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FOR MODERN EXPLORERS

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BUENOS AIRES

South America's hippest city

20 Beyond the obvious EURO HOTSPOTS

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Shortcuts

Your exclusive guide to **what's hot in the world of travel.**

**SHORTCUTS
IN THE BAG**



Colourful Palm Springs

USA LA desert weekenders just got a whole lot more colourful with the opening of The Saguaro Palm Springs. Launched in February, the Saguaro revitalised the old Holiday Inn's classic '50s architecture with a generous dollop of colour. 2009 *Iron Chef America* winner Jose Garces was brought in to reinvent the culinary offering – based around a Basque pintos bar at Tinto's and the flavours of Mexico City at El Jefe. It's bold, colourful, simple and fun – bring sunglasses. From \$163. thesaguaro.com



IMAGES COURTESY THE SAGUARO



TROPICAL TRAVEL

Pack these chic must-haves for your next Asian jaunt.



01 KAFTAN Get tropical in this Colin Heaney "Tribal" kaftan. \$585, for details got to colinheaney.com **02 BIKINI** Make the most of the tropical seas with the Amadora bikini. \$195, seventhworldland.com **03 SHADES** Be one shady lady in these Anthony Lister for COLAB "Vacation on the Sun" sunglasses. \$199, **02 8436 6677** **04 WATCH** TAG Heuer, Polished Steel, White Mother-of-Pearl & Diamond. \$6600, **1800 809 915** **05 FRAGRANCE** You'll feel as fresh as a poppy with "Flower By Kenzo" 30ml. \$87, **02 9695 4800** **06 MAP** You will never get lost with this "Crumpled city Tokyo map". \$220, flight001.com **07 SANDALS** What's not to love about these Acne Brown "Fleur" metallic strap flat sandals? \$300, acnestudios.com **08 BAG** Perfect for everyday travelling, you can fit all your essentials in this colour-block bag from Marc by Marc Jacobs satchel. \$552, marcjacobs.com **09 TANK TOP** This cute little D&G Scarf Print jersey tank will take you from day to night. \$372, dolcegabbana.com **10 NECKLACE** Over the top? No way! Make a statement in this 2 by Lyn & Tony "Africa" Necklace. \$935, **02 8338 1810** **11 RING** Add a splash of orange with this Najo ring. \$238, najo.com.au

ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S ESTATE HAS CREATED HEMINGWAY HOTELS & RESORTS, BASED ON THE LITERARY GREAT'S LIFE... ADVENTURE, INDULGENCE AND LUXURY. SIGN US UP.

JET SET EUROPE: HOTEL SEZZ SAINT-TROPEZ HAS EXCLUSIVE PACKAGES FOR THE ULTIMATE EUROPEAN A-LISTER GLAMOUR EVENT, THE MONACO F1.

Eat & Drink

Bangkok Jazz Bars, Restaurants of Basque Country, **Iconic Recipe** + Three Gourmet tours



**1. LOUD AND PROUD
ADHERE 13TH BLUES BAR**
This little gem draws an eclectic crowd who love the range of music – from acoustic blues to swing guitar, including covers and originals. “It’s a small community, like a musician’s house,” says guitarist and regular Adherent Pong Sabua.
DRINK OF CHOICE: SINGHA BEER
13 Samsen Rd, near Banglumpoo Bridge.
+66 (0)8 9769 4613

**2. HOLE IN THE WALL
THE IRON FAIRIES**
For those in the know, this old blacksmiths’ workshop in Thonglor is a whimsical wine bar with nightly performances by established and experimental jazz musicians. Be early though: doors shut as soon as there are 55 people inside.
DRINK OF CHOICE: HEINEKEN
394 Thonglor Rd, Sukhumvit 55.
theironfairies.com
+66 (0)2 714 8875

**3. BOLD AND BRASSY
SAXOPHONE PUB**
A Bangkok institution since 1987, this joint hits the perfect note every evening, with three acts (7.30pm, 9pm, midnight) playing jazz, swing, blues, reggae and classic big band.
DRINK OF CHOICE: “SAXOPHONE DROPPER”
3/8 Phayathai Rd, Victory Monument.
saxophonepub.com
+66 (0)2 246 5472

**4. COOL AND CLASSY
THE LIVING ROOM**
The Living Room offers five-star jazz in the five-star Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit. International musicians such as sassy jazz diva Alice Day (TOP LEFT) play every night, while Sundays play host to a “jazzy brunch”.
DRINK OF CHOICE: “NIGHT OF JAZZ”
250 Sukhumvit Rd.
sheratongrandesukhumvit.com
+66 (0)2 2649 8353

**5. THE AFRICAN QUEEN:
BAMBOO BAR**
If Humphrey Bogart wanted jazz with his gin, this is where he’d pull up a leopard-print chair. Sexy and sophisticated, the Bamboo Bar at the Mandarin Oriental attracts a well-heeled clientele for its line-up of internationally acclaimed crooners.
DRINK OF CHOICE: “JOSEPH CONRAD GIN SLING”
48 Oriental Ave.
mandarinoriental.com
+66 (0)2 659 9000

Bangkok and all that jazz

Under Bangkok’s broiling surface lurks a vibrant music scene – a cool underground movement of jazz and blues bars. So grab a taxi, tuk-tuk or train and check out these top five, all with no cover charge.

