



# VOGUE

## travel special

Right: Angkor Thom, part of the Angkor Wat temple complex



### ADVENTURE

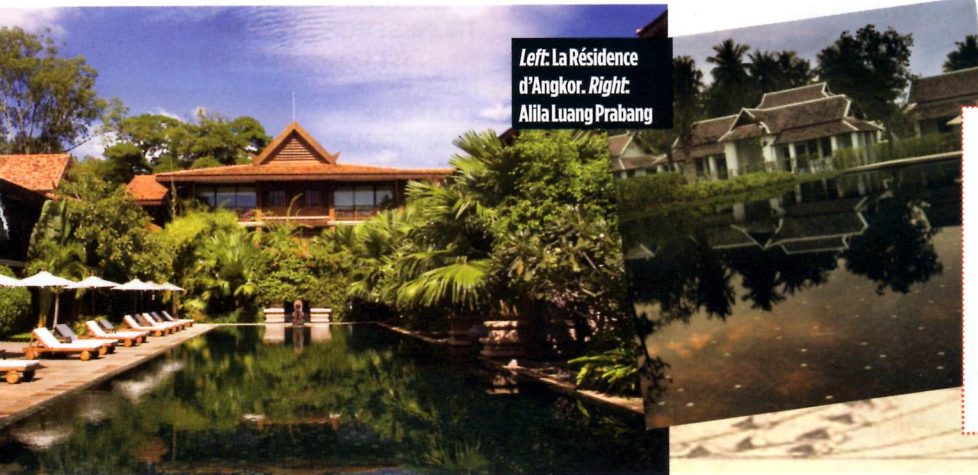
# INDOCHINA

Charlotte Sinclair delights in the fabled region's gentle approach to luxury travel

It is a truth of travel that where backpackers lead, big resorts follow – and not always with subtle consequences. The effect of traveller-led tourism on Phuket and Koh Samui, for instance, has rendered mixed results, with hotels hustling for space on overcrowded beaches. Lessons seem to have been learnt in Indochina, that storied area of south-east Asia, once under French rule and comprising Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and the hippie trail of Shangri-La. Big hotels are queuing up to make their imprint, eager to capitalise on the countries' quiet charm. But, so far, their approach has been cautious – luxury tourism is relatively new here, not least in Cambodia where the Khmer Rouge crippled the country's infrastructure. History echoes loudly in Indochina – every city has a story, and not always a good one. But savvy new hotels are making a virtue of this fascinating

past, prioritising a sense of place that has much in common with the ideals of those early Shangri-La travellers. Luang Prabang in Laos is a ridiculously pretty Unesco-protected town of temples, monks and French bakeries, hugging the Mekong. **Alila Luang Prabang** (Alilahotels.com) has 23 villas, many with private pools, and all with gardens. It used to be a detention centre (yes, that is a watchtower rising above your room), but shutters, wood floors and ceiling fans lend the place plenty of modern colonial cool. **Amantaka** (Luxuryexplorer.com), a new Aman opening, is housed in a former colonial hospital. Restful greys, blues and wood tones dominate the rooms, while a giant pool offers respite from the heat. Cross over into Cambodia and the grubby-glamorous town of Siem Reap, the hop-off point for Angkor Wat, the lodestar of

temple complexes. **Hôtel de la Paix**, (Hoteldelapaixangkor.com) is a sleek, art deco haven for temple-fatigued visitors. Rooms are minimalist but soothing, all white walls and silk cushions, and there's a spa, a restaurant and an art space. **La Résidence d'Angkor** (Residencedangkor.com) has undergone a refurbishment. The rooms have been spruced up, and the gardens landscaped – a jungle of palms shades a jade-green pool. Dark wood is the theme here, as is water – the reception is reached via a walkway that appears to float above a pool. Aman Resorts, not known for doing things by halves, opened **Amansara** (Luxuryexplorer.com) a few years ago in a former royal residence. Fabulous Sixties architecture lends a modish edge to the slate and glass serenity. What to wear for sundowners at the rooftop bar? A shirtdress from **Wanderlust** (Wanderlustcambodia.com) boutique in Siem Reap. For a honeymoon, consider **Song Saa** (Songsaa.com), a Maldives-style resort located over two islands in the Gulf of Thailand. Due to open later this year, the driftwood-furnished villas will be of the over-the-water variety, and there will be a smattering of romantic tree houses in the jungle. Tie in a trip to **Vietnam** and the Six Senses resort **Con Dao** (Sixsenses.com) in the Con Dao archipelago. The island, now a marine reserve, was the site of a prison complex, though there's nothing punitive about this resort, a series of modernist villas backed by mountains and overlooking a sweeping beach reminiscent of Queensland's finest.



Left: La Résidence d'Angkor. Right: Alila Luang Prabang

## STOP PRESS

THE FAMOUS TUSCAN BEACH HOTEL, **IL PELLICANO** – THE HOLIDAY HAUNT OF THE PRIVILEGED AND PULCHRITUDINOUS SINCE THE SIXTIES – IS CELEBRATED IN PICTURES BY SLIM AARONS, JOHN SWOPE AND JUERGEN TELLER AND WORDS BY BOB COLACELLO, BRONWYN COSGRAVE AND ROBERTO SCIO. HOTEL IL PELLICANO (RIZZOLI, £40)