

of Greg's five o'clock shadow, Jay appeared again, triumphantly bearing another silk handkerchief, this time a burgundy and navy one. Greg much preferred this one, said so, and Jay went off beaming with pleasure. What a man. Double result.

Greg reported to me later that Ashkan, the Truefitt & Hill barber from Tehran, gave him the most meticulous shave he has ever had. And then there were the eight types of after shave colognes to choose from at the end of the shave. It was a toss up between Spanish Leather and West Indian Limes. Greg emerged smelling like a West Indian aristocrat and looking 10 years younger. I kid you not, hand on heart.

THE REMAINS OF THE DAY

We hurried back up to our suite to get ready for our spa therapy in the Art Nouveau-inspired rooms of the Majestic Spa. Earlier we had seen guests sunning languidly by the spa pool from our suite windows.

I walked into our bedroom and saw the fruits of the lady butler's organisational skills. My suitcase was empty, its contents distributed where they belonged in the suite. Every piece of clothing hung up in the wardrobe, my underwear beautifully folded in the drawer, my shoes put out by the suite door, next to each shoe bag, my toiletries laid out by the bathroom sink, and my Apple devices and jewellery put neatly on the dressing table. It took my breath away. Greg pursed his lips, rueing the fact he had said no.



THE TEA LOUNGE

MALAY HOMEOPATHY

We sat in the exquisite waiting lounge of the Spa later, admiring the way the Glaswegian designer, Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Willow Rooms had been incorporated into this large space. I sipped my tea while I popped into the Pink Jambu boutique, trying to decide between a silk kaftan or a silk clutch bag to buy.

As a child I remember Noriah rubbing a traditional ointment into my brother's chest whenever he had a cold. Sometimes she would pound herbs and wrap them in a muslin bag to steam. This never failed to clear my brother Jeff's sinuses as a boy. At the Majestic Spa we decided on the pretty epic Malaya Golden Chersonese session. Two-and-a-half hours of pampering inspired by Victorian traveller Isabella Bird's memoirs of the British Malaya and its flora and fauna. I'd never read the book, although I'd seen copies of it many times during my adolescent forays into Times Bookshop in Penang. Never mind, I said, read Bird later, enjoy the massage today.

I thought the Malay herb scrub and steam for Greg would evoke these exotic scents of my childhood. I was getting a Papaya Coconut scrub before immersing into a Lime Blossom bath. If we both hadn't had high tea, we might have been tempted to taste some of these delicious sounding unguents being applied for beauty's sake. Banana and honey seemed just too good to put on our heads.

THE CHAUFFEUR, OUR DINNER AND ROCK HUDSON

We had mentioned in passing to Jay, our butler, that we were going to dine out that evening. 'Have you made reservations? Would you like a

car to take you both there?' he asked politely. These were all questions which had not occurred to our spa-pampered and addled brains. Jay then passed us a cell phone on which we needed only to press '2', and we would be connected to him to arrange for the chauffeur to come back for us after dinner. We pressed '2' while in the car like two excited kids, and the words 'Butler' lit up on the screen! How shall we ever get used to life as ordinary mortals post-Majestic stay?

After dinner that evening, we sneaked into the screening room to watch an old black-and-white movie, curled up on the leather reclining armchairs. The beauty of them looping one classic film after another is that you come in at the middle of one movie and you can stay until the next if you like, but every cinematic experience will be different for you. We caught the tail end of the 1939 Cary Grant movie, *Only Angels Have Wings*, with a young Rita Hayworth making her first major film appearance.



SUITE LIVING ROOM

HOW A HAINANESE BREAKFASTS

Our butler had suggested we try a Hainanese breakfast served in our suite. Sharp at 9am two lady butlers brought up trays of toast sandwiching delicious kaya, coconut custard perfumed with pandanus leaves. I didn't have to show Greg how to dunk the toast into our strong black English Breakfast tea; he must have been a Hainan in another life. 'This is a milder sort of breakfast than what I've seen Hainanese uncles have,' I said. 'What? A fry up with Chinese sausages?' he joked. 'A pint of warm Guinness and a raw egg!!' I said. 'There must some Irish in a Hainan,' he smiled.

Later that afternoon we both felt giddy with the romance of a planter's life. What would a planter like my father do after a long week's toil in the fields when he came to the Majestic in the weekend? That was easy – a game of pool at the Smokehouse and a stiff drink. I ordered a *gin pahit*, gin and bitters, a drink Somerset Maugham mentions in his novel *Footprints in the Jungle*. Greg went for the jugular with the 'Code 55', named after the Colt 55 in a story about a jealous wife, a cheating husband and the Majestic bar in the 70s.

That afternoon after checking out, we spent three-quarters of an hour in the Reading Room. I re-read some of Fauconnier's *The Soul of Malaya* and came across this Malay *pantun* which I translated to my husband:

*Jikalau tidak kerana abang
Masa-kan dating adik kemari.*

If it wasn't because of you, my love,
I would never have ventured here.

The elegant Majestic Wing, the nostalgia of life on a Malaysian estate, my father's work as a planter and my mother's skill as the hostess extraordinaire of garden parties equivalent of Jay Gatsby's – they have all brought me to the love of my life in faraway London.

For more information and reservations, visit majestickl.com or call +603 2785 8000.