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Every time we travel the world in search of great coffee,
we can't wait to bring them home and share. Each of these smaller Reserve
Reserve coffees has its own story to tell, so they will soon be the ones
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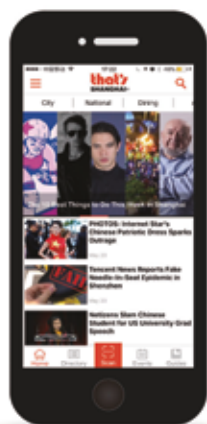
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LAILA ALIEH

The Fitness Astronaut

Interview by Ned Kelly

Born and raised near NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, Laila Alieh always dreamed of being an astronaut, and ended up working for NASA. Following her husband's relocation to China, she recently landed on Planet Suzhou, and is hoping to colonize it as the Fitness Astronaut.



So how does a person become a Fitness Astronaut? Tell us a little about your background.

For the longest time I wanted to become an astronaut and work for NASA. So I went to engineering school at Purdue University to study Civil Engineering, and later studied Mechanical Engineering at Portland State University. I worked for NASA for four years and worked in Corporate America for three years.

Can you give us the 'elevator pitch' for the Fitness Astronaut concept?

I like to help people explore fitness as astronauts explore space. Most specifically, I help brides explore fitness as astronauts explore space.

How did the idea come about?

In 2015, as I was getting ready for my wedding and getting into shape so I fit into my wedding dress, I realized it really felt like I was preparing for a space launch. There is so

much that goes into planning out a wedding, and in my circumstances (the dress didn't fit) I pretty much treated myself as an engineering problem that needed to be fixed in T minus four months and counting. So I call myself the Fitness Astronaut, because I use engineering and problem solving tools to help people learn to love health and fitness and find the right methods that work for their bodies.

Can you give us an example?

Before I start coaching my clients I ask them a lot of questions about their current lifestyle, what they struggle with, and what obstacles they are facing. I use data analysis every month, using control factors to track their transformation progress: centimeters lost, body fat reduction, photos and much more. Most importantly as an engineer, you have to have a deadline. For my brides, the launch date is the wedding – W Day. And they have T minus a certain number of months to get Wedding Fit Forever. I believe that anyone can be Wedding Fit Forever. Just like being an astronaut, it's a mission.

What stage are you at exploring the final frontier?

I am currently coaching brides in Suzhou and to clients around the globe online, writing content for a bridal website, and have started smoothie prep classes in Suzhou. I would love to help brides both locally and all over China. I would love to do speeches and presentations, providing content classes and workshops to not just brides, but anyone who needs help with their health and fitness.

What inspires you?

Helping people and watching their faces light up when they see a change in their physique and start to feel better both inside and out. We each need that one small step of support to make that giant leap for ourselves.

// Learn more about the Fitness Astronaut at www.LailaAlieh.com, or contact her at Laila@Lailaalieh.com



LOTUS VEG CAFE

NEW BRANCH, NEW OPTIONS

By Tess Humphrys

THE PLACE

Lotus Veg Cafe has built up a bit of a reputation for its tasty plant-based fare, so can this third branch in The Summit live up to expectations?

THE FOOD

As is the case with many restaurants these days, this branch's menu is on an iPad, although the waitress will still come and take your order. Not all of the pictures have English translations, so ordering is a little tricky.

Luckily the food, which comes out quickly, makes up for any mishaps during the ordering process. The sizzling stuffed eggplants (RMB32) offer a nice textural contrast between the melt-in-the-mouth eggplant and crunchy, fresh celery, all nicely boosted with a dose of Thai basil, ginger and sweet chili.

The fried kidney beans (RMB38) are nicely cooked along with water chestnuts and mushrooms that give the dish a smoky flavor, while a subtle hint of ginger and chili add gentle warmth.

Flavored with the shoots and leaves of

the Chinese cedar, the 'Xiangchun' fried rice with pine nuts (RMB30) has an earthy, almost basil pesto-like flavor. In contrast, the sweet potato with sesame seeds (RMB38) offers bite-size pops of honeyed sweetness that act as a nice palate cleanser.

The standout dish, however, is the fried noodles sprouts and 'vegetarian ham' (RMB26), where the flat noodles combine effortlessly with lightly cooked carrots, bean sprouts, sesame, and mushrooms to offer a simple, light dish with minimal sauce, but maximum flavor.

THE VIBE

Lotus Veg Café's unassuming décor and tucked away location is hiding some seriously tasty food. The incongruous hodgepodge furniture doesn't really match the industrial Chinese style of interior, while the massive cuddly toys just add to the kitsch. If you didn't already know the Lotus brand, it's easy to overlook this outlet and this is a shame.

4/F, South Building, The Summit, 119 Suzhou Dadao Xi, SIP. 苏州园区苏州大道西119号苏悦广场南楼4层 (512 6761 6567).



STARBUCKS RESERVE

Taking Your Regular Coffee Experience Up a Notch

By Tess Humphrys

THE PLACE

Suzhou is the latest location for Starbucks' new initiative; upscale 'Reserve' outlets that sell more exotic, small-batch coffee blends. Those on offer here are processed in the massive Shanghai Roastery opened in 2017.

THE DRINKS & FOOD

The menu is somewhat more complicated than at the regular Starbucks shop, and language barriers can make it difficult to choose from the fancy ways to brew your choice of beans. Currently, there are four blends on offer, which can be brewed using a traditional pour over or press-style method or the more mysterious Chemex and siphon methods. Slightly perturbed by the name Chemex, which turns out actually to be a specialized version of pour-over, we tried a cup of Hacienda Alsacia from Costa Rica, brewed using a siphon (RMB59), adding a black chocolate crown cake (RMB35) from the delectable-looking selection of desserts.

