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Scoop OF THE SUMMER

(Oops, she ate it already!)

What's going on at

Aberdeen
Country Park

A weekend in...

Ho Chi Minh

Confessions of a yogi

*Interview with a former
Miss Hong Kong*

Behind the scenes at...
Aberdeen Fish Market



Pho the good times

Callum Wiggins spends a weekend at the luxurious Reverie Saigon in Ho Chi Minh.



The custom-made Baldi Monumental Clock.

I'm sitting in the back of a chauffeur-driven black Mercedes Benz, gracefully carving its way through Ho Chi Minh city. Glass bottles of Evian water occupy the cup holders and a television screen in the driver's headrest plays a slick promotional video of the hotel.

The Reverie Saigon opened to much excitement last year with the promise of being Ho Chi Minh's most luxurious hotel. Commanding the top floors of the multi-purpose Times Square Building on newly-pedestrianised Nguyen Hue Boulevard, The Reverie Saigon is positioning itself to luxury-minded travellers in search of something special. It could be said that Ho Chi Minh itself is looking to lure a kind of clientele other than the familiar backpacker as an array of glass skyscrapers take shape across



Ho Chi Minh City's skyline is increasingly being taken up by new skyscraper developments.

the city.

If first impressions are anything to go by, The Reverie Saigon - over seven years in the making - is worth the wait. Whisked over glimmering marble floors and under giant shimmering chandeliers to the hotel lobby, the ostentatious design is striking while the staff are gracious and welcoming. The hotel lobby alone is a sight to behold - extravagant purple leather sofas with golden wings; plush sink-your-feet-into carpets and, most impressive of all, a custom-made Baldi Monumental Clock weighing in at over 1,000 kilograms. It's a hotel lobby designed unquestionably to grab your attention. It's bold, over the top and I love it.

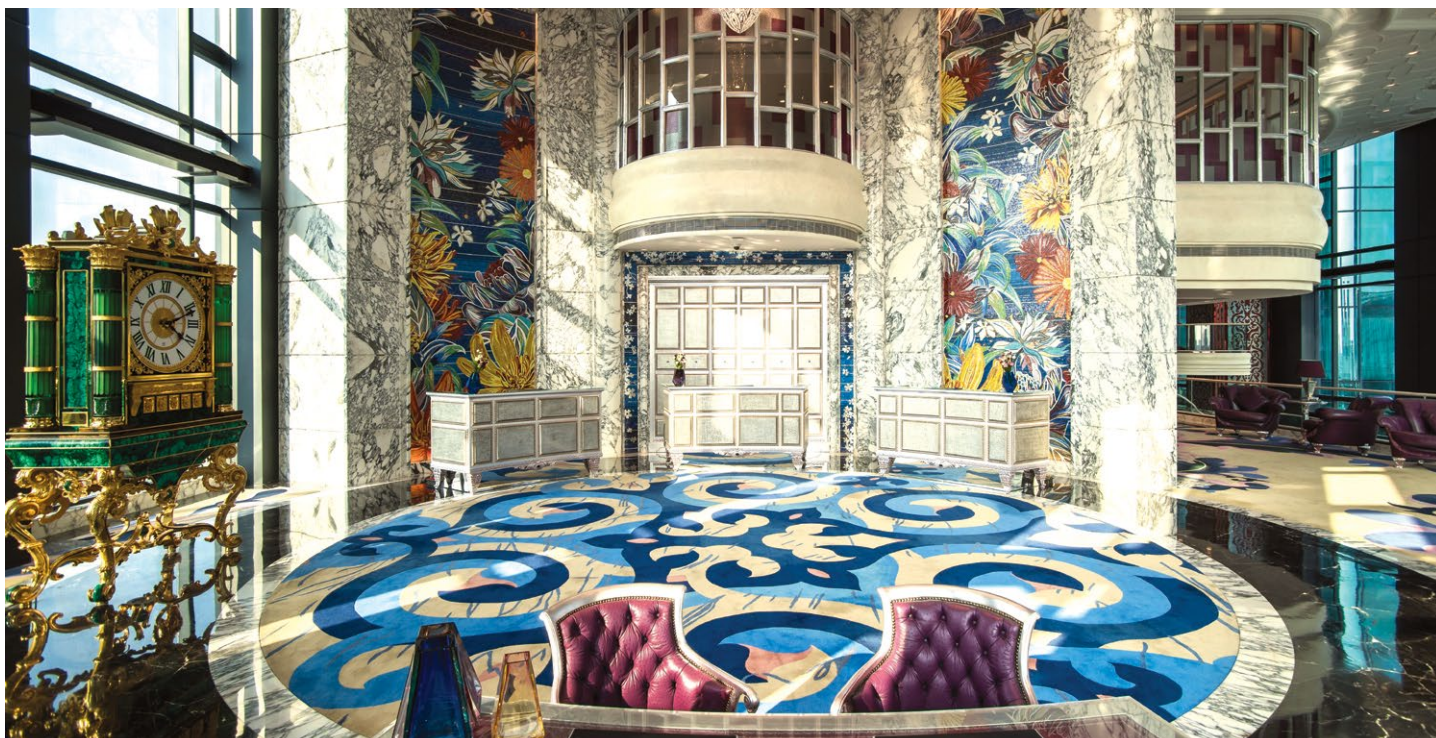
This level of opulence extends to the rest of the hotel, described by others as 'the lovechild of Versace and Liberace'. The owners have

