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This Month's Cover

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Venue: The Saigon Cigar Club
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Accessories: Anupa (www.anupa.net)

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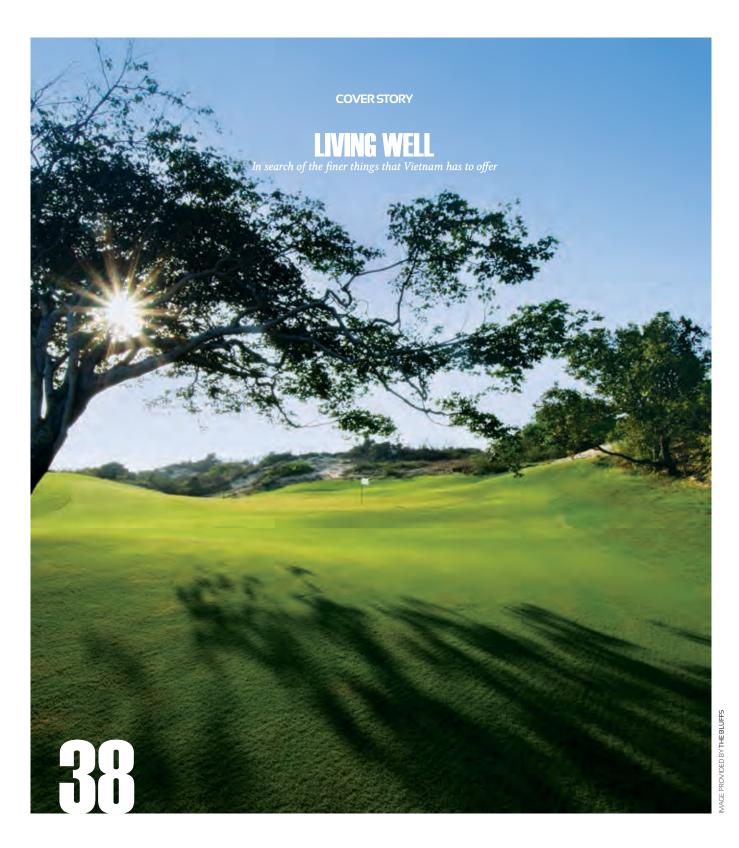
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Early Years Centre (Age 2-5) • Primary School (Age 6-10) • Secondary School (Age 11-18)





Datebook

What's on this month...

AUGUST 2-9

What: Future Stars Qualifying Tennis Tournament

Where: 20-8 Khanh Hoa Tennis Club, 75C Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, Nha Trang

About: Thanks to players like Li Na (China), Kei Nishikori (Japan) and recent Wimbledon Boys' Doubles Champion, Vietnam's own Nam Hoang Ly, tennis in Asia is taking off and Vietnam is hoping to produce the stars of tomorrow. For the first year, Vietnam will be competing in a WTA Future Stars Tournament in conjunction with the WTA Finals at the end of October 2015 featuring the world's top 8 women where World #1, Serena Williams, has already qualified. The Future Stars Tournament will showcase the top ranked Under-14 and Under-16 junior girls' players in the Asia-Pacific region from a total of 18 invited federations. Vietnam will participate in the 2015 event along with countries like New Zealand, China, Japan and Thailand. Each country who wishes to participate will host a "Junior Road to Singapore" qualifying event in the two age categories to determine who will be represented in Singapore at the WTA Future Stars tournament. While in Singapore, the WTA Future Stars will take part in various off-court activities including a Welcome Dinner, the WTA Finals Draw, Opening Ceremonies, the WTA Fan Zone and a community service activity in addition to learning about high-level athlete development, life in the public eye, media responsibilities and empowerment through tennis.

Contact: Visit www.vtf.org.vn for more info



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AUGUST 14

What: Chamboche

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 10pm; Free before midnight, VND150,000 after

About: Straight out of London with a powerful arsenal of house and techno - Chamboche is a name on the underground electronic circuit whose releases have been manipulating dance floors out of the shadows for the better part of the last decade - while his sets have shaken them very much out in the open.

Contact: Visit www.theobservatory-hcmc.com for more info

AUGUST 15

What: Wet Party

Where: Ho Tram Resort Casino Vietnam; 2pm till late About: Revelers have another reason to descend upon the resort with the announcement of its new monthly Wet Party. Every month will feature DJs from around the country and the region, music performances, bunny girls and free flow drinks. The parties will be held every third Saturday of the month (until December 2015). If free flow of beverage at the VND688,000++ is not enough, party goers can select VND988,000++ to include additional snacks at BoJangle's by the pool. The ticket also includes complimentary round-trip shuttle bus between Ho Chi Minh City, Vung Tau and the resort.

Contact: Reservations can be made at (064) 378 8333 or email bookings@thegrandhotram.com



What: Superhero Summer Camp

Where: Ta Lai Longhouse, Cat Tien National Park About: For parents who want their kids out of the big city enjoying the sights and sounds of the jungle. In the middle of the jungle, children will be able to experience various activities such as hiking, mountain biking, bamboo raft building, kayaking, animal watching, fishing, night safaris, gardening, treasure hunts and many other activities supervised by professional,

international instructors.

Contact: Email info@talai-adventure.vn for more info



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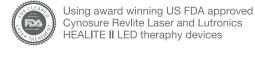
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AUGUST 19

What: The Internet of Things for Business Growth Where: Hard Rock Café (Kumho Plaza, 39 Le Duan, D1); 11:30am – 2pm

About: The Internet of Things (IoT) - the computers and other inanimate objects that communicate with each other and with people through mobile technologies, sensors and software challenges every business model in every industry everywhere. Technological change has been dramatic, and no company is immune from its impact. New technologies (IoT) will force you to reconfigure your strategy, your operations, and your whole approach to business. The luncheon will provide insight into the IoT and how businesses can apply the new opportunities that are brought on by IoT. Topics include the following and more: a practical explanation of what IoT is; the impact on business productivity and efficiency; how using IoT impacts your customers: and employees; and worldwide trends and opportunities and how Vietnam will be affected and can take advantage. This Saigon Executive Exchange luncheon will feature key people and presentations from Conech/Fablab Saigon, Intel Vietnam and Microsoft Vietnam.

Contact: Visit www.citynetevents.com for more info

AUGUST 27

What: CrowdPitch for Addressing Environment Challenges Where: Hoa Sen University (Room 903, 8 Nguyen Van Trang, D1); 6:30pm – 9pm

About: CrowdPitch Vietnam, Green Drinks Saigon and LIN Center for Community Development will co-organize an event giving local nonprofit organizations an opportunity to pitch their ideas to address an environmental issue in Ho Chi Minh City and/or nearby provinces and receive feedback from experts and community members. During the event, six semi-finalists for a Grant from LIN's Narrow the Gap Community Fund will each have five minutes to pitch their project ideas to the crowd, five minutes to receive feedback from an expert panel and another five minutes to engage in Q&A with the audience. At the end of the event, the audience will vote for the best pitch of the night and the expert panel will choose their two favorite pitches. Only three projects will advance to the final round, which will take place on 26 September and determine the size of grant each nonprofit will receive. First, second and third place grants will be valued at VND 150 million, 100 million and 50 million respectively. Contact: Applicants need to sign up at vietnamcauses.org for the purpose of transparency

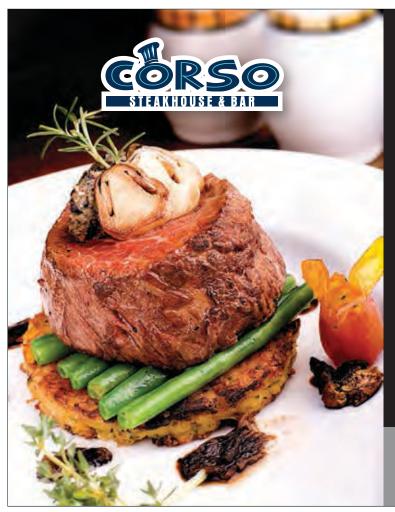
AUGUST 28

What: Romi Behl

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); Free before midnight, VND100,000 after

About: Romi B is a Hong Kong-based DJ, who is now getting into producing his own tunes. Deeply influenced by House & other forms of Electronic Music from the start of his career in 1999, after creating a buzz with his progressive sound of late 90s in the most happening clubs of Delhi at the time, his gigs eventually got him to Hong Kong. Over the years his sound eventually evolved into something that can be best described as anything between Easy Soulful to Deep Tech Dirty & Underground. His love for soulful vocals & pumping baselines can be felt in his sets. All these years behind the decks has gained him a reputation of a DJ who leaves an impression by the vibe he creates with his grooves falling over hypnotic beats.

Contact: *Visit www.theobservatory-hcmc.com for more info*



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- Impressive dining experience with wide selection of cuisines.
- 360-degree Sky Deck offering entire view of the Bay on the top roof.











Troi Oi

The country in numbers

27,000

jobs will be available in August, according to the Ho Chi Minh City's Centre for Forecasting Manpower Needs and Labor Market Information (FALMI). Demand is concentrated in the IT, garment-textiles, footwear

and leather sectors and the real estate, logistics, and sales industries. Employment opportunities are highest for unskilled labor and graduates/ post-graduates, accounting for 30 percent and 28 percent of the total job offers respectively. The demand for technicians follows closely at 25 percent. According to FALMI Vice Director Tran Anh Tuan, newly graduated students will be competing against experienced job-seekers. The southern hub's labor market increased its recruitment need in July by 17 percent from the previous month with a focus on new staff in the sales, logistics, IT and service sector.

USD14

fine for those found urinating on the beaches in Danang. People who urinate or defecate on the beaches and other public places in Danang will also be fined. Under the plan, a fine of VND50,000-VND100,000 is applied to dropping cigarette butts. Another fine of VND100,000-VND200,000 will be imposed on those who litter in public locations, including beaches. The highest fines, from VND200,000 to VND300,000, will be imposed on those who urinate or defecate on the beach and in other public locations including tenements and trade centers. Any violators who resist law enforcement officers will be punished in accordance with applicable regulations.

50KG

of ancient coins were unearthed in northern Vietnam. Luong Manh Hai, who resides in Duy Tien District in Ha Nam Province, found the coins while he and his colleagues were digging in his garden to build a water reservoir. The coins were kept in a porcelain jar buried 80 centimeters underground. The round coins measure 2.4 centimeters in diameter and are 0.1 centimeters thick. They all have a square hole at the center and feature ancient Chinese characters. Several scrap dealers have offered to purchase Hai's find, but he has declined and is waiting for the authorities' dating of the coins.





VEGETARIAN DELIGHTS Salute the season with fall – friendly dishes of plenty

Salute the season with fall – friendly dishes of plenty choices of noodle, vegetable and sauce to please your palate.

Kabin – 1st floor August 14 – Sep 12, 2015 (excluding National Day Sep 2, 2015) Dinner: 18:00 – 22:00

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Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon celebrates the Mid-Autumn Festival with its collection of exquisitely mooncakes, available for sale from mid-August 2015. These much loved delicacies are presented not only in traditional styles but also in a variety of fusion tastes as well

Paying tribute to this celestial tradition, the ensemble of mooncake creations from Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon will be perfect for gifting this season.

For further information of discount and to place your order, please call 3822 0033 ext. 2300 from now to September 27, 2015.



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~17,000

prisoners, including foreigners, will be pardoned nationwide by August 30 under an amnesty decision, making it the biggest ever, a senior police official stated. The amnesty will be given to prisoners meeting amnesty standards

on the 70th anniversary of National Day (September 2). Prisoners considered for the amnesty include those with jail terms and those with life sentences commuted to jail terms. "We will implement the amnesty as soon as possible, possibly before August 30, so that the released prisoners can celebrate National Day," news website VnExpress quoted the Deputy Minister as saying. Along with local prisoners, foreign inmates who have displayed good behavior and rehabilitation will also be set free. The clemency is aimed to encourage prisoners to rehabilitate themselves so that they can return to society sooner than scheduled. At a meeting of the Central Advisory Council on Amnesty, Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc emphasized the need to grant clemency for the right inmates in order to ensure the correctness, transparency and strictness of laws.

30%

of total tap water produced is lost in Ho Chi Minh City, meaning that for every million cubic meters of tap water produced,

300,000 cubic meters is lost due to leaky water pipes, according to Party Secretary Le Thanh Hai. This is an urgent issue that must be solved, he stressed. The Saigon Water Corporation (SAWACO) plans to reduce the rate of loss to 25 percent by 2025. City residents are always warned to use cooked water for drinking, while in other countries, tap water is always ready for drinking, Hai said. At the meeting, authorities set a target to provide clean tap water for all city residents by the end of this year. To reach this target, water supply companies in Ho Chi Minh City must finish installing pipes and supply water to 350,000 families this year.

In April, SAWACO, which is tasked with managing and supplying tap water in the city, proposed increasing the prices of tap water by 10.5 percent a year from now till 2019. As proposed, the price will top VND9,612 a cubic meter this year and VND14,357 a cubic meter in 2019, or a 50 percent rise after five years.

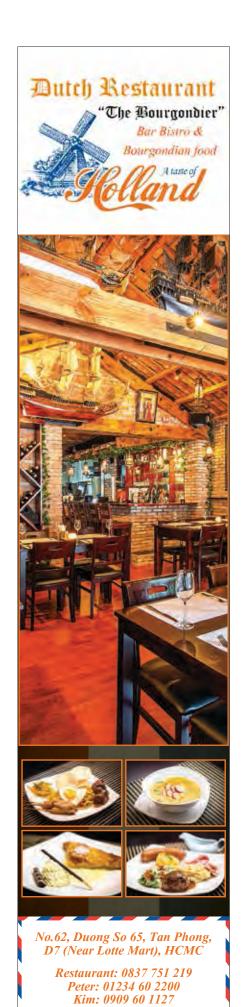
increase per year of the number of junkies, now at 204,000, in Vietnam. Nguyen

Trong Dam, a Deputy Minister of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs, released the figure at a ceremony in Hanoi to launch a movement to help junkies with detoxification and re-integration into communities. Besides addictions to heroin, cocaine and other drugs, the number of people addicted to methamphetamine is increasing greatly.

The movement's message "Communities Join Hands in
Supporting Drug Addicts" - will
assist drug addicts in their
rehabilitation and will offer them
healthcare services during postdetoxification. Participants in the
movement will be given vocational
training, provided with jobs, or
granted capital to run a business
after they have successfully been
detoxified, he added.

USD5.9MILLION

river bus project has been approved by the government. The two river bus routes will help ease the crowded traffic on roads, especially during rush hour, and contribute to the city's waterway tourism development, the municipal People's Committee said. The first route, Bach Dang-Linh Dong, will be 11km long and have seven stops, running from Bach Dang Quay on the Saigon River through District 1 and District 2 and Binh Thanh District via Thanh Da Canal to Binh Quoi Quay in Linh Dong Ward, Thu Duc District. The second, Bach Dang-Lo Gom, will be over 10km long with seven stops in Districts 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8. This route runs from Bach Dang Quay on the Saigon River through Ben Nghe and Tau Hu Canals before reaching Lo Gom Quay in District 6. The central quay of the two routes will be set up in Thu Duc District, comprising all facilities necessary for the operation and maintenance of the boats. Each route takes about 30 minutes in total, which is two-thirds of the time it takes buses on the same route, according to Daily Limited Company, which proposed piloting the two routes. All work on the two routes is expected to be completed in 2016, and the Ho Chi Minh City transport department will use 10 boats, which are able to carry 60 passengers each.



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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



RI OSSOM MOONCAKES

In celebration of the upcoming Mid-Autumn Festival on September 27, the Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa unveils its Blossom Mooncake with a contemporary design. A box of mooncake is priced at VND619,000++, which includes four unique mooncakes featuring traditional flavors such as: green tea with lotus seed and salted egg yolk, green bean with pandan flavor and salted egg yolk, savory mooncake with jambon and salted egg yolk, and savory mooncake with roasted chicken jambon. Supplies are limited and discounts up to 20 percent apply for large orders over 200 boxes and early bird purchase from now until August 30. For more information or to place an order, call (058) 388 0000 or email dining.nhatrang@ sheraton com



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VEGETARIAN DELIGHTS AT RENAISSANCE

This autumn, the Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon (8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1) is putting on a vegetarian feast in its Kabin Restaurant (first floor). Chef Ming will turn his homemade tofu, large selection of mushrooms and other flavorful ingredients into dishes that won't even have you missing meat. Expect items like Braised vegetables and tofu, Fried Udon noodles with vegetarian pork and Steamed tofu skin rolled with vegetables on the all-you-can-eat menu (VND299,000++ from August 14 - September 12). Diners can order off the menu for lunch and enjoy live cooking stations at dinner.



FUSION MAIA DA NANG PROMOTION

At Asia's all-inclusive spa resort, relaxation is at the heart of everything they do and they're having a promotion where guests stay seven nights but pay for only five. From the all pool villa accommodation boasting private pool and outdoor courtyard to their Natural Living Program designed for holistic balance with seven daily themes, Fusion Maia Da Nang (www.fusionmaiadanang. com) offers the perfect balance with all spa treatments (minimum two per day guaranteed), breakfast anytime any place, pool villa with private pool and courtyard. Offer is valid from September 1 – January 31, 2016.





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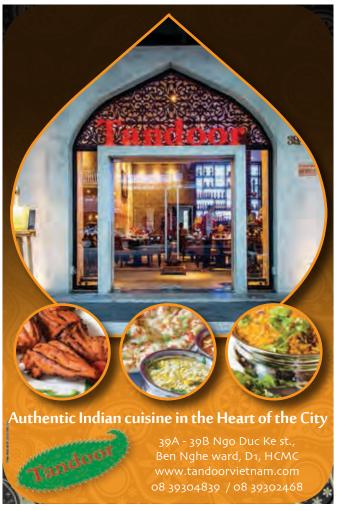


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Just 90 minutes from Ho Chi Minh City, the beach resort offers a sanctuary away from the daily grind. Relaxation is easy with a 90-minute spa journey included in every stay. Midweek offer: 20 percent off best available rate for midweek stays (excluding Saturday nights), valid until December 31, 2015. Villa promotion: Enjoy 1+1 on their private pool villas (excluding Saturday nights), valid until December 20, 2015. Visit www.almaoasislonghai.com for more info.

WOMEN ONLY SATIIRDAY

InterContinental Hanoi Westlake's (www.hanoi.intercontinental. com) Women Only Saturday is a wonderful excuse to catch up with your girlfriends while indulging your taste buds with a range of international and local dishes. All our female guests will enjoy 15 percent off dinner and one complimentary glass of Carlsberg beer. The hotel's buffet showcases both Western and Asian cuisine, including seafood, sizzling grilled meats, salads and a selection of mouthwatering desserts. Every Saturday in August from 6pm to 10:30pm, priced at VND850,000 net/adult.





Front Row

In conversation with the queen of fashion behind Vietnam's Next Top Model

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD IMAGES PROVIDED BY MILL TIMEDIA JISC

IF YOU'RE NOT really up with what's happening in fashion circles, then you'd be forgiven for thinking that this month's return of Vietnam's Next Top Model marks just another season of makeup, makeovers, and make-believe. The Top Model franchise may be one of the world's most glamorous and successful television formats around, but after 12 years on the air in the States and a distinct absence of any actual top models emerging from the competition, a healthy scepticism towards the show is understandable.

If you were following local fashion news, however, then you'd already know that Vietnam's version of Top Model is a little different. Going into its sixth season this month, the show has already turned out some of the modeling industry's biggest names - many of whom now work on international runways never-before touched by Vietnamese models in chic destinations like Paris, New York, London and Milan.

The success of the show has brought its local licensee, Multimedia ISC, to the forefront of the local fashion scene. Within the space of five years, Multimedia has grown from a tiny production team into an empire at the center of Vietnamese vogue - it represents models and designers, manages a growing number of TV formats, and has hosted glitzy fashion events. Most recently, it co-organized Vietnam's first-ever International Fashion Week surpassing local producers and fashionistas who've never quite been able to put one together in the past.

Perhaps the most remarkable factor in all the above is that the woman with her hands poised over the pieces started it all with zero experience in either fashion or reality TV - and that she reached success not by following the show's winning format, but by daring to turn its core concept on its head. That mastermind is Le Thi Ouynh Trang, and if you were expecting a vivacious media personality à la Tyra

Banks, you'd be in for another surprise -Trang built her fashion and media empire in a few short years based on a background as a plain accountant. To those who ask her (as they frequently do) how such a thing is possible, she has a very simple answer: "I'm a businesswoman. If I were an artist, I could never do this.'