Words and Images by Kerry van der Jagt

Bucket List



WARM SOUP CHIVES, WILD GARLIC AND BLUE FISH FLAVOURED WITH AROMATIC SEEDS AND LEAVES AT MUGARITZ

Great Restaurants of the World



One of Australia’s most accomplished restaurateurs, John Fink shared three of his favourite places to eat in his favourite gourmet region – Basque country Spain.

MUGARITZ,
30 MINUTES SOUTH OF SAN SEBASTIAN
“Arrive at the restaurant at noon and if you leave at about 6pm or 7pm and have a really nice long lunch, you should either go with your wife to rejuvenate your marriage or with your lover to rejuvenate your marriage, whichever. It’s beautiful. It’s in a courtyard. It’s just an environment where you go, ‘I will never forget that lunch, ever. I will never forget my time.’”
mugaritz.com

ETXEBARRI,
AN HOUR WEST OF SAN SEBASTIAN
“It’s not a restaurant in the conventional sense, it’s literally like an old farm house ... the menu there is not indicative

of the chef – it’s indicative of what’s available on the day. And half of the stuff on the menu is live, the shellfish is live. Things are killed to order and everything is cooked over a fire.”
asadoretxebarri.com

LA CUCHARA DE SAN TELMO
IN SAN SEBASTIAN
“It’s hard to find, but once you find it, it’s one of the best pincho you’ll ever have in your life – it’s fantastic, beautiful. I swear, I had a very simple meal there, I just had some grilled foie gras, I had some razor clams, and I had a beer and I was crying. It was a religious experience for me. I was just like, ‘Oh my God, this is so beautiful!’”
lacucharadesantelmo.com

3 tours to diet for

EUROPE

Bubble Tours

European wine tour gurus BK Wine Tours have launched a series of trips to Champagne region. The four-day tour drops in on a range of the well-known and established Champagne Houses plus small and independent growers. But it’s all in the wonderful epicentre of sparkling wine country, the towns of Epernay and Reims. From \$1995
www.bkwinetours.com



MOROCCO



Moroccan Food

Aussie Moroccan Chef and Cook Book author Hassan M’Souli is leading an exclusive 14-day access-all-areas tour of Morocco. Starting in the capital Rabat the tour includes almost daily cooking classes, exclusive access to remote traditional tents of camel wool and mud brick and ends in Marrakech. From \$9995 per person.
moroccobypriorarrangement.net

INDIA

Spice Tour

Sultan of spice Ian “Herbie” Hemphill is gearing up for another spice tour of India. The 16-day itinerary from 13 Jan 2013 includes some tourism hotspots in the North and then onto the *raison d’tour*, the spices, cooking demonstrations and eating in the south. Approx \$10,000
www.herbies.com.au



What's On

Fun stuff to include in your overseas itinerary in the **coming months...**



**JUNE
TO
OCTOBER**

AFRICA

JUNE 23 THE BIG FIVE MARATHON SOUTH AFRICA

If you need motivation, there are lions, leopards and rhinos. Runners from all over the world will run through the Entabeni Private Game Reserve for this test of physical endurance. Marathon aside, the week is filled with other events, including festive dinners, parties and tours. big-five-marathon.com

JUNE 28 – JULY 8 NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL SOUTH AFRICA

Grahamstown hosts the annual arts fest, with jazz performances, dance, theatre, visual arts, film, street performances and student theatre. nationalartsfestival.co.za

ASIA

MAY 12 – AUGUST 12 WORLD EXPO 2012 YEOSU KOREA

More than eight million visitors are expected to visit the New Port area in Yeosu to pledge their cooperation to protect the ocean for future generations. Expect impressive exhibitions, activities, talks and more. eng.expo2012.kr

JULY 13-22 SINGAPORE FOOD FESTIVAL

Feast on some of the world's best seafood at this annual food frenzy. At the Marina Bay waterfront there will be up to 60 stalls with international favourites like chilli and black pepper crab, Teochew, Sambal stingray and more. singaporefoodfestival.com.sg

SEPTEMBER 12-16 KING'S CUP ELEPHANT POLO TOURNAMENT THAILAND

They'll be off and stomping at this year's Elephant Polo to be held in Hua Hin. Now in its 11th year, this annual charity event aims to raise funds to help Thailand's elephants, attracting visitors (and players) from all over the world, including celebrities, professional athletes and royalty. anantaraelephantpolo.com

EUROPE

JUNE 15 – JULY 8 ZURICH FESTIVAL SWITZERLAND

As one of Europe's great performing arts festivals, the city will be overrun with theatre, opera, dance and classical music performances. zuercher-festspiele.ch

Review

Verdicts you can trust on **Hotels, Resorts & Restaurants**



BABEL RESTAURANT AT BABYLONSTOREN, SOUTH AFRICA, PAGE 46.

Inside: • Mansion Hotel, Turkey • Babylonstoren, South Africa • Hotel Sofitel So, Thailand
• Blindkuh, Switzerland • Palazzo-Venetian, USA

**International Traveller does not accept free or sponsored travel or accommodation in exchange for reviews. Our writers pay their own way and travel anonymously, which allows us to experience exactly what our readers would experience, and to write without fear or favour.*



The Venetian-Palazzo Resort, Las Vegas

VENETIAN-PALAZZO, BABY

What do you get when you cross the city of Venice with the extravagance of Palazzo Versace, then plonk them both in the Nevada desert? Either the best or worst of two worlds colliding. Mark Juddery went to Vegas to find out which.

