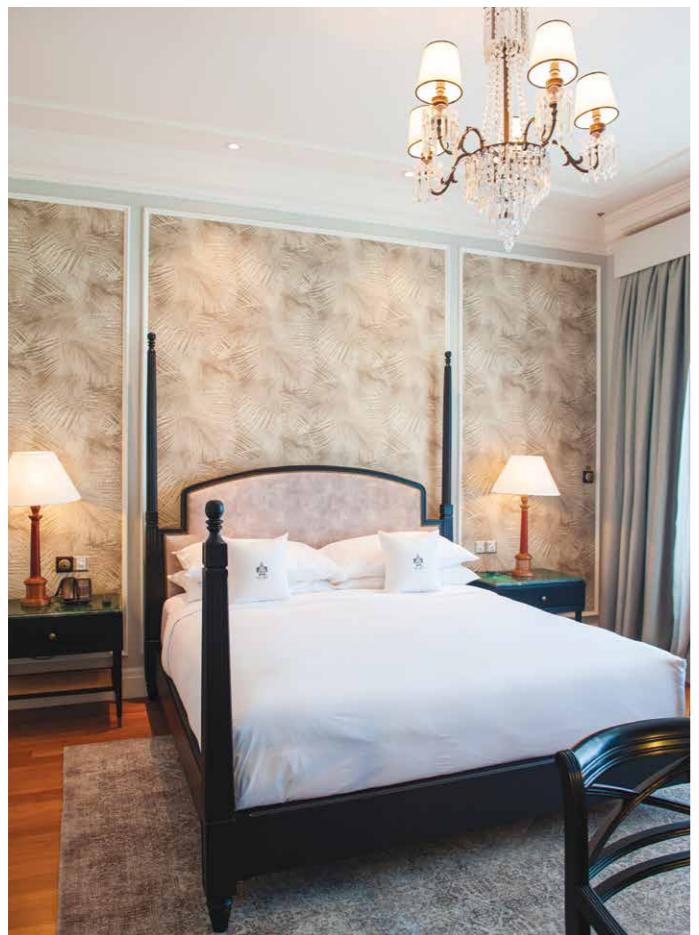


A woman with long dark hair, seen from behind, sits on a light-colored tiled edge of a swimming pool. She is wearing a white blouse with a vibrant tropical floral print. The pool water is a clear turquoise. In the background, there's a large white building with traditional red-tiled roofs, surrounded by several palm trees. Several white lounge chairs are lined up along the poolside. The overall atmosphere is one of luxury and relaxation.

Sitting pretty at
the pool at Siem
Reap's venerable
Raffles Grand
Hotel d'Angkor.

What's Old is New Again

SOUTHEAST ASIA'S GRANDE DAME HOTELS HAVE LONG LURED VISITORS WITH THEIR MIX OF NOSTALGIA, FADED COLONIAL SPLENDOR, AND OLD-SCHOOL HOSPITALITY. NOW, FOUR HAVE EMERGED FROM COMPREHENSIVE RENOVATIONS THAT ADD A CERTAIN 21ST-CENTURY SOPHISTICATION TO THE MIX.



EASTERN & ORIENTAL HOTEL

Founded in 1885 on the waterfront of George Town, Penang, the Eastern & Oriental was the first property built by the legendary Armenian hoteliers the Sarkeesian brothers, who went on to open such celebrated establishments as the Raffles in Singapore and Hotel Majapahit in Surabaya. Despite the famous personages who once trod its halls, from Rudyard Kipling to Somerset Maugham, in recent years the E&O's original Heritage Wing veered more toward dreary than dazzling. Reopening just before Christmas following a US\$10 million, 10-month renovation, the wing's 100 suites have been seriously spruced up with hardwood floors, shades of lemon and steel gray, and Malaysian botanical prints. Each include well-stocked minibars, access to a lounge for breakfast and cocktails, and use of the hotel's upgraded seaside swimming pool, with its dramatic views of the Malacca Strait. Two new restaurants include Palm Court for its decadent champagne high tea, and Java Tree for semiformal dinners with colonial-era European and Peranakan dishes and an impressive—albeit expensive—wine list; while Farquhar's Bar, an E&O institution, has been relocated to the left side of the building and furnished

