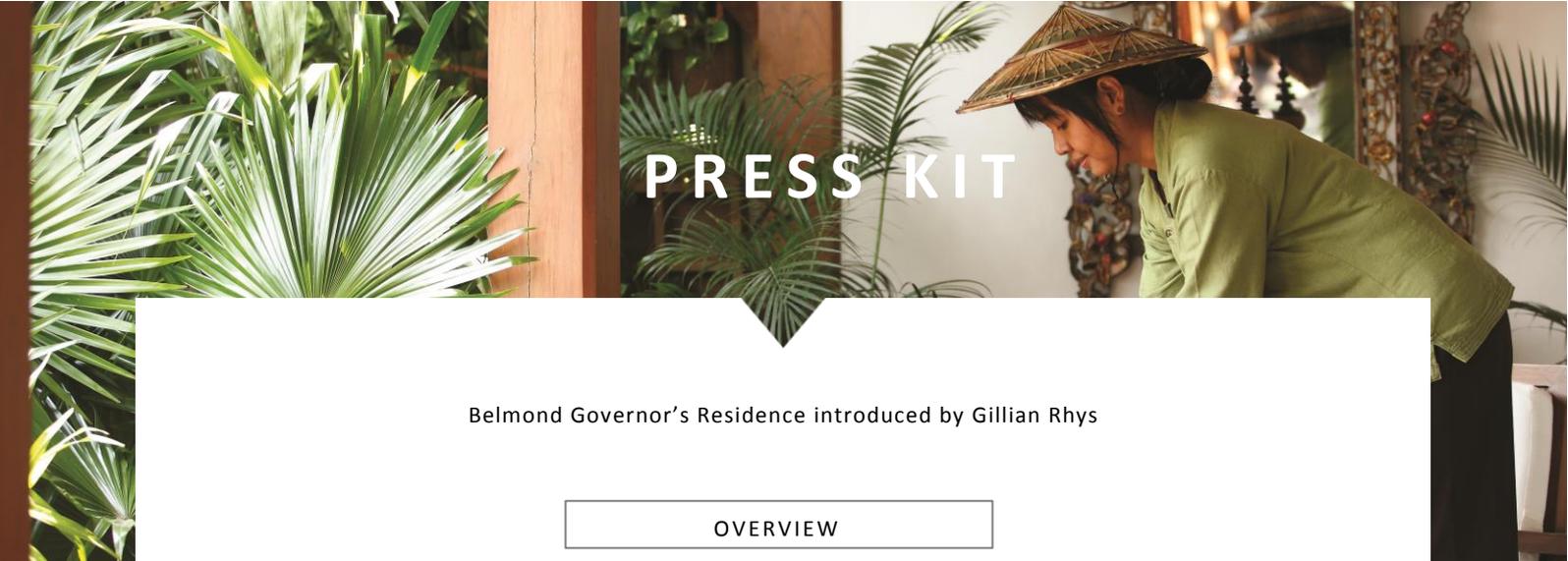




BELMOND
GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE
YANGON



PRESS KIT

Belmond Governor's Residence introduced by Gillian Rhys

OVERVIEW

Myanmar may be one of the largest countries in Southeast Asia but it is among the least known travel-wise. Bordered by Thailand, China and India and with a generous coastline edging the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, in recent years it has begun to open up to the outside world. Belmond was a pioneer of luxury tourism in the country, with the launch of the Belmond Road to Mandalay cruise ship on the Ayeyarwady River in 1995 and the acquisition of Belmond Governor's Residence hotel in Yangon a year later.

Yangon, the former capital, is the starting point for most travellers' visits to Myanmar. Among the copious signs along the road from the airport is one that reads "Welcome to Myanmar - the Golden Country" – particularly appropriate for a land that's teeming with gilded pagodas.

