



Bali getaway

and the loudest sounds you will hear are the gurgling water, the birdsong and the morning ritual of cock-crow from Cepaka Village nearby.

The two villas (one three-bedroom, the other one) are large and totally private (including from each other) so if you want absolute peace and tranquillity in an ambience of elegant Bali, this place is perfect.

Do not expect to be dazzled by bling. Think the neutrals and elegance of Armani rather than the out-there extravagance of Versace... the design features khaki and white, massive mirrors, terrazzo floors with a mix of a cane and oversized, washed wood furniture, cushioned benches and a luxurious daybed where some people actually prefer to sleep.

It is comfortable, informal luxury and similar attention to detail is found in the service where you can customize your stay ahead of time by booking anything from in-villa spa treatments to parasailing, scuba diving, village tours, golf and shopping.

And even though it is a private villa, you have all the amenities of a five-star hotel: you will be able to choose your own dinner menu and the chef is adept with Western, Thai, Vietnamese and traditional Balinese dishes.

He shops early at the market every morning to get the freshest ingredients around and (for these



times in Bali) there is a very good wine list at wholesale prices. A butler is on duty 24 hours.

There are iPod stations indoors and out for your favourite music, whether you like it pre-programmed or you bring your own. They have cable TV with extra large flatscreens.

Far from the tourist hubbub, you forget the Western concept of time as your day is spent relaxing, swimming, reading, dining – and more relaxing. Here, you really come to appreciate the ultimate luxury – time and space (along with plenty of good food & wine!).



It is a conscious decision to get away from it in all in Bali. But we are not exactly talking about the dark side of the moon here.

You can escape the traffic, the irritating doof-doof of hyperactive sound systems and the tourists themselves in just a 30-minute drive upcountry from the (too) bright lights of Seminyak.

Villa Sungai ('villa on the river') is indeed set on the banks of a gushing torrent. You are surrounded by huge trees, large stands of bamboo

Fan fair

They are celebrating the recent opening of the new Fairmont Hotel in Abu Dhabi. From the scorching desert, it is a breath of fresh, cool air. The moment you walk into the atrium-lobby, you feel at home – its very modernity a landmark of the Emirate's lightning progress.

Fairmont Abu Dhabi is part of the brand's quiet but impressive expansion around the world, now with 60 hotels – all a far cry from the first property in San Francisco back in 1907. Much later, that was where Tony Bennett first sang *I Left My Heart in San Francisco* in the hotel's famous nightclub, The Venetian Room.

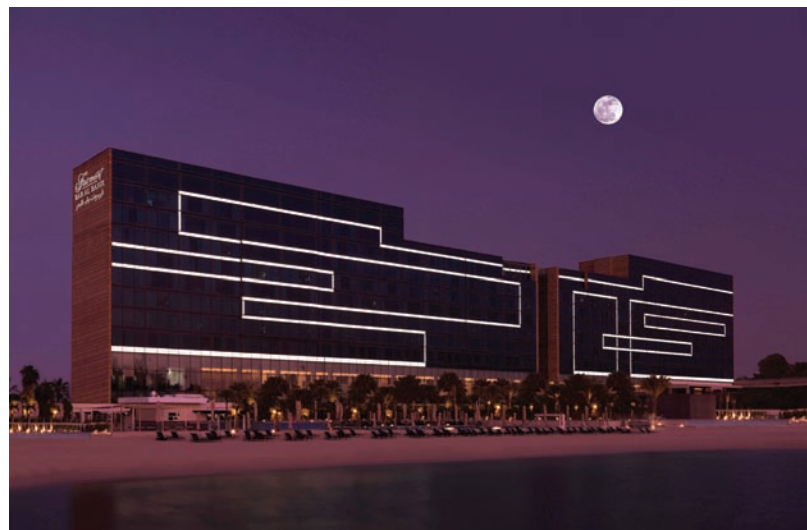
Abu Dhabi's Fairmont Bab Al Bahr, to give it its full title, is sleek, modern, elegant. And even the most seasoned of travellers will be impressed by the welcome and the ambience of quiet efficiency that pervades the whole place. Efficient without being abrupt; genuinely caring.

The lobby and many of the rooms have panoramic, floor-to-ceiling views across the creek to the new Grand Mosque and beyond.

The décor of the 369 guestroom and suites embraces an organic theme; they boast a range of rich textures, with marble, walnut wood panelling and soft furnishings inspired by bamboo and flowers.

If you really want to live it up in Abu Dhabi, upgrade to Gold – this is the 'club level' at Fairmont. But here they go just that one step further – it is literally a 'hotel within a hotel'.

Gold management is in the very capable (and nothing-is-too-much-trouble) hands of a man called Arnold Francisco, Fairmont Gold Manager. "No two days are the same. From planning an impromptu party on or off site, locating an Armani



suit in mere minutes or arranging for a guest a shipment of date palm trees, the team at Fairmont Gold have heard it and have done it all," he says.

Its bespoke services include airport limousine transfers, private check-in, personal butler service and an exclusive lounge access-

sible 24 hours, providing complimentary breakfast, evening drinks and canapés.

