

HARBOUR
DREAMS



Shangri-La Hotel, Sydney



SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, SYDNEY

THERE'S NO
GREATER ACT OF
HOSPITALITY
THAN TO EMBRACE
A STRANGER
AS ONE'S OWN.



AS OUR YACHT SAILED GRACEFULLY ACROSS the water, I felt as Captain Cook would have done 200 or so years ago, discovering for the first time the splendour of the eastern shores. Of course, the captain was not privy to the architectural wonderment of the Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge, but we were truly fortunate to bear witness to such brilliance: both icons perched illustriously on the water's edge, like jewels in the city's crown.

Strolling back to the hotel on that glorious summer's day, we could feel a certain buzz in the air. Maybe it was the sun shining brilliantly in the azure sky, or the temperate breeze that meandered in from the ocean, or the stunning view of the harbour that stole our breath every time; it was clear the city had an exceptionally positive vibe and everyone, locals and visitors alike, felt intoxicated by its beauty day after day.





OUR ROOM PERCHED HIGH ABOVE the harbour, and its spaciousness and blissful silence allowed my thoughts to drift as freely as the seagulls circling down below. Sat by the window, I closed my eyes and let the sights of this sun-kissed city flitter through my mind; from glamorous Bondi Beach, to fashionable Oxford Street and laid back Manly, the city had seduced me with its endless allure.

When I opened my eyes, the brilliant diamond-sparkled waters below welcomed me back to the harbour. Curling this way and that, the shoreline embraced the water gracefully as a dozen or two boats that looked more like toys zigzagged about, leaving trails of white water in their wake. Few cities possessed such striking beauty, and utterly mesmerised, my intentions of stealing a moment's sleep slipped away; not much could contend with the beautiful panorama that appeared before me.



THAT NIGHT AT ALTITUDE, WE ADMIRERD the harbour below, glittering like a gigantic treasure chest left wide open for the world to see. Again, the same two structures dominated the view: the bridge like a twinkling jewelled tiara and the opera house like a diamond ring sparkling with all its might. The only thing that vied for our attention that evening was the arrival of our main course, roasted beef fillet with nettle puree, silverbeet and butter poached escargots.

Dinner ended perfectly with drinks next door at Blu Bar, where a kind barman greeted us with a hearty smile and two of his favourite cocktails, as if somehow he knew it was a special occasion. Everything thus far had been flawless, and high up there on top of the world on the 36th floor, we did not feel even an inkling of returning to our room — yet. Indeed, the night was still young.





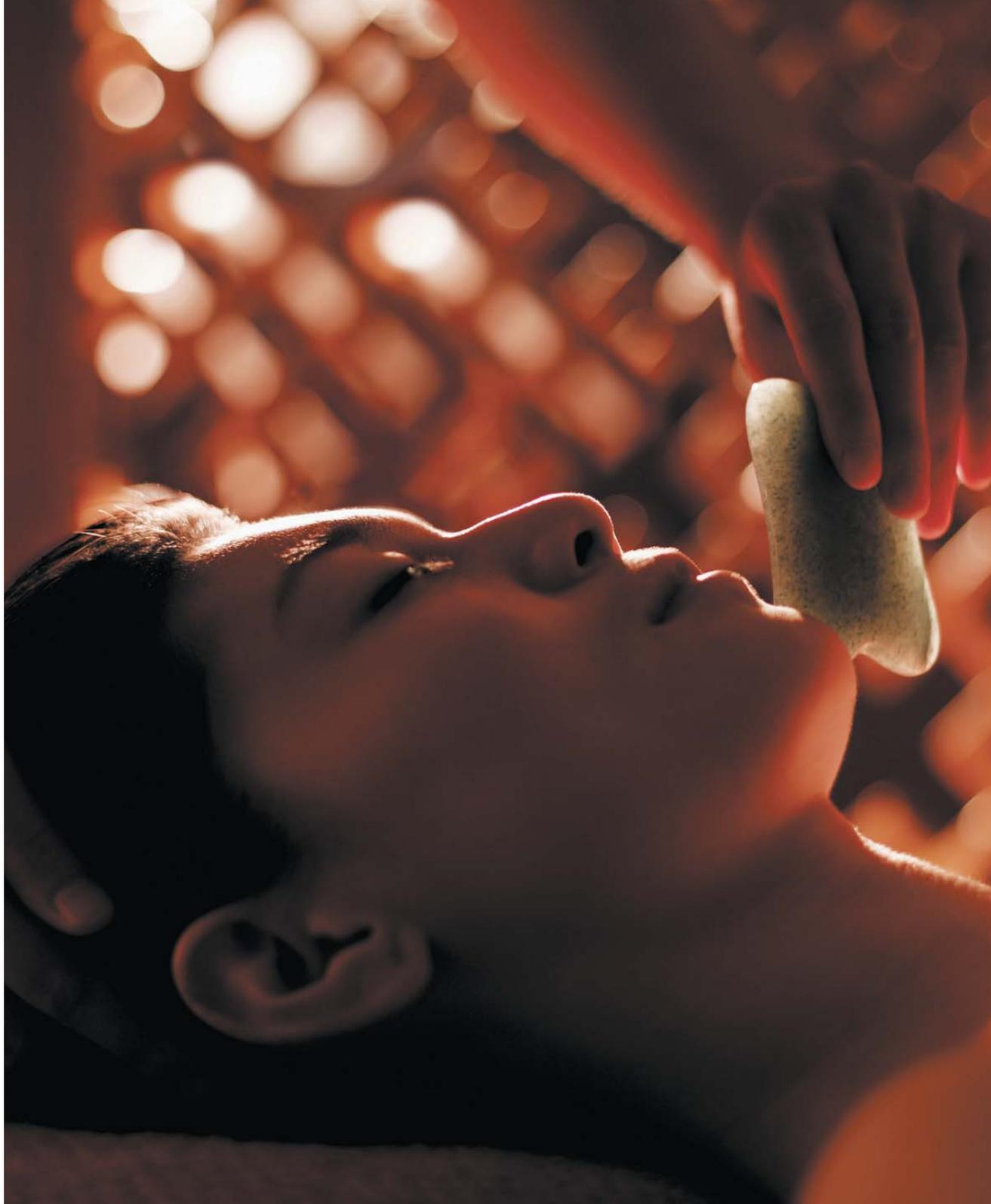






IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON AND THE desert sun was much more forgiving, its distant rays showering a healing warmth all over my body. The air was dry and amidst the sweet aroma of bush honey, a cool breeze carrying the refreshing scent of eucalyptus wafted in and out, clearing my head. Lying there, in the middle of the Australian outback, I felt peaceful and truly at one with the land, and just for a moment I thought I might have heard the deep echo of a *didgeridoo* in the distance.

I must have drifted off for a minute or two as when I opened my eyes, I was not in the desert; I was mid-treatment at the hotel spa, my therapist massaging my body with a unique blend of local native ingredients. Utterly carefree, I sighed a deep sigh of contentment, closed my eyes and returned once again to the vast spiritual expanse of this great southern land.











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"There, to his joy and surprise, he found a friendly and prosperous population who made haste to display what I have always regarded as our oldest tradition — that of hospitality to strangers." *Lost Horizon*, James Hilton

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SHANGRI-LA

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