As they enter the town visitors discover immaculate public gardens, striking stupas and a scattering of colonial buildings, some of which are now being salvaged and restored. One remaining gem is Bogyoke Aung San Market, formerly known as Scotts Market. Here, locals shop for fabrics and food (and visitors for jade, gems and gold). As the name suggests, it is full of Aung San Su Kyi paraphernalia. The likeness of The Lady is emblazoned on T-shirts, mugs, bootleg DVDs and more.

The best time to visit the temples is in the early morning, when visitors can catch a glimpse of local life as Yangon starts to stir. Men and women of all ages perform their morning exercises in unison at 6am in front of the Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon's most famous site. Others can be seen jogging towards Kandawgyi Lake, a serene expanse of water bordered by prettily manicured gardens.

Buses start to fill up with office workers; the men wearing traditional longyi (long skirts) and the women with thanaka - a cream-coloured paste prepared from tree bark – on their faces to protect their skin from the sun. Many of them are keen to talk to visitors, to find out where they are from and what they think of their country.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The teakwood mansion that makes up the main building of Belmond Governor's Residence was built in the 1920s by the Armenian brothers Samuel and Carapiet Balthazar, wealthy merchants who were also behind the Balthazar Building in Bank Street, downtown Yangon. The mansion was sold in 1952 to the Government in order to house the heads of the Karenni (now Kaya) States and became the official residence of the governor. In the 1990s the building

was converted into a luxury hotel and became part of Belmond (previously Orient-Express Hotels) in 2006.

Hidden away among a cluster of embassies in a leafy quarter of Yangon, Belmond Governor's Residence is a luscious oasis where the arrival of guests is heralded by the "welcome gong". They then pass along a teak walkway, across a serene pool and through tranquil tropical gardens to the main building - a 1920s mansion that's all wraparound verandas with gingerbread-style trim.

Shady terraces dotted with rattan sofas and the inviting swimming pool lined by steamer chairs and red Burmese parasols offer respite from the heat of the day. The elegant, cosy Kipling bar, named after writer Rudyard Kipling who travelled extensively in and wrote prolifically about Myanmar, is a must for a cooling aperitif.

The mansion, which houses two restaurants, is filled with teak wood carvings and dotted with eye-catching artwork. The pieces are curated by River Gallery, the country's leading art gallery, which specialises in contemporary Myanmar artists such as the popular painter Khin Zaw Latt. Off the lobby there's a fabulous boutique selling artworks and other locally made homeware.

Guest rooms are in a separate building reached through a courtyard with lotus pools. All are beautifully decorated with teak wood and rich fabrics; the Governor's Rooms are the most spacious—some with small balconies—and come with a daybed and window seat.

Many guests stay at Belmond Governor's Residence before or after taking river cruises aboard Belmond Road to Mandalay or Belmond Orcaella.

FEATURES

Temples and Pagodas

Yangon's most famous landmark, the Shwedagon Pagoda, is a mere ten minutes away from the hotel. An impressive, gold leaf- and jewel-topped pagoda that dominates the city, up close it's a dazzling mix of marble terraces, gilded lions and Buddha statues.

Wise guests visit at dawn before the heat and crowds get too much or wait until the cool of the evening. People watching is as fascinating as the towering, gold-leafed, diamond-studded stupa itself. The Burmese are deeply religious and a visit to a temple - often to add yet more gold leaf on to pagodas and statues - is part of daily life.

The Shwedagon is the country's holiest and most magnificent shrine. Dotted around the central pagoda are monuments representing days of the week. Devotees offer flowers and miniature parasols according to the day of the week on which they were born. Many spend the whole day here, bringing their children and eating together.

The scene is similar at Chaukhtatgyi reclining Buddha, a short drive away. Groups of women sit on the floor in front of the giant statue with a spread of tiffin boxes before them, chatting and tucking into a mid-morning meal. The Buddha is one of the biggest in Southeast Asia and has remarkable etchings on the soles of its huge feet.

Travel Like a Local

A complimentary three-hour city tour with a ride on Yangon's circular train to Hledan local market is offered every Monday exclusively for hotel guests. Participants are invited to don a longyi (traditional wrap-around skirt) and slippers and are taught basic words and greetings in Burmese.