Above, from left:
Inside a Heritage Wing Suite at Penang's Eastern & Oriental Hotel; the facade of Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor in Siem Reap. Opposite, from top:
Raffles Singapore's atrium; a deluxe two-bedroom suite in the Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok's River Wing.



with leather Chesterfield sofas and vintage prints and photos of George Town. With shipshape service, great food, and an air of polished elegance, the E&O is once again a contender for Southeast Asia's finest grand hotel (ehotels.com; doubles from US\$200). —Leisa Tyler

RAFFLES GRAND HOTEL D'ANGKOR

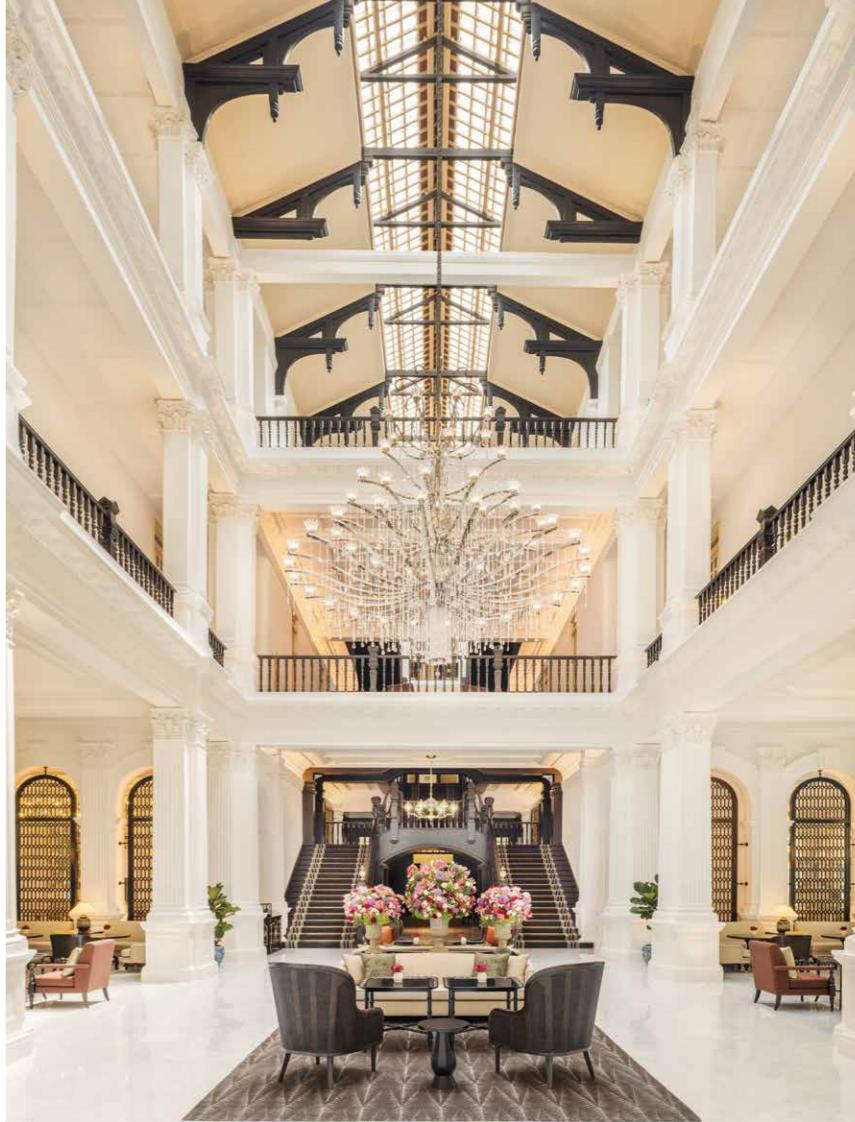
The Raffles group had a notable 2019 with the restoration of two of its marquee grandes dames. The flagship Raffles in Singapore reopened following a two-and-a-half year makeover in August, while the Grand Hotel d'Angkor in Siem Reap, a sanctuary for well-heeled temple admirers and dignitaries since 1932, unveiled its contemporary update in October. (Sister property Raffles Hotel Le Royal in Phnom Penh is due to complete renovations of its own in April.) Fusing classic and modern design details, the six-month project has resulted in a bright, colorful makeover that's apparent on entering the reception area. The Conservatory, an ornate setting at teatime with its multihued sofas and cushions, overlooks Cambodia's largest swimming pool and forms a connecting point between the original teak-and-wrought-iron elevator, the stately Elephant Bar, and now 1932; the latter is a supremely stylish restaurant helmed by Australian chef Angela Brown, who prepares traditional ingredients using progressive cooking methods, like a crisp kroeung-marinated quail accompanied by sweet-potato fondant, long-bean salad, and Khmer curry sauce. A comprehensive yet discreet interior facelift also awaits travelers staying in the guest rooms. The 119 suites now flaunt mod cons such as Segafredo coffee machines, USB sockets, and rain showers, alongside mid-century touches like brass rotary telephones. Curated guest journeys range from exclusive access to Angkor's secret pathways on Vespas to butler-escort

