

## hot spots Hilton Sydney

The extreme makeover of the Hilton Sydney employed the big guns: New York-based Hong Kong darling of design Tony Chi has his fingerprints all over the interior design of the hotel's signature restaurant and cocktail bar. Add Sydney's celebrity chef to Danish royalty, Luke Mangan, and you'll find the city's A-list begging to be at the top of the two-to-four-week waiting list for a lunch reservation.

**Does it live up to the hype?** You want to get past the hype when you've spent A\$200 million (\$1.15 billion) on morphing a tired, boxy 1980s icon into a hot destination of light and space. It's a matter of personal taste: while this visitor loves the multi-coloured retro carpet on the four floors of conference and event rooms, others claim it is migraine-inducing. The Hilton "eight-hour chair", specifically designed for bored

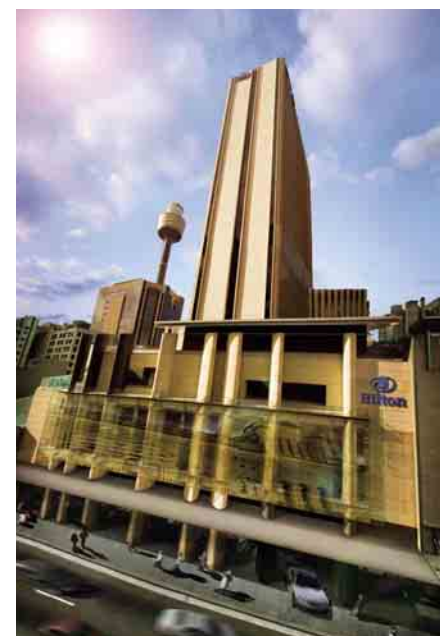
business folk sitting through yet another jargon-filled conference, is ingenious.

**What about Tony and his chi?** You'll find them in the second-floor Glass Brasserie and the Zeta Bar, which sits above it on the third, both fronted by a combined 13-metre-high glass wall. Think silver beading in military lines, draped booths, giant perfume bottles, white candles, unisex bathrooms and white leather loungers. Walls of glass overlook the historic Queen Victoria Building, which provides a pretty backdrop when lit at night.

**What's the ambience?** The barmen in Zeta are "mixologists" and hold doctorates in the fine art of combining coloured liqueurs with exotic fruit and fuel-injected alcohol. Mangan made the most of his appointment with the Hilton, touring Lyon and Paris to help devise his menu. The cuisine comes

across as clean and French and is up to the minute in flavour combinations. There is nothing stuffy here except some of the clientele, who may be in danger of becoming more menagerie than brasserie in the fight for table honours. It's best to book ahead.

**What about the rooms?** The Hilton is proud of Australia's only Bath Master service. The Ritz-Carlton in Asia has been doing it for years but it has yet to open Down Under. These bathologists, like their cousins in Zeta, have PhDs in drawing baths and combine mineral salts in many colours to soothe away jet lag. If the salts don't work, the view of the city's rooftops through your bathroom's glass wall will. Go for the signature "relaxation rooms"; they're bigger than standard and come with trimmings.



**What's the bottom line?** Rates start at A\$345 a night for a deluxe double room, including breakfast at Glass and a complimentary bottle of wine.

The Hilton Sydney is at 488 George Street, tel: 61 2 9265 6045; www.hiltonsydney.com.au. *Rachael Oakes-Ash*

## spree Kyoto

Tokyo may be the capital of Japan but Kyoto is the country's cultural and artistic heart, with traditional shops dedicated to particular crafts. Many are family owned, some having provided shoppers with a unique glimpse of history for 10 generations.

**Shoyeido** (Karasuma-dori, Nijo-agaru, Nakagyo-ku, tel: 81 75 212 5590; www.shoyeido.com) is Japan's oldest incense-making company. You'll have no problem finding the shop: just follow the delicate sandalwood fragrance to the treasure trove of incense sticks, cones, coils and wood-chips. Shoyeido's master blenders use centuries-old recipes from the Imperial Palace passed down through 12 generations of the same family. The refined incense is unique, thanks to the family's insistence on using the finest natural products and hand-preparing each blend. Exquisitely designed incense stands cost from 500 yen each (\$32.50). The uninitiated should try the Incense Trial Set (1,500 yen), which includes three sticks each of 10 different fragrances. A box of 20 sticks of the same fragrance costs 800 yen.

