

THE SINGAPORE WOMEN'S WEEKLY FEBRUARY 2019

# THE SINGAPORE Women's Weekly

FEBRUARY 2019  
\$4.80

## 125 SUPER CHIC SUPER LUCKY CNY STYLE BUYS

+ PRETTY SLIP-ON,  
SLIP-OFF SHOES  
YOU'LL WANT  
NOW

CLUTTER  
FIXES  
FOR ANY ROOM

JEANETTE AW  
FEISTY, FEARLESS,  
INSPIRING

LOVE  
YOUR HAIR  
ON-TREND  
COLOURS + GLAM  
CURLS IN MINUTES

HUAT AH!  
MASTERCHEF  
RECIPES FOR  
A DELICIOUS  
REUNION FEAST

HOROSCOPE SPECIAL

# MONEY • CAREER LOVE & HEALTH

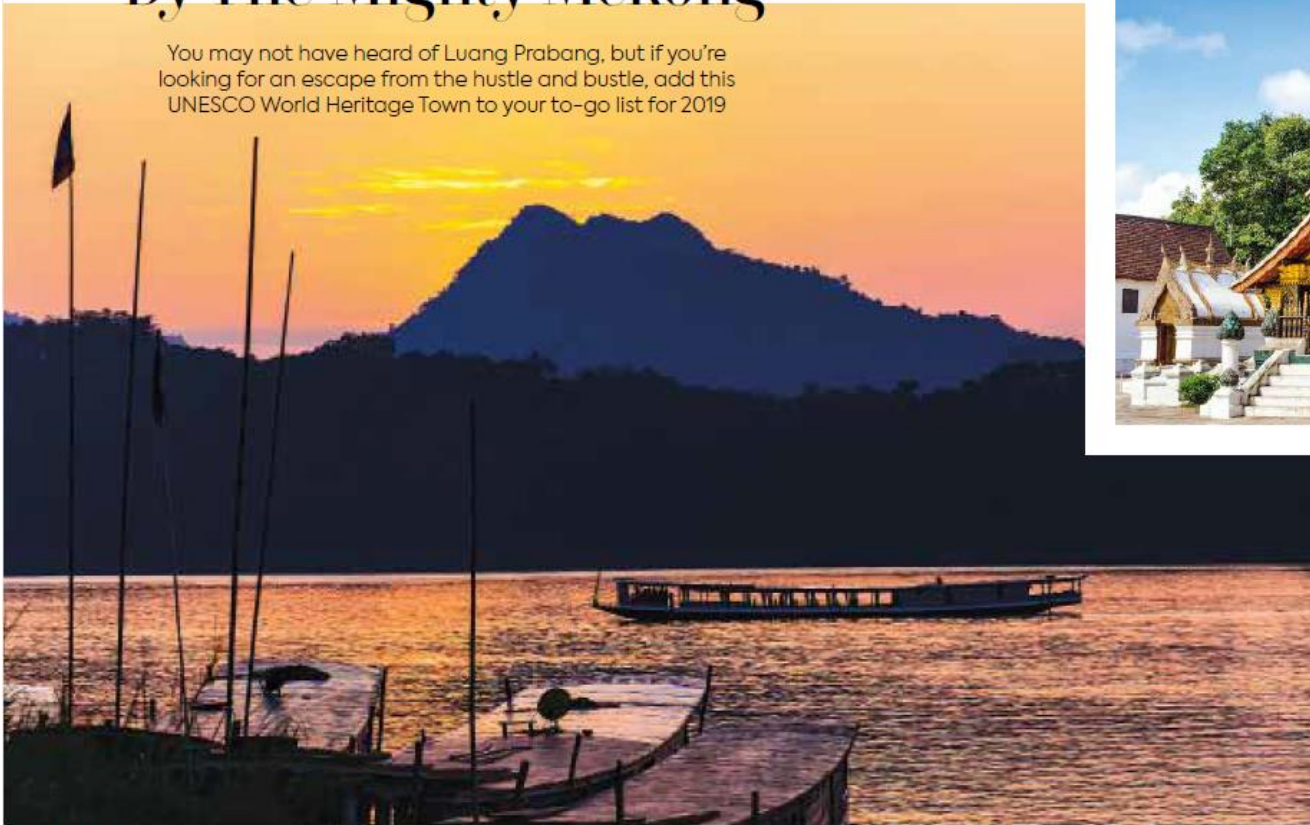
WHAT DOES THE YEAR OF  
THE PIG HOLD FOR YOU

FOR WOMEN WHO WANT IT ALL

\$4.80

## By The Mighty Mekong

You may not have heard of Luang Prabang, but if you're looking for an escape from the hustle and bustle, add this UNESCO World Heritage Town to your to-go list for 2019



A must-do in Luang Prabang is a sunset cruise down the Mekong river.

Just before sunset, Luang Prabang shimmers like a city in an ancient fable. As the waters of the Mekong turn gold, the rose-coloured tiles and gilded serpents on the temple rooftops high above the river banks begin to glow and glint in the failing light. The serpents, or *nagas*, are the city's guardians and are said to have worked miracles. After all, unlike many cities in Indochina, Luang Prabang is a marvel of preservation.

Terraces of faded French colonial houses in eggshell blue lead to laneways lined with sturdy wooden Lao houses on stilts. Yet most enchanting of all are the city's more than 40 temples. The oldest, Wat Xieng Thong, is built of teak and decorated with intricate carvings and delicate mosaics.

