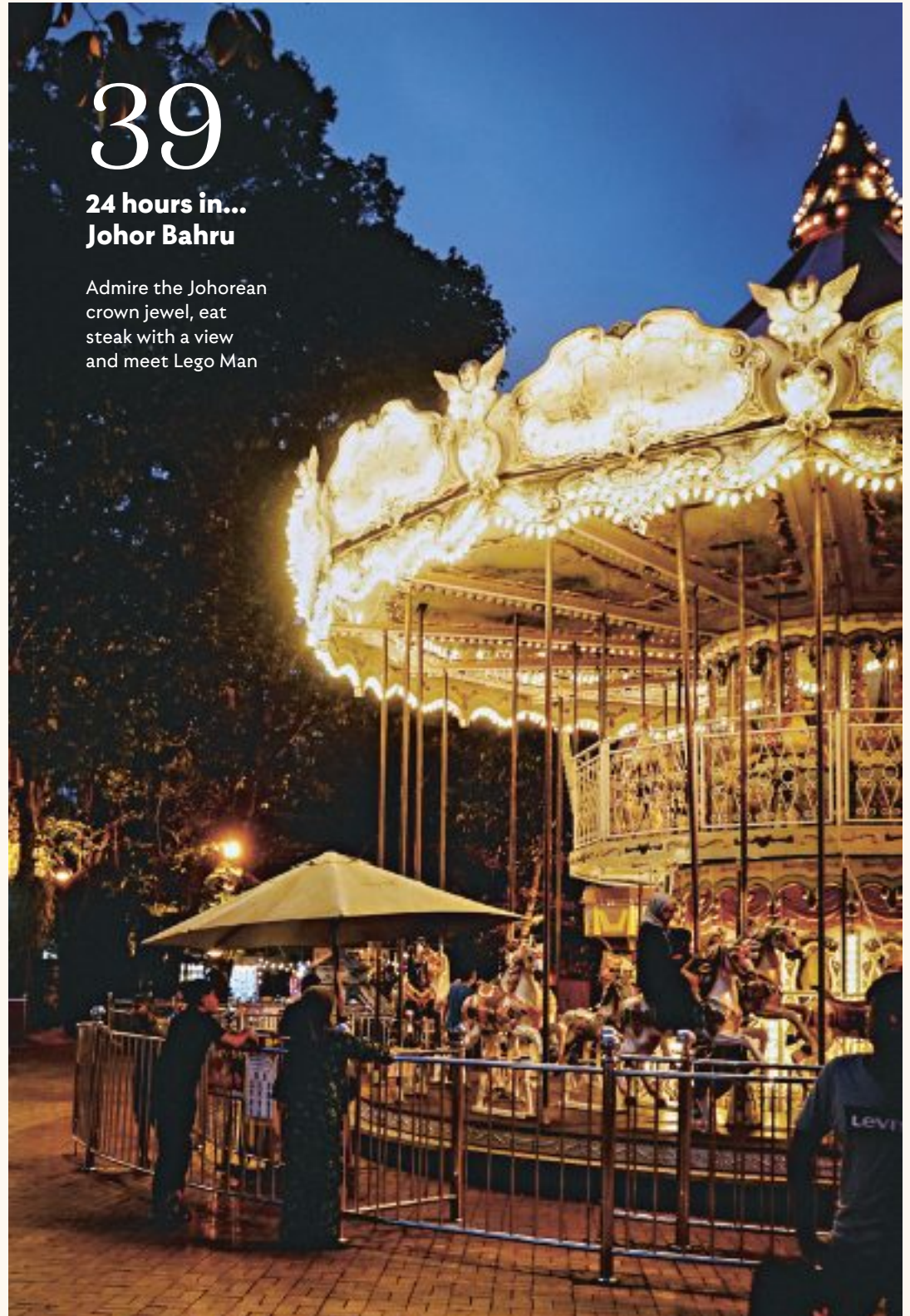
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IMAGE: AMINUR RASYID



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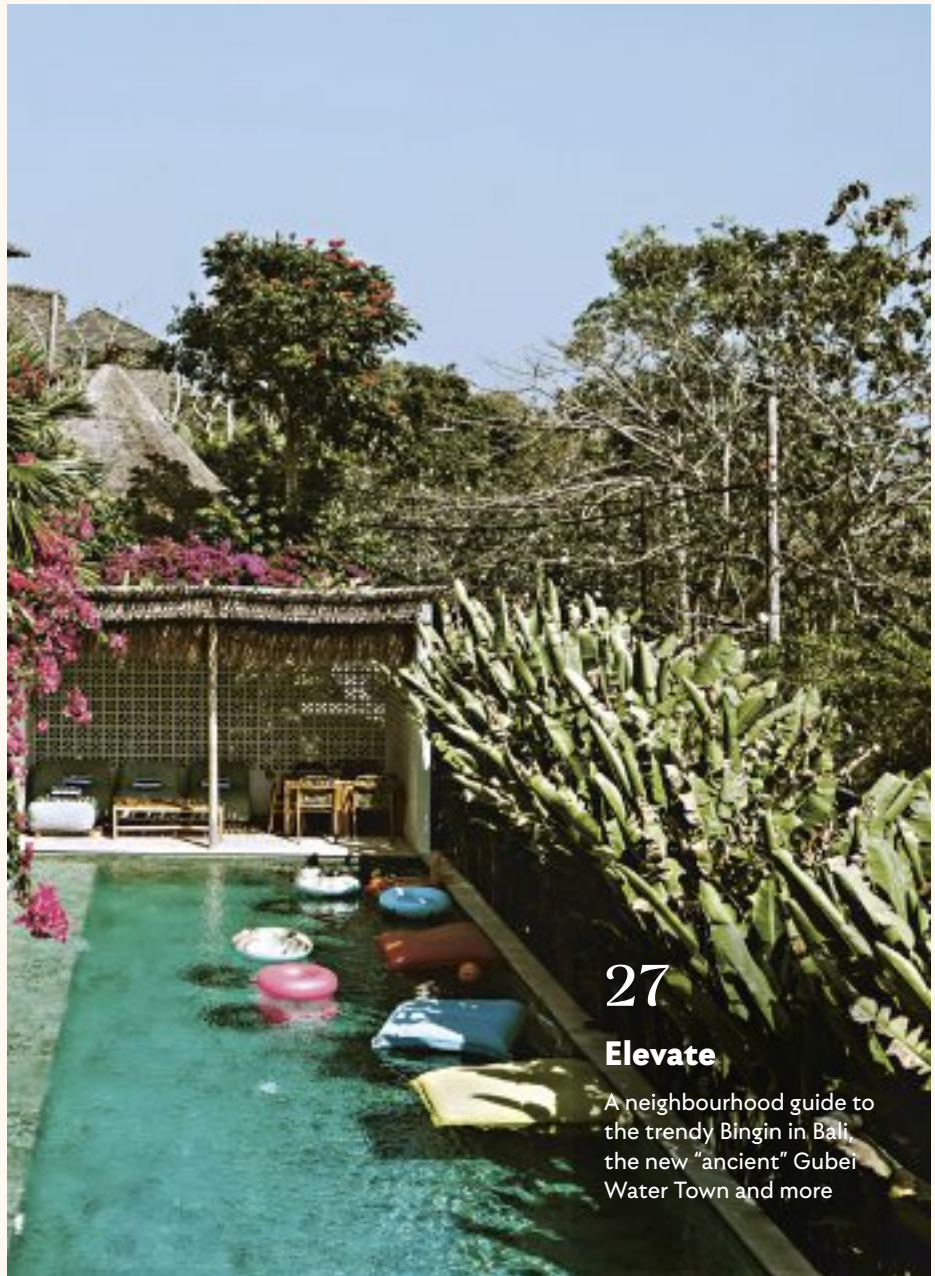
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Izham Ismail

Group Managing Director
Malaysia Aviation Group



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February may be the shortest month of the year but is never short on action, especially when Chinese New Year celebrations fall within the month. Whether it's which Malaysian brands to buy Lunar New Year products from (p13) or how you can honour the Year of the Dragon in Sydney (p57), see what festivities you can find around Malaysia Aviation Group destinations that pique your interest in our pages this month.

It's also the month where we celebrate love with thoughtful gifts and romantic dinners. How about switching things up and surprising your significant other with a trip to some place like Ho Chi Minh City? The city's upscale restaurants are fast becoming a prime spot for romantic dates, possibly more so now with the launch of the Michelin Guide for HCMC and Hanoi last July. But whether or not Valentine's Day celebrations are your thing, HCMC's fine-dining scene, our cover story this month, is coming into its own and worth the air miles. From modern Vietnamese to playful Japanese, we delve into the rich and quirky flavours that make this city a gastronomic paradise.

For those seeking a quick getaway, we've crafted a guide to spending 24 hours in Johor Bahru, or JB, the capital of Malaysia's southernmost state. Besides being known for the Johor Causeway, one of the world's busiest border crossings linking to Singapore, JB is Malaysia's second-largest city by population and has a plethora of local delicacies, exciting theme

parks, luxury hotel getaways and historical landmarks.

Join us as we explore the world, one destination at a time, and uncover the stories that make travel so addictive.



Sherman Lim

Sherman Lim
Editor

This issue's contributors



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Writer, "Stepping up to the plate", p46

Joshua is a Hong Kong-based writer covering travel, architecture, culture and innovation. He's written for *Lonely Planet*, *The Economist* and *Wallpaper**.



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Writer, "24 hours in JB", p39

Educator by day, writer by night, Sulyn pens travel and lifestyle stories. She has worked for Malaysian publications such as *The New Straits Times* and *Meris Foto*.



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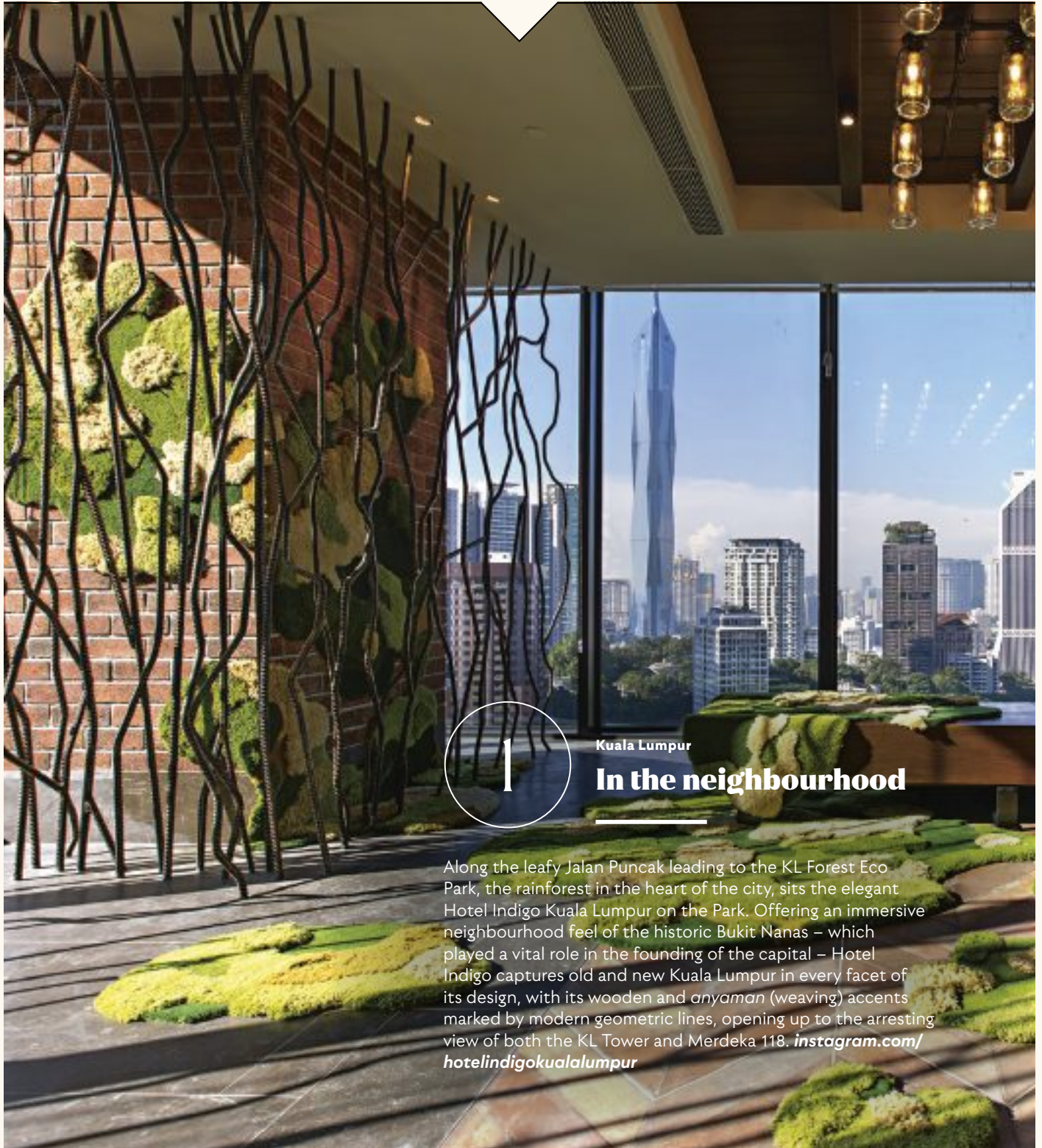
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FOR MORE INFO, SCAN ME