Las Vegas' five-star Venetian-Palazzo Resort promotes itself as the world's largest resort, and if you discount natural features like beaches – which tend to expand resort properties – that claim appears to be true. The Venetian was huge when it opened in 1999, and it now has 4027 suites. The addition of the adjoining Palazzo in 2008 meant another 3066 suites, many of them with three or more TVs, fully stocked work centres, and all-marble bathrooms with TVs of their own (in case the ones in the living area weren't enough).

Sure, it is grand opulence – at a remarkably good price – but would staying in one of these suites *truly* make you happy? Answer: who cares? If I want spiritual fulfilment, I'll go to Tibet.

For those looking for meaningless thrills, nobody does glitz quite like Vegas – and while the exterior of this resort is indeed garish, the suites themselves are designed more tastefully

than you might expect. In my room (like many, though not all, of the others), the generous sleeping area was linked by a few steps to a “downstairs” work/living-room zone big enough for a cocktail party.

In a resort this size, the huge lobby occasionally resembles a particularly well-decorated airport ticket counter, though the cheerful staff now has it down to a fine art, ensuring that – if you're happy to carry your own bags – you'll be in your room before you know it. Just go through the casino (see how this works?) to the elevators.

Other hotel facilities are generally very impressive. The Canyon Ranch SpaClub offers not just spa and fitness centres, but also physiotherapy, nutrition counselling, gait analysis for runners and the Canyon Ranch Café, a glam health bar. Only the swimming pools are a letdown, as they're either decorative, which makes them ill-suited for actual swimming, or open for only a few hours a day – which is

fine if you plan to sleep in until lunchtime. Of course, physical exercise is probably not the most common recreational activity in Vegas, so it is churlish to complain.

Vegas doesn't have beaches, naturally, but it's still synonymous with entertainment and misspent adulthood – the scene of countless Hollywood movies and TV shows, showing people having enormous fun gathered around a roulette wheel. The resort's 9755m² casino includes 1400 gaming machines and 139 table games, so you have plenty of choice in how to fritter away your money.

For all the clichés, Vegas wouldn't be so popular for holidays if it only had gambling dens. Visiting for a conference, I ensured that I took part in some of the entertainment on offer, but I didn't do any of those things your mother would warn you against. Though I was there for three days, I didn't gamble, see a drag queen (to my knowledge), watch a tribute show, or get quickly married – by Elvis or anyone else – and only once went to a funky nightclub at the Venetian-Palazzo... when I thought the queue was for the *Blue Man Group* show. Which explained why I had to show my ID.

Along with the casino, the lower floors of the Venetian-Palazzo are an assortment of boutiques, formidable restaurants (including



Wolfgang Puck's CUT, the Grill at Valentino and the celebrity-magnet TAO Asian Bistro), nightclubs and popular shows. This is the Pentagon of resorts. You could spend a week here without ever going outside. When I talked about going elsewhere, one of the staff seemed surprised: “Why would you go anywhere else?” She was joking, I think, but she had a point. The two structures, shooting into the skyline, would upstage every other building anywhere else, but this is The Strip in Vegas, where many buildings are outrageously tall and bright. Picture New York's Times Square, only less subtle.

Possibly the most interesting part of the Venetian-Palazzo Resort is... well, *Venice*. The Grand Canal Shoppes area reproduces Venice's Grand Canal, with cobbled walkways, “street-side” cafés and restaurants, street performers and gondoliers who sing “O Solo Mio” and other standards in wonderful tenor, making

you fall in love with whoever is next to you in the gondola. Above is a bright blue sky, with pretty white clouds. I did a double-take when I saw this, because it was late afternoon. In Vegas, even the sky is artificial, though this wide ceiling, covering a wide area, is bizarrely convincing in its mimicry of nature. But Vegas deals in fantasy. In the real Venice, it occasionally rains; the sky of Vegas' Grand Canal remains clear and bright, though the lights are dimmed in a timely fashion to provide a romantic, early-evening feel.

The Venetian-Palazzo does fake Venice with aplomb, but does it offer a taste of the real Vegas? In a city where Eiffel Tower and Statue of Liberty miniatures decorate the main street, where Elvis, Sinatra and the Beatles still perform, authenticity might not be the major selling point. This is as “real” as anything else in Vegasland.●

USA HOTEL REVIEW

LEFT AND OPPOSITE PAGE // GONDOLAS ON VENICE'S GRAND CANAL, NOW SHOWING AT THE VENETIAN-PALAZZO IN VEGAS. BELOW // A GRAND HALL WITH FAUX FRESCOS; AND A “SIMPLE” PALAZZO GUESTROOM.



The Details

WHERE?

The Palazzo is at 3325 Las Vegas Blvd S. The Venetian is at 3355 Las Vegas Blvd S. +1 702 414 4334
venetian.com; palazzo.com

NOTES

Both hotels offer special packages from \$172 per night for a luxury suite, which includes extras and a 20% discount on 60-day advance bookings. Breakfast isn't included, but the specials allow you discounts at many of the on-location restaurants. These are remarkably good prices for what they offer. Of course, their real profit isn't in the rooms, but in the casinos, so... best of luck!

WHAT'S THE GOSSIP?

“Over-the-top room décor (multiple flat-screen TVs, sunken living rooms, and mini-bars stocked with everything from champagne to La Belge Chocolatier desserts) belies the eco-friendly construction of [the Palazzo]. With a two-storey fountain gushing in its entry, the 3066-room high-rise resort is a memorable new arrival to the hotel scene.” Travel + Leisure

THE IT VERDICT:

Mark Juddery, who paid his own way, says: “It's basically a complete manufactured holiday – the Spice Girls of travel destinations – which is, of course, the archetypal Vegas experience.”

IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK AND VENETIAN-PALAZZO



THE COLOURFUL CAMINITO ("LITTLE PATH")
ALLEYWAY IN LA BOCA, HOME OF THE TANGO

IMAGE BY ELIZABETH THURSTON

THE BEAT OF BUENOS AIRES

Argentina's largest metropolis goes by many names: city of books; the South American Paris; the capital of tango. To find out which guise suits you best, come join the porteños in a cultural dance through its busy interlocking avenidas... **By Elizabeth Thurston**

Buenos Aires is a city I've wanted to visit forever. But why did it take me so long to get there? I guess it wasn't on the route to Europe, too far east of Machu Pichu and not exactly a side trip from LA or New York. I had, mistakenly, thought it should be part of a "big trip to South America" – that vast, alluring continent requiring months – not weeks – of dedicated exploration.

Well, all that changed in a heartbeat when I had an email from my son, Christian, who was visiting BA. He simply said, "Get yourself on a plane and join me. This is the most fabulous city in the world and you'll love it to bits. I'll book an apartment." Having an invitation from a 27-year-old, Spanish-speaking seasoned traveller offering his services as a tour guide and interpreter clinched it. Five days later my Qantas flight landed in Argentina and my love affair with Buenos began.

THE PARIS OF SOUTH AMERICA

Our apartment on the Avenida Rivadavia near the Plaza del Congreso was old-style Parisian: soaring ceilings, parquet floors, shuttered windows. Furnished with an eclectic and effortless mix of antique and modern pieces, it was typical of the sophisticated design edge of BA that celebrates both the past and the present with innovation and whimsy. Even the pretty birdcage lift with its nervous habit of jumping every time we pressed the button, and the concierge mopping the marble steps, made us feel we were in a Luis Buñuel movie.

I'd just stepped off a plane after a 13-hour flight, but Christian, determined to keep me on my feet, cheerfully took me on a mystery tour that ended an hour later in San Telmo's renowned literary café, Poesía. I was more than ready for a glass of wine and a wonderfully Argentinean *picada* – an antipasto of salami, ham, cheese and olives. San Telmo is an old quarter of the city with cobbled streets and a decidedly Left Bank feel. Famous for its antique stores, it also has great restaurants, cafés and bars where the literati sip Mendocan Malbec and discuss politics and art-house movies.

"Get yourself on a plane and join me. This is the most fabulous city in the world and you'll love it to bits. I'll book an apartment."

Sunday's antique market, an all-consuming celebration of diversity in dance, music, food and crafts, is an absolute must; much of BA's pulsating energy comes from its mix of imported Bolivian, Peruvian and Colombian culture, and the market is perfect for people-watching, sipping a beer and listening to techno tango. Stretching the entire length of Defensa, the trick is to separate the genuine antique stalls from the tourist ones.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Getting around BA is easy. If you don't want to walk too far, there's a good metro system and taxis are cheap. Our only snag was that we never found an English-speaking driver. This was no problem for Chris but frustrating for me as taxi drivers from Seoul to San Remo are my most valued source of information. With a little effort on both parts, and the obligatory mime, I can usually make myself understood. But not in BA. My French and Italian proved useless, so I thoroughly recommend a crash-course in Spanish – or at least throw a small phrasebook into your hand luggage.

BA's superb European architecture and boulevards beg comparison with Paris, Madrid and Barcelona. Many Spanish, Italian and French artisans migrated to this city on the River Plate in the 1800s and early 20th century, and some of the finest Art Deco architecture in the world is found here. Paris has her Eiffel Tower and Champs-Élysées; BA has the Obelisk and Avenida 9 de Julio, a breathtaking 12-lane avenue that throbs through the city 24 hours a day beneath the vigilant gaze of an enormous image of Evita Perón.

I was astonished at how Evita is still either idolised or demonised; she polarises Argentines with a passion that seems barely diminished from the time she and Juan Perón were in power. The love story, *Juan Y Eva*, which was released in September 2011, was screening near our apartment and the Sunday queue wound round several blocks. Even

I'LL TAKE MANHATTAN

*All dressed up with too many places to go? **Dimity Noble** – once a downtown local – returns to New York to relive old memories and hunt for new ones. Here's her savvy insider's guide to the ultimate Manhattan girls' getaway. Hold on tight.*

IMAGE COURTESY ZOE MORLEY

FOR A FREEWHEELING HOLIDAY FULL OF SHOPPING, DINING
AND ENTERTAINMENT, THERE'S NOWHERE QUITE LIKE NEW YORK.

Home to more than one-and-a-half million residents, Manhattan is the heart and soul of New York. The street pulse is electric: everyone seems to run on high-octane energy and you'll find yourself synchronising in no time.

Don't overplan your day: Manhattan is a city of villages, so make small forays (one to two neighbourhoods at a time) to soak up the atmosphere. Here's my guide to the best neighbourhoods to sink your teeth into: SoHo, Nolita, the Lower East Side, the West Village, Chelsea, the Meatpacking District, Midtown East and the Upper East Side.