Like Angkor, the vast complex of stone temples in neighbouring Cambodia, Luang Prabang is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

And yet the two couldn't be more different: Angkor, built between the ninth and 12th centuries, is deserted, a magnificent museum, while Luang Prabang is a series of inhabited neighbourhoods, each tied to a local temple by centuries of tradition.

Ideally poised to take all these in is the Avani- Luang Prabang ([www.avanihotels.com/luang-prabang](http://www.avanihotels.com/luang-prabang)). Itself a preservation building, the hotel was converted from a bungalow



The oldest and best-known temple in Luang Prabang, the Wat Xieng Thong, is located on the main street and has intricate mosaic work on its walls. Below: Take a half-day trip to the beautiful three-tier Kuang Si Falls, where you can take a dip in the azure pools.



LIVING  
ESCAPES



Steps away from the Mekong River, markets and temples, the Avani+ Luang Prabang is perfectly poised for you to explore the historic UNESCO Heritage Town.

for French military brass in 1914. Respecting its UNESCO Heritage Town surroundings, the resort's wraparound balconies and facade elegantly merge into the surrounding streetscape of colonial architecture. Guest rooms offer an open plan living experience with French-style louvred wooden doors that open out to a balcony overlooking the pool or private courtyard. By the way, the 25-metre pool offers a welcome relief from the tropical heat and humidity after a day of exploring.

The hotel, just 15 minutes from the airport, is literally steps away from the renowned Mekong River as well as the main stretch of the little town, where you'll find the royal palace, rebuilt by the French colonial administration in 1904 and tamed into a museum in 1975. Outside the palace's eastern gate is a bustling food market, best before 10 am, which sells every delicacy, from Mekong River fish and little bats to shredded buffalo skin, river weed, fragrant herbs, the freshest greens and peppery watercress.

There's also no shortage of dining options. L'Elephant serves creative French-Lao fusion cuisine, and Tamarind Restaurant offers authentic *larbs*, wraps and soups. The Bistro at Avani+ also whips up a good selection, and must-tries include the eggs benedict, which

comes with avocado and delicious morsels of smoked catfish, at the buffet breakfast; and *kaipen* or crispy river weed served with a chilli dip (perfect beer food!) at lunch or dinner. The kitchen admirably supports local farmers, dairy produce and fishermen, and strives to use sustainably-grown produce from local farmers and artisans who make their own cured meats and cheeses.

One of these is the Laos Buffalo Dairy Farm – which will make an entertaining, educational day out for the family. It's about a 25 minutes' drive from Avani+, and you'll get to see not only buffaloes there, but pigs and rabbits. The socially-responsible enterprise comprises a commercial dairy and production facility to make cheese, yoghurt and ice-cream. Led by Australian Susie Martin, the farm started operations three years ago, producing milk from buffalo rented from local farmers.

Susie, her husband Steven McWhirter, along with friends Rachel O'Shea (who's the head chef) and her husband Matthew, came to Luang Prabang in 2014 and discovered that it had a non-existent dairy industry for a land full of buffalo – tough for the cheese lovers. After much research, they decided to do it themselves, with the hopes of also benefitting the community. Their first lesson on buffalo



Clockwise from top left: Relax in Avani+ Luang Prabang's 25-metre pool after a day of exploring. The hotel's Courtyard rooms have French-louvred doors that open out to a balcony facing the pool. If the heat proves too much, hop onto one of the tuk-tuks to take you down the peninsula.

milking came off a YouTube video, confesses Susie. And now, the farm makes its own mozzarella, ricotta and ice-cream, and you can stop for a tea break to enjoy the scrumptious cakes. For tour details, visit [www.laosbuffalodairy.com/tours/](http://www.laosbuffalodairy.com/tours/)

Other tours not to miss include a sunset cruise down the Mekong River as well as a trip out to the Kuang Si Falls, a three-tier waterfall that leads to a 50-m drop into beautiful azure pools, before flowing downstream. Pack your swim gear or watch others jump into the clear, cold water (look out for signs for safe areas to swim). Visit Mekong Kingdoms Luxury Cruises at [www.mekongkingdoms.com](http://www.mekongkingdoms.com) for day and bespoke tours.

Though the pulse of Luang Prabang has quickened with increasing visitors, its traditional way of life has remained alluringly unchanged. During the dry season (December to February) as the water levels fall, gardeners plant vegetables on exposed river banks. You won't hear the scream of any jet-ski or high-speed boat, just the gentle "putt-putt" of a two-stroke engine or the splash of an oar.

In the early evening, the smell of wood smoke and sizzling chicken rises from the glowing embers of little clay barbecues, tended on the city's pavements. Now it's time to make your way to Phousi Hill, a landmark visible from all over town, where you can watch the setting sun work its magic on the waters of the Mekong ☺

+ Fab For Foodies



Australian Susie Martin (top) set up the Laos Buffalo Dairy Farm, where you can pop by for buffalo cheese and cakes.



Whether it's charcoal-grilled street food or traditional dishes like *larb* (right), there are so many different things to tempt the taste buds.



You'll be able to find a wide variety of fresh vegetables at the day market, and one of the things you'll see is the river weed, which the locals dry and fry for a snack (below).

We're giving away stays  
in the Avani+ Luang Prabang.  
See page 118 now!