12 REASONS TO LOVE MALAYSIA

Bold flavours, inspiring people and unforgettable places



1

Kuala Lumpur

In the neighbourhood

Along the leafy Jalan Puncak leading to the KL Forest Eco Park, the rainforest in the heart of the city, sits the elegant Hotel Indigo Kuala Lumpur on the Park. Offering an immersive neighbourhood feel of the historic Bukit Nanas – which played a vital role in the founding of the capital – Hotel Indigo captures old and new Kuala Lumpur in every facet of its design, with its wooden and *anyaman* (weaving) accents marked by modern geometric lines, opening up to the arresting view of both the KL Tower and Merdeka 118. [instagram.com/hotelindigokualalumpur](https://www.instagram.com/hotelindigokualalumpur)



Johor Bahru

Enter the dragon

The opulence of Fatmama Bakery's stately Dragon Year Series gift box, in a stately red adorned with dragons in gold, is matched by the melty pineapple tarts, sea-salt peanut balls and butter sandwich cookies contained within, making it a perfect gift to welcome the new year. fatmamabakery.com/2024-cny-dragon-year-series/

2



4

Kuala Lumpur

Getting in the mood

Relive the glamour of Old Shanghai this new year with the range of exquisite mini and maxi cheongsam from Luna by Dreamscaped, coming in ornate reds, blues, greens, blacks or soft pastel shades, complemented by bold, handsome piping for that extra hint of stateliness.

[instagram.com/lunabydreamscaped](https://www.instagram.com/lunabydreamscaped)



3

Malaysia

Homegrown and handmade

For a decade now, skincare brand Handmade Heroes has been a hit among Malaysians, and recently updated their iconic Cocolicious Luscious Lip Scrub and Lip Mask with bakuchiol – a retinol alternative – along with their Oat Mighty Cleansing Balm for make-up removal, which forms part of co-founder and influencer Bella Kuan's daily routine. [handmadeheroes.my](https://www.handmadeheroes.my)



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5

Kuala Lumpur

Keeping it in the family

"It was a Herculean task," says Rin Rin Wong, COO of tea sensation, Beca Tea, on the effort that went into sourcing, blending, firing and brewing their selection of teas. Difficult but necessary, as Beca Tea is an extension of a long family tradition that goes back all the way to tea plantations in Fujian, China, before coming to colonial Malaya.

"Grandpa sold tea out of a tin trunk strapped to a *beca* (trishaw), while great-grandpa processed the tea for him to sell," explains CEO PC Koh, with the name of the store a tribute to "the indomitable spirit of our forefathers in laying the foundations for our family's legacy."

“

We want to introduce more people to what we call 'straight teas', that is tea without all the embellishments”

Beca Tea stays true to this legacy by emphasising the natural taste of teas, whether served with milk, nitro-brewed or infused with botanicals, completely avoiding the sugars and syrups that are so often used to mask a lack of flavour. The standout is the Secret Stash – a painstakingly curated selection of the best

oolong, black, white peony, green and pu'er – made available to customers at affordable prices. "We want to introduce more people to what we call 'straight teas', that is tea without all the embellishments that add extraneous flavour," notes co-founder Joshua Wong, a fifth-generation member of the family.

When founding Beca Tea, according to Koh, the family asked themselves what they would do with the century-old legacy entrusted to them. With the passion and care that goes into each of their drinks, the evidence points to doing that legacy proud. becatea.com

Five tips on getting the best tea, from PC Koh, CEO of Beca Tea



See
"Fine tea dust should not cling to leaves, and when brewed, infusions should be clear, except for certain white teas."



Smell
Tea should have the right kind of fragrance. But what is "right"? Read up about a particular tea's notes before buying.



Taste
The proof is always in the tasting. Koh recommends buying a small quantity of a particular tea to test its flavours.



Pay
The best teas are not the cheapest. "Always be prepared to pay to learn," Koh says. "Always be hungry to explore."



Trust
Don't rely too heavily on certifications, as weather patterns could affect the quality of a given harvest.



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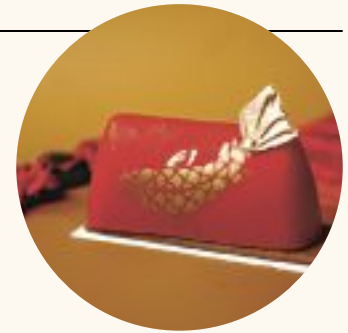
6

Malaysia

Change makers

For over a decade, Mangosteen has been diverting 100% of its profits from its skincare and aromatherapy products inspired by the tropical landscapes of Southeast Asia to empower the women and children

of the region, working with NGOs to make tangible impact in their lives. Most recently, Mangosteen's luxurious Gifts That Gift Back sets aided the children supported by the Fugee School in KL. mangosteen.my



8

Kuala Lumpur

Xiao by Crustz

The celebrated *petit gâteaux* (small cakes) of Xiao by Crustz take on a festive feel in their Chinese New Year collection, with the intricate mango and pandan petals of the Ong (prosperity), the seven-flavoured Treasure Pot ice-cream cake, or the premium Blossom set, which comes with six *gâteaux* – Pineapple Tart, New Beginnings, Longevity Bao, Lucky Fortune, Roaring Tiger and Joyest – complemented by small bites.

xiaobycrustz.com/cny



7

Penang

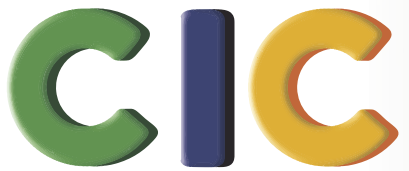
Brunching with fur kids

Yolk in George Town is the perfect brunch spot for you, your loved ones and furry friends. Opening its doors in September 2023, this café offers affordable yet hearty dishes such as Yuzu Eggs Bennie, Fish Tacos and Steak and Eggs. Pair with a cup of freshly brewed coffee or their signature "Magic Potion" drinks, which use butterfly pea tea as the base for milk, yoghurt, sparkling water and fruity beverages. facebook.com/yolk.pg

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9

Ipoh

Simply rustic

With the towering limestone mountains of Ipoh as its backdrop, Red Brick Kitchen opened in August 2023. The café's name is evidently inspired by the materials used to build their kitchen space. The dining area, however, is a glasshouse that gives patrons an immersive view of the surrounding landscape. Sample their selection of sweet and savoury waffles, brunch plates and fruit pastries.

[instagram.com/redbrickkitchenmy](https://www.instagram.com/redbrickkitchenmy)



10

Johor Bahru

French aromas

Loaf, Adam – the home baker of TikTok fame – has now moved away from the online platform and into a brand-new brick-and-mortar establishment in Larkin, Johor Bahru. This charming French pastry café opened its doors in September 2023, and serves up freshly baked pastries and cookies, a delicious fusion Malaysian-European menu and speciality drinks to go with it all. [instagram.com/loafadam.patisserie](https://www.instagram.com/loafadam.patisserie)



Malaysia

12

Being all you can be

Fashion influencer and fitness trainer Han Pin Ma extends his range with Goteskin, a wellness brand aimed at allowing men to become the best versions of themselves. Goteskin caused a sensation with its personal-care products, and since last November has included a range of skincare and body-care products – and even a little something for customers’ pets. [gote.club](https://www.gote.club)

Malaysia

For the whole family

Pokoks, which specialises in festive fashion for the whole family, launches with a new collection just in time for Chinese New Year, with elegant red, lilac, orange and turquoise full cheongsam and cheongsam tops for women and girls, and smart mandarin-collar shirts for men and boys. [pokoks.com](https://www.pokoks.com)





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SPOTLIGHT

Wall of fame

Two attractions in one quick trip out of **Beijing** BY **STEPHEN O'CONNELL**

A visit to the **Great Wall of China** at one of the many access points near Beijing is high on the list for most visitors to the city. The Great Wall at Simatai, considered one of the more wild and authentic sections of the wall – though also steep and physically demanding – is approximately three hours from central Beijing and can be combined with a visit to **Gubei Water Town**.

This “ancient town” is actually a man-made replica of China’s southern canal

towns and, since it was established in 2014, has become a popular weekend trip out of Beijing. Spring, with its burst of colourful foliage and mild weather, is a glorious time to visit Gubei, perfect for leisurely boat tours along the serene canals. Day trips are also possible, but with hot springs, traditional handicrafts, restaurants with great views and the option to hike the Great Wall at night, why not hang around a little while longer? gubeiwatertown.com



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A Culinary Tapestry

Central to Raia Hotel's allure is its unwavering dedication to a diverse dining experience. The culinary journey within Raia Hotel extends beyond conventional boundaries, featuring a thoughtfully curated menu inspired by the rich culinary traditions of Kedah, Terengganu, Pulau Pinang, Sarawak, and Sabah, where its hotels are located. Venture into Souq Garden at Raia Hotel Kota Kinabalu, where a lavish selection of Middle Eastern dishes awaits, adding cultural richness to the dining experience.

Raia Hotel's commitment to inclusivity is further demonstrated through its enticing dining promotions. For example, the weekly Hi-Tea Buffets, hosted across all five hotels, not only cater to the senses but also offer a variety of themes, catering to a diverse range of palates. Whether you're a culinary explorer or someone seeking familiar flavours, these buffets and other promotions stand as a testament to Raia Hotel's commitment to providing an affordable and diverse dining experience.

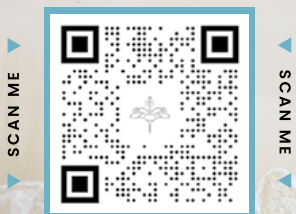


Culinary Artistry Unveiled

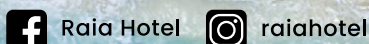
Behind the scenes, Raia Hotel takes pride in its culinary artisans. Chefs in Raia Kuching and Raia Alor Setar are not just chefs; they are distinguished award-winners, having secured medals at prestigious culinary challenges. Their expertise infuses each dish with excellence, ensuring that every meal is a work of culinary art. Whether you're a business traveller in search of efficiency, a family embarking on a leisurely getaway, or simply an enthusiast of fine dining, Raia Hotel invites you to a world where hospitality transcends boundaries, and each dining experience tells a story.

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Raia Hotel

Hotel The Mitsui's thermal spring



WELLNESS

Bathing in beauty

A wintertime trip to **Osaka** opens a world of glorious onsen-bathing possibilities across Japan's Kansai region

BY KISSA CASTAÑEDA

You can't say that you've really immersed yourself in

Japanese culture if you haven't been to an onsen. Hot spring bathing, or onsen, is a treasured ritual for the Japanese, revered for benefits such as balancing the nervous system, enhancing blood circulation, relieving pain, reducing stress and more. Rooted in Buddhist purification rituals, this wellness practice was enjoyed by the Japanese elite in the seventh century, and it reached a wider audience during the Edo period from 1630–1867.

