



# THE GALLIVANTER'S GUIDE<sup>®</sup>



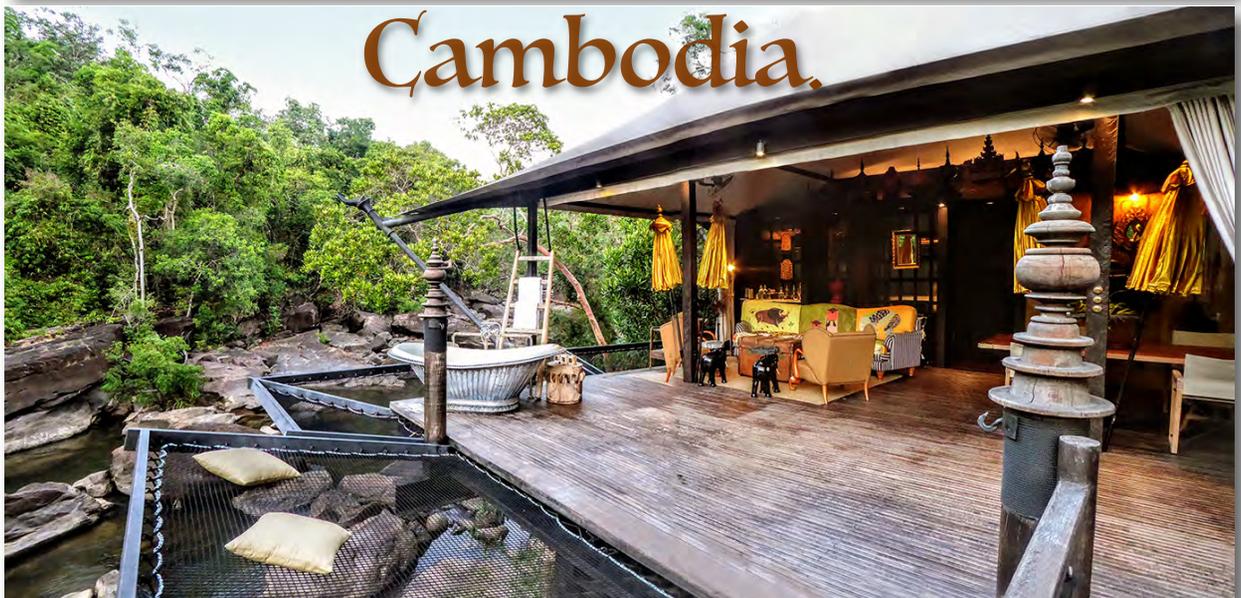
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SETTING THE BENCHMARK FOR HIGH-END TRAVELLERS



An adventure in

Cambodia.



*Above: At Shinta Mani Wild, approaching The Cambodian Royalty Tent, #1. Below: View of the tent's eclectic deck.*

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READ BY THE WORLD'S TOP TRAVELLERS IN 42 COUNTRIES, SINCE 1991.



*At Shinta Mani Wild, indoor/outdoor living in The Cambodian Royalty Tent, #1.*

**A**pril is normally a time for adventure; to try new places and maybe do a few things that you would not normally consider. Sadly, many of your travel plans have been put on hold due to the Coronavirus, but hopefully, this will not stop you planning for the future. With this in mind, Philippe takes us to Cambodia; but instead of revisiting the ubiquitous Siem Reap and its endless temples, he takes us on a wild adventure near the untrammelled South Cardamom National Park, together with Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh. However, true to our remit, adventure does not have to mean deprivation....

### **Shinta Mani Wild.**

The story behind the creation of Shinta Mani Wild is a fascinating one. A decade ago, designer, Bill Bensley and Cambodian entrepreneur, Sokoun Chanpreda acquired, at an auction, 400 acres of an unprotected wildlife corridor, that had been earmarked for logging and mining by the local government.

The goal of this enlightened duo was not to cut a single tree, and to turn this butterfly-filled valley, which is close to the South Cardamom National Park, halfway between Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville, into a sustainable and eco-friendly all-inclusive luxury tented camp.

Equally fascinating is the story behind the design and whimsical decor of the camp, which was inspired by a trip that Jackie Onassis took to Cambodia with King Sihanouk in 1967. What if she had decided to go

on safari in the Cardamom Hills? It was this thought that fired up Bensley's imagination to create Shinta Mani Wild.