The success of Vietnam's Next Top Model, in fact, can be traced back to Trang's days working as financial controller for the media agency that produced Vietnam's Who Wants to be a Millionaire over a decade ago. That's a story in itself - Millionaire's popularity gave rise to major internal power struggles that eventually destroyed the company - but as the house of cards shook, Trang became increasingly involved in production tasks, receiving a thorough grounding in the television licensing business in the process. When the agency finally fell, Trang decided to use her new knowledge to try out the game for herself.

Within a year, she found herself





Vietnam's Next Top Model 2015; Trang (second from right)

Stephane Wargnier, Executive President of Federation Francaise de la Couture

wandering the exhibitions at MIPCOM – the world's largest television content trade show in Cannes – coming to a stop in front of the CBS stand, where the large banner advertising the broadcaster's reality juggernaut *America's Next Top Model* happened to catch her eye. What stirred her passions at that moment wasn't any romantic notion of the show's appeal, however, but rather the tagline on the poster – "shown in over 100 countries."

"I'm doing business. The media business," Trang explains candidly. "Seeing as we have to sell to advertisers, we know very well that their main target is women. The woman is the person who can make the decision to buy. For any program, the first targeted consumer is always the woman. I'd heard about that show before, and I'd seen it before. So immediately in my mind, 'over a hundred countries,' it meant it was very successful."

While the chances of a fledgling media firm successfully negotiating for the license of such a major format were slim at best, Trang's compelling manner and superhuman persistence eventually won over *Top Model's* organizers. Negotiations took three years – but Trang quickly discovered that winning the license wasn't going to be the hardest part.

"When I signed the agreement in January 2010, they gave me a big book," she says

of the moment she received the enormous series bible. "From the beginning, I just had a little experience in production, so I thought it was easy. It was not. A game show is different from a reality show. For a game show, you've got a formula. You fill it out with some questions, but the setup is the same. A reality show is not easy."

Unable to make sense of the show's bible, and without any experience in modeling or fashion whatsoever, Trang's preparations were grossly insufficient – and a few months later, CBS threatened to withdraw the license. As a last-chance gesture, they agreed to allow Trang behind-the-scenes access to observe the production of *ANTM Cycle 15*, due to begin filming within days. After many frantic emails and a good deal of begging the American embassy for a rush visa, Trang got to the US on time. That experience changed everything.

"My vision totally changed after the trip," she says. "They trained us every day from post-production, production, preproduction, every single part of production. So after that, coming back to Vietnam, I had a greater sense of imagination."

Brand Ambassador

Back in Vietnam, Trang switched off her phone and closeted herself away for a week, furiously watching entire seasons of the show from all around the world. It was by doing this that Trang experienced her first epiphany – that there was a structural consistency to each season. Beyond all the catfighting, eliminations, and repetitive catchphrases, *Next Top Model* is actually a fairly decent crash-course along the career path of a supermodel in a straight, logical progression. From casting and catwalking, through to the makeovers designed to give each model a memorable look, and then on to the proper comportment of a supermodel, Trang realized that all the prepping of the squabbling contestants was building up to the commercial reality of the modeling industry – brand ambassadorship.

That simple insight opened the gateway towards a radical repurposing of her franchise. After a tremendously successful first season of Vietnam's Next Top Model, Trang saw that passing the competition winner off to a disinterested modeling agency was a fatally flawed strategy. By the time the show's top performers graduated as trained supermodels in the making, they already had their own established following - and yet they were being transferred to big agencies without any incentive to support a fresh talent who had yet to pay her dues on the runway. How much more effective it would be, she realised, to instead direct that marketing resource back into her own brand.

The point was demonstrated at the



Ken Mok, Producer of America's Next Top Model

conclusion of the first season. "In the format," says Trang, "there's only one winner. So the first runner-up, she was very sad. At that moment, the final two are winner and loser. When the show finished, the media only focused on the winner, and nobody mentioned the second one. It was like 99 and 100. Just in a moment. Then she called me, crying to me, 'Trang, can you help me find any work, I'm so sad, I have nothing to do.' So we started to support her. She had no agreement with any agency. She had become a free model."

"We work with them in the show, we know their strong points and their weak points," Trang explains. "So we started to make contact with people to find a way to support her. And you know what? After one year, the first-runner-up was even more successful than the winner. The winner became nobody in the market. The first runner up – we contacted Wilhelmina, she's working in New York right now. Immediately she worked in Singapore. All my team supported her, because – modeling is the business."

The implications were obvious. "The winner is an ambassador of my show," says Trang. "The image of my show. I want to control her, so I can control the brand. So that's why I say, I've got a business mind. I understand that the success of the show rests on the success of the winner."

Soon afterwards, Trang became the first *Top Model* franchisee worldwide to start her own modeling agency, beU Models. While it wasn't a big moneymaker initially, Trang remained unconcerned. With every

passing season of *Vietnam's Next Top Model*, the agency acquired more and more proven talent, each with their own fan base. The idea was originally conceived from the heart as a way to keep the models in work, ensuring that their names (and, by association, the show) remained in the news between cycles. With the sixth season, Trang now has enough talent to drive beU's own success – she now claims that it has already become the top agency in Vietnam.

Trang is very protective of her models, for good reason. "They're still very new," she says matter-of-factly. "They have no experience and can't speak English as well. So I have to follow them every single step."

"I take care of my models more than my children", she says warmly. "Because they are brand value."

While accompanying her models backstage as they prepared for international events, the final pieces of Trang's puzzle came together at last. At that point, she had already replicated her business strategy with Project Runway, thus garnering sufficient in-house design talent to keep her models busy. Behind the runway, however, Trang could finally see the workings of a fashion extravaganza first-hand. It gave her the knowledge she needed to put together an International Fashion Week that would not only establish Vietnam as a world-class fashion destination, but would also bring about a level of celebrity that would reflect directly on her properties. Her fashion empire had risen.

If you're thinking this was Trang's endgame, you're quite wrong. This is not a fairy story that fades out with the flashing lights of a fashion spectacle – it's an enterprise. Although her plans have yet to be formally announced, anyone with any business acumen should be able to see it coming: Trang's master stroke – first revealed to *Oi Vietnam* – is that she's about to launch her own fashion line.

"It's not my own brand, actually," she qualifies. "I have a partner in Singapore. They will create one fashion brand. And that brand will sell online all over the world."

Trang's first material fashion offering will start with items that everyone can wear, but she plans to spread into niche markets shortly afterwards. There's another TV format coming up too – *She's Got the Look*, a beauty competition for contestants over 30 – and with each season of each show, Trang will be collecting more and more talent for her empire.

It's perhaps ironic that Trang's career started with *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, because the answer to that question is now obvious. Those who seek to flatter Trang by calling her a fashion queenmaker haven't quite seen the truth of the matter. Taking the industry by strategy, Le Thi Quynh Trang has herself become the queen.

"I've got the media, I've got the models, I've got the designers, I know how to run business, and I know how to do marketing," she concludes. "Fashion, as I say, is just a game of branding and marketing."

35mm

Film photography makes a comeback

TEXT AND IMAGES (TAKEN WITH A 35MM) BY TAYNE EPHRAIM

WHILE IN DECLINE in most parts of the world since the 90s, film photography is going through something of a revival in Saigon. Film is still inexpensive and relatively easy to come by for those who know where to look, and developing a standard roll of 36 exposures can set you back as little as VND30,000. That's jaw droppingly cheap for anyone who has tried to get a roll of film developed in Sydney or London. Money matters aside, there's an aesthetic to film that you really can't get with digital: the grain, the oversaturated colors, and the timeless quality.

You may not know it, but the city is home to a budding film photography community. Stumble into one of the city's many cafés devoted to this antiquated craft, and you'll likely find SLR film cameras jostling for table space alongside *ca phe sua das* and selfie sticks. As an avid film photographer and owner of a few film cameras, today I'm visiting StunCam (308/39 Cach Mang Thang 8, D3) for the umpteenth time. Located off an alley in District 3, it's an unlikely camera shop housed inside someone's living room, and it may just be the best place in Saigon to acquire a working film camera.

"They call me when a new container comes in from Japan," says Khoa, the owner. "They have a lot of cameras, sometimes a hundred in one shipment. I choose the ones that I want then I have to clean them up and do some repairs." Often these cameras are not in the best of shape, most as old as the American War. Working closely with

his friends, they lovingly restore and oil up the cameras back to pristine condition, ready to shoot again like it's 1969. Working in tandem with a group of friends, all film enthusiasts like him, they raid the docks once a month when a new Japanese freighter pulls in.

Khoa started with digital until one day at the hardware market on Ly Thuong Khiet he saw a Canon AE-1 and spontaneously purchased it. After learning the mechanics of the film camera, he decided he didn't like relying on a battery so switched to manual completely. His current go-to is a sturdy German-built Voigtländer Bessa.

"Nowadays young people are bored with digital," he says. "They choose film to find something new in their pictures." Just like the *Jurassic* film franchise, everything



that was once considered old is becoming new again. Khoa connects with other film photographers through Facebook groups to refine their craft and organize gettogethers to "shoot the street light." It's very beautiful, he assures me. The consensus among the groups is "film just looks better."

A Hundred Pictures

Co-founder of Mayhem clothing shop and a 35mm savant, Syka says "with digital, I feel like I have to take a hundred pictures of something before I can find the right one. It's just a waste of time. However, when shooting film, you have to think carefully before you take a picture. The funny thing with film is when you get the picture it's never what you expect. I mean, some

pictures you take and you think it's not gonna turn out good, and then you get the film back and it's like, damn, perfect."

Like Khoa, Syka also started out with digital, a compact point-and-shoot her mother gave her. "Î didn't want to jump into film until I had this friend who was showing off his new film camera. I asked to borrow it for a week to try it but it was a rangefinder camera so I didn't know how to focus properly. When the pictures came back the quality wasn't good. I wanted to do it again so a friend took me to a camera shop and this is it," she says, pointing to her trusty Canon SLR on the table. "When I first started shooting, I set everything on automatic. The pictures came back, perfect, perfect, perfect, and I thought, 'I can do it!' But after two rolls on auto, I thought,

'Okay, now it's time to learn."

She taught herself the basics, getting inspiration from 1970s cinema, Flickr and Tumblr. "Sometimes in a movie I'll just pause and look at the screen. You can get a good idea for what makes a good picture by doing that. Then once I became good with the measure and everything, I started on double exposure (where one image is bled into another by winding back the film and shooting over it again), and opening the camera for light leaks. You can do some pretty crazy things with film. But the most important thing is to just enjoy it."

There's an aphorism that I find holds true to what is an unpredictable craft: The beauty is in the flaws. That's one thing to always keep in mind when starting out in film photography.



Syka





SWAP MEETS

Most film photographers connect through Facebook and Flickr, but there are also groups that meet in cafés to swap cameras, and buy and develop film. With stocks of 35mm film diminishing in Kodak shops as the factories in Japan reduce their shipments because of slow demand, film is becoming harder to find. That is why it's good to be in the know, and places like these are invaluable sources of information.

Fix Republic (30/1F Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3) is the main hub, marked out by its assortment of Vespas and fixed wheel bicycles often lined up outside. The café is crammed with all manner of film photography hardware and memorabilia, a veritable museum of old cameras with faded Polaroids adorning the walls. They order a big box of film from Germany every other month, from which you can snatch up a roll for under VND50,000, and they'll post the rolls to Hanoi for developing for about the same price.

Croplab (489/19 Huynh Van Banh, Phu Nhuan) is a smaller and more spartan café. They develop in-house and can get your scanned negatives back the same day. It's also a great place for a peek into the Saigon film photography scene, with someone always on hand to offer up a couple of pro tips to help jazz up your snaps.

Victoria Chau Doc Hotel

Discovering beauty and diversity along the Mekong Delta

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES PROVIDED BY VICTORIA CHAU DOC HOTEL

SET WHERE THE Chau Doc River meets the Hau River (a branch of the Mekong), most travelers treat Chau Doc as simply a waypoint on the road to Saigon, The Pearl of the Far East, or Phnom Penh,The Pearl of Asia, on the river route connecting the two, arriving late in the afternoon and leaving early the next morning, barely seen and just as quickly forgotten.

However, more and more travelers in the know are beginning to appreciate the town of Chau Doc, located in the far west of southern Vietnam, as an excellent base to discover the region's diversity of cultures, religions, people and nature.

Chau Doc's location by the Cambodian border means it is home to diverse ethnic and religious communities where Cambodian Buddhists, Vietnamese Buddhists, ethnic Chinese and Muslim Cham live peacefully side by side. On the water, just past where the main rivers merge, about 30 boats congregate in the early morning hours to form a photogenic floating market. The barges come from all over the Mekong Delta, laden with a variety of fruits and vegetables, and they attract a small army of hospitality boats — people selling drinks or noodles to the sellers and

buyers. Just outside of town, at the base of scenic Nui Sam Mountain, lies the Lady Xu Temple, one of Vietnam's most holy sites, attracting upwards of two million pilgrims for her annual festival. Nature lovers will be thrilled with a visit to the 850 hectare Tra Su Forest, an easy day trip from Chau Doc. Home to 140 types of flora and 70 species of birds, the submerged forest is otherworldly in its beauty.

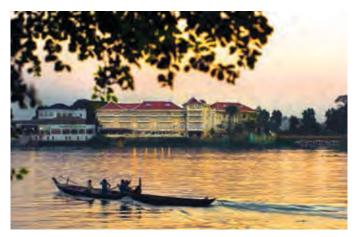
An ideal base from which to explore this corner of the Mekong Delta is the gorgeous, colonial-inspired Victoria Chau Doc Hotel, the only 4-star hotel in town. Set just next to Chau Doc's river walk, a pedestrian-only area where families come out to watch the river and where children play pick-up football games, the hotel is within easy walking distance to the Chau Doc Market and center of town, and boats taking visitors to the floating market and Cham village are conveniently moored right at the river walk.

The Victoria Chau Doc Hotel features 92 wood-floored rooms, including 4 suites, most offering spectacular views of the Hau River. Each room combines the elegance of traditional Vietnamese handicrafts and colonial Old World charm with dark wood furniture highlighted with bright locally-

produced textiles. After a long day of exploration, come home to a spectacular riverfront outdoor swimming pool or unwind at the Victoria Spa located on the top floor of the hotel with magnificent river views.

The sophisticated Bassac Restaurant overlooks the river and features typical Southern Vietnamese cuisine. Its indoor and outdoor areas are a popular spot to witness breathtaking sunrise views. The Tan Chau Salon Bar, with its plush leather armchairs and a wall of French doors opening out to an outdoor terrace is also a magical place to while away the hours watching life roll on by on the river.

Plan your summer retreat today and enjoy a special rate starting from VND1,659,740++ per night, including buffet breakfast by the river, valid for stays now through the end of September. The Mekong Coach also offers first-rate transfers between Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho and Chau Doc exclusively for Victoria guests and features leather seats, individual tablet computers and complimentary Wi-Fi. To book, email resa. chaudoc@victoriahotels.asia or visit www.victoriahotels.asia









LEGAL EASE LEGAL COLUMN

Knockoffs

How to protect and enforce your intellectual property rights

Dear Hadrien and Marijn,
Every now and then I stop by Saigon Square to shop
for clothes and knickknacks and what strikes me
most every time I go there is the huge amount (and
the amazing quality) of the counterfeit goods that
are on offer. But where does the Vietnamese law
stand in this regard?

WHETHER IT IS 'Nike' sneakers, 'Louis Vuitton' handbags, 'Ray-Ban' sunglasses, 'The North Face' jackets or the latest model 'iPhone' that you are looking for, you can find it all for a bargain in Ho Chi Minh City. Your question touches upon a rather sensitive issue for Vietnam - the protection of 'intellectual property' (IP).

In Vietnam, IP is protected through the Law on Intellectual Property and its implementing regulations. Vietnam is also a member of various international treaties, such as the TRIPS Agreement under the World Trade Organization, the Paris Convention and the Madrid Agreement. Under Vietnamese law, intellectual property rights are divided into copyrights, rights related to copyrights, industrial property rights, and rights to plant varieties. Even though violations of copyright and patents may be involved as well, the trade in counterfeit goods is most closely related to the infringement of trademarks (popularly known as ® or TM), which fall in the category of industrial property rights.

Unlike copyright, which is established automatically in Vietnam, trademarks can only be established after completing registration procedures with Vietnam's National Office of Intellectual Property. Registration may take a minimum of 12 months and, once a trademark is registered, it is protected for an extendable period of 10 years. So-called "well-known marks" form an exception to this rule as they are not established through registration, but on the basis of

actual market use.

If an infringement occurs, a range of measures is available to the owner of the trademark. They can be administrative (i.e. fines imposed by the relevant governmental authorities, and in certain cases even for the end user of the counterfeit goods!), civil (i.e. a civil lawsuit initiated to claim damages) or criminal (i.e. prosecution in accordance with the Penal Code of Vietnam).

To a large extent, the legal framework in Vietnam is pretty comprehensive and in line with international standards. So far so good, we can almost hear you say. However, the enforcement of intellectual property rights, in practice, can be a bit more of a challenge. While administrative actions can be a convenient way to deal with trademark infringements, the fines imposed are relatively low and there is no possibility to compensate the trademark owner through this avenue.

Alternatively, a trademark owner can start civil court proceedings to receive financial compensation but this option may be less appealing when you bear in mind the length of such proceedings and the inefficiency of the Vietnamese judicial system in general. Perhaps the establishment of a special court for intellectual property rights would be a solution in this regard.

An efficient protection of IP rights is an important factor for the investment climate in Vietnam. Without it foreign investors who are operating in advanced, high-tech industries will be very hesitant



A member of the Paris Bar, Hadrien Wolff has been practicing law in Vietnam for more than seven years, currently as a partner of Audier & Partners based at its HCMC office. Having gained extensive legal experience in the Netherlands and Cambodia, Marijn Sprokkereef is an associate at the Hanoi office of the same firm. Audier & Partners is an international law firm with presence in Vietnam, Myanmar and Mongolia, providing advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

to invest in research and development in Vietnam. And as a result the so-called "transfer of knowledge," something that Vietnam is often seeking, will remain limited.

Given that counterfeit goods in Vietnam are not limited to only handbags and sunglasses, but also items such as motorbikes, food, beverages, petrol and pharmaceuticals, it almost goes without saying that inefficient protection of IPs can even pose serious threats to public health and safety.

Even though it seems to present a rather bleak picture of IP rights in Vietnam, it has to be noted that considerable progress has been made over the past few years. For example, several foreign trademark owners have recently been successful in terminating infringements of their rights. Furthermore, it seems the authorities are stepping up their efforts to improve registration and protection of trademarks in Vietnam. Recent examples include the establishment by the Prime Minister of a National Steering Committee for the fight against smuggling, trade fraud and counterfeit goods in March last year and a Resolution including an action plan that was issued by the Vietnamese government on June 9, 2015 for the same purpose.

This positive tendency may be related to the fact that Vietnam is currently in the process of negotiating several free trade agreements. The EU – Vietnam free trade agreement is noteworthy in this regard, but it seems that IP rights are especially high on the agenda for the so-called Trans-Pacific Partnership. You may want to keep an eye on this because a little peer pressure from powerful negotiating partners like the US and the European Union may be just what is needed to further improve protection of IP rights in Vietnam.

Every month, *Hadrien and Marijn* answer legal questions from Oi readers. If you have any legal question you want answered, send them to *legal@oivietnam.com*.



Switching the Play

Zorb football puts soccer players inside bouncy bubbles

TEXT BY JULIAN AJELLO IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

The game of football, including its name, is one of great contention throughout the world. So many different sports claim the name despite being almost nothing alike, save for the use of some sort of inflated leather ball. Most people associate the name with the world's most beloved game that Americans call soccer. Americans have their own game called football, which bears no resemblance to its namesakes. The Australians, not to be left out, have their own homegrown version. And rugby football is yet another popular iteration that clutters the field. If you've been around fans of these games you're familiar with the arguments about which are tougher, or require more skill to play, not to mention the level of athletic prowess



displayed by those who play them.