Onsen is such an important part of Japanese culture that it has shaped the country's travel landscape. Currently, Japan has more than 3,000 hot spring resorts, and regions with mineral-rich waters have become major tourist destinations. Whether you choose a vibrant public onsen or a serene ryokan, bathing in natural hot springs is a balm for the body and soul. Here are three to discover in Kansai.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE →



1
Ryokan Fushioukaku, Osaka

While there are probably more *okonomiyaki* (savory pancake) spots than onsens in Osaka, that doesn't mean there are no impressive hot-spring resorts nearby. Just a 30-minute train ride from Umeda station, Ryokan Fushioukaku is a traditional hotel that's incredibly welcoming to those who are new to onsen bathing.

An authentic experience awaits at the expansive onsen facilities: there are two indoor and five outdoor baths to choose from. In general, bathers should start with the "coldest" pool, progress to warmer ones and then end in

the hot baths outside, best experienced during the colder months. The ryokan also has 20 tatami-style rooms equipped with their own open-air baths – perfect for those who like to feel free and bare it all in private. fushioukaku.co.jp

2
Hotel The Mitsui Kyoto

Designed by André Fu, Hotel The Mitsui Kyoto features a contemporary take on traditional Japanese design elements, such as kimono fabric reworked to become a ceiling sculpture in the lobby. This "modern ryokan" is a seamless marriage of old and new in the 161 rooms, as well as in the

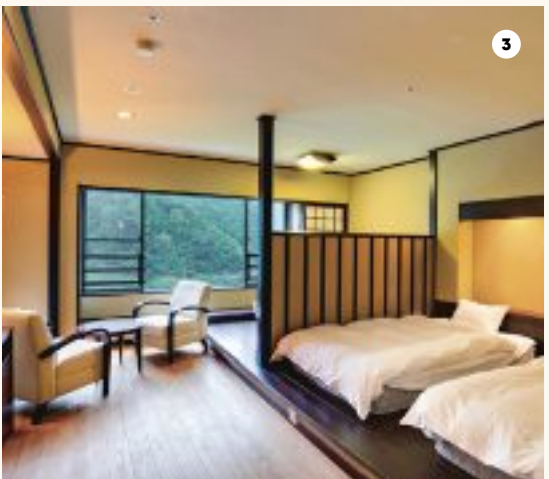


public areas, including its onsen offerings.

Make time to relax in the hotel's atmospheric thermal spring spa, which features large stones peppered across the cavernous space and jacuzzi-style pools pumped with onsen water (swimwear is required). Guests can also book the private onsen suites, which have an outdoor onsen, an alfresco lounge area, indoor and outdoor showers, and a spacious changing space – everything you need for a luxurious hot-spring experience. hotelthemitsui.com

3
Yumori Onsen Hotel Suginoyu, Nara

A two-hour drive from Osaka brings you to Okuyoshino Gorge, an impossibly beautiful location far from the deer-feeding crowds of Nara. Overlooking the Yoshino River, Hotel Suginoyu is a traditional ryokan built to maximise enjoyment of the natural surroundings, including the Yoshino



Japan has more than 3,000 hot spring resorts, and regions with mineral-rich waters have become major tourist destinations.

Senbonzakura – Japan's largest cherry blossom viewing spot with more than 300,000 sakura trees that blossom fully at the end of March.

The best way to soothe sore muscles after a day of sightseeing is to spend ample time in the *rotenburo* (outdoor onsen) to enjoy in the silky waters from Yumori onsen. The plus? It comes with a stunning view of lush forest greenery and a fresh mountain breeze that keeps you cool while you're immersed in the piping hot waters. suginoyu.com

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NEIGHBOURHOOD GUIDE

Endless summer

With the right 'hood, **Bali** can still be a beach lover's paradise when it rains **BY JULIANNE GRECO**

Is Bali's rainy season putting a damper on your top-of-the-year reset or work-from-beach plans? Bingin Beach, sprawled along the island's cliff-hemmed southern coast is the perfect spot to park yourself. Located just above world-class surfing waves and cream-coloured sands, here you'll find a laidback neighbourhood of cool cafés, trendy restaurants and stylish boutiques that look and feel perpetually sun-drenched.

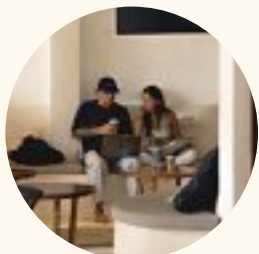
Your local

Whether it's yoga, coworking, or community, **The Space** is a hub of Bingin activity. A great alternative hangout spot to the beach, the sizeable complex has two bamboo yoga shalas and an air-conditioned coworking space that can fit up to 50 digital nomads. It also regularly hosts special events geared towards personal and professional development. thespacebali.org



Island style

Múse Store brings together a curated mix of boutique Bali brands. Like its sister shop in Pererenan Beach, the Bingin store is minimalist, chic and flooded with natural light. Give your wardrobe an island upgrade and browse a trendy selection of beachy wardrobe staples like bikinis, kimonos, two-piece sets, jewellery and other accessories. [instagram.com/muse.bali.store](https://www.instagram.com/muse.bali.store)



Barefoot luxury

Terra Cottages, which opened in 2022, is an ideal homebase on Bingin Beach. It has a convenient direct staircase access to the sand and surf. The dining options include everything from Balinese cuisine to vegetarian and vegan dishes, and the rooms are spacious and airy. The intimate boutique hotel draws inspiration from the lively terracotta shades and culture of North Africa. terracottages-bali.com



Tropical oasis

The lush **Banana Lounge Bali** is a hidden oasis, tucked away in the quiet backstreets near the steps to Impossibles Beach. Take a dip in the plunge pool, relax in the shaded stone-walled cabana and repeat. The menu blends Western classics with Indonesian flavours. Try their sizzling specialties off the grill like succulent Kingfish skewers and juicy black Angus steak. bananaloungebali.com



Sweat it out

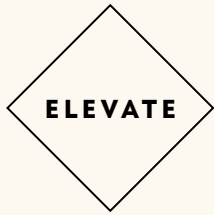
Spread across 1,207m², **Bambu Fitness** is an open-plan powerhouse with a café, community space and gym. Join their group fitness classes like CrossFit or their signature Shred – a high-energy interval training programme. For solo workouts, they host open gym all day, with free weights, climbing ropes and an air-conditioned bodybuilding room. bambufitnessbali.com

The small and idyllic Bingin Beach stretches beneath steep limestone cliffs in Uluwatu



The epitome of luxury in the heart of the city.
mandarinoriental.com





FASHION

Beyond borders

Combining creativity with business savvy, **Singapore**-based fashion brands are making waves in the global scene **BY KISSA CASTAÑEDA**

Stable, transparent and efficient – these are the reasons why Singapore has been named the best place to do business by the Economist Intelligence Unit for the last 15 years.

From TWG Tea to Grab, the Lion City has birthed some of the region’s most valuable and recognisable brands. It’s also a breeding ground for creative pursuits, thanks to government support, a bounty of talent and a multicultural environment that inspires creation. Here are three fashion brands with Singaporean roots that have grown beyond the Little Red Dot.



Youths in Balaclava



Love, Bonito

Kong, Cambodia and the Philippines, and shipping as far as New York. Apart from being a best-selling clothing label, its almost personal relationship with its loyal community sets it apart from other fast-fashion brands. lovebonito.com

Edgy streetwear by Youths in Balaclava

Singaporean fashion collective Youths in Balaclava is equal parts a symbol of counterculture and sartorial innovation in the Lion City, where non-conformist attitudes are not usually celebrated. Formed in 2015 by a group of school friends, the collective now has 18 members and is known for fusing streetwear essentials with experimental, avant-garde details.

Their rise from a local underground group to a global fashion label was cemented when they caught the attention of the Dover Street Market and began showing in London, followed by Paris. Their Spring/Summer 2024 collection, titled Hybrid Moments, showed in Paris Fashion Week. It represented different themes “ranging from racial injustice to gun violence in the United States,

honouring those who tirelessly search for beauty in the shadows”, according to a report by Hypebeast. youthsinbalaclava.com

Wearable art by Ethan K

What do Jennifer Lopez, Hailey Bieber and Princess Beatrice have in common? They’ve all carried an Ethan K bag. Designer Ethan Koh’s meticulously made bags are crafted from high-quality leather and are like portable works of art – so much so that they have become collectible items. Case in point: Hong Kong-based gallerist Pearl Lam has more than 40 Ethan K creations.

To say Ethan Koh knows a thing or two about leather is an understatement. The Europe-based



Ethan K

“**[Singapore is] a breeding ground for creative pursuits, thanks to government support, a bounty of talent and a multicultural environment that inspires creation”**

Singaporean has a deep knowledge of leather craftsmanship, owing to his family business Heng Long Leather, a tannery that supplies top-notch exotic leathers to international fashion houses. If you’re itching to get your hands on a bag, a visit to Scotts Square off Orchard Road is in order. They’re also available at Harrods in London, Saks Fifth Avenue in New York and Galeries Lafayette in Paris. ethan-k.shop

Everyday chic by Love, Bonito

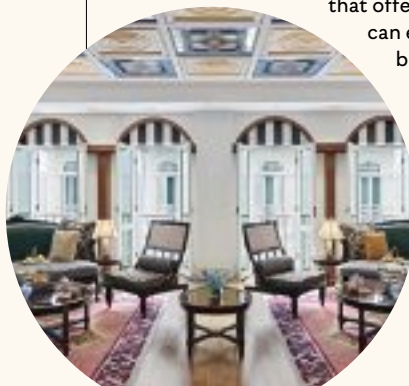
In 2005, three enterprising fashion lovers launched BonitoChico, which sold pre-loved apparel targeted to millennials. As the brand grew, co-founder Rachel Lim wanted to expand its remit: to create a female fashion brand tailored to Asian shoppers.

Focusing on creating wearable pieces with thoughtful details, Love, Bonito has since become the largest omnichannel womenswear brand in Southeast Asia with stores in Hong

Stylish stay

Situated in the vibrant Bugis cultural precinct, InterContinental Singapore remains a favourite among business travellers for its proximity to the Central Business District and the Lion City’s renowned attractions like Marina Bay Sands and the National Gallery. This 403-room restored property features charming Peranakan design elements, from the old-fashioned Chinese chest of drawers and Straits-inspired fabrics to the louvred shophouse windows that offer a glimpse of daily activity below. Suite guests

can enjoy the hotel’s new Butler Service, where head butler Shirish Shrivastava handles every request with finesse and efficiency, from personalised welcomes to private offsite travel experiences. Prepare to be pampered with bespoke touches such as pillow covers monogrammed with your initials. singapore.intercontinental.com





INSIDER TIPS

A Malaysian in... Bangkok

Michelle Goh, one of Michelin Guide Asia's top female pastry chefs and one-half of the duo behind the newly starred Mia Bangkok, shares her top dining and shopping haunts in the City of Angels **BY PARISA PICHITMARN**



I was born in Kuching, Sarawak, in East Malaysia. I was always interested in food and grew up with my grandmothers on both sides; they both cooked a lot. My earliest memory of food is standing on a stool stirring the wok with my paternal grandmother when I was nine or 10 years old.

After secondary school, I moved to Sydney and studied at Le Cordon Bleu. I worked in Australia for three-and-a-half years until my visa ended, and then moved to Singapore to work at Pollen, the fine-dining restaurant inside the Flower Dome at the Gardens by the Bay. That's where I met my Thai husband, Pongcharn "Top" Russell, who is also a chef. He wanted to move back to Bangkok and in 2016, we did.

I started working as a pastry chef at **Suhring**, which now has

two Michelin stars. Top and I were later approached by a restaurateur to create **Mia**, which we opened in 2019. Mia offers a fine dining seasonal tasting menu, as well as an omakase dessert course showcasing French techniques with Asian flavours.

What people don't really know is that chefs are just as happy when we're not cooking – the last thing I want to be doing at home is more cooking! I love the convenience of living in Bangkok, where food delivery is everywhere. On our days off, we try to support others in the industry and love eating out in a nice place. I'm glad there are so many options in this city.