My Shinta Mani Wild adventure started the instant I stepped off the plane and entered the terminal. A friendly agent took care of the visa formalities and within minutes I was greeted by my driver right in front of the airport building.

Initially, I thought that the reason why the cool box of my super comfy Shinta Mani Wild SUV was so generously stocked with ice cold beers was to ease the pain of the seemingly never-ending complimentary transfer from Phnom Penh airport. I could not have been more wrong. In fact, the beers were intended to make me slightly tipsy, as

after arriving at the camp, the last 1,250 ft of my journey would involve zip-lining to the camp's bar, also known as the Landing Zone.

After reaching the top of the 30 metre high tower, I almost chickened out at the last minute; but it was ultimately a very fun ride, with spectacular views of the jungle and the Big Raging Sister waterfall below, which despite the low water levels was still quite a sight. Fear not, though, for if you are not an adventurous soul, there is always the option of a more conventional and gentler Jeep transfer from the main gate of the resort.

After this unusual and quirky arrival, I was warmly welcomed by Mac, the utterly



*Bathroom of The Cambodian Royalty Tent, #1, at Shinta Mani Wild.*

Photography by Philippe Sernais & David Maslin for The Gallivanter's Guide© And courtesy of The Bensley Collection.



*The National Geographic Tent, #14, at Shinta Mani Wild.*

delightful Assistant Manager, who remembered me from a stay at The Siam Bangkok, years ago. After a short introduction of the resort facilities and a well-deserved tequila and pineapple cocktail, Mac escorted me to tent, #1, which is also known as The Cambodian Royalty Tent; the original mock-up tent that you see on most of the resort's promotional material.

The 15 tents are spread over 1.5 kms of riverfront and the only ones accessible by car are tents, #14 and #15; but good luck trying to get inside one of the resort's vintage Jeeps after dinner! Even sober, I struggled.

My glamorous safari-style tent was a brisk 10 minute hike on uneven gravel pathways and bridges, so you had best leave your Tod's loafers and Manolo Blahniks at home, especially if you are travelling during the so-called 'green season'. Happily, at night, rangers are on stand-by to escort you back to your tent with torches, as the pathway lighting is kept to a minimum, so as not to disrupt the fragile ecosystem.

The strenuous walk was certainly worth the effort, as my tent was extremely private and dramatically positioned on the widest stretch of the Tmor Rung River. A long elevated walkway led to a large wooden deck, with a free-standing tub positioned right on the edge of the river. There was also a big dining table, sofa, and a cowhide-covered wet bar stocked with complimentary soft drinks, ice creams, homemade granola

bars, beers and an ample selection of Champagne and wine. A safety net set around the tent was the perfect spot to gaze at the starry sky, which in these parts is completely devoid of light pollution.

Inside, behind zippered doors and windows, the bedroom featured an incredibly comfortable elevated kingsize, a sitting area facing the rapids, a large walk-in shower, twin vanities, and a separate loo.

The technology worked surprisingly well, with fast password-free Wifi, and although there is no TV, music is available courtesy of user-friendly portable Bose bluetooth speakers. A great perk is the daily complimentary laundry, which I made great use of, as this is a three-shirt-a-day destination, at the very least.

I did have a few niggles, though. The bathrobes are a bit too thick for the climate



*The Cistern, at Shinta Mani Wild; its 33 metre jet-black swimming pool.*



*Endless memorabilia in Tent #1, at Shinta Mani Wild.*  
and slippers are nowhere to be seen, although if you ask nicely, flipflops and lighter robes that are used in the Spa will be sent to your tent.

The airconditioning is a tad on the noisy side and you are not fully insulated from the outside light, as one of the tent's walls does not have blackout drapes.

Every tent is individually themed, but all share the same size and identical levels of comfort, so the only decision you have to make is whether you would rather be by the river, tucked away in the forest, or close to The Headquarters. I managed to see most of the tents and found quite a few favourites.

Tent, #2 has a lovely elevated location

above the gushing rapids and is filled with memorabilia and black and white pictures of Jackie Kennedy.