TREASURE ISLAND: DOWNTOWN
Downtown (south of 14th Street) is the place to base yourself. Quintessential Manhattan views abound – skyscrapers, water towers, cast-iron buildings – as do a plethora of boutiques, hip and eclectic eateries, and offbeat, intimate bars.

Since the defection of commercial art galleries to Chelsea during the mid '90s, SoHo is now predominantly home to boutique hotels, designer stores once found exclusively in the Upper East Side, and major clothing chains along Broadway (Zara, Top Shop, Uniqlo, etc). Unfortunately, its charm has given way to a "Gap-ified" vibe in parts. Avoid its busy cobblestone streets on the weekend as the area feels like a mall caught up in a Christmas Eve rush.

Prices for all basics (jeans, T-shirts) are about a third cheaper than you'll find back home, so stock up on essentials. Hit **J.Crew on Prince Street** for fine cotton V-neck T-shirts for under \$30, and the **Adidas store (610 Broadway)** for flashy trainers under \$100. Smaller outlet **Rag and Bone** provides cool urban staples with a bespoke edge, while **Intermix** offers the latest J Brands and other designer staples – you'll find both sprinkled in other parts of Manhattan, too.

Take a day to weave through SoHo for snoops in Acne, Marni, Isabel Marant and Alexander Wang. Notable hidden gems are: **Opening Ceremony (35 Howard Street, between Canal and Grand)**, packed with avant-garde designer clothing and accessories; **Kirna Zabate (96 Green Street)** for edgier pieces from high-profile collections; **Jérôme Dreyfuss (473 Broome Street)** for functional, French-designed leather handbags; and **Kisan (125 Greene Street)**, a meticulously curated mix of clothing, accessories and homewares by established and emerging designers. With the American and Aussie dollars being a near-perfect match, now's a good time to swoop.

Stores tend to open at 10am, so grab a seat at the zinc-topped bar at **Balthazar (80 Spring Street)** and start the day with a glass of bubbly. In a rush? Hit their bakery next-door for takeaway coffee and pastries. **Pulino's Bar and Pizzeria (282 Bowery)** offers tasty beverages, authentic thin-crust pizzas and hearty salads to a mixed crowd of bewhiskered male models, freshly scrubbed young bankers and local tattoo artists.

On the eastern fringe of SoHo, Nolita (from "North of Little Italy") has a quaint, relaxed feel, with a healthy smattering of jewel-box boutiques and cosy bohemian cafés. Mott Street is the best for browsing, followed by Mulberry and Elizabeth. Snag a mint-condition Zac Posen dress at designer consignment store **INA (21 Prince Street)**, or a vintage YSL belt in **Resurrection (217 Mott Street)**, a sanctuary for designs from past decades. **Café Gitane (242 Mott Street)** serves French-Moroccan food and excellent coffee to scriptwriters and 20-something fashionistas channelling the chic grunge look to a tee. Cheap and delicious nooks to refuel include **Café Select (212 Lafayette Street)** and **Café Habana (17 Prince Street)**.

DENS OF INIQUITY: LOWER EAST SIDE

Thanks to the city's insatiable appetite for the new, bars often sprout up overnight. But the speakeasy, it seems, is a hardy perennial. The majority are located in the Lower East Side (which has been radically altered over the past decade from tenement slums and Jewish knisherries into a playground for

nonchalant hipsters) and surrounds. Don't expect signage; their rabbit warren-like locations are revealed through secret entrances. Use street numbers for clues during your barhop. Highlights include:

The Back Room (102 Norfolk Street) – drinks are served in teacups in a bygone Victoriana lounge setting. Trespass even further to the back bar hidden behind a secret bookcase.

Beauty and Essex (146 Essex Street) – enter a glam pawnshop and head through the back door to reveal a glittering, multilevel, turn-of-the-century townhouse.

The Blind Barber (339 East 10th Street) – combines the charms of an old-fashioned barbershop with a vintage cocktail lounge.

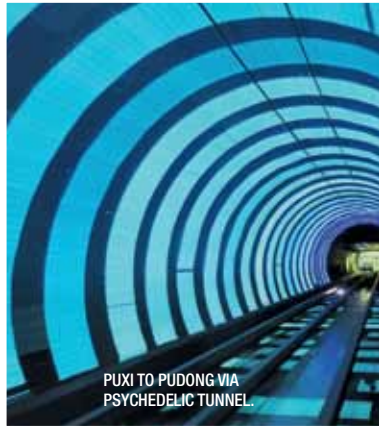
The Mulberry Project (149 Mulberry Street) – nestled between stalls selling faux designer bags and sunglasses, this basement bar with a summer patio attracts a star-studded indie music and movie crowd.

For a late night shimmy, head to **XIX (19 Kenmare Street)** – a basement hot boîte – or **Employee's Only (106 Kenmare Street)**, accessed via a door marked just that in the basement of La Esquina, an unassuming Mexican diner. Intimate live gig venues for samples of the local music scene (plus imported talent) in the 'hood include **Piano's (158 Ludlow Street)**; **Arlene's Grocery (95 Stanton Street)**; **Rockwood Music Hall (196 Allen Street)**; and **Mercury Lounge (217 East Houston Street)**.

Offering continental favourites such as steak frites, **Schiller's Liquor Bar (131 Rivington Street)** is a buzzing industrial-



IMAGE COURTESY SYLVIA PARET



48 hrs IN SHANGHAI

Shanghai has exploded onto the map. With its vibrant mix of Art Deco architecture and a futuristic skyline, this city has everything. Leave the map at home and just get lost – you won't be disappointed.



