

PostMag

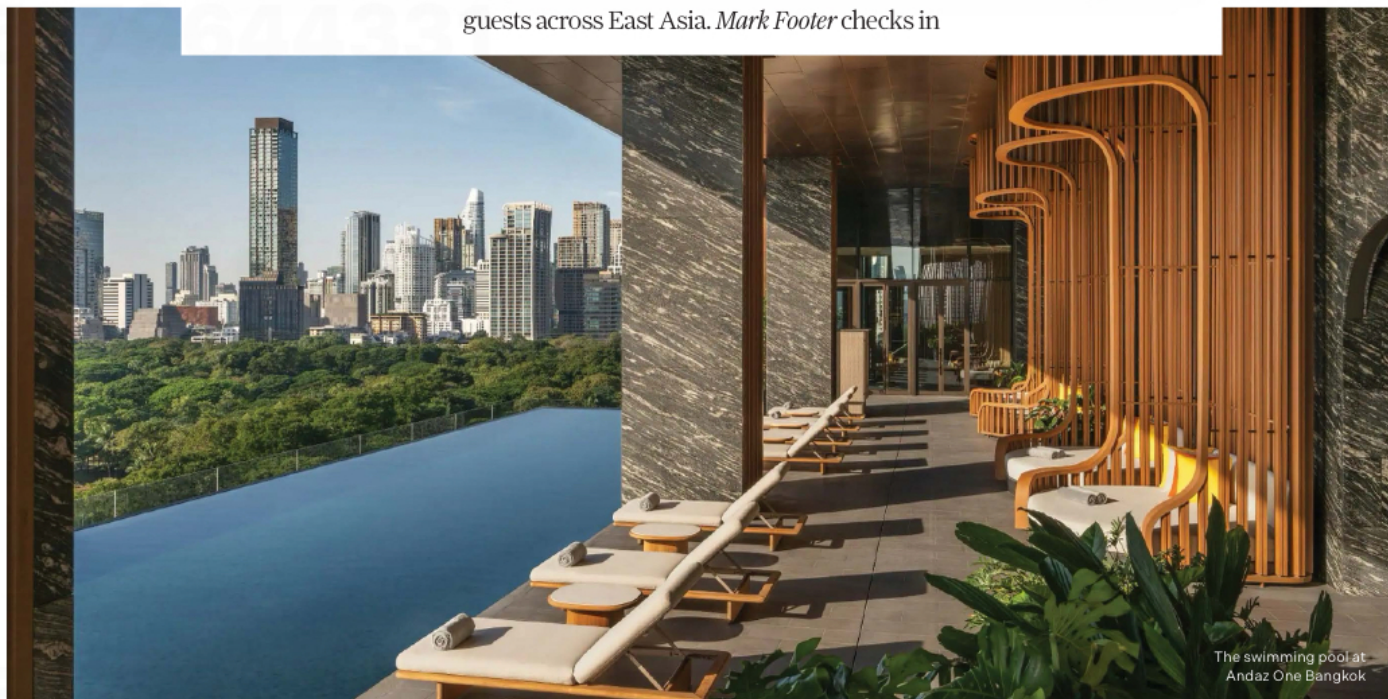
THE ROAD BACK

Retracing a landscape of memory and myth in Turkey



New stays, old souls

A slew of recently opened hotels from established brands are now welcoming guests across East Asia. *Mark Footer* checks in



The swimming pool at Andaz One Bangkok

Familiar names in unfamiliar territory, modern takes on time-worn tradition, buildings repurposed for the discerning traveller: the post-Covid rush of new hotels throwing open their doors in East Asia has continued apace in the past few months. Here are some of the most interesting:

IMPERIAL HOTEL, KYOTO (JAPAN)

In the heart of the upscale Gion district, the latest and fourth member of the Imperial chain occupies the 1936 Yasaka Kaikan building, its 55 rooms, eight with tatami flooring (a first for Imperial), found in the Main Building and the North Wing, a black timber extension.