certainly spared no expense and the attention to every bejeweled detail is meticulous.

Hotel Manager, Christina Von Wrede, shows me around the impressive range of rooms and suites in the hotel with enthusiasm. 224 luxury rooms and 62 suites are furnished by distinguished Italian designers Provasi, Visionnaire, Colombostile and Giorgetti. On my final stop on the tour I take a glimpse around the USD\$15,000 per night Presidential Suite - a room that Christina mentions even a few current heads of state have declined to stay in on the grounds of it being too exuberant, instead opting for one of the suites a few floors down. Suitably palatial in size, I'm told that the curtains alone take housekeeping an hour to correctly set in place. I leave, trying my best not to touch anything on the way out.

Guests who have booked into a suite can enjoy exclusive access to The Reverie Lounge - a relaxing space on the 38th and 39th floors. Greeted by name on arrival, the personalised service at The Reverie kicks up another notch as a dedicated Lounge team looks after your every need. Guests may enjoy an array of freshly-prepared snacks, cocktails and afternoon tea while lounging on squidgy leather sofas. The observation telescopes along the windows are a fun way of seeing the city in closer detail.

Dining and relaxing are of course top of anyone's agenda on a weekend hotel getaway. The Spa offers an extensive range of treatments in individual and couple's treatment rooms. Guests can choose from massages, facials, body and beauty treatments in the vast two-level space. Choosing our own blended oil for



The Reverie Saigon's lobby.

our aromatherapy massage was a nice touch, as was the platter of fresh fruit and ginger tea that awaited us post-treatment.

With five in-house restaurants and bars, guests aren't short of options to wine and dine. The usual breakfast and dinner buffets are served at Cafe Cardinal which has a decidedly French-style menu with a number of Vietnamese and Asian detours. The Royal Pavilion captures the essence of Cantonese fine dining well, although guests from Hong Kong have likely seen better. When such great food can be had for next to nothing from street vendors and small hole-in-the-walls throughout the city, the hotel's restaurants don't quite hit the spot. As hard as it is to drag ourselves away from inside its luxurious four walls, the best food was had on the streets below.

What to do in Ho Chi Minh

The War Remnants Museum is a sobering experience and an important stop on any itinerary of Ho Chi Minh. The museum goes into great detail, explaining the causes and horrifying consequences of the 30-year-long Vietnam war. Photographs, exhibits and written memoirs pack a powerful punch in teaching future generations about a significant part of Vietnam's past.

The **Cu Chi Tunnels** are a unique - if claustrophobic - tourist attraction that allow visitors to experience the conditions faced by soldiers who used the extensive tunnel network to move around undetected. A couple of hours by bus outside the main city, the site comprises over 100km of tunnels with a small section - widened and supported with concrete - open to visitors.

With its wide boulevards and grand French colonial architecture, essential stops around the city include a visit to **Reunification Palace**, infamous for images of the tank crashing through the front gates during the fall of the city in 1975. One of the most interesting sections to visit is the basement war command room. **The Central Post Office** might be one of the most remarkable places to send a postcard in the world. This late 19th century French-designed building is still a functioning post office and has retained its intricately designed marble floors and telephone boxes. Just next door is the **Notre Dame Cathedral** constructed in the late 19th century. Featuring two long spires reaching over 60 metres tall, the Cathedral still holds masses every Sunday. **S**



The Reunification Palace.



The Notre Dame Cathedral.

Find out more

For more details of The Reverie Saigon, visit www.thereveriesaiagon.com