Eat

BUDGET

LU BO LANG
131 Yu Yuan Rd, Huangpu District
Famous for its delicious Shanghai dim sums, you can eat with the locals in this Old Town God Temple eatery. From \$15-20 per person.

LAO ZHENG XING
556, Fuzhou Rd, Huangpu District
One of the oldest Shanghainese restaurants, extremely popular with the locals. Try the fried prawn and stir-fried eel. \$10-\$15 pp.

TOP END

WHAMPOA CLUB
3 Zhongshan Dong Yi, Three on the Bund, +86 21 6329 1003, threeonthebund.com
A sophisticated restaurant on the Bund, it serves modern Shanghainese food in a superb Art Deco setting. Also has three different rooms just for enjoying the ancient traditions of the tea ceremony. \$75-\$90 pp.

Bars

BAR ROUGE
18 Zhongshan Dongyi Rd, Huangpu District, bar-rouge-shanghai.com
Recently overhauled, it's the ultra-cool bar for a buzzing night on the Bund. If you like the idea of someone on the decks and sitting back with a few pricey drinks, this is the place.

JIAO BAR
68 Jinling Lu, near Jiangxi Zhong Lu, Bund
Small and private, Jiao Bar is an up-market local with plenty of nooks and crannies. Known for their Japanese shochu, it's perfect for a romantic couple seeking to see off jet lag with a few drinks.

BARBAROSSA LOUNGE
Inside People's Park, 231 Nanjing Xi Lu, near Huangpi Nan Lu
The Barbarossa Lounge is an institution. A sophisticated three-storey Moroccan bar set in the middle of a pond within the incredible setting of the People's Park, it's a must for any thirsty traveller.

IMAGE COURTESY SINGAPORE TOURISM

20 *beyond the obvious* EUROPE HOTSPOTS

By David Whitley



THE PLACE DE LA COMÉDIE IN THE CENTRE OF VIBRANT MONTPELLIER, FRANCE.



HELSINKI'S MAGNIFICENT LUTHERAN CATHEDRAL.

◀ Helsinki, Finland

Why now? Dubbed the World Design Capital 2012, it's a fitting title, given the indie shopping pleasures to be found in the downtown Design District, and collection of distinctive, often rather bizarre architecture.

You just gotta... Get a cultural fix at the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, then complete a distinctly Finnish quartet: swim nude in a public pool; get sweaty in a sauna (most hotels have one); then find a heavy metal pub and drink pear cider. [Visithelsinki.fi](http://visithelsinki.fi)

Inland Montenegro

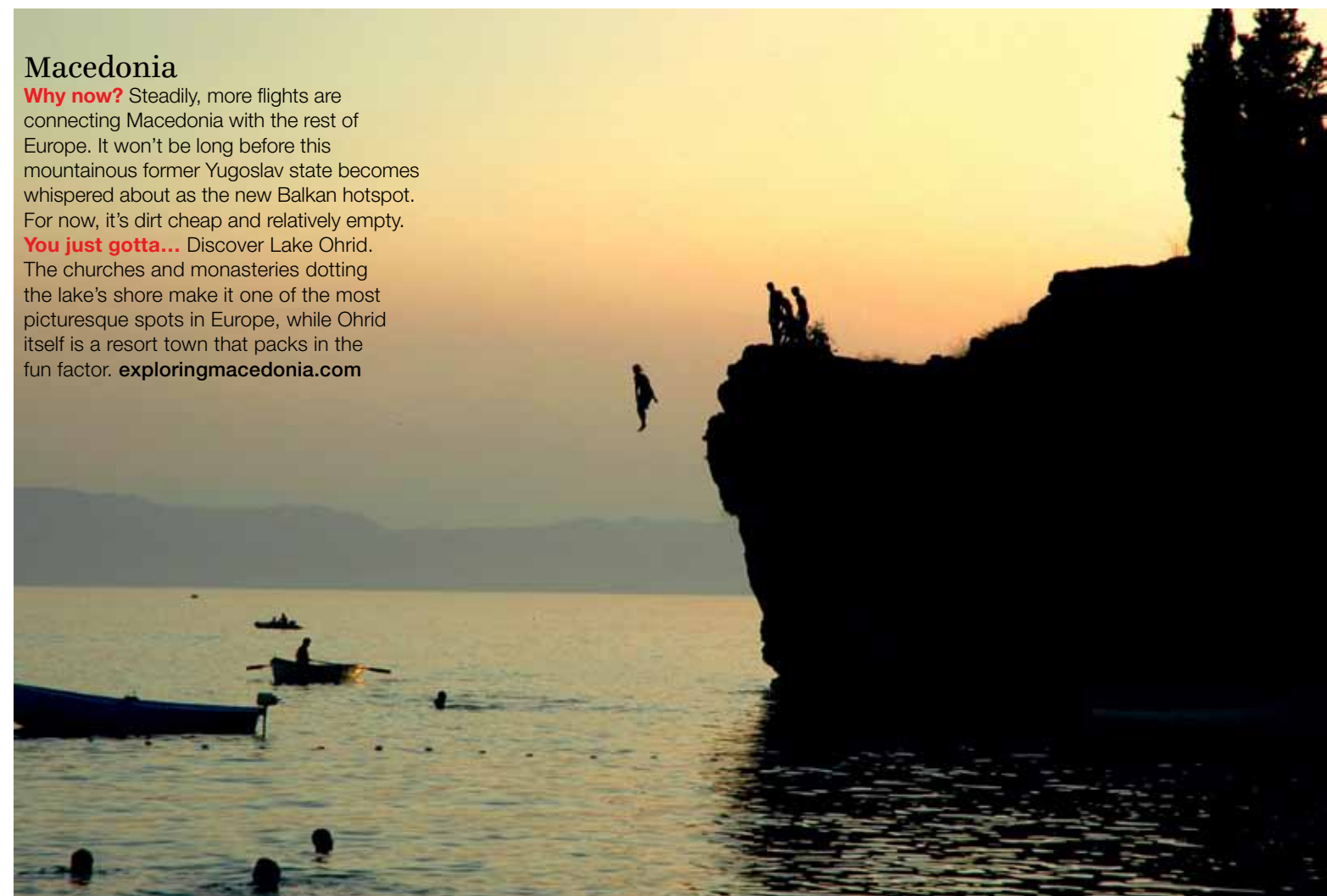
Why now? Anyone declaring the beaches of Montenegro's Adriatic coast to be Europe's new secret hotspot is five years out of date. But the mountainous inland regions of Montenegro are only beginning to be tapped. Touring company Undiscovered Montenegro, for example, is focusing on Lake Skadar, where the freshwater beaches and caves are genuinely unspoilt.