Enter zorb soccer, or zorb football, if you will. Invented by a couple of Norwegian television show hosts, it resembles the beautiful game in that it features a round, paneled ball and the objective to put it into a goal, but that's where the similarities with soccer end. The game takes on the feel of the world's other versions in that players are allowed, even encouraged, to hit their opponents with as much force and violence as one can muster. It sounds dangerous until donning the inflatable orbs that distinguish zorb soccer from anything else.

At 1.5m in diameter, and approximately 10kg in weight, the adjustable orbs cover participants from the waist to well over the



head. Players can use the orbs to deflect passes and shots as well as running into opposing players to knock them down and disrupt them.

To investigate this game's burgeoning popularity, we ventured deep into District 7, amidst the industrial parks near the river, where Frenchman Mathieu Lacour operates Saigon Zorb Soccer's (Facebook: Saigon Zorb Soccer) current home base. Zorb soccer first came to his attention in a popular YouTube video. "When I saw that I knew I had to do it," he explains. "I imported some orbs and set up shop. We've had more than 2,000 people play already and I've staged a tournament in Danang and participated in festivals and I also worked with Nike."

Base Instincts

Taking the pitch, our group started out rather tentatively as knocking people down during a game of soccer, especially your friends, is counterintuitive. The first game was highly experimental. Contact was more akin to playful nudging while we attempted to control the ball, pass and shoot. After a few solid hits, however, innate competitive juices, and the desire to smash people, were overwhelming. The game morphed from putting the ball in the net to hitting people as hard as we could.

Indulging one's violent nature with laughter and camaraderie as the byproducts is among the most fulfilling activities in which civilized human beings can hope to partake. Flying around the field with reckless abandon seeking not the opportunity to score a goal, but to lay one of your mates out like a cheap rug is both thrilling and a joy. Zorb soccer not only allows people to entertain more base instincts in a fun and friendly environment, it also levels the playing field.

Those who are good at the game of soccer won't find those skills necessarily translating to zorb. Where these people are used to running circles around those without the skill, experience, or training

to compete with them, they now face opponents whose mission is more that of a guided missile than defender. On the other end of the spectrum, the more stoutly built of us who normally can't keep up a rigorous pace will find that they are the immovable objects and the irresistible forces. So long as no one blindsides them that is. Fred, the most stoutly built person in our crew swept up and down the pitch with the force of a tsunami, leveling everyone in his path. In one instance, a player who I shall not name to spare him the embarrassment, delayed choosing sides in one game in order to make sure he was on Fred's team.

There is almost as much satisfaction watching someone launching a player off their feet, sailing through the air and landing with a thud as there is in laying that person out yourself. I said almost, because delivering a bone-jarring collision is what zorb soccer is about.

The game is sure to catch on here. France has some 40 clubs devoted to it and there are more than 30 active leagues in the US already. Lacour plans to open a space in Thao Dien for the game and will deliver to other locations should a group wish to book their own event. The latter will include a delivery fee in addition to the rate of VND150,000 per person per hour.

Not content with simply running a series of one-off events and games for fun, he has bigger aspirations for zorb. "I'm hoping to establish a league here," said Lacour. "I want to see teams based in Vietnam form leagues and divisions and have national champions to compete with those from Japan and other countries in the region where we have to travel to play."

People who give it a try all seem to have the same general feelings about zorb - that it's a tremendous amount of fun and they look forward to their next game. "It was like running around in giant bubble wrap," said Nikke, one of our other participants. "A childhood dream just came true."



IT'S BEEN NEARLY five years since the last Vietnamese rhinoceros - Rhinoceros sondaicus annamiticus - was found dead with a bullet in its leg and its horn sawn off in Cat Tien National Park. Researchers had only just proven that he was the very last representative of an ancient herd that had once roamed as far as India and central China, making him the rarest of all the world's large land mammals. While poaching wasn't the only factor in the Vietnamese rhino's population decline (European hunting, the spread of human civilization, and the impact of war on the local environment have all contributed to dwindling numbers) it was a painful blow to conservation efforts that the final hours of this millennia-old species were dealt to it by the shotgun and the hacksaw.

Vietnam remains one of the world's top three consumers of rhino horn products (the other two being China and the US), and demand in all three countries is driven by superstition. Traditional medicines have their place, and many customary folk treatments have proven to be effective; not so the rhino horn, which has been definitively proven to have none of the restorative properties attributed to it by any medical tradition. Rhino horn is boneless – it grows from the hide, not the skull, and it's a clump of protein that is compositionally equivalent to a fingernail

or a common animal hoof. Even so, a kilo of it will fetch USD60,000 on the black market, one and a half times the price of solid gold. That's an obscene amount of money for what's essentially a placebo with zero medicinal benefits.

The rhino horn trade has become an increasingly potent political issue in recent years – not only in recognition of the sheer brutality it inflicts on the animals themselves, but also for its close links with other organized international crimes, including drug smuggling and human trafficking. It's been named one of the central focuses in contemporary Vietnamese/American relations, with the most recent joint initiative being a wideranging campaign to educate local citizens in the realities of the industry.

Earlier this year, the US Embassy in Hanoi announced one of its more intriguing strategies in combating demand for rhino horn products called Wildfest – a short film competition spearheaded by some of Vietnam's most well-respected filmmakers. The concept is simple: to conduct workshops to engage and sensitize filmmakers about issues related to the illegal wildlife trade and rhino horn consumption, and provide essential information and insights to help them develop creative film concepts. At the workshops – which were held in late June

 the filmmakers were instructed in key messages that need to be conveyed and how to most effectively reach the relevant target audiences in discussion with wildlife and media experts.

Following on from the June workshops, participants (and members of the general public) are now invited to create short films of less than seven minutes' duration to convey the organization's messages. The hope, it would seem, is to provide a groundroots vehicle for transmitting knowledge to diminish demand for the trade.

Vietnamese-American documentary maker Bao Nguyen, who is serving as one of the competition's judges and also filming his own contribution to the cause, has seen the effects of the illicit trade first hand. While visiting South Africa for a film festival last year, he decided to take a safari tour to see the local fauna in the wild.

"I knew about the rhino horn trade before I got there," says Bao, "but there I was, up close and personal with a baby rhino that they'd cut the horns off of. It was done prematurely so that poachers wouldn't kill the rhino to get the horn. You get the sense of, is this the world that we want to live in, where we have to preemptively brutalize animals so that they're not killed? All the other animals, they're in their natural environment; it's one of the most



Bao (second from left)

beautiful experiences that I've ever witnessed. But when you see a supposedly wild animal stuck in a kind of purgatory, it's very sad. That meant a lot to me going there – this was before I even knew that Wildfest was happening. I think it should help me make this film more effective, with a little more heart, because I experienced it personally."

Principles, But No Rules

The concept of asking young aspiring filmmakers to popularize a social cause is perhaps very much a product of our time, but the idea is not without its critics. External observers may be forgiven for being cynical about such an important issue being handled in such a lighthearted fashion – and it would be a vast stretch of the imagination to imagine that amateur footage distributed on Youtube will be enough to counteract the inertia of centuries-old beliefs.

While Bao acknowledges the difficulties involved, he remains convinced of the competition's strategy. "I don't think I would be involved with a project unless I thought it would have some impact," he says. "For me as a filmmaker, it's hard to gauge the impact and the metrics of how many people I affect – but if you can teach the younger generation not to purchase rhino horns, or if they spread the word to their parents, I think that's something important."

Popular film producer Charlie Nguyen, who is representing Wildfest as an ambassador, echoes this sentiment. "With Wildfest, you're planting a seed for the future," he explains. "Whether it's rhino or anything else, you're raising awareness, and you're creating a ripple effect. I'm hoping people will start asking the question, why are they doing this? If people start asking

questions, we're successful. If people are oblivious to it, then it's a problem."

Charlie has no qualms about spreading this kind of critical message on entertainment-driven social media networks. "It's one way to get noticed," he explains. "To attract the young people. But it's not just movies. They're showing clips at the hospitals now to teach people that basically they're consuming fingernails; it's nothing potent. Gruesome images. It's horrible, it's heartbreaking."

"For a lot of the older generation, yes, it's too late," he admits. "They don't go on Facebook, they don't watch these short films, they're so disconnected from our reach. We just can't reach out to them. If we're lucky, then a young family member will go home and say, 'Hey Pop, what you're doing is ineffective, and cruel."

For Bao, the role of filmmakers in causes like these is to disseminate the core messages of the nonprofits, "For me as a filmmaker, I'm trying to create a story that people can connect to and really empathize with," he says. "The nonprofits have done their research over the years, and so it's important for us to integrate what they have to say. People view rhino horn as a status symbol, but some people just don't know how much impact it has on the environment, and what it's doing to the rhino population around the world. As a result of that, it could turn into a kind of reverse status symbol where people will be ashamed that they have these rhino horns. I think that's important, because if you see your neighbor being arrested in the middle of the night for having rhino horn, that's counterintuitive to the idea that you have this status symbol."

Vietnamese indie filmmaking is more of a trend out of Hanoi right now, but Bao sees the independent scene as beginning to find its voice here, as well as throughout the country. The Wildfest workshop held in Ho Chi Minh City on June 26 was packed with young filmmakers.

"I think people should choose whatever tools they have," he advises. "It doesn't matter whether you shoot with a phone or an iMax camera; if you have a good story, then that's all that matters. I think that Vietnam is the perfect place to fight against that tradition, because Vietnamese people are so resourceful in every way that it's like a brave new world. Especially in Vietnam with filmmaking, there should be no limit, there are no rules. There are principles, but definitely no rules."

The submission period for the WildFest film contest runs until August 31, and submissions will be judged by the strength of the ideas and creative concepts, production execution, effective message integration regarding the consumption of illegal wildlife products, and relevance to target audience groups. Based on these criteria, the panel of judges will select the most compelling films to be part of the official selection to compete for three awards - the grand prize, the special jury prize, and the press & critics' choice. The award-winning films will premiere at WildFest on November 1, 2015 at the Imperial Citadel in Hanoi.

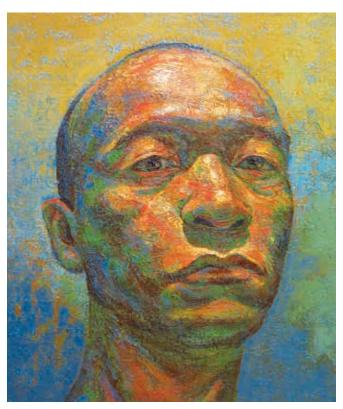
WildFest is part of Operation Game Change (OGC), a joint alliance between the United States and Vietnam, which aims to have broad appeal and influence public debate around illegal wildlife issues in Vietnam, especially to stop rhino horn trafficking.

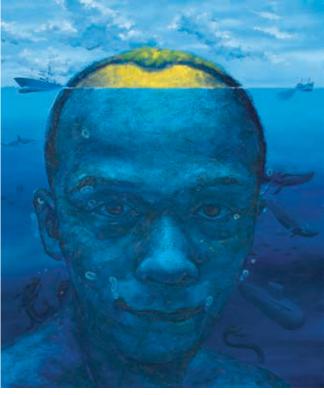
For more details, please visit www. wildfest.org and www.facebook.com/operationgamechange.

Hope in Hand

Inside the mind of one of Vietnam's most exciting artists

INTERVIEW BY OI VIETNAM IMAGES BY PHAM HUY THONG





Self Portrait

Self Portrait - Deep Blue

BORN IN 1981 in Ha Tay Province, Pham Huy Thong is a 2004 graduate of the Hanoi Industrial Fine Arts University. Among his many important solo and group exhibitions in Vietnam and abroad, Thong displayed his solo exhibition *Hands* at Craig Thomas Gallery in November 2012. We posed questions to Thong to better understand what drives this talented, compelling and articulate artist.

What mediums do you work in?

My primary medium is oil but like all artists, who are curious big-children, I keep trying other materials. Lacquer was my first successful medium. It was in 2003 when I first tried lacquer. It is a very complicated medium and without any teacher or tutor I made a lot of mistakes and failures in the first few months. Gradually, when I learned to handle the technique, I found that my lacquer paintings somehow looked very different to other artists' work. I'm not saying that my technique looked better; it just looked different. But 'different' is a very key feature in contemporary art. My lacquer paintings helped me earn a lot of money and gain confidence during my time as a student.

But since I started to develop my paintings with more meaning, stories and

thinking, working with lacquer seemed too time-consuming. It's not fun to have to wait months to find out if an idea worked out well on a lacquer surface so I tried other materials like acrylic, watercolor, ink and oil. Now most of my serious works are done with oil or acrylic while sketches and drawings are usually done in watercolor or with an ink pen on paper.

Sometimes, to express myself differently, I also try to do installations and performances. The process of build up and installation artwork always makes me feel quite excited.

What role do you think an artist should play in society in general, and, in particular, in modern Vietnamese society?

Well, if you had asked me this question seven years ago, my answer would have been very different than it is today. However, I still believe that an artist is not the pioneer of this world (but then again we have never been the 'leaders' of anything). If you want to change a country, you'd better go into politics or grab a gun and make a revolution, but if you want to change the long-term future of a country (talking generations), then being an artist is not a bad choice.

Artists and art cannot effect change quickly enough, especially in Vietnam, where art education is not developed, so the majority of people do not understand art. They do not have the right attitude to listen to what an artist is saying. But an artist still has to do an artist's job, because we are witnesses of our time, and we eternalize what we observe through our expression on canvas (or in our artwork in general).

Of course, art has an impact on society in a very gentle way. If you stand long enough, you can see how art can change this society (as changing art itself). Fifteen years ago, an artist named Truong Tan, a gay man, battled a system of censorship that sought to limit his freedom of expression. His "weird and dirty" paintings which depicted nude men making love were banned. Many of his paintings were taken down at his exhibitions and many related troubles that manifested in his life aimed at slowing down his energetic artistic practice. But Truong Tan's fight was noticed not only by the local art community but also by the international media and professional art critics. They kept talking about his artworks. Today, Vietnam is the one of the most open countries in the region where we can talk freely about homosexuality. Two years ago, there was a photo exhibition in the Goethe



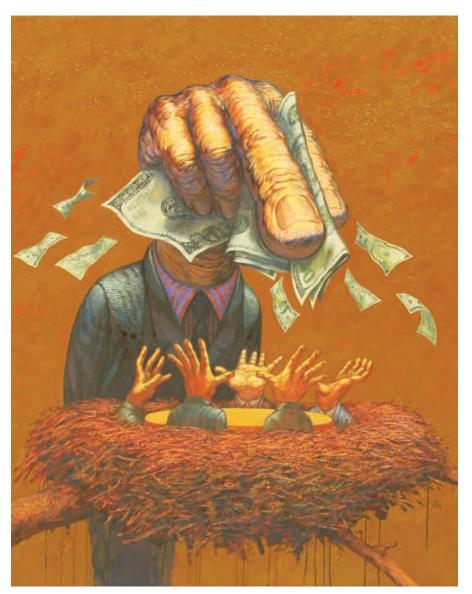
Flooding

But an artist still has to do an artist's job, because we are witnesses of our time, and we eternalize what we observe through our expression on canvas (or in our artwork in general).

Institut in Hanoi about the lives of gays and lesbians. The photographer – Maika – later on received a big international photo prize because of that. This controversial exhibition would never have taken place without Truong Tan's fight 15 years prior.

How has your artistic practice evolved since you began your career?

The art that I did in the early stages was simply portraits or self-reflecting paintings. But on the way learning, especially in the period from 2006-2007, I started to try to express my thinking and understanding about some more serious topics such as political or social issues. My first solo exhibition was a one-room installation (2006) that depicted rain and people running underneath it trying to hide themselves from a common threat, instinctively and creatively showing their own individual ways to try and stay dry.



Money-Go-Round

My second solo show was at L'Espace. This second solo show *Updated* included big size paintings and an installation. Paintings in the show were all appropriations from Dong Ho traditional prints. The lives depicted in Dong Ho prints were hundreds of years out of date. I took the same composition but recreated them with modern life issues. Mentioning modern life on the foundation of old print, I had chances to criticize current phenomenon in a context of societal history. The Updated series was not my most popular series, but it showed my biggest leap forward, talking about politics and society more directly and wisely.

Do you have professional goals as an artist and do you have an idea of where you would like to be in, say, 20 years?

Of course every artist has a dream to become internationally famous. So do I. As well as trying to make more meaningful art, I am now continuingly trying to build a broader network and collector base abroad. But as my paintings mostly talk about Vietnamese issues, I hope that my painting can come to be accepted and be understood by more Vietnamese people.

The audience for visual and contemporary art in Vietnam is currently very small. You can see many familiar faces in all the different exhibition openings. I hope in the next 10 or 20 years, visual art can come to be welcomed by a bigger domestic audience so the amount of 'famous' and 'popular' artists are closer to each other.

What particular problems or challenges do you see facing Vietnamese art/ artists, and, conversely, what advantages do you see to being an artist in Vietnam at this unique time in the country's history?

The condition for Vietnamese artists is actually good. We are living right above a gold mine of 'issues.' Just wake up every morning, look through your front door to see the street, to hear the noises and you will find a lot of things to complain about. I believe artists who live in more developed countries such as in Northern Europe, for example, do not find that much inspiration easily available.

Of course, people may expect that I should focus my complaints on issues of censorship, free speech, etc. But I have been talking about such things for a long time. Sometimes, I consider those obstacles as easy targets for an artist to fight against. I think it would be a big shock for us if tomorrow morning everything turned totally free all of a sudden and we could speak and paint about whatever we liked. I think in that event, I would be mute for a while

I thing the biggest challenge for artists now as well as in the past are the tendencies to self-censorship and greed. While censorship will try to stop you when you fight, these two things kill all your will to fight before you have ever

begun the struggle.

Can you tell us about your Tu Lap Young Talent program and why you think it is incumbent upon successful artists who are moving into mid-career status to support young artists?

I was lucky in 2008 when I received a full sponsorship to travel and see art in other countries. The differences between seeing art through books and computer screens and seeing art directly are indisputable. Traveling to Singapore, China, Thailand to see their art museums, to talk with artists and watch them working expanded my horizons and collapsed all of my old standards for making art.

Now I want to give the same chance to a younger artist. Each year, through an application process, I will select one promising artist to go with me to see Art Stage Singapore for six days. The Asiarta Foundation agreed to support that same artist with a one-month residency in Malaysia. Six days in Singapore and one month in Malaysia would be a good time for the artist to gain exposure to a different cultural environment and to give them a wider imagination of what they can be in the future.

Can you tell us about your upcoming collection Hope?

The *Hope* series was started in March 2014 and focuses on exploiting theme related to rural farmers and the urban working poor. Vietnam's process of urbanization and modernization has created an increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Those who have a low position in society are increasingly pushed to the margins. During times of economic crisis, the inequality gap does not shrink but becomes exacerbated.

The *Hope* paintings exploit the contrast between images of storm clouds representing the uncertain future of the poor and images of white clouds like the hope that rises in their hearts. Although the people who collect my paintings are well off, my intention with this series is not to engender social pity towards the subjects. On the contrary, I hope they will provide a source of encouragement because rich or poor each of us must face and overcome our own problems, something which requires great faith in the future.

Thong's latest series of paintings entitled **Hope** will be exhibited at CT Gallery (27i Tran Nhat Duat, D1) in early December 2015. ■

The Hope paintings exploit the contrast between images of storm clouds representing the uncertain future of the poor and images of white clouds like the hope that rises in their hearts.



Норе

MONEY TALK FINANCE COLUMN

Account On It

Navigating through the numerous fees and surcharges to find the best bank



Sven Roering is a partner and financial planner at Total Wealth Management PTE. Ltd (www.t-wm.com). He holds an Economics Degree from Rhodes University in South Africa, and is a candidate in the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) program, having successfully completed level 1 and is currently working towards the level 2 exam.

Dear Sven.

I just moved from Madrid to Saigon to work as a manager at a local manufacturing company. My boss told me that I am responsible for opening my own bank account while I'm here. I've noticed that there are both Vietnamese and foreign banks operating in the city. I want to open an account with a foreign bank as I'm more familiar with them however I don't have time to look through all the fees and various charging structures. I get paid in dong and am on a basic expat salary so would be looking for an option that would not punish me too much if my balance falls below a certain level. Also, I am still paying off student debt and would like to transfer money back home every three months. What's my cheapest option?