Sweet sensations

The milk tea with egg pudding at **GAGA** is super good. I think it's a textural thing. People are into *boba* (tapioca balls) but I find them to be too chewy. Egg pudding is silky, so it's like a dessert in a cup. For pastries, my all-time favourite dessert spot is **Paris Mikki**. I love the orangette cake, which is chocolate mousse shaped like an orange. There's also something about their croissants that taste different from everywhere



Paris Mikki



Mia restaurant



Wat Arun



Sorn

else. When they hold pop-ups at EmQuartier I grab my croissants there, but I think the best branch to chill and relax is at Central Embassy. fb.com/gagabkk; fb.com/parismikki

A spicy affair

My last visit to the two-Michelin-starred restaurant **Sorn** was something really special. On top of amazing food and service, it was the attention to tiny details that impressed me – there’s a designated staff who fixes the

toilet paper so it’s folded in the shape of a leaf. It’s small touches like that that separate good restaurants from great ones. I’ve been to Sorn multiple times, but one of the best decisions they have made is to give an option for spice level. When I first went, all their food was way too spicy for me. They said that is the way authentic southern Thai food is meant to be, but it’s a smart move on their part to tone it down so it’s more enjoyable for everyone. sornfinesouthern.com

Thai food for visiting friends?

If they are into street food, I take them to **Jeh O Chula**. It’s always a fun experience with their photogenic Mama noodles. If they want Thai food, I definitely take them to **Sri Trat Restaurant & Bar**. It’s my favourite and not your typical green curry sort of place. My favourite dish there is the salak soup – the snake fruit tastes savoury and I like that acidic saltiness to it. Another dish I love is their stir-fried cabbage with fish sauce. They make their own fish sauce, so it tastes different from anywhere else. instagram.com/jeh_o_chula; fb.com/srtrat

Late-night munchies

Top and I really enjoy **Daimasu**. They open until late so we can still pop over after service at Mia. It’s “dirty” Japanese BBQ, where all the tables and chairs are just overturned crates. You barbecue your own squid or beef set on the charcoal in front of you. There’s a great vibe, worth the money; the branch at Silom takes last orders at midnight. For casual Italian, **Gigi** makes the best vongole in town. Their tiramisu is always good. It stays open later than others; last orders are at 11pm. mercato-group.com; gigi-bangkok.com

Retail temptations

When I first moved here, I went to **Platinum Fashion Mall** a lot. I try not to go anymore because I spend way too much on things I don’t need! I like clothes and when you’re there, everything looks cute. Now I only go when I really have to. I needed an evening dress for an event and found a perfect one there. It was cheap and good quality for THB 2,000. fb.com/ThePlatinumFashionMallBangkok

Local chic

I recently found out that **Jaspal** is a Thai fashion brand – one of the brands under their company, **Lyn**, did a private new-collection launch event at Mia to showcase their handbags. I love the weird shoes from **Quinn**, which is another brand from the Jaspal group. One of my favourite pairs is a hot pink heel, but with a comic strip in the front. Zippers on either side say “bam” and “pow”. It’s super-fun. jaspal.com; lynaccs.com; iamquinn.com



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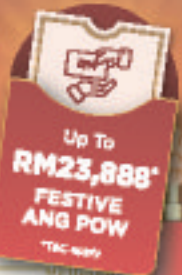
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24 HOURS IN

Johor Bahru

Words **Sulyn Chong** Photography **Aminnur Rasyid**



Once a small Malay fishing village known as Tanjung Puteri, Johor Bahru was renamed by Sultan Abu Bakar in 1862 as he established it as the capital of the Johor Sultanate. The city sits on the north bank of the Straits of Johor and serves as one of two land-entry points into Malaysia for the island nation of Singapore. The Woodlands Causeway, completed in 1924, is one of the busiest international border crossings in the world with an estimated 350,000 travellers daily.

This symbiotic relationship with its neighbour allows “JB” to thrive as an economic powerhouse. The city may be dense, but many secret treasures are woven into its fast-paced modernity. With only a day and a morning to spare, there won’t be a dull moment for short-weekend travellers to JB.

Saturday

🕒 7am

Saluting the crown

Breathe in the fresh morning air at **Laman Mahkota Istana Bukit Serene** and walk around its vast, manicured grounds. The sense of peace that fills the place will make you understand the aptness of its name.

This must-visit garden in JB allows you a glimpse of the **Sultan of Johor's palace** and official residence that sits majestically at the top of the hill. The palace and the road leading up to it are off-limits, but the garden is dotted with iconic monuments, one of them being a replica of the meticulously carved **Johorean crown jewel** adorned by a gold star and moon. *Jalan Kolam Air, Bukit Serene*

🕒 8am

Packing a punch of flavour

It's hard to miss **Gerai Cik Gunong's** bright yellow signboard. The café, just a few minutes drive from the Sultan of Johor's palace, serves traditional Johor dishes. Enjoy a serving of traditional Johorean Malay breakfast; the *lontong kering* is a must-try. In this dry version of the popular lontong, a *kuah lodeh* (creamy coconut and vegetable gravy) and *ketupat* (rice cake) dish, the soup is replaced with stir-fried vegetables, a spoonful of dried coconut shavings, a dollop of spicy sambal, a heap of beef rendang and peanut sauce. The classic version is also available.

You might also want to try the *soto*, a spiced chicken broth poured over either noodles or rice cakes. The well-seasoned and slowly simmered soup will warm your soul. They also have various traditional Malay pastries such as curry puffs, *kuih pelita*, *burger sambal* and many others to go with coffee or a hot chocolate. *Jalan Dato Musa, Kampung Pasir*



IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK (LONTONG KERING)

Get to know Johor Bahru, one of the fastest-growing cities in Malaysia



Zero KM Stone Monument

A unique road marker on Jalan Ibrahim Sultan that marks the start of road systems inland through Asia, ultimately leading to Europe.

Animal Garden

The original name of the Johor Zoo. Built in 1928, it is the oldest zoo in Southeast Asia.

Jewel of the South

Nickname of the Permaisuri Zarith Sofiah Opera House, which opened in January 2020 and has a diamond-shaped exterior.



🕒 10am Let your inner child out to play

Head over to **Legoland**, an hour's drive west to Iskandar Puteri. The theme park is filled with replicas made from millions of Lego bricks. Some of the sculptures are seasonal; for an adrenaline rush, there are plenty of fun rides including The Dragon (a thrilling roller coaster), LEGO NINJAGO The Ride (an advanced 4D indoor ride), and Dino Island (a splash ride on a log boat). You'll even get to meet Lego Man mascots around the park. To escape scorching temperatures, there's the Legoland Water Park filled with slides, rides and pools. *Persiaran Medini Utara 3, Iskandar Puteri*

🕒 3pm Old meets new

Back in the heart of the city, wander the cluster of streets that make up **JB Old Town** and explore an eclectic mix of fascinating businesses, some new, some old. At **Salahuddin Bakery**, for example, generations of bakers have been baking sweet and savoury goods like their palm-sized Bengali curry puffs and flaky puff-pastry cream cones in their trusty charcoal oven. There's also **Restoran Hua Mui**, a halal joint that has been around for more than 70 years and serves a Hainanese chicken chop dish that's fried to crispy perfection, and slathered with thick sweet and sour gravy. It comes with a side of chunky tomato, potatoes and peas.

Of the newer spots, some standouts include **The Replacement**, a Melbourne-inspired eatery with whitewashed walls and minimalist décor. Enjoy speciality coffee like the piccolo latte which is





smooth and offers a good caffeine kick. At **Flowers in the Window**, nature adorns the space with bird's-nest ferns hanging at the front of the shop and monstera plants in every corner. All the greenery mixed with the wafting smells of freshly made European pastries make this space a calming haven. *Bandar Johor Bahru*

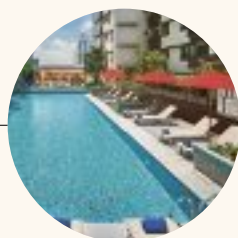
🕒 **6pm**
Photogenic fun

Enjoy a sunset view along the shoreline of **Danga Bay**. Also, be ready with your cameras as the lights turn on at the **Danga Bay World Theme Park**, a permanent funfair where you can enjoy classic rides like the merry-go-round and carousel. It's pure old-school fun. *Skudai Highway, Danga Bay*



🕒 **8pm**
Primed for dinner

Wind down at **Les Bouchons**, a fancy Parisian restaurant with a view of the harbour. Enjoy a chunky piece of Australian Black Angus rib-eye or sirloin steak, free-flow, cooked-to-perfection fries, and a glass of exquisite French wine. Don't miss the smooth crème brûlée with its perfectly caramelised crust. It's just divine. *R-G11, Menara Teega, Lebuh Laksamana, Puteri Harbour, Iskandar Puteri*



Amari
A five-star hotel with the added bonus of convenience. Located just a street away from Komtar JBCC Mall, it is linked to City Square and the CIQ Complex (the immigration checkpoint on the Malaysian side). amari.com/johor-bahru



TROVE
Located just 4.5km from Singapore's Woodlands Checkpoint, Trove features rooms in five stylish themes that celebrate Johor's history, heritage and natural diversity. trove-johorbahru.careluxuryhotels.com



Capri by Fraser
This four-star option is minutes away from the Johor Bahru Checkpoint and even offers free shuttle services to it. The shuttle route also includes several malls in the vicinity, such as Mid Valley Southkey and KSL City mall. frasershospitality.com

Stay over in style



Sunday

🕒 10am

Walk on air

The glass-floored **Sky Bridge** at **Skyscape** – Johor Bahru’s first aerial entertainment space – gives you a picturesque view of JB city at a dizzying 149m above ground. You’ll even be able to see a part of Singapore across the Johor Straits. If you’d rather skip the Bridge, there are VR games and interactive floor games. Take a souvenir snapshot at the 30m **LED Tunnel**, where the latest lighting technology synchronises with music. **Level 34, Menara JLand Johor Bahru City Centre (JBCC), Jalan Tun Abdul Razak**

🕒 12pm

One more for the road

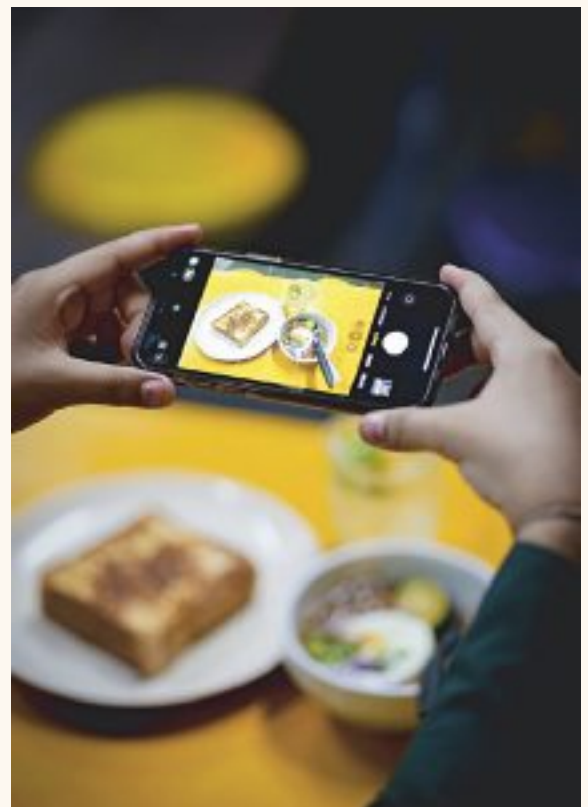
A must-try Johorean signature dish is *kacang pool*, a hearty bowl of thick, slightly spicy gravy made of broad beans, ground peanuts, minced beef and curry spices, topped with a bullseye egg and served alongside thick margarine toast. A local twist on an Egyptian dish known as *ful medames*, the recipe was passed on from Arabian merchants and altered to suit local taste – it uses ghee instead of oil, and limes instead of lemons to give it a zesty tang. You haven't truly experienced JB if you've not tried it at the original **Kacang Pool Haji. Gerai 3, Medan Selera Larkin, Susur 5, Jalan Abdul Razak**