If you prefer to be close to The Headquarters, opt for the particularly bright Great Conservationists Tent, #5, featuring books from African conservationist, Sir Laurens van der Post.

The shaded Wild Alliance Tent, #6, displays a distinctive military theme and is also set relatively close to the main facilities. This tent is connected via an elevated walkway to the fun twin-bedded Jungle Capsule, which looks like a space-

age trailer on stilts and is ideal if you are travelling with teenagers (children under 13 are not allowed).

The Butterfly Tent, #7, located at the confluence of two rivers and just below the zip-line is another favourite, with its beautiful hand-painted butterfly mural in the bathroom.

The Botanist Tent, #9, occupies a dreamy jungle location with great views of the Tmor Rung river and features a colourful botanical-themed mural; with beds, lamps and mirrors custom made by Jak and Zak Underwood.

Then there is The Birders Tent, #10, with its elevated views of the jungle and river below. It features a gorgeous mural depicting a hornbill, and a library filled with – you've guessed it – bird books.

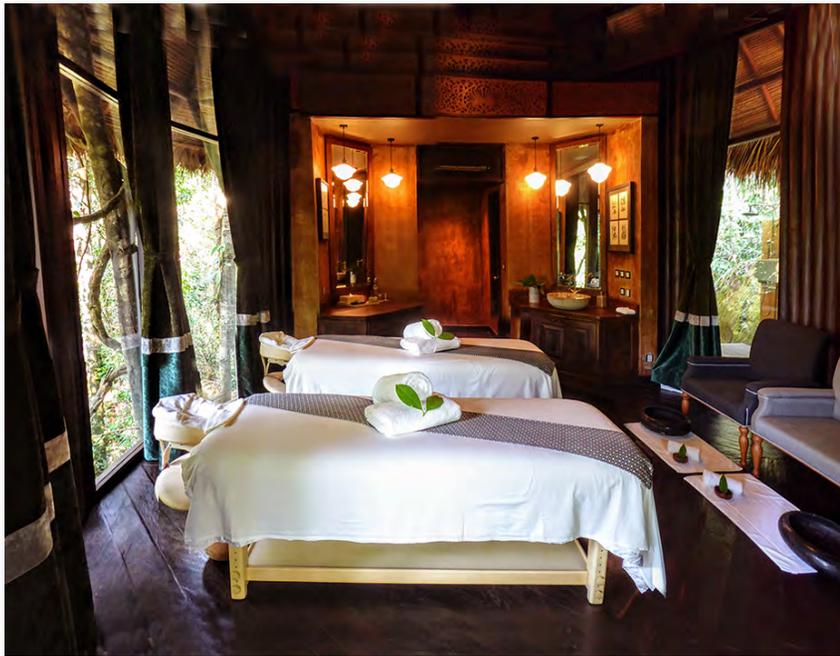
If you want to be close to the falls, the stunning National Geographic Tent, #14, faces the Middle Raging Sister falls upstream and is a wonderful option.

Despite having a spectacularly remote location on the top of a huge boulder, Tent #15, also known as The Gibbons Tent, appears bizarrely plain and unfinished.

Although the emphasis is on adventure and activities, the temptation to stay put in your tent and do absolutely nothing is really high. My favourite pursuits were those requiring minimal effort, such as lounging by the Cistern, the gorgeous 33-metre long jet black swim-



*Deck of The National Geographic Tent, #14, at Shinta Mani Wild.*



*Treatment room in The Boulders Spa, at Shinta Mani Wild.*

ming pool set atop a natural stone outcrop near the falls.

Top notch Spa treatments are unlimited; performed by extremely skilled therapists in two pretty pavilions, which are hidden in the jungle amongst huge natural rocks. Just make sure to bring your own chemical-free oil, as I cannot vouchsafe for the purity of the Thai products they use.

Another activity that I highly recommend is a relaxing waterway cruise on one of the camp's three custom built exploration boats, all designed in Bill Bensley's distinctive style. After sailing languidly for 45 minutes, your adventure butler will stop on an idyl-

lic, white sand beach and set up chairs and snacks, allowing you enjoy the wonderfully peaceful surroundings and warm waters of the Srey Ambel estuary.

Back at the camp, the decadent sundowners and foot massage are also truly special experiences you should not miss.