Yasaka Kaikan was once a theatre and cultural hall for the *geiko* (geisha) and *maiko* (apprentices) of Gion. This connection informed the restoration of the building: workers salvaged more than 16,000 exterior tiles dating from the 1930s to reuse and the design includes a copper-tiled roof and a central tower that mimic those of a Japanese castle keep. In the grounds stands a school where *maiko* are still trained, adding to the atmospherics.

The views from the seasonal Rooftop bar (for guests only) have been made all the better by the granting of an exception to local building regulations: the Yasaka Kaikan was allowed to remain 100 foot (30.5 metres) tall (a 40 foot limit applies elsewhere in Gion).

CAPELLA KYOTO (JAPAN)

It's been all go in Gion. Not 600 metres from the Imperial, the 89-room Capella, the brand's first property in Japan, has also just opened, with six keys offering an en suite onsen, for in-room hot-spring bathing.

In neighbouring Miyagawa-cho rather than Gion proper, the hotel was built on the site of the Shinmichi Elementary School, and timber and lighting fixtures from that building have been used in the construction of this. Ensuring the neighbourhood's seasonal colours remain as vivid as ever, cherry and maple trees were transplanted from the school grounds to a central courtyard garden, and the entrance mimics a traditional Gion alleyway, featuring an indoor waterfall and stones chosen to symbolise the boundary between the city outside and the sanctuary within. The main restaurant combines Kyoto produce with Californian influences while Yoi is available for kappo-style dining.

1 HOTEL TOKYO (JAPAN)

Another brand making its debut in Japan, 1 Hotels has opened a "sanctuary in the sky", spanning the 38th to 43rd floors of the Akasaka Trust Tower and offering views of the Imperial Palace gardens and Tokyo Tower.

The first in the city to achieve CASBEE S certification, Japan's highest environmental rating, the hotel's "nature-led" design blends Japanese minimalism with biophilic

elements such as preserved-moss art, recycled pallets and tactile Oya stone. The heavy wooden doors of the 211 guest rooms and suites were crafted from timber salvaged from the construction site of the Akasaka Trust Tower itself and guest showers are equipped with a three-minute hourglass rather than a digital timer, encouraging a mindful and non-wasteful "water ritual".

Overall, says a former guest on TripAdvisor, "The place feels like you're in some 5-star hotel on a tropical beach and then you look outside and you're 40 stories [sic] up looking over Tokyo."

SHANGRI-LA KUNMING (CHINA)

Shangri-La's first hotel in Yunnan province was designed to evoke the feel of a tea merchant's mansion, albeit one with 75 rooms and suites.

Check-in takes place in a "secret garden", where guests are served Yunnanese tea, and the corridors beyond are lined with stained-glass windows that cause the colours and shadows on the floor to shift as the sun tracks across the sky, mimicking the changing light of the Yunnan highlands. The Horizon Club Lounge features a massive red copper fireplace, a nod to the province's history of copper mining and the warmth of a merchant's hearth.

Suma Bar concoctions are made with indigenous ingredients such as Meili Snow Mountain meltwater and rainforest botanicals, and at the Dian Voyage Yunnan



Above:
Imperial Hotel, Kyoto



Above right:
Soori Penang is located in the heart of George Town's Unesco World Heritage site

Right:
The ArcadiaPlace, Lugu Lake



Cuisine restaurant, a "highland small-batch" approach is applied to traditional flavours, with tea masters ensuring those flavours are complemented by the brews.

THE ARCADIAPLACE, LUGU LAKE (CHINA)

A boutique retreat on the border of Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, The ArcadiaPlace is billed as a "tribute to the Kingdom of Women".

Lugu Lake is home to the Mosuo people, one of the last matrilineal societies in the world, and the hotel's main building is curved to mimic a fetus in the womb. The theme is continued nearby, at the newly established Museum of Women's Art, the first of its kind in China.