I PRESUME THE foreign banks you're referring to are HSBC, Commonwealth Bank, Citibank, Standard Chartered and ANZ. Keep in mind they are technically not foreign banks. While they have international brand names they are essentially franchises operating in Vietnam and are therefore considered Vietnamese banks as well. What I have done is taken some time to look through the individual tariff schedules from all the banks listed above to give you a hand with some basic cost comparisons.

Opening a basic account at any bank in Vietnam requires proof of identity, usually a copy of your passport, as well as proof of employment, which could be your work permit or a letter from your company (your boss could help you with this). The best thing to do would be to go to the bank you wish to open an account with and ascertain what documentation is required. This will save you time.

In terms of opening an account, this is free at all the banks listed above. You will be issued a debit card with which you can withdraw money, free-of-charge, at your bank's ATMs, and, in certain cases, free of charge at other ATMs.

If you happen to quit your job (or get fired) and want to close your account before the one year minimum, Standard Chartered will charge you VND100,000.

Standard Chartered also requires you to have the lowest monthly balance (VND1 million), and they also charge the least for falling below the minimum level (VND100,000 per month), slightly cheaper than the others.

As mentioned before, there is no surcharge for making withdrawals from your bank's ATMs, however, you might not always be close to one therefore withdrawing from another bank will incur additional charges. You will be subject to the other bank's fee which differs for every company. Citibank is quite flexible in this regard as you are able to withdraw for free, if you are a Citibank account holder, at any ATM which is part of the VISA network (has the VISA logo visible on ATM). This is the same for ANZ account holders. Making withdrawals from your Vietnamese account overseas is a different story, as you are usually charged between 4% and 4.5% of the transaction as a forex administration fee, regardless of whether you withdraw from your bank's ATMs or not. Some banks will charge a fixed fee for every transaction as well, so make sure you don't make too many withdrawals while abroad. Make 100 percent certain you can use your debit card abroad. Ask a representative from your bank before traveling.

When it comes to remitting funds to and from your bank account, the only two banks that will charge you or inward remittance into your Vietnamese dong account from overseas are Commonwealth Bank and ANZ. The others do not charge for this. At all banks you have the option of registering for an internet banking facility, where you are able to transfer funds to other banks in Vietnam and abroad. All the banks charge a nominal fee for transferring funds to third party banks within Vietnam via internet banking, however Citibank does not charge for this. Citibank also does not charge for transferring funds overseas via their internet banking facility. Remember that if you are transferring funds from your Vietnamese dong account, which is converted to a foreign currency, that you will receive the commercial rate of exchange, and not the 'true' rate. For example you would be purchasing Euro at the bank's rate in Vietnam, not Spain. This could be a disadvantage.

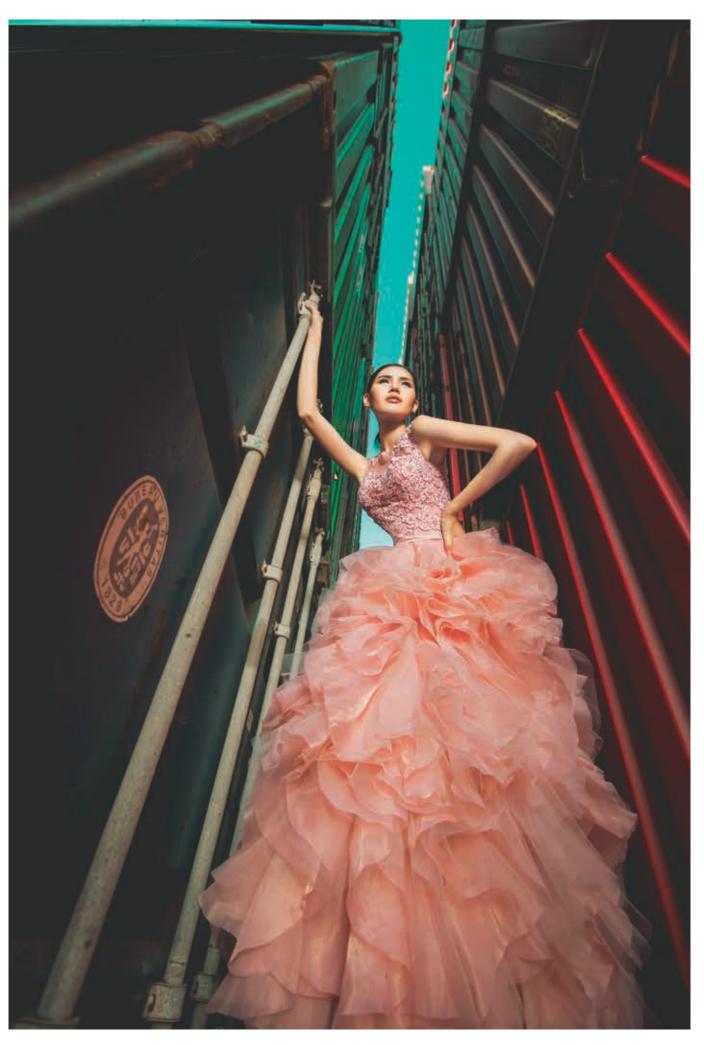
Consider the activities that are likely to take place the most on your account - domestic transfers, domestic ATM withdrawals, overseas ATM withdrawals or overseas transfers - and select the bank that would charge the least for the services you use the most.



White will forever be classic and beautiful, but there's something undeniable about the appeal of an unexpected hue in a sea of ivory. Color your wedding dress with shades of blush pink for a totally fresh and romantic look.















MILLION DOLLAR LISTINGS





TEXT BY NPD KHANH

IMAGES PROVIDED BY SAVILLS

FOREIGN HOME OWNERSHIP has long been a topic of discussion in Vietnam. Since the law change last month however, the Vietnamese real estate market is, for the first time, opening to foreigners. Under the new law, foreigners can now assume full ownership of Vietnamese properties. Among these, luxury properties are garnering some attention. But what defines a luxury property in Vietnam? How much do they cost? How do Vietnamese luxury properties stack up against those in older, more mature markets such as New York, Paris, or Shanghai? And are they viable investment options for those looking for opportunities?

"To answer that first question, right now in Vietnam, there's no

true definition for luxury properties nor are there any standards shared across the entire industry," says Vo Huynh Tuan Kiet, Senior Manager of residential projects at CBRE, one of the world's largest commercial real estate firms and a major player in the local luxury real estate industry. "Vietnam is a young market, not older than 30 years, whereas luxury properties are the territory of mature markets. The standards for luxury class properties are still in the making. That is the reason why each company in the market tends to have its own standards and definition as to what amounts to a luxury real estate product."

According to Kiet, the clearest defining factor separating a







OPPOSITE & THIS PAGE: Riviera Cove luxury villas, D9

luxury property from a lower level premium property is the price tag. High-end product averages around USD2,000 to USD2,500 per square meter in downtown Saigon. Luxury properties, on the other hand, hover around USD6,000 to USD8,000 per square meter. A typical luxury level apartment or estate will have a price of around USD900,000 to a couple of million dollars with its leasing rate about six to seven percent of its net value.

Outside of price, there are other qualifying features that define luxury. For CBRE, a property must meet their standard in three separate categories before it's considered luxury. The first two of these are location and convenience. "The location must be unique," explains Kiet. "If it is Saigon then it must be in the heart of the city, in a superb neighborhood. If it's in, say, Da Nang or Nha Trang, then it must be on the best beaches open to residential ownership. It must also have all modern conveniences and comfort that includes services, management, amenities and facilities such as private five-star gyms, parking space for cars or even for personal aircrafts."

The third feature is both the most important and the one quality that differentiates a luxury property from a merely premium one: iconic status. "It's about making a statement," says Kiet. "When someone buys a luxury property, they don't just want a very nice house or apartment. They want to make a statement. They want to show that they are different. Think of the folks who live in Beverly Hills for example, or the residents in Seoul's Gangnam District. A house in any of those neighborhoods is more than just a house. It's a badge of status."

EXCLUSIVITY

Savills, a UK founded global real estate service, has different standards and qualifications from CBRE. In Vietnam, Savills owns the lion's share of the luxury vacation home segment in Da Nang

and Nha Trang. "The characteristics that define a luxury level property to us are international standards and exclusivity," says Neil McGregor, Managing Director of Savills Vietnam. "If I were to walk into a Vietnamese luxury estate, I expect that its quality is on par with a similar level luxury property in any other part of the world, be it in Hawaii or Cape Town or Chianti, Italy."

Savills's exclusivity is similar to CBRE's iconic status in that they are both defining features that differentiate a luxury property from a premium one. "It's about class. It's about owning something that few other people have. If an item is easily obtained, it doesn't have a lot of worth. If we bill a villa or a beach estate in a gated community as a luxury property, it cannot be obtained by hundreds or thousands of people. It must be exclusive and available only to a select few: 10, 20 or 30 people."

On the topic of how Vietnamese luxury properties stack up against properties in established markets such as New York, Paris or Shanghai, Savills and CBRE hold differing opinions. "There's no sense in comparing markets with wildly different maturity and tastes. A real estate property is a unique luxury product in that its values change depending on local tastes and limitations. A Hermes bag can be sold as a luxury item in just about every country. But a luxury estate in Paris will have vastly different features from one in Vietnam simply because the tastes of their prospective buyers are not the same. There simply is no comparison," answers Kiet.

Neil, on the other hand, believes the gap between these markets is small. "We hold our properties on the same quality levels as those of older markets. On the whole however, the Vietnamese properties are much more affordable than even those of the same region. The price of a beach estate in Da Nang, right now, is about a third or a fourth of that of an estate in Hua Hin or Hong Kong."

Luxury transactions do not take up a large portion of the real estate industry. According to Kiet, only one to two percent of transactions within the industry are on a luxury level. To make up for its small size though, the luxury segment is far more stable than lower level segments, even during times of economic difficulty.

"It is an industry in itself, with its own rules and its own factors that the market from low to high-end do not share," Neil agrees.

"The number of luxury properties is not high," says Kiet. "But demand is constantly growing as Vietnam attracts more and more high income businessmen and women. Even when the rest of the industry is in a slump, the luxury segment alone keeps on rising." This makes a luxury property an interesting and viable investment option for those with the means.

"For cash buyers who can immediately claim ownership of luxury estates, they can expect lease rates of seven to eight percent of the property's value per year," says Neil.

As a whole, Hanoian buyers dominate the luxury real estate market. But this is quickly changing according to Neil. "In the last two to three years, we have seen a rising number of transactions from Saigon businessmen and women. And from December of last year, there have been many inquiries from foreign buyers. It is an exciting time in the real estate industry right now." Neil expects a first wave of expat buyers once the government follows up its July law change with a clear guideline. After that will come the second and third waves of buyers from Singapore and other countries in the region.







FOR RICHER, FOR POORER



WHEN YOU CAN'T PUT A PRICE ON LOVE

TEXT BY NPD KHANH
IMAGES PROVIDED BY MISA VU

LAM TRAN AND HIEN VO tied the knot on December 19, 2014. The theme of their wedding was called "Love in the Air" because the couple loves to travel. It was an extravagant affair nine months in the making that consisted of an executive producer, 20 artists, craftsmen, and designers, and dozens more handymen and carpenters. Custom created and beautifully produced air balloons hung from the ceiling. The aisle was lined with rows of candles, yards of silk, strings of pearls and a veritable sea of hand-sewn roses in powder white, purple and pink. The walkway was paved with digital screens that mimicked the appearance of cumulus clouds and the air in the ballroom was perfumed. A team of specialists supervised the lighting and music throughout the night. Halfway through the event aerial silk dancers from the Academy of

Performance Arts entertained guests as they hung from the ceiling. A week before the wedding took place at the InterContinental Asiana Saigon, the couple released a cinematic film showing the pair strolling through flower fields in Moc Chau before finding each other by a real air balloon rented and brought over from Thailand. The final bill for "Love in the Air" was over USD50,000.

The grand architect of the lavish wedding was Misa Vu, known in Vietnam as the "Queen of Luxury Events." Though Misa Vu's eponymous company has only been active for several years they have already designed and created 20 weddings and events, each just as grand and as costly (some more) as "Love is in the Air." There is a saying in the industry: There is Misa Vu and then there's everything else down below.

"It started with a wedding card in 2008," shares Misa. Before the glitter and glamour she worked as a crystal painter and glass artist, but unsatisfied with using only one medium she started dabbling with making paper cards. "An acquaintance of mine asked me to make the cards for her wedding. I sketched out what I had in mind for her. A card of soft powder pink wrapped in delicate lace and gilded with mother of pearls, and a rose to keep it closed. Four hundred cards with everything made by hand. She was so taken with my vision and enthusiasm that she let me decorate her wedding too."

Evidently Misa did a good job because a couple of months later another friend called to ask Misa to plan her wedding. The wedding was called "Alice in Wonderland" and she was paid VND400 million and although it barely covered her expenses it did help launch her career. By Misa's third event, a wedding inspired by Marguerite Duras' classic book *The Lover*, her luxury event planning company



was officially opened in 2010 with her work and life partner.

LABOR OF LOVE

Misa says that three factors constitute a truly luxurious event. The first one is the client's expression. "A Misa Vu wedding cannot be a typical wedding. It cannot fit any preconceived mold. It is the expression of my client's personalities, of their stories. It is their identity. It says what they want to say and shows what they want to show. Everything is tailored to the client's preferences."

The second is uniqueness. Not one Misa Vu wedding is the same. This is a promise the company makes to every one of their clients and has never failed to uphold it. The third is quality, a feature far more difficult to explain. "I never want to plan a typical Vietnamese wedding where people attend out of politeness, eat some subpar wedding food, listen to cheesy wedding music and awkward speeches made by anxious parents, check the time and then discreetly excuse themselves as they sneak out the door. A wedding is once in a lifetime. It should be a joyous occasion! So I want to create not just a party but an unforgettable moment, a never before experience. I want to compose a moment everyone in the wedding party shares, where they simply forget the time and just enjoy the night together. Everything I do, everything I plan - the decor, the flowers, the music, the perfume, the lighting, the dance and entertainment - everything must work together to orchestrate that one magical moment."

These days, a one-day event, regardless of the size and number of attendees, averages around USD40,000 to VND60,000. "I do not equate luxury with over-the-top expensive. Luxury is excellence and excellence requires the right funding," she says. "When I started out, people had no concept of a wedding planner. My clients didn't even know what a wedding planner did exactly, so I had to work my hardest to show them my vision and convince them to go with it. I budgeted carefully, wasting not a single dollar to make sure I could squeeze in as much of my vision as I could. Still I had to leave out so many things simply because there was no money for it."

She adds: "People think that we are raking in the cash but that's not true because what we charge goes to pay for the materials, for the designers, artists and performers. What we do is less a business and more a labor of love."

With time, Misa hopes to break the Vietnamese preconceived notions on weddings, the planning that goes into making them, and how much they should cost. "I want to do more events, better events, and bigger events. There are so many things I haven't tried, so many things I haven't done. I had to hold back because the market is not ready. My vision of the dream wedding is still not complete."





WAITING TO EXHALE





/1/1

THEY'VE BEEN USED to celebrate births and deaths, grand successes and plunging failures. At a puff per minute (as recommended by Swiss tobacco merchant Zino Davidoff in his 1967 *Guide to Cigar Etiquette*), they're meant to be savored in leisure. At upwards of USD1,150 for a single Gurkha Black Dragon, the most expensive cigar available on the market, cigars throughout history have been associated with the wealthy and powerful. From George Burns to Winston Churchill to Mark Twain to Whoopi Goldberg, the lure of a beautifully handcrafted cigar knows no barriers.

"[Cigars are] made for your enjoyment, not for being a snob," says Timen Swijtink, co-owner of the Saigon Cigar Club. "If you want to smoke it backwards to frontwards, do it. Fast or slow, with water or whisky, do what you like. It's a pricier product because it's difficult to produce, not because of snobbery."

Located within Sorae Restaurant on the 25th floor of the AB Building (76A Le Lai, D1), the Saigon Cigar Club is the ultimate man cave with its plush leather seating, dimly lit minimalist chic decor and expansive views of the city down below. "Some people come here right after work to relax by themselves, or to celebrate after a successful business meeting with a glass of whisky with a cigar," says Timen of his cosmopolitan clientele.

For the uninitiated, though, choosing a cigar from the largest Cuban cigar selection in Vietnam may be intimidating. That's where Timen and his staff come in, ready with a cigar primer. "We start off by asking how much time they have. If it's half an hour, we wouldn't recommend a larger cigar which may take up to two and a half hours to enjoy. We then ask what kind of flavor profile they like: light, medium or full, and what aromas they enjoy. Some cigars have notes of leather, mushroom, dark fruit like plums, vanilla or even coffee."

Over the beautifully custom-crafted humidor table which controls the humidity to an even 70 percent to prevent the cigars from rotting or drying out, Timen speaks of the handmade cigars on display with the efficiency of a sommelier. "A cigar is basically comprised of three elements of the tobacco plant. The top of the plant produces more of the flavors in the cigar. The middle of the plant produces the aromas, and the bottom, combustibility. The roller and the brand come up with a specific blend of those three to create unique strengths and aromas. On top of that, there's the terroir, the soil, climate, and craftsmanship of the tobacco growers. Because Cuba has been making cigars for so long, they're considered the world's best because they have so much know-how."

The cigar club stocks only Cubans, ranging from VND440,000 to VND2,900,000 for a Cohiba Behike 56, the most exclusive línea of

the most prestigious Habanos brands, whose production is extremely limited. "Our slogan is: 100 percent authentic, no exceptions," says Timen. "There's a lot of concern about fake cigars in Vietnam, and the untrained eye can easily be fooled. We want everyone to understand that when they buy a cigar here, they can be 100 percent sure that they're getting authentic, handmade Cuban cigars. We've even sent authentic cigars back to Habanos [the organization that markets and distributes Cuban cigars worldwide] when we felt they didn't meet the quality our customers expect."

"Whatever the price, though, each cigar is still Cuban, still handmade, a unique blend of soil and climate. There's nothing machine-made about it." In a visit to Cuba last year, Timen was able to observe firsthand the work that goes into each cigar, from the hand harvesting of the tobacco to its curing and fermentation to the rolling stage, where various parts of the tobacco plant are combined to achieve a distinct taste before finally being wrapped in a beautifully delicate tobacco leaf, specially grown under a gauze tent to prevent the leaf from growing too thick or veiny. "It's the leaf that determines the color of the cigar, not necessarily because of aging," explains Timen. "There are actually a lot of similarities to chocolate, wine, coffee and scotch. Cigars, just like a wine, will continue to develop."

Timen recommends smelling a cigar from the very end, instead of near the label, to get a good sense of the flavors and aromas of the cigar, but adds that the flavors can be slightly different in the beginning, middle and end, even in the same cigar. He also recommends leaving a bit of distance between the cigar and the torch when lighting to almost "toast" it. And whatever you do, don't inhale. Without a filter, cigar smoke tends to be thicker than cigarette smoke, and is therefore meant to be rolled around in the mouth and savored, much like wine, before exhaling.

For cigar aficionados, the Saigon Cigar Club offers membership (starting at USD900++) which includes your private humidor and advance notice to events, amongst other perks. "Our clients are 50-50, expat and Vietnamese, but more and more Vietnamese are starting to find out about it. When something is brand new, it usually starts with expats but our focus is really with the Vietnamese community because that's where the potential is."

Legendary comedian George Burns once defined happiness as "a good cigar, a good meal, a good cigar and a good woman – or a bad woman; it depends on how much happiness you can handle." If you're the type with money to burn, the Saigon Cigar Club offers all the happiness you can smoke.





ROLLIN' DOWN THE RIVER





TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

IMAGES PROVIDED BY HERITAGE LINE

IN AN ERA of supersonic planes, bullet trains and even space tourism, discerning travelers are opting to return to the Golden Age of Travel, going low and slow.

Cruising is the fastest growing segment of the travel industry, with an estimated 21 million passengers testing out their sea legs last year. While the vast majority are traveling on ocean-going cruise ships, river cruising, with its smaller ships and ability to dock right at the cities instead of distant seaports, is increasing at an even faster rate.