If you are feeling rather more adventurous, you can hop on a motorcycle behind an AK-47 armed Wildlife Alliance Ranger and patrol the forest to clear away snares left by poachers, or, at a more leisurely pace, go fishing with Tulga, the Mongolian fly-fishing expert.

The split-level Headquarters is where you

take all your meals, as room service is not an option, given the distances involved. The huge open-air restaurant, with its cathedral ceilings, massive mirrors, green bamboo chairs and Burmese wooden horses, is another wonderful, whimsical Bensley creation. Here, Bishal Subedi, the Nepalese Chef, offers a set of rotating themed menus each night. My favourite was the sumptuous curry night, which included various ways of preparing curries from across Asia.

Generally, I found the cuisine to be fresh, healthy and surprisingly good, given the remoteness of Shinta Mani. Mouthwatering breakfasts and simple yet delightful lunch options are presented on a blackboard and change on a daily basis. Make sure you try the scrumptious Kep-style blue crab cake



*Dining in the huge open-air restaurant of The Headquarters, at Shinta Mani Wild; the cuisine fresh, healthy and surprisingly good.*





An outing to the Srey Ambel estuary, where your adventure butler sets up drinks and snacks; all part of the Shinta Mani Wild adventure.

with poached egg and green chilli hollandaise.

In a firm commitment to the community, the majority of staff comes from neighbouring villages, whilst others graduated from the Shinta Mani Foundation, created by Bill Bensley to improve the life of under-privileged Cambodians.

Service, under Camp Manager, Sangjay Choegyol was fantastic; from Roth, my butler, to Savin, the gentle therapist, and the smiling team at The Headquarters; all de-

lightful and eager to please.

The emphasis of this unique glamping destination is on the word 'wild', so despite the luxurious nature of one's tent and the top notch service and cuisine, it may only appeal to the more adventurous souls amongst you. Personally, I had a lot of fun and absolutely loved it, so I encourage you to move out of your comfort zone and experience it for yourself.

[shintamaniwild.com](http://shintamaniwild.com)

**Gallivanter's Rating:** ★★★★★

### Rosewood Phnom Penh.

Rosewood's first urban hotel in South-east Asia is housed within the top 14 floors of a brand new mixed-use high-rise; the architecture, apparently, echoing the shape of a rising dragon. In a city which, until not long ago, did not have buildings higher than five stories, the imposing Vattanac Capital Tower sticks out like a sore thumb.

That said, the location in the business district is excellent, as you are within walking distance or a short taxi ride away from the city's major sights, such as the famous Wat Phnom temple and the sublime Art-Deco Central Market.

The hotel's first point of entry is the elegant ground floor arrival reception which, with its giant Hanuman monkey king sculpture and soaring ceilings, reminded me of the entrance to a lost Angkor Wat temple.

This is where you find the Concierge desk, managed by the enthusiastic Franco, who can organise anything, from Mekong cruises, to private city tours in one of the hotel's stylish fleet of custom-made remorks (local tuk-tuks). From here, an ultra fast elevator whisks you to the 35th floor Sky Lobby; an expansive yet intimate space, decorated with travertine walls, wooden floors, inviting sofas and an eclectic collection of Cambodian art, which competes with the breathtaking pan-



The Landing Zone, at Shinta Mani Wild.



*Tradition with modernity at Rosewood Phnom Penh.*  
 panoramic views of the city; the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers beyond.

Designed by Melbourne's BAR Studios, this sumptuously decorated mid-sized property offers 175 rooms and 37 suites, blending touches of Khmer architecture and French Colonial influences in an understated classic-meets-contemporary style.

The accommodation is set between floors 25 to 32, which is a tad confusing, as you always have to start on the 35th floor Sky Lobby before descending to your room. The same is true for the majority of the restaurants, which are accessed via another set of elevators at the opposite end of reception.

