



HERITAGE, REPLATED

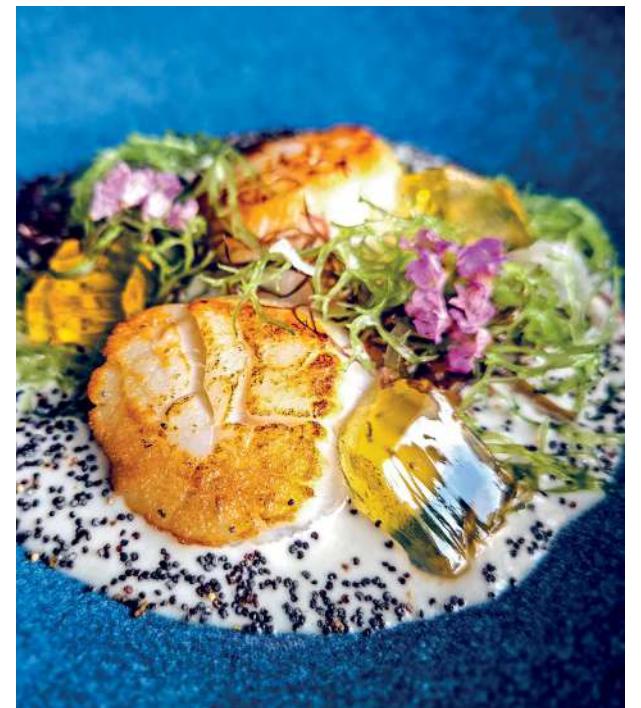


Above: Southern golden thread marigold at Khaan, Bangkok. Top left: Lamai Garden in Vietnam. Bottom left: Chef Suhalmi Tasir in ATAS, Malaysia.



Traditional cuisines are seeing an haute-dining resurgence in Southeast Asia, where chefs are pairing time-tested flavours with new-age approaches.

By Jeremy Tran



Top right: Chef Thanathip Chusawan tames the flames at Wok Wok, Pattaya. Bottom right: Enticing scallops at Table by Sandy Keung, Hong Kong.



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RECENTLY AS 10 years ago, I believed that fine dining was synonymous with sophisticated European cuisine. This meant the silky richness of French sauces, the earthy aroma of shaved Italian truffles—flavours that felt a world away from the food of my upbringing. But today, across Southeast Asia, the most exciting dining rooms no longer chase caviar from the Caspian or foie gras from France. Instead, they're looking into family kitchens, local markets, nostalgic flavours, and the farms and forests just beyond their doorsteps.

Heritage recipes are being reborn with modern imagination: a humble noodle dish presented like a jewel, a forgotten wild mushroom elevated to star status on a tasting menu, and a childhood dessert transformed with fine-dining finesse. From Bali to Bangkok, Hong Kong to Ho Chi Minh City, a generation of homegrown chefs is reclaiming their roots with pride and creative fire.

One moment that crystallised this shift for me unfolded at The Long Table by John Hardy in Bali. Chef Tomy Saputra's Sumatran grilled beef fillet arrived glistening and aromatic, its tender flesh marinated in tamarind and fermented soy

—an ode to his home island. Dining there, and at other heritage-led restaurants, has felt like journeying through memory and place. These experiences allowed me to appreciate familiar flavours with renewed curiosity and to find wonder in what has always been there.

I'm not alone in feeling this pull. My conversations with food lovers and chefs alike echo a shared hunger to rediscover what is local, seasonal, and forgotten. The Future of Food: Asia Pacific 2025 report by Marriott International affirms this culinary awakening, casting a spotlight on heritage revival, hyper-local sourcing, and conscious cuisine as the defining forces shaping the region's next gastronomic chapter. Intrigued, I set out to step behind the pass to meet the chefs firing up this flavourful renaissance.

HYPER-LOCAL AND TERROIR-FIRST CUISINE

Heritage cuisine often begins with the land itself, showcasing native ingredients—the herbs, grains, fruits and spices that have nourished communities for centuries. This is especially evident in northern Thailand. In Chiang Mai, a narrow staircase above a gelato shop leads me to the Michelin-selected

COURTESY OF NÉN DANANG, OPPOSITE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF BLACKITCH ARTISAN KITCHEN (2); COURTESY OF LOCUS NATIVE FOOD LAB (2)



restaurant **Blackitch Artisan Kitchen**, where chef Phanuphon "Black" Bulsuwan refuses imported ingredients.

Everything he uses comes from Thai soil, rivers or forests. One month, the spotlight might be a wild betel leaf curry; another, river prawns from the nearby Tapi River. Shelves of ferments line the space. "Seasonality isn't a restraint but a gift," he tells me. "When wild herbs appear after the first rain, it forces us to listen to nature's rhythm."