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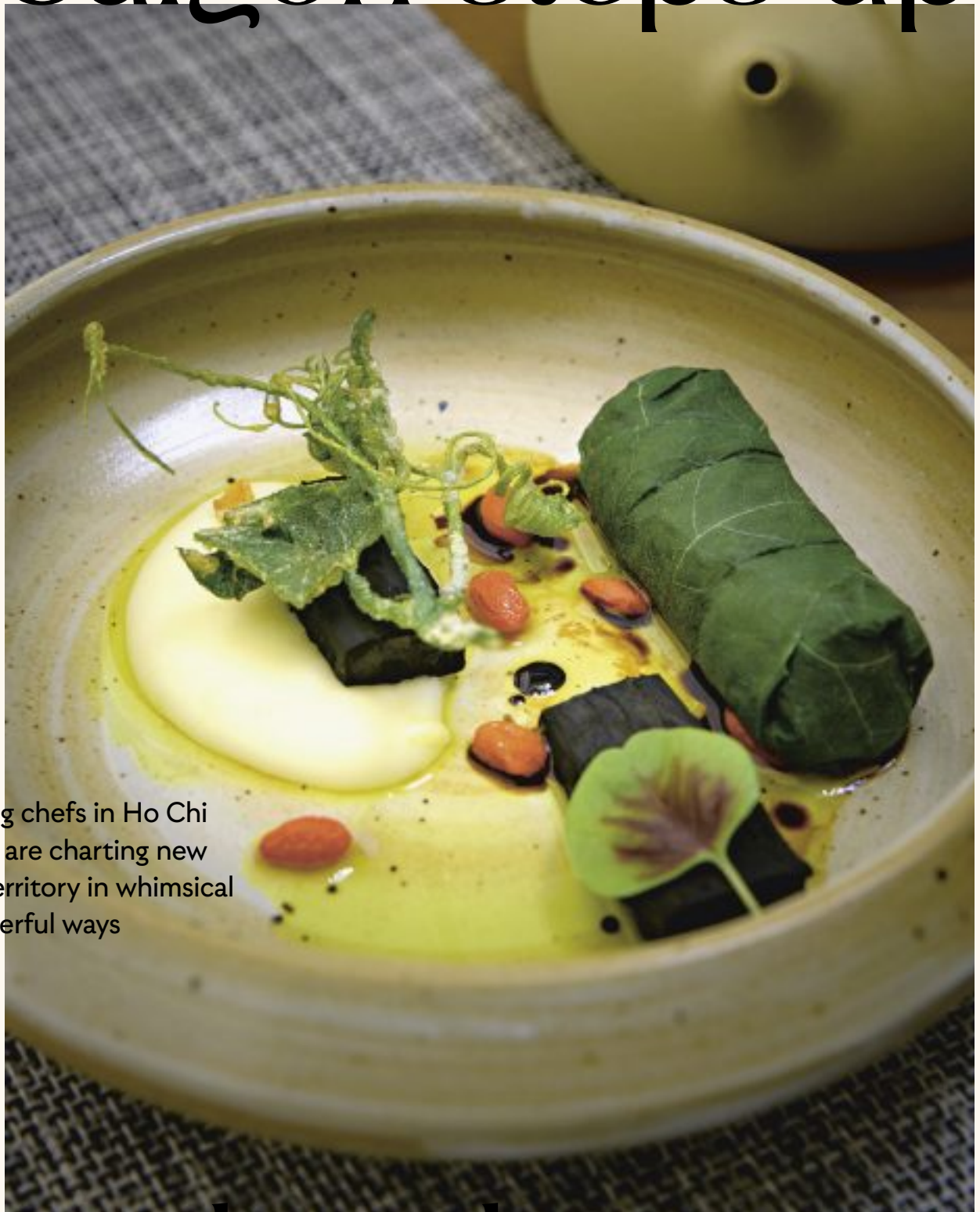


www.kaysteaklobster.com



Saigon steps up

Fine-dining chefs in Ho Chi Minh City are charting new culinary territory in whimsical and wonderful ways



to the plate



Words **Joshua Zukas** Photography **Aurelien Foucault**

The French may have designed Ho Chi Minh City's historic centre, but the Vietnamese have made it their own.

Previous spread:

Duck herbal soup at Oryz Saigon; welcome garden at Nén Light

This spread (from left

to right): Central hall of the Saigon Central Post Office; river prawn *ban xeo* taco at Anan Saigon

Vendors hawk iced coffee and tropical fruit juice beside heritage buildings like the Central Post Office. Tangled alleyways fan out from outspread boulevards and verdant parks. Pavements are not for long, languid promenades – like they are in Paris – but the venue for Ho Chi Minh City's famed street food scene.

A decade ago, this culinary cacophony may have drowned out Oryz Saigon, which opened in October. Here, mellifluous chatter flows through the restaurant's tenderly lit dining room. Curious diners gaze at imaginative creations. Aromas waft from the open kitchen, where a skilled team moves with precision. Although it's only been around for a few months, Oryz feels like a well-drilled machine, a reliable dining destination to mark special occasions – anniversaries, perhaps, or personal milestones – and is one of the more recent examples of Ho Chi Minh City's transforming dining scene.

"The Saigon fine-dining scene is flourishing," says Peter Cuong Franklin, the Vietnamese-American founder and head chef at Anan Saigon, which brandishes Ho Chi Minh City's only Michelin star. Since establishing his restaurant in 2017, the former investment banker has seen a revolution in the restaurant scene, and he believes that it's time for overseas impressions to catch up.

"Most travellers' perception of Vietnam is still stuck in the Bourdain era," says chef Peter, referring to Anthony Bourdain, who covered Vietnamese street kitchens for his culinary-adventure TV series in the 2000s, dined on *bun cha* in Hanoi with Barack Obama in 2016, and sadly passed away in 2018. "It's seen as the place for cheap street food – not fine-dining experiences."

Quick lunches at everyday eateries cost \$2 (VND50,000), while well-prepared meals at more upmarket establishments charge about \$10. By contrast, tasting menus at fine-dining restaurants hover around the \$100 mark, and cost more if diners are drinking beer or wine.

Defining fine-dining isn't easy, but of the 55 establishments listed in the inaugural Michelin Guide Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, which launched last June, more than a third offer an undeniably high-end experience. Like Oryz, most of those high-end restaurants offer some form of tasting menu, a progression of small dishes that reflects the *chefpatron's* mission and philosophy. For many, this is a hallmark feature of a fine-dining establishment.

Despite international perceptions, Oryz has in fact stepped into a somewhat crowded scene. Chris Fong, the Singaporean head chef, did a lot of soul-searching before committing to Ho Chi Minh City. After working in more than a handful of Asian countries, he considered opening restaurants in Melbourne, Guangzhou and Singapore, but ultimately decided that this was the place to put down roots.





HO CHI MINH CITY

The next challenge for chef Chris and his team was to identify gaps in the market. “We realised that everyone is doing modern Vietnamese, a kind of fusion,” he says. “Other than Japanese omakase, East Asian dining is not really represented here.” Some dishes, such as their *bun bo hue* – spiced beef tartare, pickled banana blossom and crunchy rice-cake parcels, a recipe that refines the taste of the beef-noodle dish from Central Vietnam – take inspiration from local cuisine. But some menu highlights, including the duck herbal soup – minced duck, pumpkin leaf tempura and charcoal cassava root – clearly draw from further afield. “Diversity is what we really stand for,” says Chris.

The chef emphasises that a pan-regional approach will also guide future innovations. Ideas in the pot include a tasting menu that diverges from French *dégustation* and pioneers a distinct Asian progression; communal *kaiseki*-style multi-course menus suited to multi-generational dining groups; and take-home recipe cards. “We are thinking about how we can transform the experience,” says Chris.

Nén Light, which opened in 2022 and appeared on the Michelin list a year later, is also looking to transform the fine-dining experience, though perhaps in a more fanciful way. Tucked down an alleyway and encircled by a garden of bamboo, wax apple and *Muntingia* trees, the restaurant is a calming refuge within a hectic neighbourhood. Guests enjoy a small appetiser and welcome drink in the leafy garden before moving to the minimalist dining room – ideal for quiet couples – and embarking on a journey.

Founder and head chef Summer Le believes that every creative product needs a story, and she has incorporated this idea into her tasting menus, which she calls “Sto:ry Menus”. Sto:ry Menu #5, which runs this month, is called “Days of 22”, and is inspired by chef Summer’s time as a student in Japan from 2006. The playful final main course is a Japanese pilaf with black chicken and Tonkin jasmine. The fun part is the seasoning. Diners can flavour the dish with spice mixtures that are meant to represent the characters from *Doraemon*, a Japanese comic book popular with Vietnamese millennials like Summer. “We do what we like,” she laughs, “and what we think makes sense.”

Clockwise from right: Upper-floor dining room at Anan Saigon; Nén Light’s founder and head chef Summer Le; dining room at Nén Light; venison and wild pepper served with a *pâté chaud* pastry at Nén Light





Directory

Anan Saigon

89 Ton That Dam,
District 1
anansaigon.com

Oryz Saigon

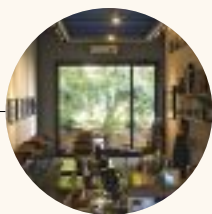
51 D, Tran Nhat Duat,
Phurong Tan Dihn,
District 1
oryzsaigon.com

Nén Light

122/2 Tran Dinh Xu,
District 1
restaurantnen.com

“

As high-end options in HCMC proliferate, innovate and diverge, some pundits question whether these are still fine-dining establishments”



RedDoor

Besides the superb coffee, RedDoor has a comfy couch for long conversation. From here you can peer out of the window at the ornate arched entrance of the Ho Chi Minh City Opera House. [instagram.com/reddoorspace.saigon](https://www.instagram.com/reddoorspace.saigon)



Manki

Manki occupies a repurposed home – and part of the fun is finding the entrance. The passion of the barista is palpable, but the real draw is the dreamy balcony where you can look over the leafy street below. [instagram.com/mankispecialtycoffee](https://www.instagram.com/mankispecialtycoffee)



S'mores Saigon Caffè

With three prime locations across the city, the design theme behind S'mores is repurposed heritage meets industrial chic. All three venues have quiet corners where young couples sip on creative, colourful drinks concoctions. [fb.com/smoresaigoncaffe](https://www.fb.com/smoresaigoncaffe)



Coffee dates in the city

In town for Valentine's? Here are three pre-dinner cafés that set the mood for romance



Left to right: Chef Chris Fong putting the finishing touches on the duck herbal soup at Oryz Saigon; *bun bo hue* at Oryz Saigon

Eccentricities also abound at Peter Cuong Franklin’s Anan Saigon, a rowdy restaurant with tight, cloth-less tables that evokes the downtown dining scenes of New York or Hong Kong. “When it’s so compact you have a sense of energy in the room,” says chef Peter, who was born and raised in Vietnam before being evacuated to the United States as a child refugee in 1975. “You can hear what your neighbours are saying, and that’s kind of fun.”

Though a modern fine-dining restaurant, Anan remains Vietnamese at its core, a kind of extension to the boisterous decades-old market on its doorstep. The tasting menu is speckled with dishes that are inspired by Vietnamese favourites, like Le Petit Banh My, a bite-size take on Vietnam’s iconic sandwich, and River Prawn Banh Xeo Taco, a homage to the small rice crêpes of Hue in central Vietnam. Peter Cuong

Franklin’s formula is working wonders; his informal diner was voted Best Restaurant in Vietnam by the Asia’s 50 Best judges this year.

As high-end options in Ho Chi Minh City proliferate, innovate and diverge, some pundits question whether these are still fine-dining establishments. But the chefs helming the restaurants seem unconcerned. As chef Peter puts it: “If we try and meet other people’s expectations, we will lose our identity.” ■

Suite inspiration

Rooms with a view, both inside and out

M Village Ton That Dam opened in 2023 just a few doors down from Anan Saigon, so it also benefits from the charismatic market outside. Besides the chic, minimalist design, the property also comes with a gym, shared kitchen and rooftop pool, making it ideal for longer stays in the city. mvillaage.vn

Leaning into the old Saigon motif, **Signature by M Village** which opened in 2023, couldn’t be better located for history and architecture buffs. It’s located just a few steps from the Ho Chi Minh City Opera House, Central Post Office and Notre Dame Cathedral. signature.mvillaage.vn

Though it opened in 2021, **Wink Saigon’s** flagship property continues to innovate. Today it feels fresher than ever, with fearlessly hip design and tech-powered services, and a young, dynamic, in-the-know concierge team who go above and beyond. wink-hotels.com



Malaysia Airlines flies from Kuala Lumpur to Ho Chi Minh City 18x weekly.



