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## Hotel Review: Hotel Vagabond Singapore

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Singapore's new boutique luxury property features live art, an artist-in-residence program and an opulent design bound to turn heads

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Hotel Vagabond's reception area features a large brass rhino. // © 2017 Hotel Vagabond Singapore

Feature image (above): The walls at Hotel Vagabond Singapore are covered with a mix of original art, prints and reproductions. // © 2017 Hotel Vagabond Singapore

The thumping grew louder and louder as I tucked into my passionfruit panna cotta and sipped Earl Grey tea. I whipped my head around to find a woman, adorned with wavy hair and earbuds, as she swirled her body to the left and then jerked to the right. Her hands gripped a pair of high-heeled shoes that she clanged on the table like drumsticks, and her eyes were squeezed shut as if she were willing herself somewhere far away.

This seemingly bizarre display in the Salon of Hotel Vagabond Singapore, which opened its doors in 2016, was no random occurrence. What I and other guests witnessed was performance artist Kate March rehearsing for the on-site immersive dinner-theater event, "Expect the Unexpected." March was part of the boutique hotel's Artist-in-Residence program, for which artists from around the

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## The Details

**Hotel Vagabond Singapore**  
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world apply for tenures ranging from a weekend to three months. They create art in the open, for all guests to see, while staying at the hotel rent-free.

“We decided to bring the concept of live art to Singapore and to encourage all different types of artists — including DJs, poets, performance artists and musicians — to come here,” said Harpreet Bedi, co-owner and general manager of Hotel Vagabond. “Our only requirement is that the artists engage with the guests.”

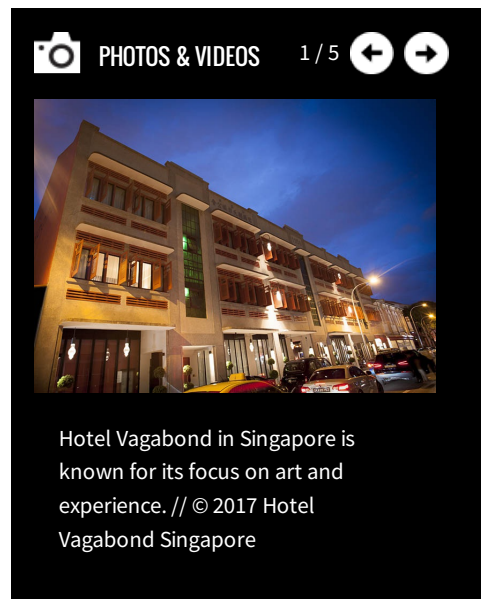
The nature of the interaction is up to the artists, so long as guests can get a feel for their talents. For example, an Artist-in-Residence mixologist took over Bar Vagabond with a new cocktail menu, and guest DJs both performed and conducted talks about how to spin music. California-based composer Julie Herndon spoke to guests about her work and invited them to sketch their experiences in Singapore. Herndon, in turn, is using the guests’ sketches as inspiration for a sound map, a sonic representation of a specific location.

Part of Marriott International’s Tribute Portfolio, Hotel Vagabond has embraced its location on the outskirts of Singapore’s Little India. The structure itself is comprised of six shophouses, which formerly served as a bicycle repair shop, a dormitory for migrant workers and a brothel, among other incarnations. Rather than knocking down the shophouse pillars to create an open floor plan, the hotel worked with French architect and designer Jacques Garcia to incorporate them in the grandest way possible — by turning them into stunning brass banyan trees, hand-carved by artisans in India.

The opulence continues with a spotless brass rhinoceros used as a reception desk, a golden monkey sculpture by French artist Franck Le Ray and walls covered in a mix of original works, as well as prints and reproductions.

My favorite piece in the hotel’s collection was Marco Brambilla’s “Evolution (Megaplex) (2010),” a dramatic video installation that plays continuously in the elevator. Satinder Garcha, founder and CEO of Garcha Hotels, parent company to Hotel Vagabond, found elevator rides to be boring and awkward, and decided to install a piece of art that could capture anyone’s attention. He succeeded. With aggressive classical music and a collage of clips from films such as “King Kong,” “Little Shop of Horrors,” “Dune” and

“Interview with the Vampire,” the piece is so disorienting and hypnotic that guests often forget to press the button for their floor when they first step in.



When they do make it to their guestrooms, however, travelers find plenty of artistic accoutrements, including a Scottish leather Roberts Radio and travel photography taken by Garcha himself. I stayed in a Classic guestroom, which was tiny, even by European standards, at approximately 240 square feet. While there was little space to fit much more than a king-size bed, the room came equipped with a Nespresso machine, international outlets to charge devices and a smartphone for guests to browse the internet, make unlimited local calls and even select international calls during their stay.

Measuring approximately 732 square feet, the Vagabond Executive Club Suite includes a separate living area with a pullout bed and an exclusive art collection. Guests with Executive Club access are treated to a host of benefits, including an a la carte breakfast, a small-bites menu in the afternoon and an a la carte lounge menu with wine and spirits; high-speed Wi-Fi access; and a laundry credit.

The hotel’s location provides an opportunity for travelers to explore a side of Singapore that might not otherwise be on their itineraries. During my stay, I walked a little more than a block to the Berseh Food Centre where my travel buddy and I sampled the region’s popular dishes, from Hainanese chicken rice to “carrot cake,” a greasy egg dish made with preserved radish, garlic and not a single carrot. While the breakfast at Hotel Vagabond was gourmet, I enjoyed picking up Singapore’s ubiquitous breakfast dish, kaya toast, made with a creamy coconut jam, from a nearby open-air restaurant.

“The coolest hotels are in the nongentrified areas — that’s truly what boutique hotels are,” said Bedi of the 41-room Hotel Vagabond, which is walking distance from both the Arab Quarter and Little India. “At our hotel, you are sure to get the local Singapore experience.”

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