"River cruising is one of the best ways to discover a country and its culture," said Maarten Perdok, Managing Director of the Vietnam-based, luxury river cruise company, Heritage Line Co., Ltd. "You get to see the country from a different angle and go to places other tourists don't because there are simply no roads going to those places."

In addition to enjoying the convenience and intimacy of river cruising, Heritage Line guests can also expect onboard levels of luxury more commonly associated with bygone eras. "You're very close to life on the river which is quite unique," explains Maarten. "But then you have your floating hotel, luxury that's always on standby. During the day guests go off on excursions but in no time are back to their cabin, their comfort zone, with a chilled glass of









wine waiting for them and an attendant to shine their shoes."

Established in 2009, Heritage Line is a consummate collector of ships and vessels combining Old World elegance with modern comfort. In the Mekong Delta, the Jayavarman and the Jahan are inspired by French colonial cruise liners, and travel the Mekong River between Saigon – Chau Doc – Phnom Penh – Siem Reap. In Halong Bay, Heritage Line operates three traditional wooden junks on one- and two-night itineraries.

The newest river cruiser in the collection is the 23-cabin Anawrahta, named after the 11th century king who founded the Burmese nation. Built entirely in Vietnam, it will ply the Ayeyarwady and Chindwin Rivers in Myanmar beginning mid-September 2015. Named "Destination of the Year" by *Travel + Leisure* magazine, Maarten adds that "Myanmar has a lot of potential because it's practically untouched by the commercial world. But because infrastructure is lacking, river cruising is one of the best, if not *the* best way to travel the country."

The Anawrahta features Kipling's Bar with high ceilings and large windows, the Mandalay Lounge with polished wood floors and the relaxed feel of a colonial club as well as the Hintha Hall Restaurant where guests dine on white tablecloths with gleaming glassware while watching the scenery roll by through large picture windows. Staterooms range from 32-86 sqm and boast private balconies, fine works of Burmese art and even a private Jacuzzi in the Royal Suites. Guests will enjoy the highest crew-to-passenger ratio (46 crew serving 46 passengers) on the Ayeyarwady, world class cuisine and unique excursions as well as daily onboard

lectures and entertainment.

While the gorgeous interior mixes Burmese motifs and British colonial-style décor, the ship itself can rightly be called a work of art, comprised of an aluminum superstructure on top of a steel hull. "Because of the low water levels in Myanmar, we used a lot of lightweight materials for this cruiser which are typically not used," said Technical Director Stefan Malin. "We took advantage of the experience we had from building two other ships, bringing together the right contractors and the right materials to build a very high-quality vessel."

"We wanted to reach a low draft of just one meter, so that we could stay ahead of the competition and cruise further out, and stay longer in areas with very low water levels," added Maarten. "We can go to remote places on the Ayeyarwady where no one else can go, offering guests a very unique experience all year round."

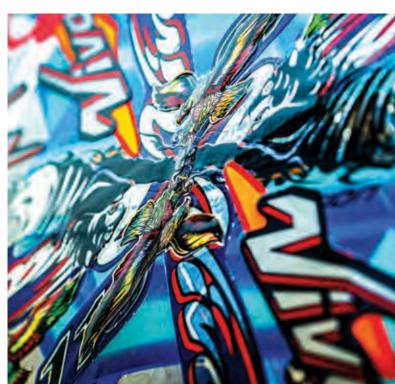
The Anawrahta will sail on four different itineraries ranging from four to 11 nights, visiting ports including Yangon, Bagan, Mandalay and Homalin. The longest itinerary is the 901-mile, 12 day/11 night journey from Mandalay to Homalin on the Chidwin River and ending in Bagan on the Ayeyarwady River, with excursions to textile and silversmithing workshops, temples and convents and teak forests with working elephants, amongst others.

For more on Heritage Line's exciting itineraries and to see the ships in more detail, visit www.heritage-line.com and www.facebook.com/HeritageLine. Special offer from 20% off for cruising with Heritage Line Halong, Mekong, and Myanmar until end of 2015.















THE COLLECTIBLES



THE OUTLOOK ON COLLECTING CONTEMPORARY VIETNAMESE ART

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

TUCKED DOWN A small alleyway in Binh Thanh District, a group of us are at San Art contemplating a series of seemingly unrelated works of art. There's an alphabet primer embroidered with silver thread, children on a playground, what looks to be a color blindness eye chart and a student with his hand raised. Over a glass of champagne, art consultant Sophie Hughes points out that they're actually all part of the same series by artist Phan Thao Nguyen. Upon closer inspection, the embroidered primer is all religious terms in French, Vietnamese and Latin; a giant hand looks to be moving the children around in circles like pieces on a game board and the student raising his hand actually has his eyes closed and his open book is blank.

"This series is set in a fictional school named after Alexandre de Rhodes [a French missionary largely thought responsible for Vietnam's present Romanized alphabet]. It's a statement on how literacy or in some cases, illiteracy, has been used to control people," explains Sophie.

The thought-provoking images are indicative of Vietnam's contemporary art movement, a new direction spearheaded by a young generation of artists. "Historically, artists were realigned during the war, expected to support the revolution. They had useful skills for communication and were incredibly effective in Dien Bien Phu and in the American War as morale boosters for soldiers. But what we're looking at now, post-*Doi Moi*, is that artists are starting to express themselves again," says Sophie.

The art revolution, though, has taken significantly longer to emerge than its political counterpart. "There was an interesting phenomenon in Vietnam in the early 90s, a real art boom. Collectors from Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong were buying up a lot of Vietnamese art. But the thing about this art was that it presented a romantic, nostalgic view of Vietnam that everyone wanted after the war — a slim girl, wearing an *ao dai* in a conical hat shyly looking up at you. That's what sold — faded Indochine colonial [crap] — and galleries selling it were doing very well as businesses. But they expected their artists to be like manufacturers, to produce these works over and over again. There was no breathing space to think about solo shows, to think about what kind of art they wanted to produce. But a small handful of galleries [including San Art with its studio and residency programs] started taking a completely different approach which is to support artists, give them space to exhibit, allow them to grow and experiment. And that's the interesting art of Vietnam, genuinely coming from young artists, a generation that is experiencing all of these radical changes, processing it and communicating it back through

their art. So when you're looking at these works, you're seeing a fascinating reflection on contemporary Vietnamese culture. Usually, it takes years to reflect on what 'contemporary Vietnam' is, but these artists are reflecting on it right now, a sort of cultural documentation of Vietnam in the present."

STUCK IN STORAGE

The art world is beginning to take notice. Sophie speaks of a client who bought a Le Hoang Bich Phuong painting on silk in 2012 for USD2,000. Soon after, the artist was shown in Japan as part of the Asian Women Artists exhibition and the value of her works have since quintupled. "The Vietnamese art market is a very exciting new frontier," says Sophie, who likens it to a futures market, albeit one with a dark side. "One of the biggest growing businesses in Singapore is art storage. That gives you an idea of how art's treated as a commodity. That's why Japanese banks spend tens of millions on Picassos and stick them in a vault. I feel there's strong potential for Vietnamese art to be a very interesting new market and it will go up in price, but to buy art for that reason, I think, is misguided. I can buy something for a thousand dollars one day, stick it in storage and five years later sell it for USD100,000. But artists produce these works as an expression of themselves, not intending for it to be stuck in storage somewhere."

While acknowledging the business side of art collecting, Sophie encourages buyers to pick pieces that they connect with on a personal level. "My belief is that the appreciation of art comes from an understanding of it, its context, culture and history. Falling in love with a piece of art often comes from knowing the story behind it — what inspired it, who the artist was influenced by and what they've lived through. That brings the art alive. It's easy to be swayed by the monetary value and the potential for it to go zooming up in price, but if you talk to any collector, you'll find that it's much more a personal and genuine relationship."

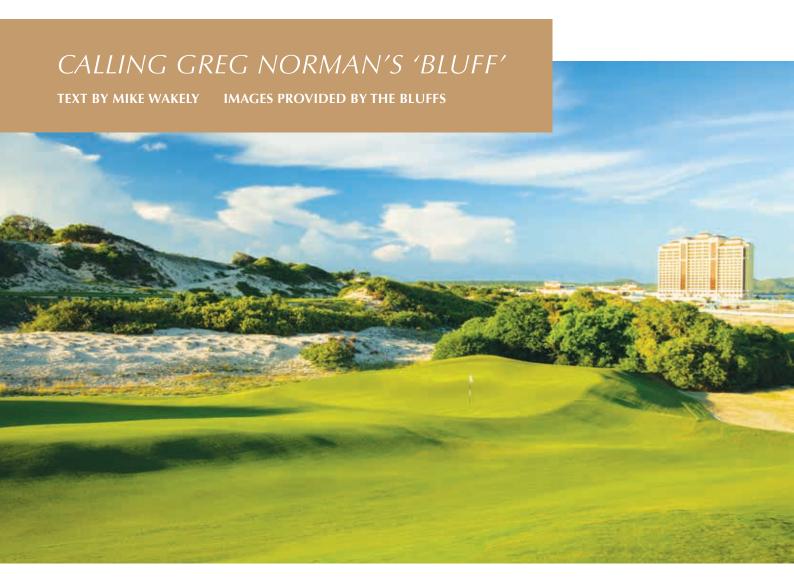
Sophie notes that the contemporary art collecting scene has been dominated by expats for many years, but that Vietnam's nouveau riche will start buying local art. "The argument if you're talking about luxury is that you can buy the same imported brands, the same car, handbag, whatever, but true luxury is about having an original, a one-of-a-kind, like an haute couture dress. If you do have the means available to get anything, then after a while, once you've bought all the brands, then you're kind of like: 'OK. What next?' It's then that art collecting becomes really exciting."

Sophie Hughes offers half- and full-day consultancy tours and studio visits. For more, visit www.sophiesarttour.com



LINKED IN





THE BLUFFS POSSESSES so many of the traits of a great traditional links golf course - blind tee shots, fast undulating greens, sloping and unpredictable fairways and punishing, sandy rough if you err off line – which is worryingly easy to do if you're not an accurate driver. In common with other great links courses, this one has been lovingly designed to meander seamlessly through its natural surroundings. Greg Norman is famous for designing courses that cause the "least disturbance to nature," and The Bluffs (www.thebluffshotram.com) is probably his finest effort yet. Not only has he hewn a truly sympathetic links course out of the existing sandy landscape, but he has also given Vietnam a venue that would be more than worthy of hosting the country's first significant tour event.

Like the Chambers Bay course that hosted the last US Open, this is a course with significant changes in elevation, rising to almost 50 meters at its highest point. It provides stunning (and challenging) golf holes, and equally glorious views as the dunes, jungle, sea and distant mountains unfurl beneath you in every direction leaving you feeling on top of the world. In keeping with the Chambers Bay

similarities, it also shares lightning fast and almost mountainous greens, where the slightest misread or overzealous putt can leave you 30 feet further away from the hole than when you started. This is a course (like the Old Course at St. Andrews) where I would implore you to listen to your caddy; they know where all the best lines are and how to avoid the worst of the pitfalls. It took me four holes and about 12 putts to come to this conclusion, so please don't make the same expensive mistake I did.

Even the first tee has a nod to the opening hole at St. Andrews with a shared fairway, which is designed to lull you into a false sense of security. This may be one of the more straightforward driving holes, but take advantage – it's not going to get this inviting again! The second is a good example of how much accuracy you're going to need in order to shoot a good score. A long par three surrounded by forest, with a green protected by two bunkers, an out of bounds to the left and water to the right – it is not a shot for the faint-hearted.

The fourth hole is the second of the par 3s, and while much shorter is equally well defended by deep pot bunkers. It also sits



high up and exposed to any wind driving in off the ocean, so you need to pick the right club and just try and hit the safety of the green.

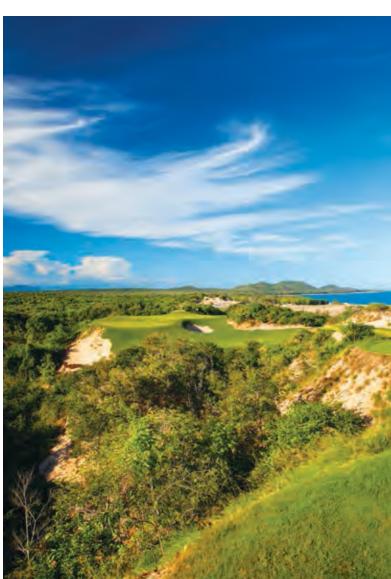
As I play my way around the holes there are different challenges everywhere. Back to back par 5s on the fifth and sixth will test your uphill long game, missing greens will leave you with devilish chips that will force you to use your imagination. The uphill par 4 thirteenth has a tree in front of the green that means anything driven short leaves you needing a creative approach.

The longest par 5 on the course (650 yards from the competition tee) is a beautiful hole with a large landing area for your drive (favor the right side of the fairway in order to see the green for your second), bunkers ready to snaffle up any errant second shots and a large front bunker guarding an expansive, hilly green.

You finish with the longest par 4 on the course, with all 489 yards of it uphill, requiring two absolutely mighty blows just to have a chance of making the green. If I walked off with a five at the last, I'd be very happy. (Happier than the seven I actually signed for...)

Regardless of my score, this is a course I'd always walk off with a smile on my face. The Bluffs is a fun and creative round of golf. It provides plenty of options to choose to plot my way around; a choice of split fairways on a number of holes, a couple of risk and reward drivable par 4s and the chance to use every club in my bag.

When I've had a chance to let the round sink in, what strikes me is the sheer quality of the work that they have done. The clubhouse is stunning, with a tasteful and palatial locker room and a restaurant overlooking the course with views out to the ocean beyond. The service is excellent, from the front desk to the highly knowledgeable caddies, but it's the course itself that outshines them all. I appreciate that it's new, and only time will tell how well it beds in, but the fairways are like lush expanses of green carpet and the greens run like billiard tables. I believe that I could go round here a hundred times and probably not play the same shot twice, and it's that unpredictability and mental challenge that gives The Bluffs the potential to be one of the very best courses, not just in Vietnam but across Asia.







Dairy Therapy

A cheesy culinary corner of Paris opens in Le Padam

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



IN THE BIOGRAPHICAL film *La Vie en Rose*, French singer Edith Piaf is approached by Marlene Dietrich after a performance in New York City. "I haven't been to Paris in ages," says the German actress. "But this evening, when you were singing, I was there... in the streets, beneath its sky... You took me on a journey."

Le Padam (230 Nguyen Van Huong, D2, across from the BIS Elementary School), Saigon's first and only cheese bar, aims to whisk diners on a culinary journey to a quaint Parisian bistro, serving up artisanal French raw milk cheeses. Fittingly taking its name after Piaf's 1951 hit Padam, Padam where the sultry cabaret singer croons about a tune that she can never get out of her head, Le Padam is a shrine to everything fromage, a frustratingly common expat obsession.

Armed simply with a love of cheese and old movies, Cyrille and Ann set out to open a high-cultured but ultimately comfortable place where guests could feel at home

The first eatery of Frenchman Cyrille Jean and his Vietnamese-Canadian wife, Ann, the shop combines his love of cheese and old French movies with French country décor, courtesy of Ann's artsy friends from her previous career in film directing.

What the menu lacks in length, it makes up for in simplicity — a place to come and sample a range of cheeses that would otherwise be too expensive or impractical to buy for home. The Cheese Board (VND390,000 for five, VND250,000 for three) features a selection of cheeses of your choosing from the 13 or so varieties they stock, each piece at around 30-35g and served with freshly baked baguette and homemade jams. Cyrille, hailing from Brittany, is the resident cheesemonger and happily makes recommendations, partly based on guest preferences and admittedly based on how he's feeling that day. "Most





Tartiflette; and Camembert roti

of the time, the guests trust me," he laughs. "I'll ask them if there is some kind of cheese they might not want, like Roquefort [a strong sheep milk blue cheese], but often it'll depend on my mood, whether I feel like encouraging them to try something new." Upon hearing that I prefer soft, mild cheeses, he chose for me a board that included tomme de brebis and tomme de chevre, two sheep and goat milk cheeses that were delicately milky with a buttery aroma and a fragile but heavenly Beaufort, made from cow's milk from the French Alps, so flavorsome that I could practically taste the grass and flowers they ate. An earthy Brie de Meaux and a pungent Saint-Nectaire completed the selection, thoughtfully arranged from soft to strong.

Cyrille is a seaman by trade, spending 15 years on the high seas before meeting Ann in Hanoi and opening up Le Padam at the beginning of the year. "I was tired of working for a**holes, so I thought that if I have to work for an a**hole, I want that a**hole to be me," says the affable young Cyrille. Armed simply with a love of cheese and old movies, the couple set out to open a high-cultured but ultimately comfortable place where guests could feel at home,... that is if home were a cozy French country house, with windows thrown open to fields of flowers in the distance, where wine barrels double as tables, apothecary jars hold dried lavender and a beautiful blue pool table add to the chilled atmosphere. The concept was to make something different that you couldn't find anywhere else. We wanted to share what we love about French culture," says Cyrille, explaining the old movie stills that adorn the walls, the hand drawn French cartoons and the satirical quotes reflected in the bar mirror — all the accoutrements of home, but noticeably sans big kitchen.

Le Padam's menu features mainly cheeses, cold cuts (Serrano ham), and a small selection of salads and sandwiches. Ann makes some of the most delicious strawberry and pineapple jam to go with the freshly baked baguettes (plain and sesame, VND40,000 each) and tasty rillette de porc (VND110,000), a slow-cooked, pâté-like shredded pork with fat and herbs. There's also a baked camembert roti (VND250,000), a divinely oozy mess, sweetened with a touch of honey and a liberal sprinkling of herbes de Provence that just begs to be sopped up with a crust of baguette. The no-cooking rule takes a break on Thursdays with a tartiflette (VND390,000), a wonderfully rustic dish from the Savoie of potatoes with bacon and onions and a splash of white wine, then topped with 100 g of Reblochon, a strong, nutty cheese, that's meant to melt and seep into all the nooks for a soulsatisfying experience.

In Padam, Padam, Piaf sings about an obsession that haunts her day and night, that will one day drive her mad. Happily for cheese-obsessed Saigonese, Le Padam provides a welcome dose of dairy therapy, bringing a smile to anyone who says "cheese."

High Five

Cheap beers and bus tours are not the only treats found along Bui Vien

TEXT BY LORGAN LOVETT IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN







LINED ALONGSIDE THE numerous other restaurants and bars in District 1's famous backpacker area is an oyster place that's delighting curious travelers on a budget and impressing the most seasoned expats with its eclectic menu. *Five Oysters* (234 Bui Vien, D1) immediately strikes me as a great spot for people watching. There's a pleasure to be taken from observing the antics of drunks and vendors while tucking into good food on a Friday evening.

We were led upstairs to an outdoor table pleasantly placed next to a small tree and gratefully took our seats overlooking the street. Staff promptly pulled out the slide roof when a downpour immediately threatened to spoil the seating arrangements. We relaxed and took a look around. There was the usual busy crowd of foreigners, with many of the diners trying the eponymous food of the restaurant, possibly hoping to capture some of its aphrodisiac qualities too.

Five Oysters boasts an interesting menu packed full of exotic as well as more familiar options that aim to please most tastes. Diners can delve into frog porridge, grilled octopus with chili oil and traditional Vietnamese hits like *pho* along with Western standards such as steak and chips for those missing home comfort food.

We embraced four raw oysters (VND10,000 per piece) and four grilled oysters (VND30,000 a piece) with spring onion, garlic and a sprinkling of peanuts. A burst of ocean accompanied the first slurp of raw oyster, breaking the illusion that we were far away from the sea while stuck in belching muggy traffic on the way to the restaurant. All of the oysters are sourced about 90km away at Vung Tau beach, ensuring their freshness. They were as you'd expect: juicy and served on ice. The raw oysters came with wasabi which I spread generously over one. Sucking up that combination is likely to whack the hangover out of any backpacker and the cocktails' menu, as I discovered, harbored an even more potent surprise. The grilled oysters worked well for a less intense although still very enjoyable flavor.