You just gotta... Get active. If hiking, kayaking and mountain biking in pristine surrounds is your thing, then you'll not be battling the crowds here. undiscoveredmontenegro.com

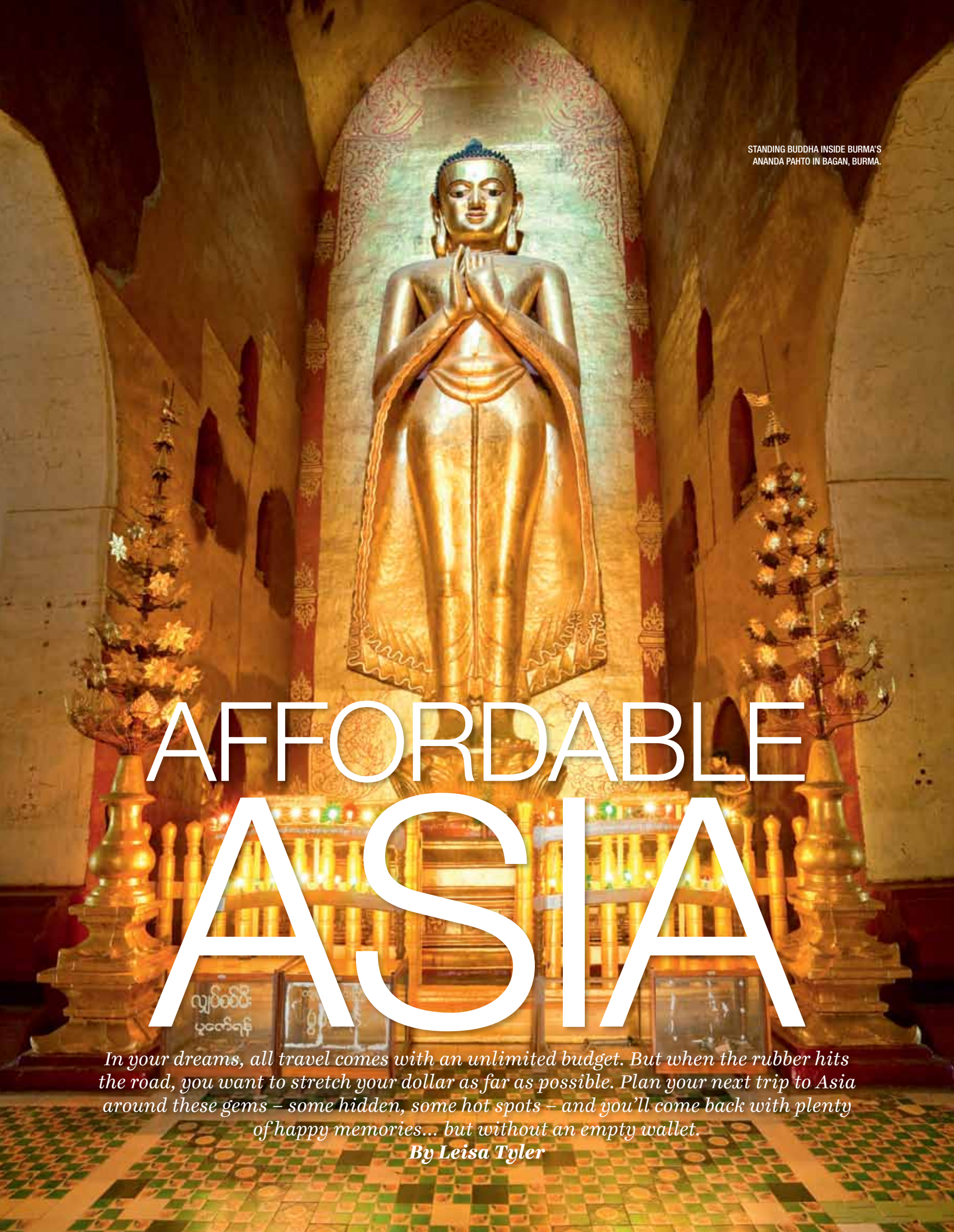
Macedonia

Why now? Steadily, more flights are connecting Macedonia with the rest of Europe. It won't be long before this mountainous former Yugoslav state becomes whispered about as the new Balkan hotspot. For now, it's dirt cheap and relatively empty.