Three hours north, chef Kongwuth "Kong" Chaiwongkachon sees his role at **Locus Native Food Lab**, at Tatvani Estate, as a bridge between biodiversity and the plate. His menus move in two directions: traditional *khantoke* meals served on wooden trays, and contemporary reinterpretations of those same flavours. "Protecting biodiversity begins with how we source, cook and present food," he tells me. "We need to reimagine traditions in a way that resonates now, while never losing sight of their origins."





On Vietnam's central coast, **Nén Danang** has become a standard-bearer for this terroir-first philosophy. Awarded the country's first Michelin Green Star, chef Summer Le sources 99 percent of her ingredients locally. "We reduce imports, lower our carbon footprint, and stay rooted in the biodiversity of our land," she says. Forgotten plants and humble vegetables take centre stage, and even eggshells become noodles. "Guests arrive expecting flavour," she says, "but [we want them to] leave thinking about making the most use of everyday ingredients in different ways."

In Bali, **Begawan Biji** glows with the warmth of live fire, surrounded by regenerative rice fields. Chef Andrew Fahludza layers up Balinese, Javanese, Chinese and Dutch influences into dishes like pork chop with chilli sauce from North Sulawesi province or snake-gourd curry. With much of his inspiration coming from his mother's cooking, he wants locals to feel a sense of pride and belonging through his meals, and visitors to discover "the depth, diversity, and warmth of Indonesian food culture." Profits fund conservation and regenerative farming programs.

CLASSICS WITH A TWIST

While some chefs root their cooking firmly in the land, others reinterpret heritage through weaving together market fare, family recipes, and royal cuisine into contemporary culinary art.

It's fitting that Thailand's first recipient of the Michelin Guide Young Chef Award, chef Sujira "Aom" Pongmorn, is at the forefront of the region's shift toward "story-driven gastronomy." She curates an 11-course odyssey at **Khaan** in Bangkok that feels like opening a gilded book of Thai history. Her *goong chae nam pla* swaps fish sauce for fermented



FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF QUENINO; COURTESY OF LONG TABLE BY JOHN HARDY; COURTESY OF WOK WOK



northern Thai soybeans, adding umami depth, while her roasted-duck red curry is paired with pineapple, cinnamon-braised pear, and apple mille-feuille—a homage to Bangkok's old trading quarters, where Thai and Chinese flavours intertwine.

Two hours south in Pattaya, **Wok Wok** at Andaz Jomtien Beach sees chef Thanathip Chusawan reimagining centuries-old *hor mok*—a steamed seafood curry once reserved for royals—in a young coconut shell, and refining *khao tang* with riceberry crisps and a silky coconut-pork-shrimp dip. "The challenge is balancing authenticity with accessibility," he explains. It is northern Thai heritage cuisine made "resort elegant."

Malaysia's revival comes alive at **Atas** at The Ruma in Kuala Lumpur. Chef Suahalmi Tasir's *ayam percik* preserves charcoal-grilled flavours but reappears as a delicate roulade, while *bubur cha-cha* becomes a textural parfait. "It's about promoting Malaysian flavours in a way that resonates with both locals and travellers," he says. "Tradition and modernity don't clash here. They work together."

At **The Long Table by John Hardy**, the storied jewellery company transforms communal lunches into an elegant (and educational) dining experience. Chef Saputra reimagines *marandang*, the braising technique behind *rendang*, in his signature *iga bakar*—short ribs glazed with sambal-infused sauce. "With more than 17,000 islands, Indonesian cuisine is far too vast to be defined by a single flavour," he says. "Our goal is to curate based

on sustainability, harvest rhythms, and the stories each ingredient carries."

CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON A PLATE

Cosmopolitan hubs like Singapore and Hong Kong have existed for centuries as cultural crossroads, with culinary traditions reflecting blended heritage. Some of my favourite chefs in these cities are getting playful in diving into these melanges.

"Diversity is embedded in our DNA," says chef Kevin Wong at **Seroja** in Singapore, where he channels the Malay world through scallops charred over mangrove wood and *roti paung* soft as clouds. For Wong, sustainability is cultural stewardship: "Food is culture. By supporting growers, we preserve their craft and identity." Sitting at Seroja's 24-seat counter, you feel as if you're travelling across oceans without ever leaving your chair.

Across town, **Quenino** reflects chef Sujatha Asokan's personal story. She weaves her Malaysian, Chinese, Singaporean and Indian heritage into dishes often anchored by ginger flower, scattered through salads, sauces, even sorbets—and tattooed on her arm. "Hawker food will always be at Singapore's heart," she says, "but Southeast Asian flavours can go beyond comfort. They can be layered, expressive—even cheeky."