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A sanctuary for traveller pains

A blissful blend of chiropractic care and Traditional Chinese Medicine

The rigours of travel, particularly long flights, can often result in discomfort and pain, as cramped spaces and prolonged periods of sitting can lead to spinal misalignments and muscle tension.

Nova Chiropractic, a modern chiropractic practice nestled in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, aims to address this traveller discomfort. Its central location in KLCC ensures easy access for those exploring or residing in KL, making it a go-to haven for expats and travellers seeking personalised pain relief.

A holistic touch

Pain signals potential issues or overlooked dangers in our bodies. Chiropractic care provides a non-invasive solution for muscle, spinal and nerve pain, offering effective relief without resorting to medication or invasive measures.

What sets Nova Chiropractic apart is its infusion of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) into chiropractic care. This harmonious fusion – gentle, non-invasive and medication-free – presents patients with alternative paths to pain relief.

People at the heart of its practice

The practice welcomes a range of clients, from expectant mothers and infants to athletes and those grappling with back pain and slipped-disc issues. Its dedicated team of chiropractors, trained in both TCM and chiropractic techniques, work closely with each patient to provide personalised care and effective treatment plans, enabling them to resume their travel activities after a visit.



3 questions with Dr. Chin, founder of Nova Chiropractic

My favourite part of being a chiropractor is...

Being a part of my patients' recovery journey. I often tell my clients that healing is a journey, not a destination.

The biggest myth about chiropractic care is...

that it's risky. If done correctly, chiropractic care has minimal risk, and incorporates light and fast adjustments.

To me, wellbeing is... about your overall state of health, happiness and prosperity.

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February

BEST SPOTS IN MALAYSIA

2024

The best hotels and restaurants to stay and dine in across Malaysia this month



For contemporary interiors: Signal Poshtel

Set in the heart of Kota Kinabalu, Signal Poshtel is a splendid base from which to explore this lively city. It's located in Jalan Gaya, home to a wide array of street food and bustling weekend markets. The stylish, design-led hotel features modern bunk beds and plenty of spaces to hang out and socialise with other travellers. Whether you're travelling solo or with your loved ones, you're bound to enjoy your stay at this rare gem of northern Borneo. Looking for a budget-friendly alternative? Check into Signal Hostel at Sinsuran.

Level 1 to 4, Lot 120, Jalan Gaya, Kota Kinabalu |
IG: @signalposhtel | +60 88-221 168 | +60 11 5877 2391

Signal Hostel (Dorm Rooms Only)
1st Floor, Block G, Sinsuran Complex, Kota Kinabalu
+60 88 534 490 | +60 10 334 3008



For a family beach getaway: Angsana Teluk Bahang

A fresh new take on the Penang beachfront scene, Angsana Teluk Bahang is a vibrant resort that's perfect for couples and families. With 231 sea-view rooms and suites featuring Peranakan-inspired décor, this beach resort offers extensive family-friendly amenities. Adults can enjoy spectacular sunset views of the Andaman Sea from all rooms, indulge their appetites at no fewer than five dining venues and relax at the Angsana Spa; meanwhile, their little ones can have a blast at the Rangers' Club offering arts, crafts and cultural-enrichment classes. Book a stay at Angsana for a truly memorable family getaway in Penang.

11 Jalan Teluk Bahang, Tanjung Bungah, Penang
angsana.com/malaysia/penang | +60 4-817 0888



Here be dragons

Diving with seadragons, visiting a garden protected by the mythical creature and cheering on dragon boats – just some of the fun and unique ways to ring in the Year of the Dragon in Sydney

Words **Rachel Lees** Illustrations **Cheryl Owen**

Charismatic, intelligent, confident and powerful. They're the personality traits of people born in the Year of the Dragon, but these adjectives could just as easily apply to Sydney. The Australian city is undeniably charming, with its sparkling harbour, laid-back lifestyle and renowned food scene.

If you happen to be in town for the Lunar New Year, then your good luck has already started. Recently named the 10th wealthiest city in the world – with an estimated 126,900 millionaires, 184 centi-millionaires and 15 billionaires – Sydney oozes the ideal vibe for calling in prosperity as the Lunar New Year ushers in the Year of the Dragon. The mythical beast, the fifth animal of the Chinese zodiac, is associated with good luck, strength and health, so bring it on!



Kids and dragons

Dragon-related activities to fuel the imagination of young ones



WATCH DRAGON BOATS RACE

About an hour south of Manly by public transport, the beating of drums signals a fearsome battle on top of the water in Darling Harbour, near the Sea Life Sydney Aquarium and the new, restaurant-lined Barangaroo precinct. People of all ages gather along the waterfront to cheer on teams as they race in the annual Lunar New Year Dragon Boats Festival.

The event, happening on 16–18 February, is free for spectators and begins with a traditional eye-dotting ceremony or awakening of the dragon, to rouse the 12m-long dragons and ensure a safe weekend of racing. For extra good fortune, Taoist monks also perform a blessing of the waters.

If you don't catch the dragon boats, don't worry – the wider Sydney Lunar New Year Festival, which

has been running since 1996, goes on for a longer period. Originally known as the Chinese New Year Festival, it was renamed in 2020 to include the many national communities taking part, from Chinese and Malaysian to Vietnamese and Mongolian, among others.

This month, the festival will run from 10–25 February. Highlights include food markets with live music in nearby Haymarket, home to the city's Chinatown. When you've had your fill of noodles and dumplings, head to one of the ticketed cultural performances that span dance, music, theatre and storytelling. Expect everything from Chinese folk dancing and Japanese drumming to K-Pop. And don't forget to look up at the end of each day, when the skies light up with spectacular firework displays.

Learn about Komodo dragons, Australian water dragons and other lizards at a **Reptile Keeper Talk** at Taronga Zoo Sydney. Held daily at 11am, the informative sessions are free with zoo entry. taronga.org.au

What's the difference between eastern and western dragons? Find out at the Sydney Opera House's free **Design Your Own Dragon** class, then create your own artwork to take home. sydneyoperahouse.com

Find Chinese dragons – and the remaining 11 animals of the Chinese zodiac – in **The Emperor's Quest**, an educational treasure hunt held daily in the Chinese Garden of Friendship. darlingharbour.com



For authentic French cuisine: Chez Gaston

Chez Gaston is a traditional French bistro located in the heart of Bangsar, just minutes away from Telawi Street and Bangsar LRT. It offers authentic French cuisine at affordable prices, in a relaxed setting for guests to enjoy delicious food and drinks with their loved ones. Chef Florian Nigen, who previously helmed a renowned restaurant in Brittany on the western coast of France, brings his expertise to prepare a wide range of French meat and seafood dishes, as well as delightful desserts. With attentive staff who ensure a delightful dining experience, Chez Gaston brings the flavours of France to Kuala Lumpur.

12G, Jalan Bangsar Utama 9, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur | [facebook.com/chezgastonkl](https://www.facebook.com/chezgastonkl)



For delicious meals on-the-go: Lizzie Café & Bakery

Indulge in your favourite bakes and coffee at Lizzie Café & Bakery at Nu Sentral. This charming little nook, located by KL Sentral station, offers a delightful array of fresh handmade breads, sandwiches, cakes and delectable treats to accompany your warm cup of joe. Whether you're looking for a quick breakfast, a satisfying lunch on the go, a refreshing tea break or a delicious dinner, Lizzie Café & Bakery is the perfect destination for a scrumptious meal.

LG25, Nu Sentral, Shopping Center, Jalan Tun Sambanthan, Kuala Lumpur | +60 3-2776 0672



DIVE WITH SEADRAGONS

An otherworldly creature lurks several metres below the surface of the water. Sporting leaf-like appendages, and purple spots and stripes, its marigold-coloured body is camouflaged among the kelp, where it uses its long snout to feed on crustaceans. The weedy seadragon might be considered fearsome if it wasn't a willowy 30cm long. A relative of the seahorse, seadragons are endemic to New South Wales and you can see them in the wild in Sydney on a guided dive.

Spanning an area of roughly 20ha, Cabbage Tree Bay is a protected aquatic reserve off the southern end of Manly Beach, a 30-minute ferry ride from the city. The reserve is home to some of

the most diverse marine life in Sydney, including octopuses, stingrays and wobbegong sharks. There are brightly coloured nudibranchs, and inquisitive eastern blue groper – the fish emblem of New South Wales. If you're lucky, you may even spot a turtle.

But if it's dragons you seek, you'll need to swim to the outer reef to the "dragon patch" as it's affectionately known to locals. Dive Centre Manly, which has been in business for 30 years, offers guided dives of Cabbage Tree Bay. You'll need to bring along your dive certification, and you can rent their gear or use your own. Not certified? They also offer a great dive experience for beginners. divesydney.com.au

VISIT A GARDEN OF DRAGONS

In need of some tranquillity to counter the festivities? Make your way to the koi-filled ponds, gentle weeping willows and intricate pavilions of Darling Harbour's Chinese Garden of Friendship. Opened in 1998 as a symbol of unity between the sister cities of Sydney and Guangzhou in China, the 1.07ha compound was modelled after Ming Dynasty private gardens and designed to encourage the flow of *qi*, or internal energy.

Native magpie larks flit among Himalayan cedars, sacred ibis forage in the bamboo forests, and Australian water dragons bask on sun-splashed rocks by the pond. The lizards are Australia's largest dragons, growing to a length of 80–90cm, and while they're usually shy, they seem to feel confident enough being in





the onsite restaurant. Inside a heritage-listed teahouse, delectable dumplings, Chinese tea and Sichuan cuisine are served against the backdrop of the lake and the majestic Dragon Wall – a large ceramic mural featuring two Imperial dragons playing with a pearl of friendship.

You can learn all about the history, landscape and cultural heritage on the garden’s daily guided tours. There’s also a small exhibition of digital photos and artworks that depict the genesis of the gardens and the relationship between New South Wales and Guangdong Province. Free koi-feeding sessions are held every day at 11.30am, and you can join a movement and meditation class on Tuesdays at lunchtime. All under the watchful eye of the dragons, of course. darlingharbour.com ■



Malaysia Airlines flies between Kuala Lumpur and Sydney 14x weekly.

Beyond Chinatown



In 2021, 4.6 percent of Sydney’s population was born in China, which makes Chinese people the largest migrant population in the city.



In the suburb of Hurstville, 16km southwest of the city centre, more than half of all residents report Chinese ancestry – more than any other suburb.



Aussies got a taste for Chinese food in the 1930s, favouring chicken chow mein, chop suey and sweet and sour fish. Now, a variety of Chinese cuisines are available.



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Benithem, a Malaysian office furniture company, achieved the prestigious Enterprise 50 Award top spot in 2022. Known for its commitment to quality, the company's products reached more than 40 countries worldwide. Benithem's emphasis on quality extends beyond its furniture, earning ISO certifications and GREENGUARD approval for environmental responsibility.


What distinguishes Benithem is its patented, European and US-standard series, notably the Zoom chair. This ergonomic masterpiece, a result of substantial investment, showcases meticulous craftsmanship and durability, embodying the company's dedication to excellence.


The company credits SME Corp. Malaysia and Deloitte Malaysia for recognising their dedication. Benithem acknowledges the significance of SME Corp. Malaysia's programmes and initiatives, especially for SMEs aspiring to grow further. Gratitude is also extended to Benithem's 120-member team, attributing this achievement to their unwavering commitment.


With this award, Benithem reaffirms its commitment to quality and aims to continue making Malaysia proud while striving for an even brighter future.

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Welcome aboard Malaysia Aviation Group's (MAG) airlines! This month, see what we have on offer to ensure that you have a safe, seamless and fuss-free journey with us.

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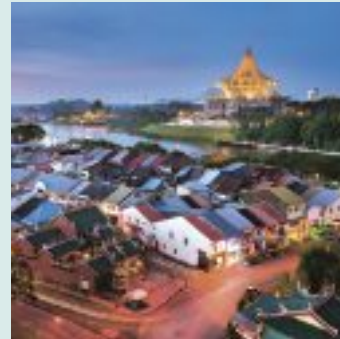
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MAG adds 248 additional flights through to March 2024 to accommodate increased festive travel

Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) has announced a significant boost to flight frequencies to meet travel demand through to March 2024, with the addition of 248 flights in its domestic and international network. The additional flights are offered on both Malaysia Airlines and Firefly, departing from KL International Airport Terminal 1 (KUL), Subang Airport (SZB) and Penang International Airport (PEN).