You just gotta... Discover Lake Ohrid. The churches and monasteries dotting the lake's shore make it one of the most picturesque spots in Europe, while Ohrid itself is a resort town that packs in the fun factor. exploringmacedonia.com



IMAGES TOP: FRED OLSEN CRUISES; BOTTOM: JASON ROGERS



STANDING BUDDHA INSIDE BURMA'S ANANDA PAHTO IN BAGAN, BURMA.

AFFORDABLE ASIA

In your dreams, all travel comes with an unlimited budget. But when the rubber hits the road, you want to stretch your dollar as far as possible. Plan your next trip to Asia around these gems – some hidden, some hot spots – and you'll come back with plenty of happy memories... but without an empty wallet.
By Leisa Tyler

ASIA SPECIAL LAOS



BY HOOK, BY CROOK OR BY FRIENDLY TUK-TUK – BOOK A TRIP TO THIS UNSULLIED SOUTHEAST ASIAN GEM AND SAMPLE ITS DELIGHTS.



MAP ADAM TURNBULL

WHERE TO EAT

- **Tamarind** was once a café tucked between temples, but now has larger premises by the Nam Khan river. Local cuisine, contemporary presentation, closed Sundays, bookings essential. tamarindlaos.com
- **L'Elephant** remains one of the best in Luang Prabang. French or Laos set menus, fine dining atmosphere. elephant-restau.com
- **Tamnak Lao** is where you go when there's no room at Tamarind. Local cuisine of a high standard, just missing a little on service and presentation. tamnaklao.net
- **The Night Market** sees the main street closed to traffic so vendors can sell souvenirs and textiles. A side lane opposite Phousi Hill is rampant with cheap vegetarian food and charcoal grilled meats. Bargain prices, local flavours.

GETTING THERE

Luang Prabang is serviced by direct flights between Chiang Mai, Bangkok and Hanoi. Vietnam Airlines and Thai International connect with Australia, while Laos Airlines links Luang Prabang with Thailand and Cambodia.

THREE MORE GREAT THINGS TO DO

- Once known as the land of a million elephants, today the numbers in Laos are closer to 1000. **Elefant Asia** sponsors the welfare of working elephants, operating forest tours to fund their work. Travel by boat from Luang Prabang to meet your elephants, then return a week later having experienced remote villages and the ultimate in slow travel. elefantasia.org
- Local photographer **Paul Wager** is an ex-pat Australian who discovered Laos and lost his way home. He offers personal

workshops, knows a few remote villages and charming temples, and shares his knowledge in a personal and relaxed style. paulwager.info

- Each dawn, the monks of Luang Prabang gather outside their temples for **Tak Bak**, collecting morning alms. Lined up from senior to novice, they accept food from the residents. To maintain respect for the monks, participation requires adherence to strict rules.

BEST THING ABOUT LUANG PRABANG

This is not a beach destination filled with rowdy backpackers; French colonial charm and ancient Buddhist temples are preserved with respect and care, and the town now attracts travellers seeking the very best of Southeast Asia.

WORST THING ABOUT LUANG PRABANG

The spiritual tradition of morning alms should be the highlight of any visit, but be careful to avoid the centre of town, especially in the cooler months when tourists escape the European and Chinese winters. Busloads of over-eager visitors thrust their cameras in the way of monks and fail to show due respect. Just walk away from the crowds and enjoy the reverence of Tak Bak in a quiet street without the more glamorous temples.

WHERE TO STAY

Accommodation abounds, with five-star hotels outside the old town and charming boutique guesthouses next door to the temples.

- **Ancient Luang Prabang:** clean and tidy with a touch of Laos style to add comfort. Three star, around \$70 per night. ancientluangprabang.com
- **Villa Santi:** On the edge of the main street action with older style luxury and

good service. Four star packages from \$150 per night. villasantihotel.com

- **Hotel De La Paix:** tucked away in a quiet area surrounded by rice fields and farmers. Five star comfort within a short drive of the temples. hoteldelapaixlp.com

ASIA'S BEST COOKING SCHOOLS

The key to a great cooking school is getting your hands dirty with yummy produce, well-spoken local chefs, and lovely surrounds.

- **LUANG PRABANG / LAOS:** Bookings are essential for Tamarind Cooking School, and a minimum group size is required. Pickup from your hotel and a visit to the market is included; beer and softdrinks are extra. tamarindlaos.com
- **GUILIN / CHINA:** Southern style Chinese cooking differs greatly from Cantonese and Imperial styles, with influences from ethnic minorities that link China to Southeast Asia. In the town of Yangshuo, one cooking school is helping local girls share their recipes in a converted farmhouse surrounded by limestone karst hills. yangshuocookingschool.com
- **HANOI / VIETNAM:** Hidden Hanoi is relatively new and full of fun and energy. Like Tamarind and Yangshuo, there's an Australian connection behind the scenes, combined with superior local knowledge. Small classes and big personalities are the key, and the food is as good as anything on the streets. hiddenhanoi.com.vn
- **BANGKOK / THAILAND:** A short boat ride into the narrow khlongs of Bangkok takes you away from the bustle of the city and into the leafy gardens of Thonburi. Amita Cooking Classes are the talk of the town for a sensational location and sumptuous Thai cuisine. amitathaicooking.com