

GETAWAYS

SCAVENGER HUNTS

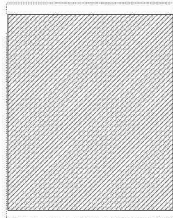
Colorful, culinary-driven adventures are meeting the ever-growing demand of personalized custom experiences—and the star of the show is chef.

by Alix Strauss



Fresh-caught lionfish seasoned and served. *Opposite, clockwise from top:* Secret Bay's villas are hidden among lush vegetation; infinity pools offer mountain-peak views; open-air villas feature sustainably sourced hardwoods; sparing pesky but tasty lionfish for dinner.

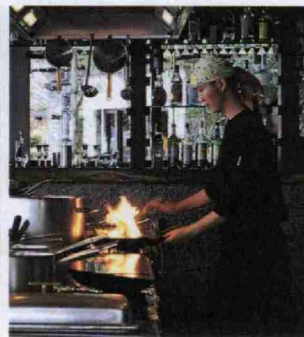
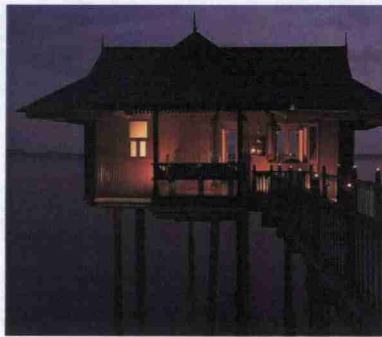
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On a 300-acre island off the west coast of Malaysia, Pangkor Laut Resort offers the choice of an overwater bungalow, a hill villa overlooking the Strait of Malacca, or a butler-staffed estate residence with a private pool. And among the many activities is a **private, half-day gastronomic journey** dubbed Chef's Kitchen Experience (\$99/person). Guests meet the chef at 9 a.m. for a short boat ride to Pangkor Island to shop

dried seafood stores and stalls selling street food, souvenirs, and coffee. They make stops to learn the trade from an authentic noodle maker and visit an anchovy facility to see how thousands are sorted and dried open air—style in a space the size of a football field. Then they catch lunch from a flat-bottomed sampan boat and recoup with the resort spa's Signature Bath House Ritual, which combines Japanese, Chinese, and Malay bathing traditions.

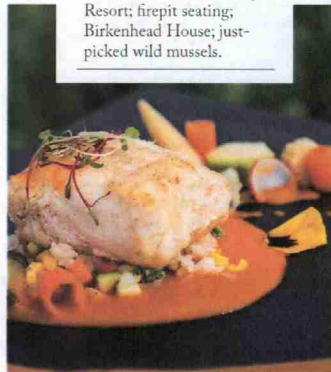
They meet again with the chef to prepare a three-course meal while learning secrets of Southeast Asian cooking then dine on sea bass in coconut sauce, stir-fried chicken with chili and cashews, and prawn tempura. Says General Manager Derrick Gooch, "The experience really immerses guests in Pangkor's local community. They witness the cooking process firsthand and get to see where the ingredients come from." pangkorlautresort.com



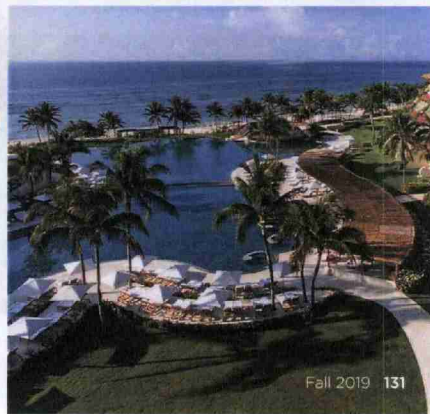
Clockwise from left: Pangkor Laut's overwater bungalow; in the chef's kitchen; a newly discovered cenote; the Grand Velas pool; fresh fish at Azul, a beachside dining venue. *Opposite, clockwise from top left:* Foraging for mushrooms; out in the forest; Barnsley Resort; firepit seating; Birkenhead House; just-picked wild mussels.

Looking for an underground rainwater pool experience? **Grand Velas** Riviera Maya, set on 206 acres of jungle and mangroves, delivers this, plus the opportunity to **dine 60 feet below the earth's surface** (priced from \$7,000 for up to eight people) in one of the destination's newly discovered cenotes. "Found throughout the Yucatan Peninsula, cenotes are natural water pools once revered by the Mayans as sacred wells," says Michel Mustiere, culinary director at the resort. "We thought it would be a unique idea to showcase these distinct geological features in an exclusive culinary experience."

To reach the special spot, guests take a two-hour car ride through the jungle and, when the road becomes too narrow, walk the last 10 minutes of the trip. They use a ladder to climb down into an underworld of stalagmites and stalactites where they can swim in crystal-clear water before having a three-course picnic of resort-made bread, cheeses, and an authentic Mexican taco bar prepared



by Mustiere. A tasting of tequila and ancestral drinks like bacanora, sotol, tuxca, and pox follows. "Guests will learn how these ancestral recipes came to be and how they are being reinvented and reintroduced to a modern palate in new cocktail recipes," says Mustiere. grandvelas.com



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For serious oenophiles, 12 hours and around \$36,000 is all that's needed to experience Grand Velas Los Cabos' Over-the-Top Wine Lovers Experience for two with two-star Michelin chef Sidney Schutte. Located between Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo, the all-inclusive property offers 300-plus ocean-view suites, each over 1,200 square feet with a private terrace and plunge pool. The package includes a three-night stay in a Grand Class suite, wine-infused spa treatments (a red wine bath and grape mud massage), and **a chance to make your own vintage**.

Participants fly two hours by private jet from the resort to the burgeoning wine country Valle de Guadalupe on the

northern tip of the Baja Peninsula. Led by vintner Don Pedro Poncelis Jr., the private tour covers three wineries, with six varietal tastings at each. Sip Gran Ricardo at Monte Xanic; Gran Amado, Sombrero, and Grimau at Viñas de Garza; and Vino de Piedra and Espuma de Piedra at Casa de Piedra. The final destination allows guests to make their own custom blend from a variety of vintages and varietals. A multicourse tasting menu by Schutte is served among the grape vines at a table for two. "We modeled our wine getaway after the most exclusive ones in France," says Poncelis Jr. "But this is unique because it is to Mexico's lesser-known but highly regarded wine region in Ensenada." grandvelas.com •



Clockwise from top: Grand Velas Los Cabos; the Grand Class suite with an oceanfront view; an oyster dish; two-star Michelin chef Sidney Schutte.