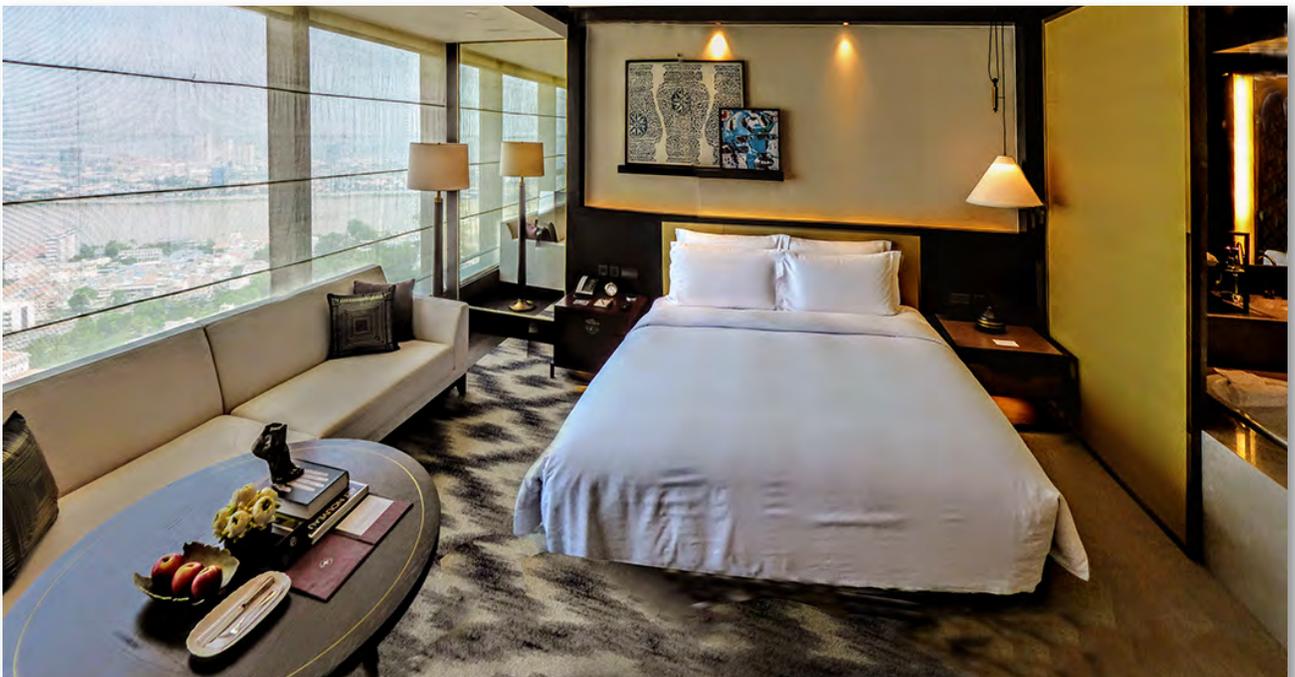
I felt instantly at home in my serene and generously-sized Premier River View, which came with the added benefit of free flowing selected alcoholic drinks, served in the



*A corner of The Living Room, at Rosewood Phnom Penh.*

warm and elegant Living Room, which is particularly sensational at dusk and remind-

ed me somewhat of The Park Hyatt Tokyo. In typical Rosewood style, my room was



*At Rosewood Phnom Penh, Premier River View Room, #3210.*



*At Rosewood Phnom Penh, bathroom of Premier River View Room, #3210.*

very residential, with a large window-facing table that doubles as a work or dining space, custom-designed Ikat panels, a comfy cream sofa set against the floor to ceiling windows, and plenty of coffee table books and playful objets d'art.

The marble bathrooms here are especially good, with twin vanities, shimmering mosaic floors, lacquered doors hiding a separate

loo, a huge walk-in shower and a deep tub set along a wooden sliding screen, cleverly separating the bathroom from the bedroom.

As expected in a such a new hotel, technology worked really well, from the huge flat screen TV and super-fast Wifi, to the electric blinds and drapes, which are operated from an easy to use bedside console.

Thanks to the friendly and very resourceful Ukdy at Reception, I managed to see every single room category.

I did not care much for the Grand Premier rooms, such as #2603, which on paper seem quite appealing, yet lack the airiness and open plan feel of an entry-level room.

Of the suites, I really liked the corner bedrooms and bright bathrooms of the Mekong Suites, such as #2912. A larger Manor Suite, such as #2625, features a square-shaped sitting room with dining table; but I found their bedrooms too narrow.