As a simple Briton, the next dish, snail pie (VND70,000) was considered exotic. Cut into six pieces and served with a simple garnish of tomatoes and cucumber, the pie had a certain earthiness to it that was balanced with the chili sauce dip. The ingredients of mushrooms, eggs, pork and snails were surrounded by a crispy shell of rice paper. The pork brought a meaty texture to the pie and the snail were chewy morsels similar to mussels. Manager Truong Loc says the snails are one of the reasons why his place attracts so many French customers.

Loc lives with his kitchen staff, a tight-knit team, and holds daily meetings to

FROM TOP: Rooftop; Four raw oysters; four grilled oysters





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Signature shot of vodka; tofu, mushroom, vegetables, spring onion and carrot with noodles; bananas flambé: and banana cake

feedback on customers' remarks to always improve service. He has a sincere goal to please his customers, whom he considers more like guests, and often drinks with them, taking the opportunity to warn newbies of Bui Vien's potential dangers - the scammers and thieves.

As he worked the room, making everybody feel comfortable and welcomed, Loc told us that snails stuffed with pork meat then seasoned and steamed is the most popular dish. The restaurant's snails, crab and fish are plucked from fruit gardens, lakes and rivers of the Mekong Delta.

We also enjoyed another main of tofu, mushroom, vegetables, spring onion and carrot with noodles (VND70,000). The tofu soaked in the flavors of its neighbors, the mushrooms and onions, while the carrot offered a crisp cleanser mixed with soft noodles. The freshness of the ingredients also meant we gobbled everything down quickly. For dessert we had the light and refreshing bananas flambé (VND50,000) and a stodgy and satisfying banana cake (VND30,000).

It was time to wash down the feast. I chose the restaurant's firebrand signature shot of vodka, fresh oyster, chili, Tabasco and a slice of lime. The drink looked like the shallows of a Vietnamese shore with remnants of oyster collected like pebbles at the bottom of the glass. I braced myself before I tilted the shot and sucked out the oyster.

Dining at Five Oysters was a great experience - quality food for backpacker prices.





Bites and Bubbles

Saigon's newest spot for tapas at Caravelle Saigon

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

THERE ARE ONLY so many ways to do fine cuisine – your à la carte restaurant, your buffet, your swanky café – but the **Caravelle Saigon** (19-23 Lam Son Square, D1; www.caravellehotel.com) seems to have found one more. Determined to capture a fresh niche in contemporary dining, their newest venue Tapas Kitchen is the Caravelle's tiniest five-star restaurant space yet. You'll find it located just inside the hotel's Dong Khoi entrance – ideally placed to rush right in, take a seat at the bar, and feast like a king before heading off to your next appointment.

It's a brilliant notion, and the execution of it has played out very well for the Caravelle. Designed perhaps as a quick, trendy, and tasty stop-off point for light business brunches on the go - or easy gourmet hunger-busters with a fine atmospheric vibe - the restaurant's compact layout has more in common with a simple food stand than a traditional Spanish bodega. What's unique about this dining concept, however, is the contrast between its unassuming setup along the hotel's short thoroughfare through to the lobby and the obvious refinement of its simple furnishings. Tapas Kitchen seats just five patrons at a short bar, but guests are treated to a full open kitchen experience as Chef Tu and his team prepare fine tapas creations in full view. For those rushing through downtown Saigon with just a half hour to spare and a penchant for something towards the upper end of the dining spectrum, this is a unique and intriguing option.

Originally trained in Italian cuisine – with a particular interest in its crossover points with classic Asian dishes – Chef Tu serves fashionable East/West fusion tapas bites with all the flair of contemporary plating techniques. The tapas menu, with its range of selections inspired by various world cuisines, changes each month to stay abreast of fresh seasonal ingredients and to avoid repetitiveness – regulars and first-timers alike are well-advised to check the restaurant's chalk board to catch daily specials.

Tapas Kitchen's August menu features a range of interesting gourmet options. We start with the house smoked salmon on crostini with chive crème fraîche (VND130,000) – an excellent palate opener, especially with its sprig of dill, lemon, and sprinkle of pepper. Do use the garnishes provided; the flavor is far richer for it. This is followed by a classic Mediterranean onion bell pepper compote with whipped goat cheese (VND130,000) – beautifully







FROM TOP: Smoked salmon on crostini with chive crème fraiche; Onion bell pepper with goat cheese; and Duck liver terrine canapé



FROM TOP: Thai green curry chicken spring rolls; Lamb samosas; Crab omelet with gratin Mornay sauce; and Parma ham and mushroom pizza







presented with a crispy deep-fried basil leaf, and nicely-balanced in composition so as to avoid being unnecessarily overpowered by the pervasive smokiness of the cheese. These two dishes are completed by a third bread-based item, a creamy duck liver terrine canapé on a buttery toasted brioche with strawberry and apple compote (VND228,000). Tapas Kitchen uses a ready-to-eat Rougie foie gras, which takes on the sweetness of the compote to realize a refined dessert in taste.

One of the most interesting among Tapas Kitchen's fusion offerings is the Thai green curry chicken spring rolls (VND130,000), which are prepared to exactly resemble classic Vietnamese rolls with a deeply spicy filling recalling a fiery vindaloo. The innocent-looking sweet chili sauce they're served with itself delivers a serious and delightful burn – not for the faint-hearted. These are nicely paired with a plate of lamb samosas (VND130,000) with well-rounded flavors, accompanied by a paprika and cucumber mint yoghurt that serves to cool everything back down.

Chef Tu's best traditional Spanish offering is a crab omelet with gratin Mornay sauce (VND148,000), saturated in gruyere cheese. The generous hunks of crab give each slice a juicy, fleshy consistency, gently setting the stage for our last dish – bite-sized slices of Parma ham and mushroom pizza (VND148,000), served on a doughy base with olive oil, tomato sauce, and a side of rocket salad.

We take advantage of the neighboring Champagne Corner to pair all of the above with a nice Moet & Chandon Imperial Brut, an enticingly citrusy champagne that enhances the tapas servings with fine fruity notes. Beyond the bubbly, Tapas Kitchen has its own list of wines and other beverages on the house menu.

The restaurant opens at 10am and is open until 11pm at night. While its primary emphasis is on a quick, luxurious bite at the bar, guests can opt to order from Tapas Kitchen and take their meal at the Cafe de l'Opera across the passageway, with its premium views of the city's municipal theater. That would be to miss the point, however – just as it is in Spain, the tapas menu is a wonderful exploration of tastes, and this unique upscale version of the cuisine and dining experience is one of those Saigon moments you really don't want to miss out on.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Lemongrass and lime juice; smoothie; vermicelli soup; and Catina Green Tea

Cooking for My Family

Vietnamese homecooking at a historic address

TEXT BY RACHEL CABAKOFF IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

REPRESENTING A MARRIAGE of old and new, *Catina Café* (151/6 Dong Khoi, D1) mirrors the past and present of former rue Catinat (now called Dong Khoi) - a street once under French rule and home to a handful of colonial buildings that are still in existence today. Walk through the famous Art Arcade, past paintings and souvenirs, up the small staircase and first-time visitors may mistake this relaxing café as someone's living room.

Originally a residence, the house has been in the owner's family for years.

After spending time traveling and living in Australia, she (wishing to stay anonymous) developed a passion for cooking and decided to open up her family home to the public, to share her childhood memories and delicious home cooking. The continuous theme of expressing the past while celebrating what's new resonates throughout the café with soft, neutral colors of grays and browns,

custom-made modern wooden benches and chairs ornamented with soft burnt orange cushions, and vintage photographs of old Saigon sprinkled across the walls – "welcome in, make yourself at home" is the vibe. Interior design is another one of her great passions and is reflected in her travel collection of paintings and accessories, which she now proudly displays at the cafe.

After making ourselves comfortable we decided to start with refreshments. With an extensive list of drinks to choose from - coffees, teas and fresh squeezed juices - I went with the rejuvenating Lemongrass and lime juice (VND60,000) to start and my friend chose the Raspberry, strawberry and grape mixed with mandarin smoothie (VND80,000). Both were perfect refreshers after coming in from the humidity. We also tried their special Catina Green Tea (VND60,000) which was surprisingly just as green in

color as the name yet it still housed a natural flavor.

Glancing over the menu, Catina has something for everyone — Western and Vietnamese options as well as healthy and sweet indulgences. Ranging from breakfast options like yogurt with mixed fruits and kumquat (VND60,000) to more unique Asian dishes such as fermented purple sticky rice (VND70,000), your delicious *banh mi* (VND70,000) and Vietnam's popular fried spring rolls (VND85,000). Italian lovers can even choose a spaghetti bolognese (VND125,000) or a selection of cheeses, salami and pate (VND130,000) to satisfy their palettes.

With the owner's recommendations, we went with some of her favorite homemade dishes. We paired the Catina vermicelli soup with beef, tomato and pineapple (VND80,000) with a *banh mi* style baguette stuffed with sautéed chicken (VND70,000). The soup was unique in that the pineapple



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Banh mi with sautéed chicken; Steamed sticky rice with cotton meat and sausage; Fried breadfruit; banana cake; and Corn cake

added a tangy flavor to the perfectly seasoned broth and the *banh mi* had a mouthwatering garlic sauce paired with the tender chicken and cilantro seasonings that kept us wanting more. The owner expressed her concerns for sourcing fresh ingredients and keeping the flavors consistent in each of her homemade dishes. Since opening two years ago, this has been Catina's mantra from the beginning.

Our appetites were craving for more so we decided on the Steamed sticky rice with cotton meat and Chinese sausage (VND70,000) and a serving of Fried breadfruit (VND60,000). For those who haven't tasted this type of dish before it's worth a try. The sticky rice and the salty,

dry cotton meat paired with the sweet and flavorful sausage left us scraping the plate clean. As for the fried breadfruit, we decided it might give french fries a run for their money. Commonly mistaken as actual potatoes in this form, the breadfruit is indeed an actual fruit. So that means it's a healthy treat, right? After dipping them in butter and adding a little sprinkle of sugar the healthy aspect went out the door but it was well worth it.

We rounded out our meal with a Catina banana cake (VND40,000) and Corn cake (VND60,000) for dessert. For all you banana lovers out there this banana cake is the one for you with its melty warm temperature and fresh bananas and the corn cake was a winner as well. Although it may not sound appetizing eating corn cake, paired with flavors of coconut, peanuts and whipped cream frosting — it was a light and special treat.

The owner explained to us that she cooks for her guests like she cooks for her family and this was apparent in the details of each dish. We felt right at home. For those who want delicious Vietnamese cuisine, Catina Café can satisfy this urge while also catering to Western appetites. Whether you're looking for a quiet reading spot, a place to people watch from the balcony overlooking the street or a new lunch alternative — you won't be disappointed.

CHEERS! WINE COLUMN

Burgundy

A sommelier's trip to France

Alfredo de la Casa has been organizing wine tastings for over 20 years, published three wine books, including the Gourmand award winner for best wine education book.

You can reach him at www.wineinvietnam.com.

THIS MONTH I want to take you to France with Catherine Guo, a Japanese sommelier living in Vietnam who just spent a month there visiting some of the country's most charismatic wineries. She spent three weeks in just Burgundy visiting almost 60 wineries.

Catherine has always been passionate about wine and recently graduated from the Court of Master Sommeliers last year in California. According to Catherine, perhaps the most remarkable characteristic about Burgundy, apart from the excellent wines they produce of course, is the people. Almost every single winery is a family-owned business and, for most people in the area, life is just about great wine and friendship. These traits are reflected by how welcoming they are with visitors to their cellars and on how much care they put into their land. Generation after generation of vintners, most of whom have just a small plot of land to grow grapes, have adopted biodynamic techniques in making wine to minimize any damages to nature and the environment.

The principal grapes grown in Burgundy are chardonnay (for white wines) and pinot noir (for red wines), however other grapes like gamay noir, aligote, sauvignon blanc, cesar, melon or tressot are also being grown in small quantities, and generally used to add complexity to the wines.

Geographically, Burgundy is situated between Dijon in the north and Lyon in the south, covering part of the geographic areas of Cote d'Or, Saôneet-Loire, Rhone and Yonne, leading to a great diversity and variety in its wines.

For Catherine, a pinot noir fan, the highlight of the trip was discovering the best pinot noirs: delicate, complex and very characteristic, which cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world; plus realizing that until you try a pre-2000 pinot, you haven't really discovered what these wines have to offer. Catherine was also surprised by the large number of women making wine in the area, a profession that was historically dominated by men.

So what Burgundy wines can you try in Vietnam? Plenty! Let's start with the





most popular Chablis, ideally paired with many seafood-based Vietnamese dishes, or even raw oysters. If you are looking for something different, perhaps more complex, try some of the wonderful white wines of Ruly or from Macon Villages or, even better, Volnay.

Burgundy is perhaps the most terroiroriented region of France: it has over 400 different types of soil, which results in different but amazing wines, even in neighboring vineyards. What I'm drinking this month: Reserve de Vaudon 2011 from Joseph Drouhin. This wonderful Chablis offers a right gold color, full of life. The nose is smooth, bringing lemons, and a light scent of mangoes and nutmeg. The palate is soft with medium to long length, bringing lemons and a touch of vanilla, and rather flowery. Nice and a bit acidic at the end making it an ideal pair with prawn salad, steamed prawns, fish, oysters and seafood in general. Available from the Wine Warehouse.

CHUC AN NGON!

Worth Every Bite

The making of a hundred dollar eggroll



Vietnamese chef Jack Lee (www.chefjacklee.com) has served a host of Hollywood A-listers from Angelina Jolie to Barbra Streisand, and recently returned to chef for Acacia Veranda Dining (149-151 Nguyen Du, DI). His biography You Don't Know Jack by Oi writer NPD Khanh will be released later this year.



IT'S NO EXAGGERATION to say that I owe my cheffing career to the humble eggroll.

When I was starting out, I had an incredible opportunity to volunteer at the prestigious Hotel Bel-Air in Beverly Hills. I knew I was lucky just to get to see the inside of that kitchen, and I was desperate to find a way onto the permanent staff roster.

Like any workplace, the Bel-Air kitchen had its version of office politics, and there were always rumors floating around between the chefs, the servers, and even the guards. The only way I could get in on the gossip was by bribing the staff with food – almost always, eggrolls.

One day I heard that there were several high-profile guests coming to dine at the restaurant, and that the kitchen management was in a panic looking for something new to impress them with. These VIPs were all top executives from American Airlines, and it hit me that those guys were probably tired of the slightly stuffy Californian French classics regularly served at the Bel-Air.

As you can imagine, I was doing a lot of eggrolls in those days, and so I took a chance and put something together without being asked. I went for more of a *goi cuon* spring roll, but instead of the usual ingredients, I threw in the best of what I could find in the kitchen – some fillet mignon and wagyu beef, making the dipping sauce out of mirin wine.

The F&B manager at the time, whose name was Rolland Rainer, was pretty frantic by this time, and so I managed to get my dish in front of him. He took a taste and declared it "sexy" – his favorite word – and that was what got

served up to the airline VIPs. I was dragged out and introduced as "our in-house Asian chef". It was a major stroke of luck, but that's how I got my position as Bel-Air's banquet chef a few months later.

Later on in my career, my eggroll had its renaissance – and it became the one dish that changed everything for me. I'd seen truly luxurious larger-than-life dishes during my time at Bel-Air and catering in Hollywood – USD5,000 burgers and such – and I felt that I wanted to create something to show off the complexity of Asian cooking, to prove that it could go the same lengths as Western gourmet cuisine.

I chose the eggroll because that's what reminded me most of my childhood. Leaving my mom in Saigon when I was ten years old was the most traumatic experience of my life, and I would always remember our time in the kitchen when we'd make eggrolls together, wrapping them nice and tight just like she showed me. It's probably true to say that the USD100 eggroll was something I made for my mom.

So what exactly goes in there that makes it cost one hundred dollars? In short, Maine lobster tail, sevruga caviar, Alaskan crab – I picked the tenderest part – and autumn truffles for their nuanced taste (summer truffles are too heavy, and white truffles are too fine and light). I made the sauce from sauvignon blanc wine with fresh, organic raspberries and bird's nest. The garnish was edible gold leaf – so fine you can't even use your hands to touch it. I had to attach the gold with ice-cold tweezers from the freezer.

It's basically an emperor's feast in one tiny package. I wanted to show people a true gourmand's dish, where it's all about the flavor and not about stuffing your face full of food. I wanted the first bite to be so full of complexity that it made up for the tiny portions of the dish. The food of a true gourmet, and fully deserving of its price tag: the one hundred dollar eggroll.

>>The List

Wine & Dine

BARS



Known for its cool house music, live DJs at weekends and innovative range of cocktails. Downstairs is a trendy bar where the glitterazi like to be seen; rooftop an open bar with more chilled style music. In between a new Vietnamese dining concept.

95 Hai Ba Trung, D1 090 902 82 93 www.blanchystash.com



At this laid back venue, tourists and locals alike can sit around Chu's large oval bar or on luxurious padded benched. It has a full cocktail menu as well as a short menu of snacks and sandwiches.

158 Dong Khoi, D1



This sports pub has five floors including inside/outside area on the ground floor, a lounge area, 4 pool tables, 6 dart boards and a rooftop bar. Along with good selection of 70s, 80s and 90s hits with attentive staff and pub grub. R1/49 Hung Gia 3, PMH, D7



Saigon's king of cool, Last Call is renowned for the finest cocktails in the mellowest of settings. Slink your way back to the Seventies in the velvety interior or watch over the passing crowds from the laid-back terrace. Funky (and even sexy) to the core, this classy establishment is fittingly close to the Sheraton

59 Dong Du, D1 3823 3122



Two-storey Irish-themed bar and restaurant that offers a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere. Known for its excellent food menu, this is a fun place to socialize while shooting pool or playing darts. They occasionally

74/A3 Hai Ba Trung, D1



The Fan Club 🔃

The largest sports bar in Saigon, with all the live sports available on 12 large HD screens, an exciting place to watch your team win! A great selection of food Θ beverage. We also have a enclosed relaxing garden for

The Vista, 628C Hanoi Highway, An Phu, D2 www.dtdentertainment.com Facebook: The Fan Club

Also Try...

Chill Skybar

Offers the most stunning panoramic views of Saigon and a wide range of wines and cocktails personally prepared by Vietnam mixologist Le Thanh Tun

Rooftop, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai, D1 3827 2372 www.chillsaigon.com

An open air, but well cooled bar in the heart of Bui Vien on the site of the once popular Stellar cafe. A cut above the regular backpacker haunts in style and offer. Downstairs is a modern bar with flat screen TVs showing sports, a huge circular bar and tables, and outdoor seating for people watching. Upstairs are air conditioned rooms, pool table and outdoor deck. Serves a wide variety of liquors, including wines by the

Game On

Opened in July 2013, Game On is one of Saigon's biggest sports bar, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. The bar also has an extensive drinks menu including coffees, juices, beers, wines, vodkas, and more. Game On also boasts a function room for corporate meetings or private parties.

115 Ho Tung Mau, D1 6251 9898 gameonsaigon@gmail.com

Located on the 20th floor of Novotel Saigon Center, on Top Bar provides views over Saigon from an expansive outdoor terrace. The venue offers a menu with over 20 cheeses, cured meats and both Vietnamese and international-inspired tapas. 167 Hai Ba Trung, D3

Purple Jade

Lively and cosmopolitan, Purple Jade is a must on any nightlife agenda. The lounge offers an innovative menu of tasty snacks and signature cocktails in a sleek and chic aesthetic to complement the chilled-out vibe.

1st floor – InterContinental Asiana

Saigon 3520 9099 6pm until late dine@icasianasaigon.com

RED offers one of the longest Happy Hours in Saigon, from 9am -9pm, with live music available from Monday-Saturday. This multi-level bar has a non-smoking floor and a function room along with a top quality pool table and soft-tip dart

machines. A menu of Eastern and Western dishes includes wood-fired

70-72 Ng Duc Ke, D1 2229 7017

Saigon Saigon Bar

This iconic bar is a great place to watch the sun go down over the lights of the city and relax with friends. Live entertainment nightly, including their resident Cuban band, Qʻvans from 9pm Wednesday to Monday

Rooftop, 9th floor, 19-23 Lam Son Square, D1 3823 4999 11am till late caravellehotel.com

CAFÉS



An institute that's been around for over 30 years, Kem Bach Dang is a short walking distance from The Opera House and is a favorite dessert and cafe spot among locals and tourists. They have two locations directly across from each other serving juices, smoothies, shakes, beer and ice cream, with air conditioning on the inner levels

26-28 Le Loi, D1



MOF Japanese Dessert Cafe

Matcha Zen Garden - Peace, Serenity and Beauty. MOF, Saigon's MOF

Matcha pioneers have channeled all the ZEN of a Japanese garden into a miniature edible masterpiece. Using premium Japanese Matcha, MOF's desserts, please the senses and excites the palate.

