



### BANGKOK Rebirth of a rebel

By Lee COBAJ

Thailand's City of Angels has always had its devilish side, more vice than virtue, more grit than gloss. But Bangkok appears to be polishing its halo, as it joins the likes of Hong Kong and Singapore as a thoroughly modern Asian metropolis. Street-food hawkers have been relocated into designated areas, many of the seedier bars have closed down, and even the raucous backpacker hub Khao San Road is having an enforced facelift. But it's not all been about taking away. The long-neglected Chao Phraya riverside has seen a number of swish developments, from cool creative districts to the enormous Iconsiam mall, with its Vegas-style dancing fountains and rooftop panoramas. From here you can view three of Bangkok's most exciting new luxury hotels, all arriving in early 2020. Dead ahead and perched atop the new Jenga-shaped MahaNakhon Building is the first **Orient Express** hotel by Accor, with 154 rooms trimmed with silk and marquetry, and a 78th-floor rooftop pool. Back on the riverbank lies low-rise modernist **Capella Bangkok**, which among its 101 rooms counts 12 riverside suites complete with private gondolas. Just upwater is the Jean-Michel Gathy-designed **Four Seasons** (above), a shining high-rise with interconnecting courtyards, sky gardens and a spa worth flying all the way to Bangkok for. *Orient Express, orient-express.com; Capella Bangkok, from £395 per night, capellahotels.com; Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok, from £333 per night, fourseasons.com*



### BEIRUT A bohemian bolthole

By Teresa LEVONIAN COLE

On a typical morning in Beirut, dawn breaks to the melodious call of the muezzin, segueing into the joyful carillon of church bells. Almost three decades after the civil war that left the country in ruins, its citizens live in peace once again, and with its proximity to sea and mountains, cultural history dating back to the Phoenicians, vibrant contemporary art scene and fabulous restaurants, Beirut is reclaiming its status as the sophisticated playground of the Middle East.

**Arthaus Gemmayze** (left), due to open in February 2020, is the city's newest hot ticket. A 17th-century, palazzo-style boutique hotel in the old city, its 19 rooms spread across four houses were once the home of the Debs family. Painstakingly restored by Nabil and Zoe Debs to create a home from home for guests – its garden and pool a haven from the bustling surroundings. Expect a rich collection of international art (from Eugène Delacroix to Victor Manuel), fine dining, rooftop bar, hammam and screening room. But where Arthaus really steals a march is in the insider knowledge of its owners, whose cultural contacts and personalised service mean guests can enjoy VIP visits to the studios of local designers (including Elie Saab's), artists and artisans, as well as special access to galleries (and the new Nabu museum), private homes and archaeological sites. A sunset visit to the magnificent ruins of Baalbek is not to be missed. *Arthaus Gemmayze, from £210, including breakfast, arthaus.international*

INTERVIEW BY FRANCESCA SIZ