It's fun watching the barista work the lab instrument-like siphon, and the whole brewing process took about 10 minutes. Time,

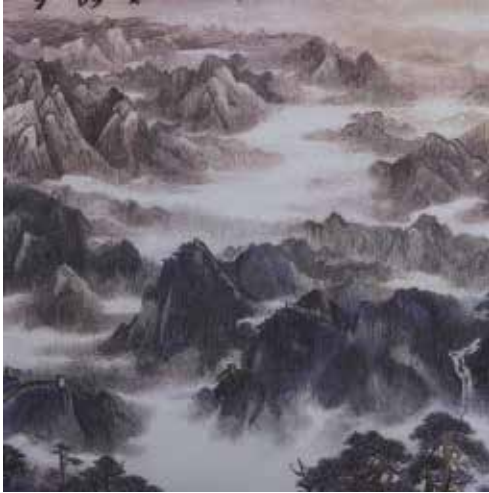


then, to sample the cake – which was tasty, but not as chocolaty as it looks. Other food options include a slightly increased range of Starbucks sandwiches and salads. Served in a stylish black mug on a wooden tray, the coffee had a refreshing bitterness, though it's debatable whether it was worth the money.

THE VIBE

The impressive central bar area lets you get close to the brewing action, which certainly adds to the experiential vibe Starbucks is going for at the Reserve stores. Tastefully decorated in rich soft greys with shiny copper accents, it's a pleasant place to hang out and for those who can't resist merch, there are also lots of stylish products on offer.

Multiple locations, [Starbucks.com.cn](https://www.starbucks.com.cn)



● Zhou Haiyun's Embroidery Exhibition

A tradition of Suzhou since the Song dynasty, many modern day embroiderers based in small towns near Taihu dedicate their lives to preserve this age-old craft. Suzhou born crafts-woman Zhou Haiyun, who has more than 40 years of experience in this field and is known for her depiction of local sceneries with embroidery, will be showcasing her work at the Suzhou Museum.

// Through Sunday, May 20. Suzhou Museum, 204 Dongbei Jie 东北街204号 (szmuseum.com)



● The Beauty from Finite to Infinite

Featuring the newest creations of contemporary artist/painter Zhu Yuze, this exhibition showcases his signature style of blending Chinese and Western-style oil painting to showcase the harmony between life and nature.

// Through Sunday, May 6. Suzhou Museum, 204 Dongbei Jie 东北街204号 (szmuseum.com)



● Philharmonix - The Vienna Berlin Music Club

Putting a contemporary spin on classical music, the dynamic seven-piece ensemble is comprised of members of the Berlin Philharmonic and Vienna Philharmonic and covers a vast music repertoire from Sting to Johannes Brahms.

// Monday, April 30, 7.30pm. RMB100-580. Suzhou Culture & Arts Center, 1 Guanfeng Jie, SIP 苏州工业园区观枫街1号 (www.sscac.com.cn)



● InterNations April Event

Join InterNations' longstanding monthly networking event at Novotel Suzhou SIP and meet fellow expats in the city in a relaxed environment over delicious food from the BBQ buffet and free-flow wine, beer and soft drinks. There's even an afterparty at Hemingway Terrace & Lounge for those who want to party all night long.

// Friday, April 20, 7.30pm. RMB160 for albatross members / RMB210 for basic members / RMB230 at the door. Novotel Suzhou SIP, 688 Suzhou Dadao Dong 苏州工业园区苏州大道东688号 (www.internations.org)

● Martin Stadtfeld Piano Recital

Since winning the 2002 International Bach Competition, 37-year-old German pianist Martin Stadtfeld has established himself as one of the world's most prominent interpreters of classical music. After performing with renowned orchestras in Europe, Japan, Korea and the US, Stadtfeld will pay homage to great composers like Bach, Schubert and show off his own musical creations in this concert.

// Friday, April 20, 7.30pm. RMB80-480. Suzhou Culture & Arts Center, 1 Guanfeng Jie, SIP 苏州工业园区观枫街1号 (www.sscac.com.cn)



EVENTS



● Suzhou Cultural Heritage Workshop

Join this great opportunity for in-depth understanding of Suzhou's intangible cultural heritage. In collaboration with Ctrip and the Suzhou Tourism Bureau, the workshop will introduce Suzhou's history and culture, including a tea ceremony performance, oil-paper umbrella hand painting lesson, silk scarf hand tie-dye lesson, circular fan water extension painting lesson and more.

// Saturday, April 14, 2pm. RSVP via That's Shanghai WeChat. Camelia Restaurant, 1/F, Four Seasons Hotel Pudong, Shanghai, 210 Century Avenue, by Pucheng Lu. 世纪大道210号上海浦东四季酒店1楼, 近浦城路



● Lawrence Ku Trio

Renowned Chinese-American guitarist Lawrence Ku, who performs regularly alongside some of the biggest names in music including Karen Mok and Li Ronghao, will be performing in Suzhou for one night with famous Taiwanese bassist Michael Ning and drummer John Thomas. Expect plenty of chemistry as the trio rocks the stage with their instruments.

// Friday, April 13, 7.30pm. RMB50-180. 2075 Renmin Lu 人民路2075号 (www.szpcc.cm)

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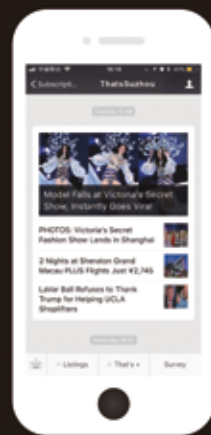
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