Somerset Chancellor Court, GF, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai & Mac Dinh Chi Corner, District 1, HCMC (08)38239812 / www.mof.com.vn



No disappointments from this earnest local cafe consistently serving exceptional international standard coffee. Beautifully-styled and focussed on an attention to quality, Cafe RuNam is now embarking on the road to becoming a successful franchise. The venue's first floor is particularly enchanting in the late evening.

96 Mac Thi Buoi D1 www.caferunam.com



The Library

The Library recaptures the romance of a bygone era while offering an all-day snack menu as well as the finest tea, coffee, wine and spirits in an elegant setting. Ground floor - InterContinental Asiana Saigon dine@icasianasaigon.com



A quaint cafe with a red brick wall on one side and a mural of everyday life in Saigon on the opposite. A friendly staff serves smoothies, juices, and a good array of Italian-style coffee such as cappuccinos and lattes for cheap, prices start from VND15,000.

85 Nguyen Truong To, Q4



The cafe is located on the top floor and resembles an inner city warehouse. The best seats are by the windows where you can watch the traffic zoom by. If you prefer your coffee brewed a particular way, there there are a number of brewing techniques to ask for, from Siphon to Aeropress and Chemex. Sorry, no Vietnamese *ca phe sua da* served here. **27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1**



Call / SMS



Order online:











CHINESE



Dragon CourtThe well-heeled Chinese certainly go for luxury and this venue has it in spades. Situated in a classy location just opposite the Opera House, Dragon Court features a broad selection of dishes from across the spectrum of mainland cuisines, making this an ideal a-la-carte venue as well as the perfect spot for Dim Sum. 11-13 Lam Son Square, D1

3827 2566



New World's own slice of Canton with a particularly fine Dim Sum selection, Dynasty is a traditional lavishly-styled Chinese venue with flawless design. Authenticity and a sense of old-world China make this one of Saigon's more refined options for the cuisine. A number of private rooms are available

New World Hotel 76 Le Lai, D1 3822 8888 www.saigon.newworldhotels.com



Dine Cantonese-style by the river at the Renaissance Riverside's own Chinese venue decked out with flourishes reminiscent of classical Qing period tastes. Kabin's cuisine is known for presenting new takes on traditional dishes as well as for its more exotic fare.

Renaissance Riverside Hotel, 8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1 3822 0033



Thoroughly traditional Chinese venue at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers offering choice oriental delicacies against a backdrop of fine Chinese art. This opulent venue, open throughout the day, is one of the city's more beautiful restaurants in this category.

Level 2, 88 Dong Khoi, D1 3827 2828 www.libaisaigon.com



Ming Court

The best in Chinese cuisine with a unique Taiwanese focus in a Japanese hotel, Ming Court is classy in its precision and graceful without compromise. It's certainly one of the city's most impressive venues for fans of the cuisine, and nothing is left to chance with the venue's signature exemplary service standards.

3rd floor, Nikko Saigon Hotel

235 Nguyen Van Cu, D1 3925 7777



Ming Dynasty

Ming Dynasty serves authentic Chinese food in a setting reminiscent of an old Chinese palace. Specialties include dim sum, abalone and dishes from Guanadona

23 Nguyen Khac Vien, D7

Also Try...

Hung Ky Mi Gia An old mainstay on the Chinese cuisine trail with well over a decade in operation, Hung Ky Mi Gia is known for its classic mainland dishes with a focus on delicious roasts. Safe and tasty Chinese food

20 Le Anh Xuan, DI 3822 2673

Ocean Palace

A place for those who love Chinese food. The large dining room on the ground floor can accommodate up to 280 diners. Up on the first floor are six private rooms and a big ballroom that can host 350 guests.

2 Le Duan Street, DI

Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan) The brainchild of an overseas

Chinese/Vietnamese architect who wanted to build something extraordinary in his home town, this venue combines the architectural features of seven world heritage structures blended into one. The cuisine is just as eclectic with representative dishes from several major Chinese traditions

12 Duong 26, D6

3755 1577 www.7kyquan.com

Shang Palace R

Renowned as one of the finest restaurants in the city, Shang Palace boasts mouth-watering Cantonese and Hong Kong cuisine served in a warm and elegant atmosphere. Whether it be an intimate dinner for two or a larger group event, Shang Palace can cater for three-hundred guests including private VIP rooms. With more than fifty Dim-Sum items and over two-hundred delectable dishes to choose from, Shang Palace is an ideal rendezvous for any dining occasion.

1st Floor, Norfolk Mansion 17-19-21, Ly Tu Trong, D1 3823 2221

Yu Chu

Yu Chu is renowned for the quality and presentation of its authentic Cantonese and Peking cuisines along with its elegant décor. Watching the chefs prepare signature dishes such as hand-pulled noodle, Dim Sum and Peking Purch right in the hitchen is a Peking Duck right in the kitchen is a prominent, popular feature.

First floor, InterContinental Asiana

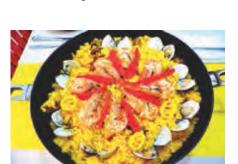
Saigon (Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan) 3520 9099 www.intercontinental.com/saigon





Cuban venue with fine Spanish cuisine, Cuban cigars and German beer. A wide range of tapas and cocktails. Great bar atmosphere and late night entertainment.

6 Cao Ba Quat, DI www.lahabana-saigon.com



Tapas Saigon

Tasty tapas at Vietnamese prices not far from the lasty tapas at Vietnamese prices not far from the center of District 1. Fresh ingredients, broad menu with food prepared by a Spanish chef. Best washed down with authentic house sangria.

53/36B Tran (Khanh Du, DI

090 930 0803



With all the warmth you'd expect from a decent venue in this category, Olé serves authentic and tasty Spanish favorites with great tapas and highly-recommended paella. Family-run venue with a passion for great food and good service without undue fuss. Feel at home.

129B Le Thanh Ton, D1



VIVAI Tapas Bar & Grill R

VIVAI Tapas Bar & Grill Inly uses the freshest ingredients, many imported from Spain, for the most authentic tapas experience in Saigon, starting from under VND50,000/plate. Cool décor, indoors and outdoors eating areas, a well stocked bar, and great wines from VND60,000/glass (sangria just VND130,000 per HALF liter). Delivery available.

90 Cao Trieu Phat, Phu My Hung, D7
Facebook: "VIVATapasBar.PMH"



Pacharan

Ho Chi Minh City's original Spanish restaurant,
Pacharan occupies a high profile corner spot on Hai Ba
Trung. Spread over four floors, it offers a casual bar, two
floors of dining (one which becomes a destination for
live Spanish music late at night) and a rooftop terrace.
Features an extensive menu of tapas, main courses,
sangria and wines.

97 Hai Ba Trung Street, DI
100 1302 15 30

090 399 25 39







FRENCH



Augustin is a romantic and charming French restaurant located just steps away from the Rex Hotel. Serves lunches and dinners and offers 10 percent discount on a la carte menu items

10D Nguyen Thiep, D1 www.augustinrestaurant.com



La Creperie R

The first authentic Breton French restaurant in the country, serving savory galettes, sweet crepes with tasty seafood and some of the best apple cider in

17/7 Le Thanh Ton, D1 3824 7070 infosgn@lacreperie.com.cn 11am-11pm



La Fourchette

Small and cozy, La Fourchette is a favorite among the French expat community. The vintage posters and wood paneling add to the charm of this French eatery located right in downtown, a stone's throw from the Saigon River.

9 Ngo Duc Ke, D1 3829 8143 www.lafourchette.com.vn



Le Bacoulos 🗵

Le Bacoulos is a French restaurant, bar and lounge that serves French cuisine, bar food like burgers, fish and chips alongside vegetarian options like spinach soup and Greek salad. There's also a garden to unwind in with a glass of wine or enjoy a game of pool.

13 Tong Huu Dinh, D2 3519 4058 www.bacoulos.com



Let Terruir

Let Terroir serves dishes such as Bouchée à la Reine
duo, Pan seared salmon along with pastas, risotto and
decadent desserts. The wine list here is an oenophile's
dream with over 200 labels in stock from Australia,
California and Chile to Italy. The restaurant is on two
levels with a small terrace in the ground floor.
30 Thai Van Lung DI
30 Thai Van Lung DI
30 Thai Van Lung DI

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



This unassuming restaurant is located down an alley and up three flights of stairs. The charming French owner/chef will happily run through the entire menu in details and offer his recommendations. An accompanying wine list includes a wide range of

178/4 Pasteur, D1 www.tycozsaigon.com

Also Try...

L'essentiel

L'essentiel offers a quiet intimate dining experience with space for private functions and alfresco dining on an upper floor. The food is fresh, traditional French, and the wine list is carefully collated. 98 Ho Tung Mau, DI 0948 415 646

La Cuisine

A cosy restaurant just outside the main eating strip on Le Thanh Ton, La Cuisine offers quality French food in an upmarket but not overly expensive setting. Suitable for special occasions or business dinners to impress. Regular diners recommend the filet of beef

48 Le Thanh Ton 2229 8882

La Nicoise

A traditional 'neighbourhood' French restaurant. La Nicoise serves simple. filling French fare at exceptional value in the shadow of the Bitexco tower. Most popular for its steak dishes, the restaurant has an extensive menu which belies its compact size. **56 Ngo Duc Ke, DI**

La Villa R

Housed in a stunning white French villa that was originally built as a private house, La Villa features outdoor tables dotted around a swimming pool and a more formal dining room inside. Superb cuisine, with staff trained as they would be in France. Bookings are advised, especially on Friday and Saturday evenings

14 Ngo Quang Huy, D2 3898 2082 www.lavilla-restaurant.com.vn

Le Bouchon de Saigon

Delightful, welcoming French bistro that really puts on a show of fine quality and service. With its small-village atmosphere and exotic cuisine, this is one of the more atmospheric and high-aiming venues of the genre. 40 Thai Van Lung, DI

www.lebouchondesaigon.com

Trois Gourmands

Opened in 2004 and regarded as one of the finest French restaurants in town. Owner Gils, a French native, makes his own cheeses as well

18 Tong Huu Dinh, D2 3744 4585



INDIAN



A small chain of slightly more upscale Indian restaurants serving both Northern and Southern Indian cuisine including curries, naan and tandooris.

17/10 Le Thanh Ton, DI 33 Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2



Ganesh serves authentic northern Indian tandooris and rotis along with the hottest curries, dovas and vada from the southern region.

38 Hai Ba Trung, DI www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com



Baba's Kitchen 🛛

One of Saigon's best-loved Indian venues, Baba's is One of Salgon's Dest-loved Indian Venues, Isada's is dedicated to authenticity in its cuisine and fair prices. Tell them exactly what spice level you want and they'll cater to your tastes – from the mildest of butter chickens to the most volcanic vindaloo. Always friendly. 164 Bui Vien, D1 / 49D Xa Lo Hanoi, D2



Saigon Indian

Saigon's original Indian eatery is still going strong, located in a bright, roomy upstairs venue in the heart of District 1.

1st Floor, 73 Mac Thi Buoi, D1



Known for its complete North & South Indian cuisine, Bollywood's specialty is its special chaat & tandoori dishes. Parties, events & catering services are available, with daily lunch tiffin and set menus. Free delivery in Phu My Hung. Complete menu on Facebook. **SA 26-2 Sky Garden 2, Phu My Hung, D7**

Hotline: 0906357442 (English)



The Puniabi

Best known for its excellent tandoori cooking executed in a specialized, custom-built oven, Punjabi serves the best of genuine North Indian cuisine in a venue well within the backpacker enclave, ensuring forgiving menu prices.

40/3 Bui Vien, D1





ITALIAN



Cian Bella

Hearty homestyle Italian food served with flair and excellent



service. An extensive menu is complemented with daily specials. Arriving guests are greeted with a free glass of Prosecco. Diners sit in a cozy setting upstairs or on the ground floor for people-watching. Big groups should book in advance. 11 Dong Du, D1

3822 3329 tonyfox56@hotmail.com www. saigonrestaurant group.com/ciao



Inter Nos R

Inter Nos means "between us" in Latin. Food amongst friends is exciting yet sincere. At Inter Nos, their dishes represent the appreciation they have towards guests, who they consider as

family. Many of the ingredients are handmade, from the cheese to the pasta, even the milk is taken directly from the farm. The emphasis is on handcrafting special ingredients so that quests can taste the honesty in the food

inter

nos.

26 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2 090 630 12 99 info@internos.vn www.internos.vn facebook.com/internossaigon



La Bettola R

Chef/owner Giuseppe Amorello combines sleek decor with traditional home cooking in this two-story centrally-located Italian eatery. Expect creative dishes such as rucola e Gamberi as well as La Bettola that includes shaved porchetta, focaccia and homemade mozzarella. There's a wood-burning oven on the premises and they try to hand-make all their ingredients. They also deliver.

84 Ho Tung Mau, D1 3914 4402 www.labettolasaigon.com



La Cucina 🛽

La Cucina has opened on Crescent Promenade in Phu My Hung, with an open-plan kitchen that can accommodate 180 diners. Enjoy top-end dining featuring the best of Italian cuisine and a wide selection of imported seafood, prepared from the freshest ingredients, in a relaxed, rustic atmosphere with a wood-fired pizza oven at its heart.

Block 07-08 CR1-07, 103 Ton Dat Tien, D7



Designed with an intimate atmosphere invoking something like an Italian town, this venue focuses on traditional ethnic Italian cuisine (rather than the ubiquitous pizza and pasta), creations of the skillful executive chef – straight out of Venice. The place lights up on romantic Thursday evenings with candlelight and light music.

17B Le Thanh Ton, D1

3823 1080 www.lahostaria.com



LovEat R

Mediterranean food meets the Italian flair at LovEat. Home made scrumpitous dishes are served in exquisite setting, that embodies the métier and the spirit of a modern bistro with an atmosphere that is warm and welcoming in the heart of the city. Black mussels, slow cooked ribs, tiramisu are some of the signatures dishes of LovEat's extensive menu.

29 Hai Trieu, D1 086 260 2727 www.loveat.vn

Also Try...

Filling, hearty Italian fare served with a smile in the heart of District 1. Authentic pizza and a comprehensive range of pasta, pork, chicken and beef dishes offers something for everyone. Located a stone's throw from Ben Thanh Market

86 Le Loi, D1 3824 4286

The luxury Park Hyatt Saigon is home to Opera, an authentic Italian dining experience open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Try their famous lasagna and tiramisu. Head chef Marco Torre learned his craft in a number of Michelin-star restaurants throughout

different regions of Italy during a 14 year career. Dine on the deck alfresco or inside in air conditioned comfort. **2 Lam Son Square, D1**

Pendolasco

One of the original Italian eateries in Ho Chi Minh City, Pendolasco recently reinvented itself with a new chef and menu, and spurned a sister eatery in District 2. Set off the street in a peaceful garden with indoor and outdoor eating areas, separate bar and function area, it offers a wide-ranging Italian menu and monthly movie nights. 87 Nguyen Hue, D1

3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

It's too late to call this Saigon's best-kept secret: the word is out. Wander up to the end of its little hem off Le Thanh Ton for the most unique pizza experience in the entire country – sublime Italian pizza pies with a Japanese twist. Toppings like you wouldn't imagine and a venue you'll be glad you took the time to seek out. 8/15 Le Thanh Ton, D1

012 0789 4444 www.pizza4ps.com

Pomodoro

Often unfairly mistaken as a purely tourist dining destination, Pomodoro offers an extensive range of Italian fare, especially seafood and beef dishes. The dining area is in a distinctively curved brick 'tunnel' opening into a large room at the rear, making it ideal for couples or groups.
79 Hai Ba Trung

3823 8998



JAPANESE



Achaya Café 🛭 R

Achaya Cafe has two floors providing a nice atmosphere for meetings, relaxation or parties. The menu is extensive with drinks and Western, Japanese, and Vietnamese food – from sandwiches, spaghetties, pizzas, steak and special Japanese sweet desserts.

093 897 2050 11am - 10:30pm



Ebisu R

Serving neither sushi nor sashimi, Ebisu's menu instead focuses on a range of wholesome charcoal-grilled meals and on thick, white Japanese udon noodles – made from imported udon powder from Australia – and presenting an overall rustic cuisine with a variety of

35bis Mac Dinh Chi, D1 3822 6971 ductm@incubation-vn.com www.ebisu-vn.asia



Gyumaru R

Gyumaru is a quintessentially minimalist Japanese dining experience rotating around the style of meat meal Westerners would be quick to link to a gourmet burger, but without the bread. Fresh, healthy, innovative cuisine in a relaxed, cozy environment and regular specials including quality steaks.

8/3 Le Thanh Ton 3827 1618 gyumaru.LTT@gmail.com



Ichiba Sushi Vietnam serves fine sushi and signature drinks/cocktails in a lounge setting. Featuring one of the most eclectic Japanese menus in the city. The current Japanese venue to see and be seen in everyone who's anyone is there.

204 Le Lai, D1 www.ichibasushi.vn



A Japanese whisky bar and grill serving some of the best Kobe beef in the city. The menu is Japanese with a European twist. The venue is celebrity bartender Hasegawa Harumasa's first foray into Vietnam, styled after his flagship operation on Ginza's fashionable whisky bar district in the heart of Tokyo.

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



Robata Dining An R

The restaurant has a downstairs bar and a second floor with private rooms that have sunken tables, sliding fusuma doors and tabletop barbecues. Popular with the Japanese expats, the menu serves up healthy appetizers, rolls, sashimi and An specialty dishes like deep fried chicken with garlic salt sauce An style.

15C Le Thanh Ton, D1 www.robata-an.com

Also Try...



Blanchy Street R Inspired by London's world-famous Nobu Restaurant, Blanchy Street's Japanese/South American fusion cuisine represents modern dining at its best in the heart of downtown, a truly international dining experience in a trendy, modern and friendly setting. Great sake and wine selection. 74/3 Hai Ba Trung, D1

3823 8793 www.blanchystreet.com 11am - 10:30pm

Serves authentic Japanese cuisine including sashimi, sushi, tempura, sukiyaki and shabu shabu.

River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2 6683 5308

One of the larger Japanese restaurants in the city, this exemplary sushi venue is an ideal choice for business and friendly aatherinas

74A4 Hai Ba Trung, DI 38245355 www.yakatabune-saigon.com

Osaka Ramen

This sleek, open-kitchen contemporary eatery serves up Japanese noodles starting from VND78,000. There are also set menus, individual dishes and a range of smaller, appetizing sides.

SD04, LO H29-2, My Phat Residential Complex, D7

Sushi Dining Aoi

Sushi Dining Aoi is one such restaurant, where the whole atmosphere of the place evokes the best of the culture

With its typical Japanese-style decor the smooth earthen tones of the wooden furniture and surrounds, the warmth and privacy of the VIP rooms it's possible to believe you're in a more elegant realm. 53-55 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, D3

3930 0039 www.sushidiningaoi.com

Yoshino

The decor is straight out of the set of Shogun, with black wood, tatami mats, stencilled cherry blossoms and all the trappings of Japanese exoticism
– tastefully done. While Ho Chi Minh
City is certainly not short of fine Japanese eateries, this one is particularly impressive

2A-4A Ton Duc Thang, D1 3823 3333

KOREAN



Galbi Brothers
Superb casual BBQ venue focusing on every foreigner's favorite K-dish; galbi. Home of the only allyou-can-eat Korean BBQ in Saigon, GB is distinguished by its inexpensive lunch sets and unabashed enthusiasm for Korean spirits.

RI–25 Hung Phuoc 4, Pham Van Nghi – Bac, D7 5410 6210



Kang Nam Ga 🛭

An exceptionally refined style of Korean BBQ fit out with high-tech smokeless racks, Kang Nam Ga is fast becoming the Korean go-to venue for a wide-ranging and clean introduction to the cuisine. Delicious beef sets and the infamous and eminently popular ginseng chicken soup — all Kangnam style.