The Fairmont has eight dining and entertainment venues. Elements is for all-day dining – extending to poolside if the weather is right. The Al Naba'a Lounge is situated in the heart of the hotel,

Ritzy heights

News this month that the world's highest hotel, the new Ritz-Carlton in Hong Kong will finally open in the New Year. The new hotel will occupy floors 102 to 118 of the new International Commerce Centre (ICC) in Kowloon and, of course, rooms on the harbour side will have one of the best views in the world – across the water to Hong Kong Island.

They are planning an interior of 'sophistication, style and elegance' – modern design by Singapore company LTW. Viva Asia learns that one of the unique aspects of the hotel, which reflects a move to more casual elegance of The Ritz-Carlton brand, will be its bars and restaurants, which have been stylishly designed by Japan's Spin Studio and



Wonderwall.

There are six dining venues, including Chinese and Italian restaurants, and the alfresco rooftop bar will sit at 490 metres above sea level where you can enjoy Asian style tapas and designer cocktails.

Its huge 930sqm ballroom will be lit by a 'sea of crystal chandeliers.' And, in shopping-mad Hong Kong, the new one-square-kilometre Elements Mall will be downstairs.

London calling

The Eurostar is a great option for going from London to Paris without tedious and costly transfers to airports (you go from city centre to city centre), endless waiting and possible weather-delayed flights. It is a great move to go a little early to the station and experience the Oyster Bar.

St. Pancras Station is sort of in the wrong part of town and J.K. Rowling must have been thinking of it when she invented Hogwarts. However, they have renovated the whole interior and now there is a shopping concourse, not just for souvenir junk; there are name brands here – such as Pinks for bespoke shirts.

To give it its full name, The St Pancras Grand Restaurant, Oyster and Champagne Bar is located on the Upper Concourse, right alongside the Eurostar platform. But everybody refers to it as the Oyster Bar or, across the way, the Champagne Bar, longest in the world covering the entire length of the 20-carriage Eurostar platform.

The Grand serves breakfast (from 7 a.m.), coffee, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner, cocktails and drinks (until



11 p.m.). Their fashionable Whisky Bar offers an impressive whisky selection and a chic new cocktail list.

The staff appears to be all French; the food is proudly British. You can choose a selection from the actual Oyster Bar and order main course from the menu. The Champagne Bar has an impressive list with some 20 styles available by the glass. It also offers an all-day light food menu.

It is a pleasurable interlude while you wait for your train – the atmosphere is definitely one of subdued excitement – it recalls the romance that travelling was 60 or 70 years ago. And some nice extra touches: they have provided discreet gaps behind chairs in the restaurant as, on the train, you have to look after your own luggage. And the booths in the Champagne Bar are heated during the winter.

Forbidden city

The Forbidden City, the romantic name given to the imperial palace in Beijing is one of the world's most famous heritage sites. It is also a unique tourist destination, receiving tens of thousands of visitors every day. Maintaining it is not an easy task but the Chinese government is not only doing that but they have just opened sections of the palace previously closed for renovation and restoration.

These are a multitude of courtyards off the central axis of the palace, formerly used by government institutions, which have now been moved to other parts of the capital.

So, take some extra time to visit the Forbidden City: explore its hid-



den rooms and museums and now stop by some of these courtyards where you can simply feel the history of bygone splendour.

If you want to have a comprehensive guided tour with expert historians, you might try The China Guide. Their tours are mostly private and they give you time to linger at spots you find more interesting. (There are no factory shopping stops; meals are in quality local restaurants; guides are carefully screened).

CHEFS CORNER

You Can Leave Your Hat On

The Altitude Restaurant, located on the 36th floor of the Shangri-La Hotel Sydney commands some of the most stunning views across Sydney. Equally as stunning is the long list of accolades attributed to the restaurant and Altitudes chef de cuisine Steven Krasicki. Most recently the restaurant was named Restaurant of the Year and Chef Krasicki was named Chef of the Year at the 2010 Australian Hotels Associations National Awards of Excellence.

This comes on top of the restaurant retaining its One Hat in the Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide Awards 2011. The restaurant was commended for its intriguing and well balanced dishes, extensive cheese and wine list and superior ser-



vice. The awards celebrate the best in dining in and around Sydney; with only 35 city restaurants receiving One Hat. Any visit to Sydney should include dinner at Altitude and pre and post dinner drinks in the award winning Blu Bar, also located on the 36th floor of the Shangri-La Hotel.

UP IN THE AIR

Singapore Airlines to launch in-flight connectivity

Customers on Singapore Airlines will soon be able to stay connected at all times during their flight. The multi-million-dollar collaboration with inflight connectivity provider OnAir will include a full suite of onboard communication offerings, providing customers with access to Wi-Fi Internet and mobile telephony services. The mobile telephony services will enable customers to send SMS text messages with their GSM-compatible mobile phones, send and receive email messages easily on Smartphones and Blackberry devices, and make and receive voice calls.

Singapore Airlines will be the first major airline in Asia to launch a full suite of inflight connectivity services, when it goes live in the first half of 2011. The services will be introduced progressively on flights operated by the Airline's Airbus A380, Airbus A340-500 and Boeing 777-300ER aircraft.

Customers will see their usage reflected in the monthly bills from their telecommunications provider where international GSM roaming rates apply. Customers wanting to use the internet will be able to sign up for an access package when they log in to the system.

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