The heart of the hotel, in the lobby, is a Mosuo hearth, where guests are invited to drink butter tea, just as they would in a local home, and the guest rooms are designed to evoke the *nizhayi* ("flower house"), the private quarters where Mosuo women traditionally receive partners. The bathrooms feature tiles fired to match the "jade-blue" hue of the rainy season waters in sacred Lugu Lake, views of which can be seen from the property.

A Trip.com guest who stayed in February looked *up* rather than *out* at the lake: "At night, you can stargaze, and a Mosuo brother even makes butter tea and roasts sweet potatoes for you!"

ANDAZ ONE BANGKOK (THAILAND)

One Bangkok is a "city within a city" and its Andaz blends in by employing features such as traditional Thai window grilles and textile tapestries. The hotel was designed as a "vertical neighbourhood", every floor reflecting a different facet of the site it stands on, which was home to Thailand's first radiotelegraph station.

At the ground-floor entrance, the installation *Pocket of Nature*, by Pinaree Sanpitak, features vintage transistor radios and photographs of the telegraph station. In the

sixth-floor lobby hangs a massive mural called *Blockwillt*, by Ploenchana Vinyaratn, made from upcycled yarn and hand-tufted carpet, and inspired by the tangled overhead electrical wires and street grids typical of old Bangkok.

Most of the rooms are angled to look out over Lumpini Park, giving a rare green view amid all the concrete, and the hotel's rooftop Mediterranean restaurant, Piscari, hides a "hush-hush" speakeasy.

SOORI PENANG (MALAYSIA)

In the heart of George Town's Unesco World Heritage site, this hotel is the pet project of Soo K. Chan, the founder of SCDA Architects (known for Soori Bali), who grew up in the very shophouses that now form the hotel. The resulting design is said to feel less like a commercial hotel and more like a meticulously restored family estate.

Eschewing the "Peranakan kitsch" (cluttered antiques and loud colours) found in many of Penang's heritage hotels, Chan's uses traditional air-wells as vertical shafts of light that pierce dark, cool interiors. Custom onyx lamps, alabaster pendants and marble tables abound.

The hotel hosts weekly performances of Hokkien opera, face-changing art and shadow puppetry, and given its integration into the Leong San Tong Khoo Kongsi, Soori guests have privileged access to one of Southeast Asia's most ornate and revered clan temple complexes.

"One of the most memorable moments was the private night viewing of the Khoo Kongsi temple, illuminated and almost empty, which felt magical and deeply atmospheric," says a guest from New York, on TripAdvisor. "The hotel also arranged a ride through the old streets in their custom trishaw, a charming way to experience the neighbourhood."

The Soori's 15 suites are large for a heritage shophouse conversion and several are split-level (duplexes) with internal reflecting pools, fountains and light wells.

FAIRMONT HANOI (VIETNAM)

While many hotels in Hanoi's Old Quarter are small, the 241-room Fairmont has launched as an expansive social and dining hub, with eight restaurants and bars, including a contemporary Vietnamese restaurant led by celebrity chef Luke Nguyen and Hiryu, a Japanese "stage of fire and flavour" featuring teppanyaki and a sushi counter.

The design of the hotel was inspired by Vietnam's Red River and the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long, interiors blending modern architectural lines with warm woods, linen-clad walls and local detailing.

Also impressive in its scale is the 3,500-square-metre wellness floor, complete with a rooftop infinity pool overlooking nearby Hoan Kiem Lake.

"The Cirua Wellness Centre is without a doubt the highlight of the hotel," says a guest from Kuala Lumpur, on TripAdvisor. "The forestry room in particular was such a nice experience, with the scent of pine and a very comfortable heated temperature that made it feel like a proper space to relax. The rooftop pool and bar are also excellent, offering great views of the Old Quarter." ■

Right:
Shangri-La Kunming

Below:
Fairmont Hanoi