The circular train, made up of open carriages dating back to colonial times, loops around Yangon, offering fantastic glimpses into daily city life. At the market guests can wander around hundreds of food stalls before returning to the hotel by a choice of transport: public bus or trishaw – a three-wheeled local vehicle.

Myanmar Cooking Class

Guests can tour a local market and choose exotic ingredients such as yard-long beans, okra, banana blossoms and pickled tea leaves, with a Belmond Governor's Residence chef before heading back to the hotel for a cookery class. Myanmar cuisine is influenced by the surrounding countries of Thailand, Laos, China and India. Standout dishes benefitting from

Myanmar's wealth of local produce include its thoke (salads), butter beans fried with garlic, banana blossoms with pork and - Myanmar's national dish - lephet thoke, fermented tea leaves with chopped tomatoes. Meat and vegetable curries are also popular. The Belmond Governor's Residence chef will show guests how to balance flavours in the Myanmar way with a mix of salads and curries, cold and hot, mild and spicy.

PEOPLE

Eddie Teh, General Manager

Eddie Teh has expanded his role with Belmond in Myanmar since he became General Manager of Belmond Road to Mandalay cruises in 2012 and added Belmond Orcaella cruises in 2013. In October 2016 he was promoted to become General Manager, Hotels & Cruises in Myanmar, which includes his new role as General Manager of Belmond Governor's Residence, Yangon's colonial-style landmark hotel.

Originally from Malaysia, Eddie grew up in George Town, Penang. After completing an apprenticeship in hospitality, he gained experience in several Southeast Asian hotels. From there he travelled to Sydney and instantly fell in love with the harbour city so decided to call it home. In 2000, while working as a Regional Director of Food and Beverage, he was named Food & Beverage employee of the year by the Australian Hotels Association.

Eddie has witnessed the transformation of Myanmar as the country has opened up to the outside world. As he notes "It's an exciting time to be in Yangon, being part of so many changes. But it is wonderful to be able to 'come home' to the old-world charm of Belmond Governor's Residence where time has stood still, untouched by the city's growing hustle and bustle. It is such a delight every time I step into the hotel. Suddenly my mood is uplifted by the greenery all around. The sound of car horns is replaced by singing birds and it's hard to resist diving straight into the large pool while making my way to my beautiful office!

"Living in Yangon has never been better for the locals and more convenient for visitors. The restaurant and bar scene has really burst into life over the last 18 months and offers tastes from around the world. And for adventurous diners, the local street food stalls are still very much part of the cuisine. There are new things to experience everywhere, from department stores to the airport. But while the pace hots up, I have a lovely place to escape to where life seems to slow down and our guests can enjoy the pleasures of the past."

Khin Khin Soe, Chief Gardener

Khin Khin Soe was born in Myanmar and studied mathematics at university. She began her professional career working for the Government in the Garden & Playgrounds Department where she had an opportunity to learn about landscaping. During her time there she rose to taking charge of Yangon's public gardens and was awarded the Mayor's Cup in Green Garden Maintenance.

In 2004, Khin Khin joined Belmond Governor's Residence as Garden Supervisor and was promoted to Chief Gardener in 2009. She created the verdant landscaping, organic garden and lotus pools and cares for the hotel's resident animals including two peacocks and geese.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENVIRONMENT

Belmond Governor's Residence works closely with two Food & Beverage programmes for the disadvantaged. My Red Elephant trains young people, in conjunction with the Mary Chapman School for the Deaf. A three-month cookery course for the hearing impaired at the school trains students for work at hotels and restaurants. Belmond Governor's Residence currently employs two of the students full time in the kitchen and a further two are enrolled on a training programme at the hotel.

Belmond Governor's Residence also works with Shwe Sa Bwe, a restaurant training centre in Yangon. It offers Myanmar people of modest means living in remote areas the opportunity to train, free of charge, as chefs or front of house staff. They then go on to take up jobs in the Food & Beverage industry. There are currently three employees at the hotel who have studied at Shwe Sa Bwe.