Look no further for Zen-like beauty than the many **Yojiya** cosmetics shops (see www.yojiya.com for locations). Elbow your way past droves of Japanese women to stock up on Yojiya's most famous product, Aburat-origami, the secret to a perfect matt complexion. The velvety oil-blotting facial paper was origin-

ally used by geishas and now holds cult status in Japan (3,360 yen for 10 booklets containing 20 sheets each). Yojiya's deep moisturising travel hand cream is an excellent buy at 400 yen.

Protect yourself from the midday sun or showers with a beautifully decorated umbrella (*wagasa*) from **Tsujikura** (Shijo-agaru, Kawaramachi-dori, Nakagyo-ku, tel: 81 75 221 4396). The bamboo and paper umbrellas are made in Kyoto by master craftsmen and are available in small sizes for children (4,000 yen) as well as vast, decorative versions worthy of a hotel foyer. Prices rise according to size and intricacy of decoration, but a medium-sized umbrella costs no more than 6,000 yen. Tsujikura also sells an impressive range of handmade paper lanterns, from traditional round items to more contemporary styles by Osamu Noguchi. Children will love the miniature toy lanterns and umbrellas, which make interesting souvenirs and cost less than 1,000 yen.

Next, head for the hallowed halls of **Miyawaki Baisen-an** (Tomino-koji, Nishi-iru, Rokkaku-dori, Nakagyo-ku, tel: 81 75 221 0439), which has been making Japanese fans since 1823. This is not a shop for the budget-conscious, with prices starting at 3,000 yen and specially decorated fans costing from several hundred thousand yen – but the quality is outstanding.

For a unique buy, visit the



Reuters

indigo-dyeing workshop of **Aizen Kobo** (Nakasuji-Omiya Nishi, Yoko-omiyacho, Kamigyo-ku, tel: 81 75 441 0355). Aizen Kobo uses traditional Japanese methods to achieve intense blue dyes and is the acknowledged world specialist in this time-consuming hand-dyeing technique. Levi's has sent observers to learn from this master, and the British Museum has a collection of his works. Although larger items are expensive, the indigo colours never fade. A decorated *noren* (a traditional split-curtain hung in doorways) costs from 150,000 yen, while a kimono-style jacket costs from 300,000 yen. The shop also sells a range of smaller items such as table-mats (3,000 yen each) and toy animals (1,000 yen each).

The Kyoto Tourist Information office (tel: 81 75 344 3300) provides excellent city maps and volunteer guides. *Catherine Shaw*

## book review

### Wide Angle: National Geographic Greatest Places

Text by Ferdinand Protzman (National Geographic)

The slickness of digital cameras fosters the illusion anyone equipped with one can cut it as a travel photographer. Don't like the look of that landscape snap? With a "digicam" you can just delete and try again until you hit the mark.

But digital shots can look one-dimensional. A gulf still exists between amateurs and professionals, as *Wide Angle: National Geographic Greatest Places* shows. This 12-chapter collection displays 260 of the magazine's finest photographs, which, judging by the depth of field, were taken with SLRs.

Culled from an archive of more than 10 million, the photographs span the world and more than a century, with an emphasis on the past decade. Commentary comes from Ferdinand Protzman, an *ARTnews* magazine editor who contributes to *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune* and the *Harvard Review*, among other "heavies".

Some readers may find Protzman's style too formal. He peppers his prose with allusions to Tolstoy and Marx. He claims a "multivalent" photograph of sailors touring New York's Times Square contains references ranging from hip-hop to Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* to Sinclair Lewis (the 1930 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature).

Many readers will perhaps flick past the prose, which faces formidable competition epitomised by a portrait headed, "A Woman Walking Past War-ravaged Buildings in Croatia". The picture, taken by political specialist Ed Kashi in 2002, is starkly graphic: it depicts a black-clad woman in a headscarf taking a winding path lined by buildings so bullet-ridden they bring to mind a moth-eaten jumper.

Other pictures in the book prove the value of observation, zeroing in on details easily overlooked as we focus on guidebook landmarks in a spirit of "seeing the sights".

But the shots that have the most impact are those that take a direct approach, thrusting the viewer close to the action. "Smiling Crocodile in Botswana", a 1995 portrait by nature photographer Frans Lanting, reveals the reptile in such detail you can almost touch its pointy teeth and smell its evil breath.

*Wide Angle: National Geographic Greatest Places* is available from www.paddyfield.com, priced \$234. *David Wilson*

