

BEST OF SINGAPORE off the beaten track



Singapore offers many a hidden treasure for those wanting a fruitful escape from the well trodden path. Whether you're looking for retail therapy, culinary delights or some cultural inspiration, Jean Qingwen Loo has the low-down.

Privé

Located on Keppel Island, Singapore's only privately owned island, Privé is definitely a hidden gem. This sophisticated, yet relaxed waterfront venue offers an 88-seater fine-dining restaurant, a bakery café and outdoor bar all under one roof. Under top Australian chef Tony Bilson, the restaurant presents a signature menu of steaks, roasts, seafood and pastas that won't disappoint. The 150-seat alfresco Gastrobar, boasts signature bites like bacon-wrapped scallops and a range of unusual cocktails like the starfruit martini. And unlike most other cafés, the beauty of casual dining at the Bakery Café is that it opens till midnight, with delicious snack options such as the gourmet burger with a hand-chopped Wagyu beef patty covered in deep fried onions.

"The common thread between the three outlets is that they're all here for you to enjoy a unique lifestyle experience," says restaurateur Michel Lu, who also owns the fashionable downtown establishments Hacienda, Cicada and Superfamous.

2 Keppel Bay Vista, Marina at Keppel Bay. The restaurant opens Tuesday to Sunday from 12pm till 3pm and 6.30pm to midnight. The Bakery Café is open daily from 9am till midnight.

Mimolette

Mimolette is a breath of fresh air. A charming black and white colonial house nestled amidst lush untouched greenery, surrounded by towering trees without a single high-rise building on the horizon, complete with horses from the neighbouring riding club trotting through fields of green – that's Mimolette. Serving new American fare in a crisp-white, stylish dining room, the menu features dishes such as seared cod, slow cook roasted lamb rack and American Angus beef tenderloin. If you're visiting for its popular brunch, feast on treats like Nutella and banana crepes, eggs Benedict and its famous donuts and scones. 55 Fairways Drive; open 11am to 3pm and 6pm to 11pm, Tuesday to Friday. Weekend brunch 10am to 3pm, 6pm to 11pm on Saturday.



Front Row

Housed in a 1950s three-storey shophouse set against a backdrop of modern steel skyscrapers known as "the hill", Front Row is a concept store that promotes international progressive fashion labels and young upcoming Asian designers. It stocks women's and men's apparel from contemporary, progressive international fashion brands and is the exclusive stockist in Singapore for A.P.C., Cosmic Wonder, United Bamboo and Woods & Woods brands. The third floor houses convertible spaces that have been used for private fashion collection viewing, art exhibitions, fashion shoots and private events. "In a fashion show, the people in the front row get the best treatment and the best seats in the house," says Ann. "This connotes our service philosophy — to service our customers well and be the leading store to showcase cult, progressive fashion labels."

5 Ann Siang Road; open 12pm to 8pm, Monday to Saturday. For more information, visit www.frontrowsingapore.com or call 6224 5501.

Wild Oats Bar

Set in a charming colonial mansion amidst a sprawling garden on Emily Hill, Wild Oats bar has an intimate and chilled ambience. A wide selection of drinks include old and new world wines, local and international beers and cocktails. The signature 'Emily Royale', a strawberry cheesecake shot and the blueberry margarita are big hits. There is also an array of finger food like the Parmesan cheese wings with blue cheese or chicken rice-styled chilli sauce and mini burgers.

"Many bars in Singapore are growing bigger with very loud music that makes conversation impossible, but Wild Oats remains as an alternative choice where people can have a drink, be away from it all and catch up," says bar manager Mitchell Noble.

Wild Oats, Emily Hill, 11 Upper Wilkie Road; open 6pm to midnight, Tuesday to Sunday.



Post-Museum

Located in two 1920s shop-houses in Little India, this cultural space consists of the Show Room, an exhibition space, Food #03, a contemporary vegetarian café and Back Room, a multi-purpose venue. It also houses artist studios and offices. The activities at Post-Museum cover areas from art, design and architecture to work by non-governmental organisations. "As curators, we need to unlearn what we know about art and culture and engage it with new and fresh eyes," says Woon Tien Wei, founder of Food #03 and a

member of the curatorial collective behind the museum. The museum's location also makes it easier to communicate these works and events to a broader public from the art audience to the migrant worker community. Visitors can expect new experimental works and old projects with a new twist. "This openness allows us to take Post-Museum and its programme in unexpected directions and often results in very pleasant surprises," says Woon. 107+109 Rowell Rd

Xi Yan

Xi Yan (banquet of joy) puts a gutsy imaginative face to modern Chinese cuisine. Tucked away in a quiet spot in Tanjong Pagar, having dinner at Xi Yan is like eating at an old friend's house. The restaurant, decorated with a wide collection of contemporary paintings and ceramics, has an unpretentious feel that encourages diners to feast and make merry. Celebrity chef Jacky Yu, who started Xi Yan in Hong Kong during the late 1990s, wanted to reinterpret Chinese cuisine by integrating food from Cantonese to Teochew and drew upon the diverse influences of Asian culinary cultures. The result is a range of exciting dishes like the Sichuan salivating chicken and golden roe glutinous rice with crab.

"We serve food that diners can identify with, feel compelled to own and even put forward suggestions for us to explore," says partner Thomas Choong. "This is where ideas are constantly challenged, reinvented and created."

38A Craig Road. Dining at Xi Yan is strictly by reservations only. Open 12pm to 3pm and 7pm to midnight everyday. 📞



my favourite escape



The Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence, notable for the famous dome designed by Filippo Brunelleschi.

Mr Chow Kok Fong, Chief Executive Officer of Changi Airports International, shares his experiences in Tuscany and Umbria, his favourite holiday destinations.

"I've been to Central Italy, specifically Tuscany and Umbria, around a dozen times. You can access the region by a two and a half hour drive from Rome or fly directly to Florence or Pisa and then pan out into the surrounds.

What is great about the place is that you can alternate your schedule between spending a couple of days in cities like Florence or Siena and then head for the hills and back. A city like Florence, of course, offers an enormous wealth of museums, shopping and fine-dining. Then you get to a small village or town like Montalcino where you basically immerse into a rustic backdrop, your whole body switches to a mode that celebrates the tranquillity and earthiness of community life.

The cuisine is great because much of the fare is unpretentious and always relies on the freshest of seasonal produce. The region is renowned for its olive oil, truffles, hams and salamis and any dish that is based on these ingredients will be a treat. Add to this the various strains of micro-regional influences and you get

a range of quite distinctive cooking styles and flavours.

A pilgrimage to Enoteca Pinchiorri at the Via Ghibellina in Florence for dinner is truly a dining experience befitting its three Michelin star rating. The fare is a merger of Tuscan and French-inspired creations. I have been well received by the owner on the few occasions I have been there. On my second visit – some four years after the first – he presented me with a bottle of wine from his cellar, so I guess that is one way to capture a diner's loyalty.

One year, driving around Chianti, I stumbled on a small restaurant, Osteria del Vicario located in Certaldo Alto. This restaurant is housed in a 13th century monastery and tables on the balcony command great views of the surrounding countryside.

This is a region that has been blessed with a disproportionate abundance of truly beautiful landscape and rich history and set amidst an earthy pace of life, which makes for a dramatic contrast for someone who lives in a fast moving place like Singapore." 