Another good option would be one of the six Rosewood Suites, such as #2613, which come with four-seater dining tables in their spacious sitting rooms, whilst at the top end, the Monivong House, #3215, has a combined sitting room and open-plan kitchen area; a great choice if you like to entertain.

At 1,722 sq.ft., Norodom House, #3115, is the largest of all the suites and features a study, dining room, large and elegant master bedroom and a stunning corner bathroom with an egg-shaped tub and sweeping city views.

Rosewood Phnom Penh offers a plethora of dining options. Iza, the urban Japanese Izakaya-style restaurant, with its open kitchen, beautiful steel lattice screens and unbeatable views, looks stunning; but the Sal-



*Norodom House, #3115, is the largest of all the suites at Rosewood Phnom Penh.*



*Cuts, the recently opened steak house, at Rosewood Phnom Penh, and a selection of cuisine from the hotel's various restaurants.*

mon Tataki Don that I had for lunch disappointed.

Cuts, the recently opened steak and seafood venue, is the highest restaurant in town and a big hit with the expat community and affluent locals. This buzzing venue opens for lunch and dinner and features a seafood bar, 3 private dining suites and a wine vault tasting area that houses 3,000 bottles. Request a table in the elegant rear room, which boasts striking red leather curved banquettes, contemporary wooden floors and

an intriguing gold statue by a local artist.

The cuisine, by Argentinian Chef, Hugo Bertolini was very accomplished. Chicken, roasted in a Jospser charcoal oven, was excellent, and the seared Hokkaido scallops were perfectly seasoned. A very nice touch was the beautifully presented bottle of Rosewood branded Negroni, waiting for me in my room after dinner.

Sora, the sprawling indoor/outdoor venue, designed by the Bond Studio, has a cantilevered rooftop bar and adjoining Whisky

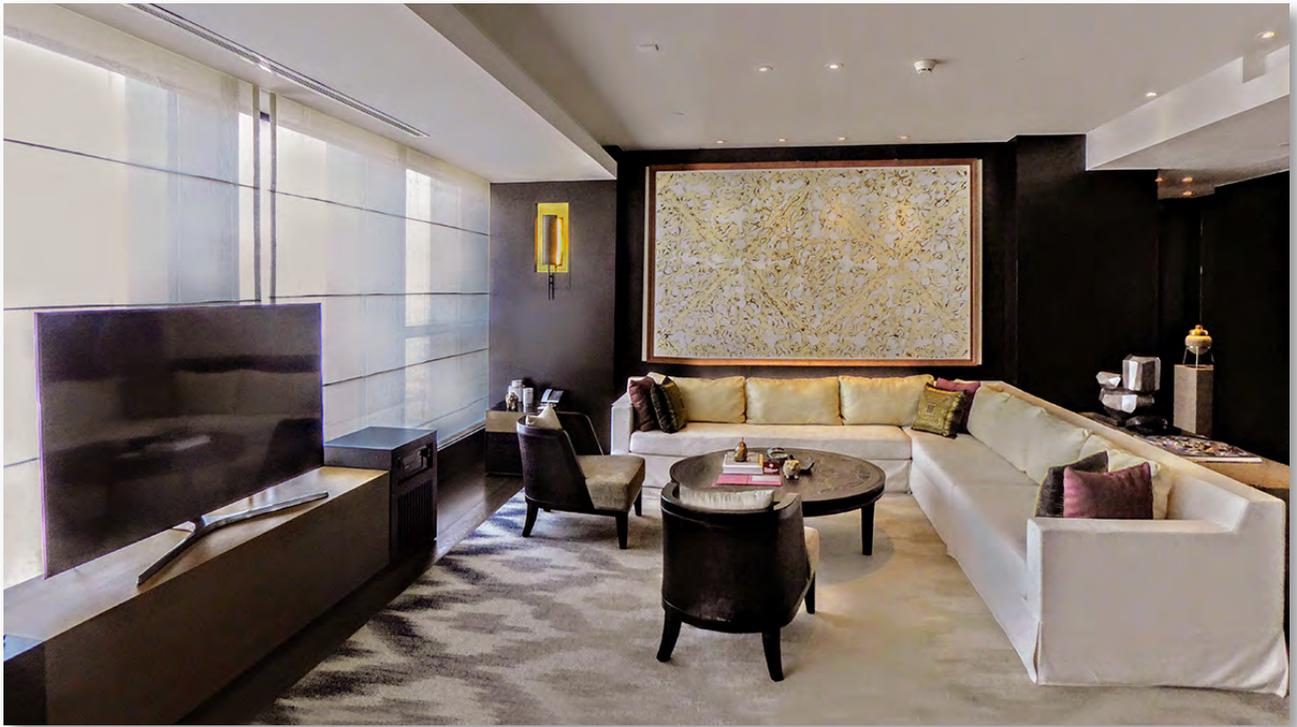
Bar, which is a stunner.