In Hong Kong, **Table by Sandy Keung** reframes East-meets-West as itself a "third culture." Local pork stars in char siu rice, while in-house depuration tanks ensure clean, local shellfish in a

From top left: Quenino's Indonesia Mud Crab; chef Tomy Saputra at Long Table by John Hardy; a refined version of traditional *khao tang*, Wok Wok.

city reliant on imports. Guided by what she calls Conscious Ingredient-Based Cuisine, her menus follow Traditional Chinese Medicine principles. "Seasonality is not just right for the environment," she says. "It's right for our health. We are part of our environment, after all."

SUMPTUOUS AND SUSTAINABLE

Some of Southeast Asia's most forward-thinking kitchens are rebuilding their own food system around circularity, a natural extension of sustainability and heritage preservation.

In Phuket, **Jaras** partners with WWF Thailand to turn invasive species into fine-dining ingredients. The Giant Blue Crab Curry celebrates local biodiversity with live blue crab-leg salad, jumbo-crab lump taco, and a yellow curry mousse paired with shoots from the invasive mangrove fan palm. The dish Khanom Jeen Zero-Waste Noodles is made from invasive black-shin tilapia transformed into noodles paired with southern roast curry, wild vegetables, and crisp fish skin.

Speaking of "noodles," squid noodles inspired by the northern Vietnamese dish *phở chua* are a must-try at Hanoi's **Lamai Garden**. "This dish reflects the delicate way Vietnamese people weave together fresh herbs and sweet-sour fish sauce to achieve harmony," chef Hieu Trung Tran says. Guests walk through a herb garden before settling in this Michelin Green Star-holder's dining room, and many of the ingredients come from Tran's own smallholding farm, where he and his wife raise black pigs and ducks. "If ingredients are raised with care," he adds, "they can stand proudly alongside the world's best."



COURTESY OF JARAS, OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF TALES BY CHAPTER; COURTESY OF BEGAWAN BIJI; COURTESY OF TABLE BY SANDY KEUNG



In Saigon, **Tales by Chapter** takes zero waste to new heights with a plant-based menu built around its farm in the highlands of Da Lat. Every part of every ingredient finds a purpose. Corn silk becomes tea and fuel; beets are roasted, pickled, juiced, and reborn as "zero wine." It proves that circular dining—in Vietnam or anywhere—isn't pie-in-the-sky idealistic; it's achievable and, importantly, flavourful.

I'M EAGER TO SEE where these chefs will take Southeast Asian cuisine next. They're telling their life stories through menus of fire, spice and aroma. So, for travellers chasing meaningful meals—the "food pilgrims" fuelling the US\$1.1 trillion global gastronomic tourism industry—dining at these restaurants provides an exciting taste of past and present, and a look at the sustainable food practices that will carry heritage into the future. ☺



DETAILS

HONG KONG

Table by Sandy Keung tablebysandykeung.com; Signature Series tasting menu HK\$1,499 per person.

INDONESIA

Begawan Biji Ubud, Bali. begawanbiji.com; dinner for two from Rp2,000,000. **The Long Table by John Hardy** Seminyak, Bali. johnhardybali.com; set menu Rp600,000 per person.

MALAYSIA

ATAS at The RuMa Hotel & Residences Kuala Lumpur. theruma.com; four-course set menu from RM208 per person.

SINGAPORE

Seroja seroja.sg; lunch menu S\$218 (Friday and Saturday), dinner menu S\$288 (Tuesday to Saturday).

Quenino at Artyzen Singapore. quenino.com; tasting menu from S\$200 per person.

THAILAND

Blackitch Artisan Kitchen Chiang Mai. blackitch.com; tasting menu from Bt2,590 per person. **Locus Native Food Lab** Chiang Mai. locusnativefoodlab.com; tasting menu from Bt3,000 per person. **Jaras**, at InterContinental Phuket Resort. phuket.intercontinental.com; tasting menu from Bt3,650 per person. **Khaan** Bangkok. khaanbkk.com; 11-course tasting menu from Bt4,900 per person.

Wok Wok at Andaz Pattaya Jomtien Beach. hyatt.com; dinner for two from Bt3,000.

VIETNAM

Nén Danang restaurantnen.com; tasting menu from VND2,200,000 per person. **Lamai Garden** Hanoi. lamraigarden.com; tasting menu from VND1,800,000 per person. **Tales by Chapter** Ho Chi Minh City. talessign.com; plant-based tasting menu VND1,650,000 per person.