For the Chinese New Year festive period, the airline will increase the KUL to Singapore (SIN) route with an extra two flights, elevating the frequency from 56 to 58 on 7

& 8 February 2024. Meanwhile, additional flights to domestic routes will also be added to accommodate the festive celebration, with attractive one-way fares starting from RM109 within Peninsular Malaysia, and from RM255 for Sabah and Sarawak routes.

Malaysia Airlines will also be increasing flights from its hub in KUL to key domestic destinations, with an increase of three additional flights each to Kota Bharu (KBR) and Alor Setar (AOR); eight more to Sandakan (SDK); nine more to Sibul (SBW); one to Tawau (TWU); and two to Kuching (KCH).

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Experience seamless travel: EZBagz kiosks for quick check-ins on Malaysia Airlines domestic flights

EZBagz kiosks have been installed at the Malaysia Airlines (MH) check-in counters specifically designated for domestic flights, located from Row B3 to B8. At these kiosks, passengers have the convenience of printing their bag tags before securely placing their bags

on the conveyor belt. This entire process typically takes approximately 45 seconds per bag, significantly minimising waiting times at the check-in queues. Currently, EZBagz kiosks are offered exclusively for Malaysia Airlines' domestic flights.

Explore the world with MHflypass ASEAN



Customers wanting to celebrate the festivities by exploring neighbouring cities can take advantage of the airline's MHflypass ASEAN, which offers up to three return trips (or six one-way trips) in one year to any ASEAN destination within the network. MHflypass ASEAN is grouped into three different zones, so you can choose the one that works best for you.



radiant complexion despite the stresses of travel. But the benefits don't stop there. Collagen supplements also contribute to the strength and beauty of our hair and nails, ensuring you're always looking your best for that close-up travel photo.

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When it comes to collagen supplements, Nutribear Essential Fish Collagen stands out from the crowd. This scientifically-backed formulation has been meticulously tested by a team of expert nutritionists and biotech scientists to ensure uncompromised quality and proven results. It's also available in travel-friendly sachets, perfect to keep you nourished on the go.

What also sets Nutribear apart is its commitment to purity and potency. The supplement is free from additives, genetically modified organisms, sugar, fat, gluten, dairy, soy and other artificial flavours. This ensures that you're getting the full benefits of collagen without any unwanted additives.

Customer testimonials

But don't just take their word for it. Countless individuals have experienced the positive impact of Nutribear collagen supplements on their joint and bone health. Testimonials from satisfied customers attest to the non-fishy odour of the supplements and highlight how it has relieved joint pain, allowing them to enjoy their travels to the fullest.

Next time you embark on a trip, make sure you pack a box of Nutribear collagen supplements. Your joints and bones will thank you, and you'll be able to embark on your jaunts with ease and comfort.

For more information on Nutribear and to experience the benefits of collagen supplements yourself, visit their website at nutribear.co.

Your travel essential for wellness

Enjoy the benefits of collagen supplements while exploring new destinations with Nutribear

As frequent travellers, we understand the challenges of maintaining our health and wellness on the go. Luckily, collagen supplements offer a convenient and effective solution to the toll that constant travel takes on our bodies. Collagen, a vital protein found in our bodies, plays a crucial role in maintaining supple skin and flexible joints. But the benefits of collagen supplements go beyond just improving skin health.

Supporting healthy joints and bones

One of the key advantages of collagen is its ability to support joint and bone health. Long flights and hours of walking while exploring new destinations can strain our joints, leading to discomfort and limited mobility. Collagen supplements aid in maintaining joint flexibility, reducing discomfort and allowing us to keep up with our adventures pain-free.

Jet lag, varying climates and exposure to different pollutants can also take a toll on our skin. Collagen supplements promote skin elasticity and hydration, helping us maintain a healthy and



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A350-900

No. of Aircraft **6** | Passenger Seating **286**
Length **66.80m** | Wingspan **64.75m** | Height **17.05m**
Max. Cruising Speed **944km/h**
MHConnect Wi-Fi Connectivity



A330-300

No. of Aircraft **15** | Passenger Seating **290**
Length **63.66m** | Wingspan **60.30m** | Height **16.79m**
Max. Cruising Speed **980km/h**
MHConnect Wi-Fi Connectivity on selected aircraft



A330-200

No. of Aircraft **6** | Passenger Seating **287**
Length **58.82m** | Wingspan **60.30m** | Height **17.39m**
Max. Cruising Speed **880km/h**
MHConnect Wi-Fi Connectivity on selected aircraft



B737-800NG

No. of Aircraft **42** | Passenger Seating **160, 166, 174**
Length **39.5m** | Wingspan **38.5m** | Height **12.50m**
Max. Cruising Speed **857km/h**



B737-8

No. of Aircraft **2** | Passenger Seating **174**
Length **39.52m** | Wingspan **35.90m** | Height **12.30m**
| Max. Cruising Speed **976km/h**



ATR 72-500

No. of Aircraft **9** | Passenger Seating **72**
Length **27.05m** | Wingspan **27.17m** | Height **7.65m**
Max. Cruising Speed **510km/h**



B737-800NG

No. of Aircraft **5** | Passenger Seating **189**
Length **39.5m** | Wingspan **38.50m** | Height **12.50m**
Max. Cruising Speed **857km/h**



A330-200F

No. of Aircraft **3** | Maximum Cargo Capacity **65 (70) tonnes**
Length **58.82m** | Wingspan **60.30m** | Height **16.88m**
Max. Cruising Speed **1,021km/h**



ATR 72-500

No. of Aircraft **8** | Passenger Seating **68**
Length **27.05m** | Wingspan **27.17m** | Height **7.65m**
Max. Cruising Speed **510km/h**



Viking DHC-6 Twin Otter Series 400

No. of Aircraft **6** | Passenger Seating **19**
Length **15.77m** | Wingspan **19.80m** | Height **5.94m**
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NOW SHOWING

MOVIES p84 TELEVISION p92 AUDIO p95



Oppenheimer

Check out our Chinese New Year Special on page 89 and Valentines Special on page 92!



Table for Six



Ride on



The Notebook



Whisper of the Heart

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Oppenheimer

A team of scientists led by a physicist spend years developing and designing the nuclear weapon, forever changing the course of history.

Christopher Nolan, celebrated for his cinematic mastery, ventures into uncharted territory with his inaugural biographical drama centred on the eminent physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer. Known for crafting blockbuster spectacles such as *The Dark Knight Trilogy*, *Interstellar* and *Inception*, Nolan now delves into the historical narrative surrounding Oppenheimer's pivotal role in the creation of the nuclear weapon. The film, featuring the formidable talent of Cillian Murphy as Oppenheimer, promises a gripping exploration of the scientist's profound moral dilemma – a pulse-pounding paradox that revolves

around risking the world to save it. The ensemble cast adds a stellar dimension to this cinematic endeavour, with luminaries like Robert Downey Jr., Matt Damon, Emily Blunt, Josh Hartnett, Florence Pugh, Josh Peck and Academy Award Winner Rami Malek contributing to the narrative depth. Nolan's foray into a biographical realm, coupled with the gravitas of Oppenheimer's story and the formidable cast anticipates a cinematic tour de force that transcends the boundaries of entertainment, offering audiences a thought-provoking journey into the complexities of morality, science and profound consequences of human innovation.

Hollywood Latest



Ageless Love defies societal norms in a captivating tale of Emma, a vibrant woman in her twenties, and Charles, a distinguished man in his fifties. Despite societal judgments, their undeniable connection transcends age, challenging stereotypes. As their love deepens, they face doubts, skepticism and generational challenges.



The movie **Reality**, released in 2023, is a crime drama directed by Tina Satter and co-written by Satter and James Paul Dallas. The film adapts the FBI interrogation transcript of Reality Winner, an American intelligence leaker, which was originally presented as the play *Is This a Room* by Satter. Sydney Sweeney takes on the lead role as Winner.



In **Surprised by Oxford**, the brilliant but emotionally guarded Caro Drake arrives at Oxford with only one goal in mind: to earn her Ph.D. But she discovers mystery, vulnerability and love during a turbulent friendship with a charming young man. Directed by Ryan Whitaker, the true-life story is based on author Carolyn Weber's award-winning memoir.



If You Were the Last, a science fiction romantic comedy released in 2023, is directed by Kristian Mercado. The lead roles are played by Anthony Mackie and Zoe Chao. Adam and Jane, two NASA astronauts on a multi-year exploration mission find themselves stranded, and amidst their predicament, discover love blossoming between them.



Craft Me a Romance



Butcher's Crossing



The Kill Room

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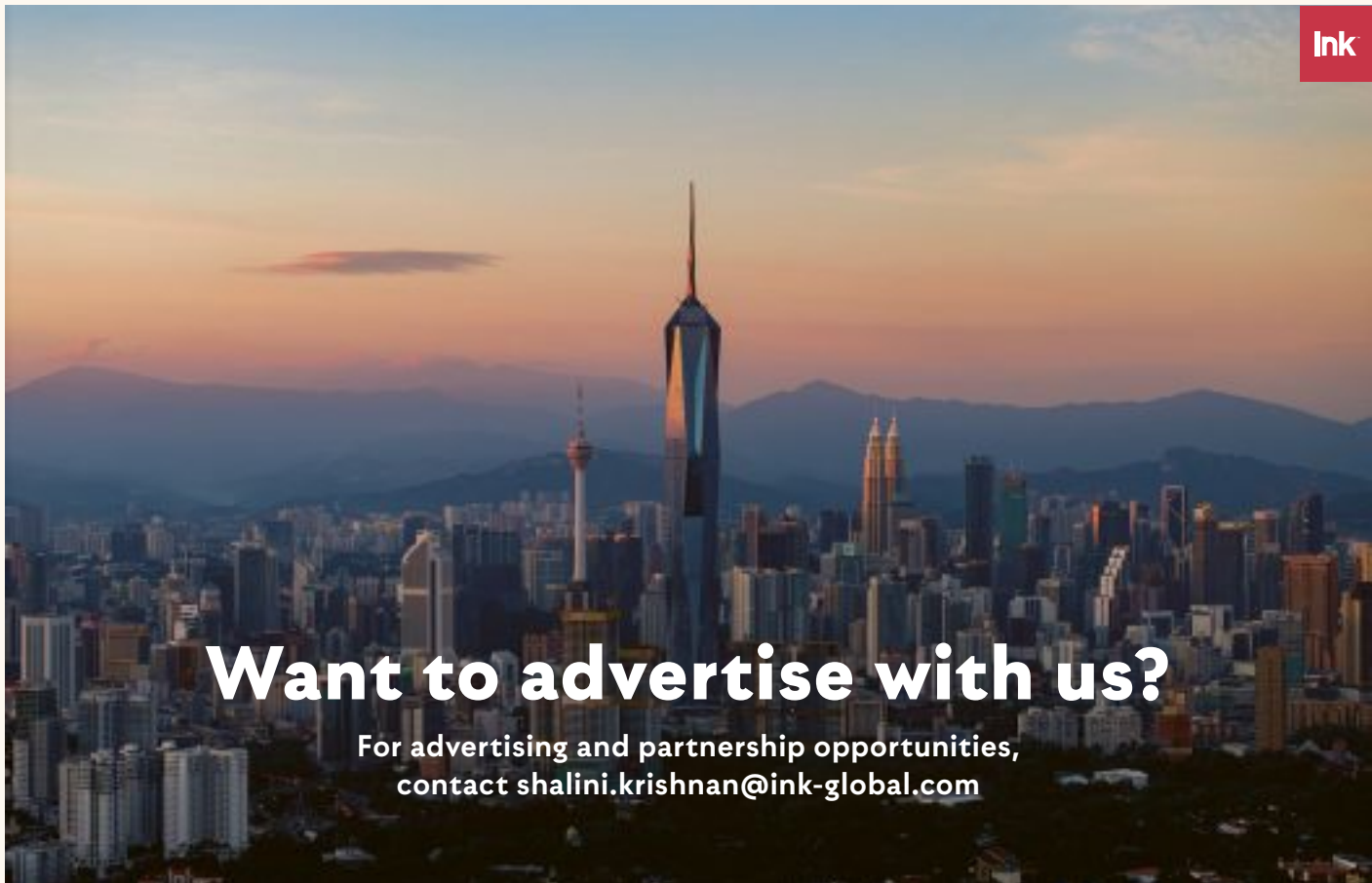


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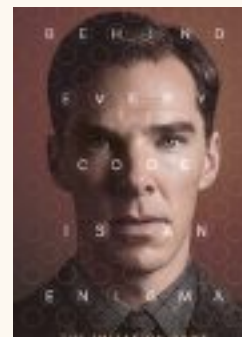
MOVIES

Sequel Special

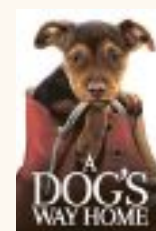
Men in Black (1997) introduces a covert group overseeing extraterrestrial activity, featuring Agents J (Will Smith) and K (Tommy Lee Jones) protecting Earth from aliens while concealing their existence. The film blends sci-fi and humour, setting the franchise's tone. *Men in Black II* (2002) sees J and K confronting alien Serleena (Lara Flynn Boyle), guarding Earth from her pursuit of a potent artifact. The sequel maintains humour and introduces new alien characters. *Men in Black 3* (2012) involves time travel, revealing J's quest to save K in 1969, adding emotional depth. *Men in Black: International* (2019) expands the universe, featuring agents Molly (Tessa Thompson) and H (Chris Hemsworth) investigating global alien attacks, offering a fresh perspective.