Meanwhile, Brasserie Louis, the relaxed contemporary all-day-dining restaurant on the 35th floor, serves a relatively modest, yet high-quality breakfast buffet, plus some very good à la carte options. Although it is a less exciting restaurant in terms of decor, I found the French (try the superb steak tartare) and Khmer food here to be excellent and the service very personable.

Zhan Liang, the Chinese restaurant, had yet to open when I stayed, but I hear it will



*At Rosewood Phnom Penh, the rooftop venue, Sora.*



At Rosewood Phnom Penh, Monivong House, #3215; one of the hotel's largest suites.

feature Chinese and contemporary Khmer cuisine.

The well-designed and very soothing Sense Spa on the 33rd floor is all neutral colours and clean lines and offers 7 light-filled treatment rooms and a pedi-manicure studio by Bastien Gonzalez. The products are mostly from Maison Caulieres and Kerstin Florian, but there are also a few interesting treatments

incorporating Cambodian herbal remedies. On the same level, you will find a striking 22 metre emerald green lap pool, with unobstructed skyline views and a state-of-the-art 24/7 gym.

Management is very visible and service, under Managing Director, Michael Parker, is excellent, if occasionally a little forgetful; but the genuine smiles from the charming

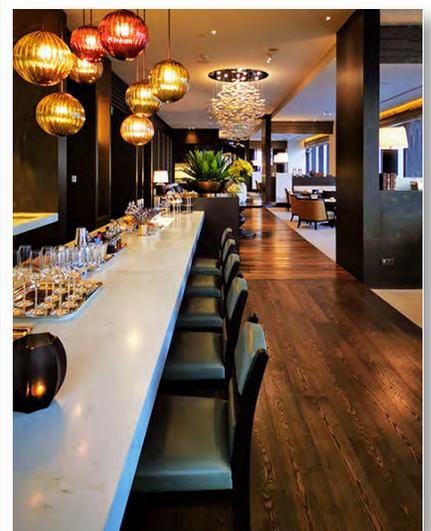
staff make up for any shortcomings. I loved how I was always offered reading material in the restaurants and how everybody was always happy to engage in conversation, whilst Housekeeping was flawless.

This cool and sophisticated oasis, soaring above the dust and chaos of the Pearl of Asia, seriously impresses, and with a modicum of fine-tuning would not look out of place in Hong Kong, London or New York.

Rosewood Phnom Penh makes for a very civilised stop-over on your way to the sights of Cambodia, and I certainly cannot wait to return.

[rosewood.com](http://rosewood.com)

**Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓+**



At Rosewood Phnom Penh, the urban Japanese Izakaya-style restaurant, Iza, and right, The Living Room, for all-day-dining, pastries and drinks.



*At Amansara, the second, extremely private pool, left, and the pool suites walkway, right.*

accommodations; the best being the 12 newer Pool Suites, which have small plunge pools in their private courtyards. These airy

Suites are close to the resort's second outdoor pool, which is extremely private.

If you are a fan of Bill Bensley design

### Siem Reap Options.

If you do decide to revisit Siem Reap on your journey to Cambodia, then **Amansara** remains a wonderful hideaway from which to explore the temples of Angkor, as it is only a 10-minute drive away. Opened in 2002, with just 12 junior-suite-style suites, this intimate resort was built in 1962 by King Sihanouk as a royal guesthouse.

