

SINGAPORE

Wanderlust, Little India

Thanks to the efforts of four separate creative teams commissioned by lawyer-turned-hotelier Loh Lik Peng, this former Little India schoolhouse has been whimsically restored to showcase a madcap, endearing mishmash of provocative and quirky designs. The lobby level offers a dash of postmodern glamour — think a handsome Frank Gehry sofa — juxtaposed against a gray-toned industrial space. Twenty-nine guest rooms are available in three themes: the petite “Pantone” rooms on level two, each done up in a different hue; level three’s paper-inspired “Mono” rooms, featuring either chirpy Pop Art installations or origami-like ceilings; and, best of all, the “Whimsical” rooms



2010 LUXE LIST

manicures and pedicures, and Ayurvedic *abhyanga* oil massages, all accompanied by glasses of freshly squeezed cucumber juice and soothing tunes from preloaded iPods. Minimalist and Japanese-inspired, the villas, which come in two categories, feature plush canopied beds and flat-screen TVs. Spa Villas offer three-meter plunge pools with therapeutic jets, palm-fringed sundecks, a dining area, a sunken outdoor bath, and a roomy steam shower, best enjoyed with the resort's bespoke herbal concoctions. Pool villas take it up a notch with bigger pools and a cozy kitchen, while the grand Amala Residence boasts three bedrooms and a nine-meter pool. Children under 12 are not admitted, and silence reigns throughout the resort (108 Jl. Kunti, *Seminyak*; 62-361/738-866; *theamala.com*; doubles from US\$325).

JAPAN

Sankara Hotel & Spa, Yakushima
Embraced by the subtropical rain forests of Yakushima Island, off the southernmost corner of Kyushu, this auberge-style retreat is designed to harmonize with the green mountains and centuries-old cedar forests that have earned the island a spot on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Newly placed on the roster of the Ryokan Collection's Small Luxury Japanese Hotels, the Sankara is a fine, upstanding addition to the family. Twenty-four villas and five cottage-style suites sit on elevated ground overlooking the sea, with interiors clad in wood tones that complement the leafy surrounds. The resort makes a point of coexisting with the island's community; French-trained chef Chiharu Takei sources all his produce locally, making for guilt-free satisfaction at the hotel's two restaurants (553 *Haginoue*; 81/997-47-3488; *sankara-hotel-spa.com*; doubles from US\$815).

LEBANON

Le Gray, Beirut
Eagerly awaited, this sassy property by British hotelier Gordon Campbell Gray symbolizes a new era for Beirut. Adjacent to the Green Line that divided the once conflict-ridden city, the 87-room hotel overlooks the newly rebuilt downtown,

where fashionistas sip café au lait among sleek boutiques. Set in a dusky yellow tower rising around a soaring glass-domed atrium, each spacious guest room has dining tables, couches, walk-in dressers, and a host of gadgets. Despite airport-style security, the small lobby is just as striking, featuring a backlit white metal wall punched with the shapes of flowers and dragonflies. Head to the rooftop for a dip in the purple-glass infinity pool, or relax at one of five bars and restaurants, including the alfresco Indigo on the Roof, where you can get a taste of Beirut's budding organic movement while watching the city being rebuilt below (*Martyrs' Square*, *Solidere*; 961-1/962-828; *legray.com*; doubles from US\$495).

MALAYSIA

Clove Hall, Penang
Native son Christopher Ong brings his talents home, upgrading this 1910 colonial bungalow-turned-gentleman's club into six unique suites on lovingly landscaped grounds shaded by clove and coconut trees. Generous rooms, none smaller than 45 square meters, come with four-poster beds, loungers, and Ong's museum-quality Asian antiques. The Ginger and Clove suites each boast a colossal stone bath, while the two upstairs quarters have bijou balconies. Take breakfast outdoors by the sea-foam-green tiled swimming pool or in a photogenic dining room filled with Peranakan furniture on original black-and-white tiles. Butterflies flutter among the palm fronds during quiet days, and at night the staff light the ground with lanterns. Explore the waterfront and the Technicolor shop fronts of George Town on the hotel's vintage bicycles or by complimentary chauffeured SUV (11 *Clove Hall Rd.*, *George Town*; 60-4/229-0818; *clovehall.com*; doubles from US\$175).

Straits Collection, Penang

Spread between separate rows of restored George Town shophouses, the Straits Collection offers a tantalizing choice between two addresses—one behind the Goddess of Mercy Temple on Stewart Lane, and the other on Armenian Street, at the start of the old quarter's Heritage Trail. Spruced up by Narelle McMurtrie of Langkawi's Bon Ton Resort, the accommodations leave you feeling like you're living in this colorful city, not

removed from it. None of this means sacrificing style for authenticity—expect Chinese antiques in eye-popping hues, flat-screen TVs, skylights, and sexy open-air rain showers. Friendly staff can guide you to the best spots for sightseeing and shopping—like the state-owned toddy shop or the incense maker around the corner—while Kopi Cine, the cozy corner bistro, offers fresh salads, tasty local desserts, and nightly screenings of classic films (47–55 *Stewart Ln. and 89–95 Armenian St.*, *George Town*; 60-4/263-7299; *straitscollection.com.my*; doubles from US\$129).

NEW ZEALAND

Matakauri Lodge, Queenstown
The southern sister of New Zealand's acclaimed Farm at Cape Kidnappers and Kauri Cliffs, Matakauri Lodge overlooks the shimmering water of Lake Wakapitū on the South Island. Set just outside Queenstown, the recently refurbished property—it was originally built as a spa retreat—is both close to the action of New Zealand's adventure capital, and yet far enough removed to feel like a backwoods estate. Dressed in an earthy but contemporary Kiwi flavor, each of the 10 suites is equipped with a fireplace and a private porch overlooking the lake and the aptly named Remarkables range. British-born chef Dale Gartland has been brought down from the Farm to oversee the restaurant in the cedar-sided main lodge, while a spa rounds out the offerings with alpine-inspired treatments (569 *Glenorchy Rd.*; 64-3/441-1008; *matakaurilodge.co.nz*; doubles from US\$835).

SINGAPORE

Wanderlust, Little India
Thanks to the efforts of four separate creative teams commissioned by lawyer-turned-hotelier Loh Lik Peng, this former Little India schoolhouse has been whimsically restored to showcase a madcap, endearing mishmash of provocative and quirky designs. The lobby level offers a dash of postmodern glamour—think a handsome Frank Gehry sofa—juxtaposed against a gray-toned industrial space. Twenty-nine guest rooms are available in three themes: the petite “Pantone” rooms on level two, each done up in a different hue; level three's paper-inspired “Mono” rooms, featuring either chirpy Pop Art installations or origami-like ceilings; and, best of all, the “Whimsical” rooms