Hollywood Favourites



Hollywood Kids



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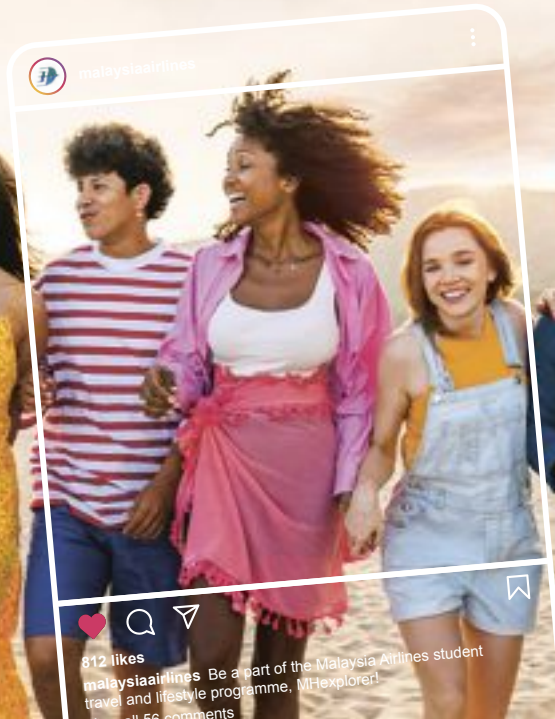
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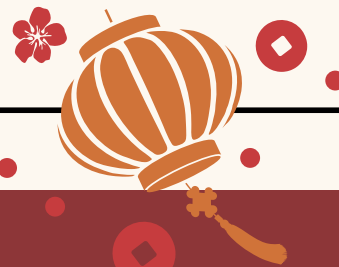


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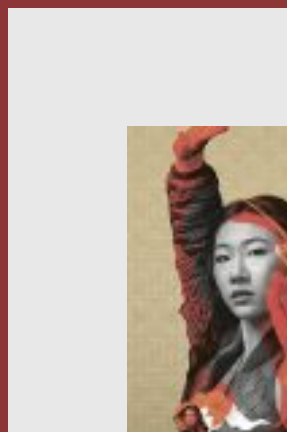
Chinese New Year Special



The 2022 Hong Kong comedy film **Table for Six**, a sequel to the 2015 short film *Table for Three*, explores the dynamics of family ties and shared meals with a Chinese cultural backdrop. Directed by Sunny Chan, the melodramatic comedy features Dayo Wong, Stephy Tang, Louis Cheung, Ivana Wong, Lin Min-Chen and Peter Chan. In a similar vein, Larry Yang's 2023 Chinese action drama **Ride On**, starring Jackie Chan, Liu Haocun and Guo Qilin, delves into the world of an old-school stunt performer and his trusty stunt horse. Meanwhile, Wong Chun-chun's 2022 Chinese romantic comedy **Don't Forget I Love You**, a sequel to *The Stolen Years*, portrays the love story between a psychologist and a composer, played by Gulnazar and Jasper Liu. Both films capture the essence of Chinese New Year with themes of family, tradition and love.



In the **Jio Ni O CNY Special**, host Jeanne embarks on a journey to Chinese New Villages and celebrities' hometowns, immersing herself in the festivities while savouring local cuisines. She not only indulges in the flavours but also delves into the art of preparing these regional dishes, showcasing the charm and taste of regional cuisine. Meanwhile, the **CNY Midnight Supper Xpress** caters to those staying up late during Chinese New Year, addressing midnight cravings with celebrity hosts demonstrating super-easy supper recipes.



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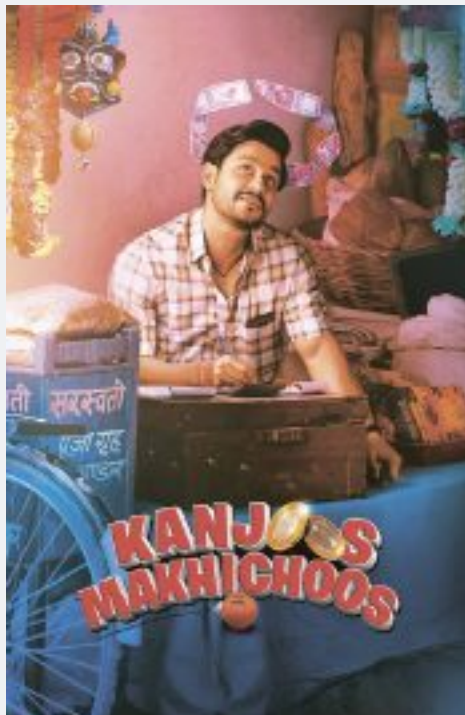
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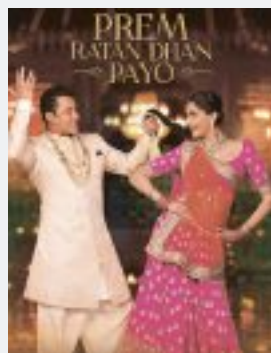
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MOVIES

Hindi



Kanjoos Makhichoos, a Hindi comedy film directed by Vipul Mehta, is based on the renowned Gujarati play *Sajan Re Jhooth Mat Bolo*. Starring Kunal Khemu, Shweta Tripathi, Piyush Mishra, Alka Amin, Rajeev Gupta and Raju Srivastava, the film follows the lead character, Jamnadas Pandey (Kunal Khemu), infamous in town for his miserly ways. Unbeknownst to his fed-up family, Jamnadas's thriftiness is geared towards fulfilling his father's to go on a *char-dhaam yatra*, a pilgrimage.



Tamil



Kantara, a 2022 Kannada action thriller directed by Rishab Shetty and produced by Vijay Kiragandur, stars Rishab Shetty in a dual role, including a Kambala champion at odds with forest officer Murali (played by Kishore). Set in coastal Karnataka, the film released on September, 2022, and achieved commercial success, ranking as the second highest-grossing Kannada film and the fourth highest-grossing film in India for 2022. The movie received positive reviews and won the Silver Peacock – Special Jury Award at the 54th IFFI. A prequel, **Kantara: Chapter 1**, is in the works.

Malay



Thai

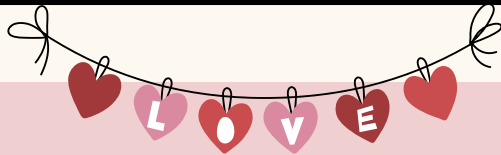


Korean



The Childe, a 2023 South Korean neo-noir action thriller directed by Park Hoon-jung, features Kim Seon-ho and Kang Tae-joo in their film debuts, alongside Kim Kang-woo and Go Ara. The film follows a man with a Korean-Filipino heritage aspiring to be a boxer. Returning to Korea to find his father, he becomes entangled with nefarious individuals, leading to a gripping narrative of suspense and action.

MOVIES & TELEVISION



Japanese Movie

Whisper of the Heart, a Japanese animated film, beautifully portrays the journey of self-discovery and budding romance. The film's essence resonates with Valentine's Day, as it emphasises the importance of following one's heart and embracing love's transformative power. With its heartfelt storytelling and enchanting animation, it captures the spirit of the holiday, celebrating the exploration of emotions and the joy found in authentic connections.



Korean Movie

Killing Romance, a Korean film, navigates the complexities of modern relationships and the challenges of sustaining love. In a departure from traditional romantic narratives, it reflects the reality of love's ups and downs. This film's exploration of the darker aspects of romance serves as a poignant reminder on Valentine's Day that love requires effort, understanding and resilience in the face of adversity. The movie stars Lee Haneea and Lee Sun-kyun.



Hollywood

Valentine's Day is a romantic comedy that weaves together multiple love stories on the titular holiday. Released in 2010, it explores the essence of Valentine's Day – celebrating love in all its forms. The film portrays diverse relationships, highlighting the joy, the spirit of the holiday, complications and surprises that love brings.



Malay Movie



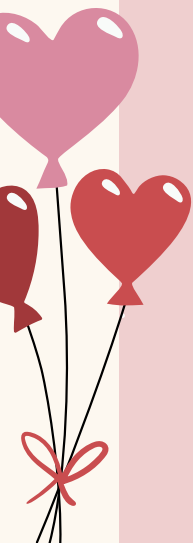
Malay TV Show



Japanese TV Show



Korean TV Show



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Young Sheldon follows the childhood of Sheldon Cooper from *The Big Bang Theory*. The TV show humorously explores Sheldon's prodigious intellect and social challenges. For passengers aboard Malaysia Airlines, the full box set of *Young Sheldon* seasons is available in the In-Flight Entertainment system. For audiences of all ages.



Bob Hearts Abishola is a charming sitcom depicting the cross-cultural romance between a compression sock businessman and his Nigerian nurse. This heartwarming show explores love's complexities with humour and cultural nuances. Travellers on MH can indulge in the complete series, enjoying the delightful journey of Bob and Abishola.



Call Me Kat stars the quirky and lovable Kat, who ditches societal expectations to open a cat café. This feel-good sitcom blends humour and heart, celebrating individuality. Malaysia Airlines offers the complete series on its In-Flight Entertainment (IFE) system, allowing passengers to enjoy Kat's hilarity and joy from embracing life on one's own terms.



Doom Patrol is a DC Comics-inspired series following a group of misfit superheroes. Blending humour and darkness, it explores their peculiar abilities and personal struggles. For in-flight entertainment on Malaysia Airlines, passengers can access the full box set season, immersing themselves in the offbeat world of the *Doom Patrol*.

TV Shows



Kids



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Cantonese and Mandarin songs showcase diverse musical landscapes. **MY TV Love Songs** captures the essence of Cantonese ballads, blending heartfelt lyrics with soulful melodies. Meanwhile, **Greatest Duets: A Love Songs Collection** is a Chinese-language record in Mandarin, featuring duets that evoke powerful emotions. Both albums celebrate love through distinct linguistic and musical expressions, enriching the tapestry of Chinese music.

Monumental find

Penang Hill, also known as Bukit Bendera (“Flagstaff Hill”) is part of the Penang Hill Biosphere Reserve, a Unesco inscription awarded last year for its wonderful collage of natural terrain: dipterocarp forests, coastal rainforests, mangroves, sandy beaches and marine habitat. Penang Hill’s diversity of landscape and wildlife makes it a favourite among hikers traversing its moderate to challenging trails – but only the most ardent hikers know its secret gems.

One such find that’s been buzzing on social media is a collection of gold-painted stupas that sit on lush slopes overlooking George Town. Nicknamed the Golden Stupas of Penang Hill, the monuments can be accessed via a challenging two-hour hike along the Hye Keat to Stupa Valley via the Heritage Trail; alternatively, there’s a convenient 10-minute shortcut through Penang Hill funicular railway’s Middle Station. The stupas, which were supposedly built by private landowners, are said to bring inner peace – as well as delight – to those who set out to find these enchanting monuments.

Penang Hill



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