LEISA TYLER (TOP LEFT); COURTESY OF RAFFLES SINGAPORE; OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF RAFFLES SINGAPORE; COURTESY OF MANDARIN ORIENTAL, BANGKOK

ed visits to the boutiques of Kandal Village. A quintessential Indochine-style property in a prime city location, the Grand expertly balances its proud history—it once hosted Charlie Chaplin, Charles de Gaulle, and Jackie Kennedy—with its future-proofed modern-day reincarnation (855-23982-598; raffles.com; doubles from US\$220). —Jonathan Evans

RAFFLES SINGAPORE

Unveiling its new look last August, this 132-year-old icon (it's gazetted as a national monument) has been ushered into the 21st century thanks to a two-and-a-half-year overhaul. Interiors by New York-based designer Alexandra Champalimaud strike a fine balance between nostalgia and contemporary relevance, with the hotel's 115 beautifully restored suites now sporting ivory hues, Peranakan floor tiles, and sleek four-poster beds alongside iPads that control everything from the temperature to the lights. Leather key card holders are embossed with the likenesses of the hotel's illustrious past guests, among them Joseph Conrad and Elizabeth Taylor. A huge crystal chandelier hangs in the soaring, pillared lobby, which leads to the refreshed Tiffin Room (where breakfast and North Indian cuisine are served), the soigné Writers Bar, and La Dame de Pic, the first restaurant in Asia by Michelin-starred French chef Anne-Sophie Pic. Other big-name chef collaborations include BBR by Alain Ducasse and Yi by Jerome Leung, the latter located in the transformed Raffles Arcade, where you'll also find the Long Bar (now on level two), new boutiques,



and the serene Raffles Spa, which debuted in December (65-6337-1886; raffles.com; doubles from US\$605).

—Christopher P. Hill

MANDARIN ORIENTAL, BANGKOK

Thailand's most storied hotel wrapped up a US\$18 million restoration of its two oldest wings in 2016, just in time for its 140th anniversary celebrations. But the reason it's on this list is the recent (and long overdue) refurbishment of the River Wing, which, while being a 1970s addition to the property, signals the completion of the most extensive revamp in the hotel's history. Enlarged guest rooms and an increased number of suites are complemented by a lighter, airier design that includes whitewashed wood paneling, teak floors, Jim Thompson fabrics, and decor (like hammered-brass royal barge sculptures) that references the Chao Phraya River, views of which can be admired through floor-to-ceiling windows and from newly furnished balconies. The alfresco Verandah restaurant has been remodeled, as has the beloved Lord Jim's, which now shares space with Kinu by Takagi, a Kyoto-style kaiseki concept from renowned Japanese chef Takagi Kazuo (66-2-659-9000; mandarinoriental.com; doubles from US\$710). —David Tse