Today, you take all your meals in the glorious circular dining room, which, originally, was the King's private screening room. 12 further suites were added at a later stage, so that today, there are 24 junior suite style



*The elegant Butler's Lounge, at Shinta Mani Siem Reap.*



*Outdoor area of Pool Villa, at Shinta Mani Siem Reap, with its 30 ft. private pool.*

and you love The Siam in Bangkok, then you will probably adore **Shinta Mani Siem Reap**, which is part of The Bensley Collection. Set right next to the gardens of the Royal Residence, this exceptionally intimate retreat has just 10 private Villas, each with its own 30ft pool, roof terrace and private butler service. This is the place to go if you crave space, privacy and extremely personalised service.

Cuisine is geared around in-room dining, from barbecues on your terrace, to breakfast on your rooftop; but if you do venture beyond your villa, then try the 7-course Khmer tasting menu at Kroya, or locally-aged beef at the Steakhouse, after a tippie in Bensley's Bar.

It could be worth returning to Siem Reap just for this!

# GALLIVANTER'S Gossip



**C**REATING HOTEL SUB-BRANDS is nothing new. Indeed some hotel groups have more brands in their portfolios than others have hotels. However, there seems to be a sudden rush of late to appeal to the perceived lifestyle differences of Millennials. **Capella** is reviving its lifestyle Patina brand (remember its Singapore hotel that did not open in 2016?) and will open **Patina Maldives** at the end of this year, with 90 villas. **Constance Hotels & Resorts** of Mauritius, who operate the splendid Le Prince Maurice, just created their first, all-inclusive **C-Resort** on the east coast of the island, whilst **Aman** finally confirmed what I mooted months ago and in 2022 are launching not just **Janu Montenegro** (see above), but also **Janu Al Ula** in Saudi Arabia and **Janu Tokyo** - [januhotels.com](http://januhotels.com). For me, the best expression of the dual brand was Adrian Zecha's Amanresorts, which was founded in 1988, and its sub-brand, GHM, which followed in 1992. I also look to **Four Seasons** which, thankfully, operates a single high-end brand and continues to do so very well.



**T**HE SPANISH PARTY ISLAND of Ibiza has never been close to my heart, but its little sister island, Formentera, could tempt me, especially now that **Casa Formentera** is opening on June 1st, with just 16 rooms. A stroll from the 7km white sand Platja Migjorn beach, the focus here is on wellness and sustainability, with cool, contemporary interiors. [casaformentera.com](http://casaformentera.com)

**E**VEN IF YOU HAVE STAYED MANY TIMES at **Six Senses Douro Valley**, it is worth returning for their new **Vineyard Wing**, with its seven suites and three rooms; the most alluring being The Vineyard Rooftop Suite. With this new addition, the hotel now offers 60 accommodations; but even now, I suspect that you will have to book up well ahead, as this is easily the best hotel in Portugal. It will be interesting to see what **Six Senses** do in **Rome** when they open in 2021 on the Piazza di San Marcello, with 95 rooms, as the city is seeing quite a number of high-end properties joining the mix. Their hotel will be set in the 18th Century Palazzo Salviati Cesi Mellini, which is conveniently located within walking distance of the better shops and sights. Design is by Patricia Urquiola. [sixsenses.com](http://sixsenses.com)

**G**REAT HOTELKEEPING IS ALL ABOUT GREAT HOTELIERS, so let us see who has gone where. **Aman Venice** is now headed by experienced hotelier, Licinio Garavaglia. After 23 years, Frank Marrenbach leaves his role as CEO of the **Oetker Collection** and the group's Chief Financial Officer, Dr. Timo Gruenert takes over. Marrenbach becomes Managing Partner of German-based Althoff Hotels. Michael Voigt leaves **L'Oscar** London to head up London's **The Goring**. François Dussart takes over as COO of Michel Reybier's **La Réserve** hotels. Vincent Billard takes over as General Manager of Rosewood's **Hôtel de Crillon Paris**. Ex GM of One&Only Reethi Rah, Mark Hehir, opens the 100-room **Ritz-Carlton Fari Islands**, also in the Maldives, with design by Kerry Hills' studio. Interestingly, this resort is owned by Pontiac Land, who are also developing Patina Maldives.

**A**S I WRITE THIS, THE WORLD BECOMES CRAZIER BY THE HOUR, as the **Coronavirus** closes borders and hotels; preventing most of you from travelling. **Gallivanter's 100 Club Members** who need to revise their travel plans can contact me for future hotel advice, as many of you have already done. Stay safe!

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