



Hotel Vagabond offers the Chelsea experience amidst Singapore's sterility

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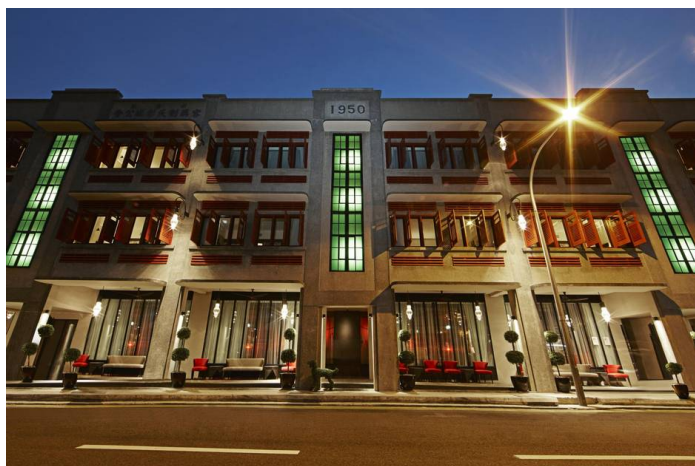
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If ever there was an antidote to the hyper sterility of modern Singapore, it is the brand new Hotel Vagabond. Its artist-in-residence program, with its nightly salons, is a fresh and distinctly Asian take on New York's legendary Chelsea arts hotel. (Some of the hotel's more than 1,000 paintings, video installations and photographs are even, by local standards, a bit naughty.) Designed by Paris's celebrated Jacques Garcia, the hotel is a fantastical world of lush crimson and gold wrapped in moody lighting, at once Moroccan casbah, maharaja's palace and French salon. It's the perfect backdrop for travellers to engage with the international artists who are regularly invited to take up residence in the hotel's several ateliers.



Designed by Paris's celebrated Jacques Garcia, the hotel is a fantastical world of lush crimson and gold.

TRENDING



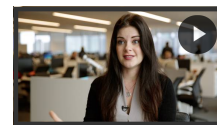
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LOCATION, LOCATION

Adding to the exoticism, Hotel Vagabond is found near two of the city-state's most interesting and still intact historic neighbourhoods. Little India, especially vibrant Sunday nights, is a five-minute walk away. This is where you'll snack on crispy dhosa at hole-in-the-wall Saravanaa Bhavan or indulge a late-night shopping urge while browsing through crowded racks of silky saris at Jewel's Shop.

Or, stroll a few minutes from the hotel in the other direction to reach Kampong Glam, the traditional Muslim quarter. Here, the mood is set by the scent of frangipani in the Sultan's Palace garden and the sound of powerful daily calls to prayer from the gold-domed Sultan Mosque. In the enclave's narrow streets lined with traditional shop-house architecture, all things heritage and hip are on display.



Guests are greeted by a life-size, brass rhinoceros-as-reception desk.

DESIGN

Garcia has created an apartment for the Sultan of Brunei, advised on the restoration of the Chateau Versailles and created Paris's opulent Hôtel Costes. Hotel Vagabond is his first Asian project, and he has indulged in his passion for Moorish North Africa and the desert kingdoms of India. Guests are greeted by a life-size, brass rhinoceros-as-reception desk. A pair of two-metre-high gold elephants flank the elevator. Dine or lounge in the retro-Parisian style salon-turned-lobby where the intertwined branches of brass banyan trees (made by armorers for Rajasthan royalty) reach the ceiling. A large abstract sculpture of a gold monkey above a long brass bar stands watch over a room of mauve-and-crimson velvet with colourful



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tasselled chairs on leopard-print carpet. And that's just the public space! The glamorous but less theatrical rooms have dark mahogany furniture, hand-painted screens and walls lined with exotic travel photos. All in all, a perfect mise en scène for a hotel that motto tells its guests: "If you must get into trouble, do it at the Vagabond!"



An elephant sculpture looks over the Hotel Vagabond's salon.

EAT IN OR EAT OUT

When Italian-Australian chef Drew Nocente came up with the idea to open a contemporary grill specializing in charcuterie, he says he knew his Singaporean and expat clientele might need a nudge to warm to cured, pickled and smoked dishes using the most under appreciated parts of animals, e.g. tripe, tails and jowls. But, he says proudly, the concept, worked: "I've converted a lot of people!" Lardo (pork fat) and salt-and-pepper tripe are his most popular dishes so far. That, he says, inspires him to up the ante. "I'm thinking kangaroo rilette might work," he says. Non-carnivores, however, can breathe easy. He also offers his grandmother's recipe for pappardelle and some lovely fish dishes. But this is Singapore, so grab some Malaysian laksa nearby at Da Lian or check out chef Drew's fave dim sum joint around the corner, Swee Choon Tim Sum.



A banyan tree sculpture over the bar at the Hotel Vagabond.

BEST AMENITY

You won't get a gym or a pool at this hotel, but you will get access to a changing cast of artists in residence. A nightly cinq à sept provides guests the opportunity to mingle with artists such as filmmaker/photographer Julia Calfee or learn about sound production from DJ Charlie B. Wilder.



The Vagabond suite.

IF I COULD CHANGE ONE THING

Though I adored the artsy ambience, I still needed a towel rack near the sink and a longer cord for the hair dryer. It would be nice not to crouch to blow dry.



The lobby bathroom of the Hotel Vagabond.

WHOM YOU'LL MEET

Hotel Vagabond has a significant staycation following among Singapore's sophisticates who want a few nights escape from the confines of the well-mannered island.

Hotel Vagabond, 39 Syed Alwi Rd., Singapore; hotelvagabondsingapore.com; 42 rooms from \$300.

The writer was a guest of the hotel.

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