6B Le Quy Don, D3 3933 3589 kangnamga@gmail.com



The venue may be upscale, but the service and feel of this local-style Korean restaurant is very much down-to-earth. Enjoy the pleasure of casual outdoor streetstyle Korean dining without worrying about the proper decorum for an international venue. Great Korean dishes at good rates

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7 5410 1086



Long-standing venue serving Korean delicacies in this city for many years, Seoul House is simple on décor and strong on taste. Specializes mainly in Korean hotpot and arills

33 Mac Thi Buoi, D1 3829 4297



Won's Cuisine 🛭

One of the city's most important Korean venues – for reasons of authenticity, but rather for straying from the norms. The restaurant's proprietress has infused so much of her own quirky tastes into the menu she's completely ignored the conventions of the cuisine, making Won's a unique creation with an unforgettable

49 Mac Thi Buoi



THAI



Baan Thai

Stylish modern restaurant with a superb bar, Baan Thai serves authentic Thai cuisine with additional local and European twists. Friendly venue with large screen TVs for casual entertainment.

55 Thao Dien, D2 3744 5453 www.baanthai-anphu.com

Supremely chic Thai venue with all the authentic burn you need – or without if you prefer. An opulent, fashionable decor with the cuisine to match – often reported to serve dishes comparable with those of Thailand itself.

Kumho Link, Hai Ba Trung, DI

Hidden away down a narrow alley in the heart of downtown this unique Thai restaurant boasts authentic flavours and surprising character. Eat downstairs at tables in a cosy, themed environment - or be brave and climb the narrow

spiral staircase to the attic and crouch on cushions in true Thai style while attentive staff serve plates to share. 71/2 Mac Thi Buoi St. D1

3823 7506

Tuk Tuk Thai Bistro

kitch and authentic, Tuk Tuk brings the pleasure of street-style Thai food into an elegant but friendly setting. Now a fashionable venue in its own right, Tuk Tuk's menu features some unique dishes and drinks you won't see

elsewhere. 17/11 Le Thanh Ton, D1 3521 8513/ 090 688 6180

The Racha Room R

Brand new fine & funky Thai venue with kooky styling and a great attitude – and some of the most finely-presented signature Thai cuisine you'll see in this city, much of it authentically spicy. Long Live the King! Reservations

recommended. 12-14 Mac Thi Buoi, D1 090 879 14 12

STEAKHOUSE



Corso Steakhouse & Bar

The steakhouse boasts an open kitchen with private dining areas. With an extensive wine menu, contemporary Western and Asian cuisines and a wide range of sizzling steaks cooked to your liking, this is the ideal choice for a special celebration or formal business dinner. **Ground Floor, Norfolk Hotel, 117 Le Thanh Ton, DI**

3829 5368 / www.norfolkhotel.com.vn



Nossa Steakhouse

NOSSA A stylish restaurant featuring Italian cuisine and Western steaks

with a wide selection of imported steaks from Australian and the US. Nossa brings food and decor together to create a cozy ambiance. With an attention to bringing authentic flavors, we provide good food, good prices and good taste. Special promotion for first year anniversary Buy I steak get 2nd steak 50% off.

36 Pham Hong Thai, D1 0938 584 188 / www.nossa.vn



El Gaucho High end steakhouse with fine American and Wagyu beef steaks along with traditional Argentinian specialties. Outlets in Hanoi and Bangkok too. Expect to pay for the quality. Reservations recommended.

74/1 Hai Ba Trung, Ben Nghe Ward, DI.

5D Nguyen Sieu, D1 Unit CRI-12, The Crescent, Phu My Hung, D7 www.elgaucho.asia



Not a traditional steakhouse per se, but Pho 99 is known for its excellent filet mignon steaks made out of Cu Chi beef. Also serves great *pho*.

139 Nguyen Trai, D1 S36-1 Bui Bang Doan, D7



New York Steakhouse

New York Steakhouse is definitely in the upmarket category and serves exclusive American imported beef dishes, with a whole range of steaks from rib eye, New York strip steak and tenderloin being popular options. 25-27 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, D1



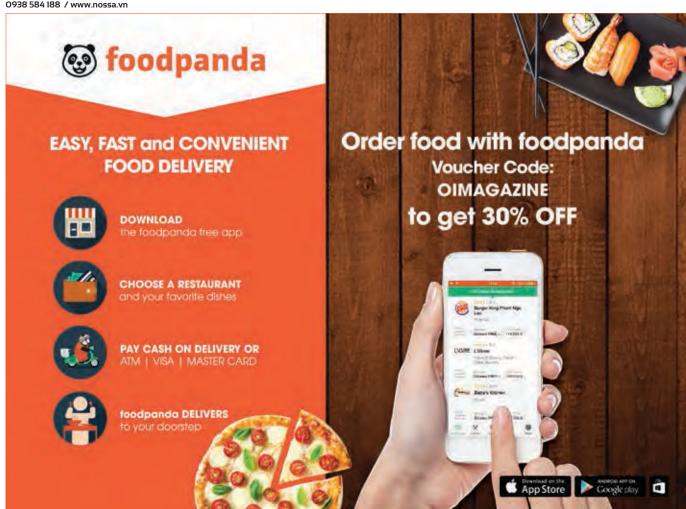
Trocadero

A brand new restaurant in SG. With cozy decoration & a selection of wines from



12 countries. The open balcony on the 1st floor looks out onto the park. The elegant 2nd floor for business meetings or private parties ideal. Reasonable prices for 'A' grade imported USA beef, French foie gras

98 Vo Thi Sau, D1



VIETNAMESE



Five Oysters

Five Oysters serves authentic and excellent Seafood &



234 Bui Vien, D1



Frangipani Hoa Su

Frangipani Hoa Su offers Vietnamese cuisine with a variety of dishes from different parts of Vietnam ranging from pho, bun bo Hue to mi quang. It serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. It also has an open space and a VIP air-conditioned room together which can hold a maximum capacity of 500 people, making it an ideal venue for different types of events and functions 26 Le Van Mien, D2

frangipani.restobar@gmail.com



Brightly-styled and perfectly lovely, this is a minimalist local venue with international appeal that features a menu designed by the former head chef of Hanoi's Sofitel Metropole. Refined and distinguished without a hint of being stuck-up about it and very affordable.

68 Pham Viet Chanh, Binh Thanh 6258 1508 papaya@chi-nghia.com www.chi-nghia.com



Leafy green roof garden, upmarket restaurant with reasonable prices and a wide menu of choices. Open style kitchen advertises its cleanliness. Designer interior with spotlighted artwork and beautiful cushions give an oriental luxurious feeling – augmented by dishes served on earthenware crockery.

17a Ngo Van Nam, D1

3829 1515



Ouan Na - Vegishouse

A Vietnamese vegetarian and vegan restaurant that uses the freshest ingredients to create dishes such as fresh spring rolls, sticky rice, curry specialties and coconut-based desserts. Decor is swathed in dark mahogany wood and red curtains.

796/7 Truong Sa, Ward 14, D3 Opening time: 10:30am-2pm; 5pm-9pm 9526 2958

Facebook: quanna.vegishouse



Red Door R

Red Door offers traditional Vietnamese food with a contemporary twist. The restaurant is also a platform for art talk. science talk, and social talk; where ideas and passions are shared

400/8 Le Van Sy, D3 012 0880 5905

Facebook: "Reddoorrestaurant"



Also Try...

Tasty BBQ venue situated above Temple Bar. The venue has a traditional, rustic theme with old-style furniture and a quaint Vietnamese decor, making this a nicely atmospheric restaurant and a great place to dine with international friends new to the cuisine. The menu features a number of local favorites

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1 3821 1631

Banh Xeo 46A

Fun Vietnamese-style creperie popular with locals and expats alike for its tasty, healthy prawn pancakes, along with a number of other traditional dishes.

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

Cha Ca La Vong

If you do only one thing, you'd better do it well – and this venue does precisely that, serving only traditional Hanoian Cha Ca salads stir-fried with fish and spring onion. Delicious.

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Famous for its inclusion in the Anthony Bourdain No Reservations program, the

venue is best known for its theatrics. Every bowl of rice is served in a terracotta bowl that is unceremoniously shattered upon serving. Unforgettable local food in a very pleasant traditionallystyled venue

59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3 3932 6363 comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com comnieusaigon.com.vn

Cuc Gach Quan

Deservedly one of the highest ranking Vietnamese restaurants in Saigon on Trip Advisor, this delightful restaurant serves up traditional, country-style foods and contemporary alternatives in two character-filled wooden houses located on opposite sides of the street from each other. Unique food in a unique setting and an unbelievably large menu. 10 Dang Tat, D1 3848 0144

Highway 4

The menu reflects the ambiance of the north and wider Vietnam, although dishes are carefully selected to meet a more

101 Vo Van Tan D3 www.highway4.com

Hum is a vegetarian restaurant where food are prepared on site from various fresh beans, nuts, vegetables, flowers, and fruits. Food are complemented with special drinks mixed from fresh fruits and vegetables

2 Thi Sach, D1

3823 8920 www.hum-vegetarian.vn

MayFine Vietnamese fare served in a character-filled three-story rustic villa located up a narrow alley, off the beaten track. Watch the chefs prepare authentic food from a varied menu in an open

kitchen. 3/5 Hoang Sa 3910 1277

Nha Hang Ngon

Possibly the best-known Vietnamese restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Hang Ngon serves up hundreds of traditional local dishes in a classy French-style mansion.

160 Pasteur, D1 3827 7131 www.quananngon.com.vn 8am - 10pm

Temple Club

Named after the old-style Chinese temple in which the venue is located, tempie in which the venue is located, the ancient stylings of this impressive restaurant make for an unforgettable evening spent somewhere in Saigon's colonial past. Beautiful oriental art that will please all diners and great local

29-31 Ton That Thiep, D1 3829 9244 templeclub.com.vn

Thanh Nien

A favorite with tourists and locals for many years, Thanh Nien behind the Diamond Plaza is a buffet in a home Diamond Plaza is a Durret in a nome setting, with a-la-carte dining available in the leafy garden outdoors. Relaxing, beautiful place to eat.

11 Nguyen Van Chiem, D1
3822 5909

Propaganda Bistro R
Spring rolls and Vietnamese street food with a Western twist. Serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. The restaurant features hand-painted wall murals in an authentic

propaganda style. 21 Han Thuyen, D1 3822 9048

INTERNATIONAL



EON51 Fine Dining

Situated 200m above ground, EON51 Fine Dining is the highest restaurant offering guests a dining experience in a truly unrivaled setting in Saigon.



quality imported ingredients. L51 Bitexco Financial Tower, 2 Hai Trieu, D1 17:00 – late 6291 8751



MAY Restaurant and Bar

We have over 20 years experience in hospitality business in Vietnam with some famous Brand such as Shadow Bar & Café and MAY

Restaurant & Bar. MAY- short for 'Me and You', it is all in one premium casual kitchen θ bar downtown. Located centrally on the historic Dong Khoi street with a fusion of Western and Asian cuisine and pride themselves in their wine list and international standard of service. Happy Hour from 3pm to 7pm. You can even receive a 10% discount by calling 091 711 1921 or make reservation at www. mayrestaurant com vn

19 -21 Dong Khoi, D1 / 8am - 1am 6291 3686 / 0917 111 921 may.restaurant19@gmail.com Facebook: "may.restaurant.bar"



Portofino R

Portofino serves cicchetti - a tradition from Venice best likened to Spanish tapas, but usually served in larger portions, featuring cheeses, salad, pasta, prawns, pork, beef, salmon and seafood. Highlights for innovation: Trippa alla Romana – tripe with chickpeas, marinara sauce and fried egg; Slow braised pork belly served on mascarpone polenta; and Mozzarella in Carozza breaded fresh mozzarella, anchovy and basil toasted with pomodoro sauce. 15 Dong Du, D1



Saffron R

The first thing that will strike you when you enter Saffron is the terracotta pots mounted on the ceiling. Located on Dong Du, this restaurant offers Mediterranean food, some with a distinct Asian influence added for further uniqueness. Prepare to order plates to share and don't miss the signature Cheese Saganaki! Guests are welcomed with complimentary Prosecco, fresh baked bread served with garlic, olive tapenade and hummus 51 Hai Ba Trung, DI

382 48358



TnT BBQ R

TnT BBQ delivers authentic American BBQ right to your doorstep. This delivery only BBQ joint specializes in smoked ribs, chicken, beef brisket pulled pork and turkey breast.

0166 666 7858 11am – 10pm facebook.com/tntbbqvietnam



Zombie BBQ R

Zombie BBQ is a modern American BBQ restaurant featuring smoked ribs over Beachwood smoke for 8 hours. Offerings include BBQ chicken specialties from around the world as well as Alligator, Fresh Jalapeño poppers, Mexican street

tacos with grilled meats as well as Vegetarian food. A never ending parade of meats find their way into the spit roaster as well as new creations every week.

628A Vo Truong Toan, Distric 2 6685 3756 / 09 1851 0139 4pm - 11pm Facebook: ZombieBarbequesaigon



Also Try...

With a great view of the Saigon River, this restobar serves imported steak, healthy salads and much more in an alfresco

40 Lily Road, An Phu Superior Compound, 3744 6790

www.boathouse.com.vn

Boomarang BistroLocated in The Crescent by the lake, the spacious Boomarang Bistro Saigon serves Australian and other Western food in the most pedestrian friendly, relaxed part of

107 Ton Dat Tien, D7 www.boomarang.com.vn

Owned by an American, Cali Burrito serves delicious Californian-style (specifically San Diego) burritos, tacos and quesadillas. Popular favorites are carne asada, grilled chicken, sausage and eggs, and steak and eggs. Located in Phu My Hung, D7, stop by or order for speedy hot delivery

Duong So 6, Hung Vuong Building 1 (EOO6), Phu My Hung, D7 Delivery: 090 255 0533 Facebook: Cali Burrito

Daily menu change for their breakfast and dinner buffets, served in a relaxing atmosphere with eight live cooking stations with over 60 varieties of domestic and international dishes. A meeting place to enjoy a cup of coffee from selected premium blends and delicious homemade pastries and

Hotel Equatorial 242 Tran Binh Trong, D5 www.equatorial.com

Corso Steakhouse & Bar

With an extensive wine menu, contemporary Asian cuisine and wide range of juicy, sizzling steaks cooked to your liking by our professional Chefs, Corso Steakhouse & Bar is the perfect choice for a special celebration or formal business dinner

3829 5368 ext 6614 www.norfolkhotel.com.vn

Deutsches Eck / German CornerThe restaurant is fast becoming

known for its sausage, beers, and their Schweins Haxe or pork knuckles. A number of German beers to select from including Konig Pilsener, Bitburger, Koestritzer Black Beer, HB-Hofbrau Weisse, Schwarzbrau Exquisit,

and Schwarzbrau Weisse. AOOI Nguyen Van Linh St., Phu My Hung, D7 / 54106695

Greens hopes to provide a healthy alternative to the many fast food options now available in the city. They use only high quality, fresh ingredients from their partner organic farms in Dalat to use in their salads. They also offer online delivery

158/11, Nguyen Cong Tru, D1 www.greensvn.com

An Australian family diner and bar concept. Renowned for steaks, seafood and other Western fare served in an informal environment. Smoke-free

Ground Floor, Bitexco Financial Tower 2 Hai Trieu, D1

Khoi Thom R

Khoi Thom has evolved into an authentic Mexican-style cantina serving home-style dishes, many from the Mexican chef's family.

29 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3

La Fenetre Soleil 🛭

Literally 'window to the sun', LFS showcases a fusion of old-world fittings (exposed bricks, antique furniture and chandeliers) with newworld elements (fur cushions, mosaic tiles and glass tables). Serves a range of cocktails, imported beer, coffee and smoothies together with a Japanese Vietnamese fusion menu.

4 Ly Tu Trong, D1

Market 39

Market 39 unites the best of East and West in a buffet and a la carte dining experience, along with one of the best Sunday brunch buffets in town

6am – 10pm Ground floor - InterContinental Asiana Saigon 3520 9099 dine@icasianasaigon.com

Travel & Leisure





Stilt Standing

Thirty miles from Hong Kong's Disneyland park, a small fishing village offers a contrasting view of the city's past

TEXT BY NICHOLAS HEATH





LANTAU ISLAND MAY be famous for Disneyland, the Giant Buddha and even Hong Kong International Airport, but today I'm choosing the lesser known fishing village of Tai O as my destination. Quaint and sleepy, Tai O or the "Venice of Hong Kong" as it is known, seems like a pretty wholesome destination these days, but it was not always so. Adding a little color to the popular history of the town, Tai O is said to have a checkered past involving smugglers, contrabands and pirates. Even now there's a rumor that it's stilled used as an entry point into mainland China by human traffickers. The only thing I find

to be particularly fishy about the place during my visit is the smell. Tai O's famous salted fish and shrimp paste are the main offenders, with both being popular exports here.

Perhaps calling Tai O the "Venice of Hong Kong" is a bit of a stretch. I didn't find any luxury boutiques or dim sum carts here; however that is part of the appeal. It's a little town that's completely different from the modern metropolis of Hong Kong Island and a welcome respite from the high-octane chaos of the mega city.

In keeping with my desire for a more leisurely experience, I opt for the scenic





WAGE BY BILLIE NORMAN

route to Lantau Island by using the ferry rather than the quicker option of the MTR (Hong Kong train service). The ferry

Kong Island as I sail out of the harbor is gorgeous. It's easily worth the extra journey time, especially as I boarded early

service is excellent and the view of Hong

to get a window seat.

My first port of call is the transit hub Mui Wo. From here I take a local bus for the 22 kilometer journey to Tai O. The bus ride takes about an hour, but again, the journey is a great way to see the countryside and virtually spans one complete side of the island. Typical of my experiences in China, the bus driver has a no-holds-barred approach to his work, so some of the sharp turns and steep descents are slightly hairraising at worst, bumpy at best. I'm glad I decided to seek my lunch out in Tai O and didn't eat before.

Tai O is best known for its stilt houses, which were built to stand over the tidal flats and salt marshes where the town is situated. Just before arriving, I get a good view of the structures from the bus window, and look forward to the calm of this small village. My serene moment is shattered the minute I leave the safety of the bus as tour guides accosted me, eager to offer jaunts by boat around the town. After viewing the itineraries of a few touts,

I realize all the routes are pretty much the same, so I take the plunge. Unfortunately my boat doesn't leave the dock until a few more paying customers join me, so I'm forced to wait. I pass the time watching the dried fish vendors ply their wares. We eventually set off and crisply weave around the narrow waterways to view the famed stilt homes up close. They emerge from the water on wooden legs as schools of fish swim in the murky water beneath. Squid hang from porch beams and trays of bright orange egg yolks dry in the sun.

The boat then sails out into the open ocean on the vague proviso that we'll spot a famous Chinese white dolphin. Unfortunately the dolphins must have missed the memo to make an appearance, but we do spy some silver fish that leap out of the water every now and then.

These days it's not just the dolphins that are rare around these parts. Tai O's fishing industry can barely sustain its current residents, and the town has become increasingly reliant on the tourist trade to get by. So to boost tourism, Tai O also offers interesting activities and sites worth visiting such as the former Marine Police Station, built in 1902, that has been turned into Tai O Heritage Hotel and boasts stunning views across the area.

The hotel is a joint venture between the government and the non-profit Hong Kong Heritage Conservation Foundation, which runs the site. The colonial structure, on a secluded spot at the edge of the sea, has nine rooms and a restaurant. Even if you aren't a registered guest of the luxury hotel, you can still explore its grounds. There are also a number of temples to visit and

more scenic walks on offer, but the best part of a visit to Tai O involves simply strolling around the warren-like mazes of the stilt fishing houses. The view on foot is actually more amazing than the one from the boat, and gives a sense of how the Tanka people (local fishermen and women) live and work... and how unreliable their electricity supply must be.

I was also interested in learning more about the history of the locals so I visited the Tai O Rural Committee Historic and Cultural Showroom. While the collection there wasn't extensive, it allowed some insight into daily life showcasing interesting fishing tools and relics formerly used by the local community.

Before too long, the sun's getting low and it's time to leave. Tai O may not be as a grand as Venice, but I found it to be a welcome alternative to Hong Kong's crowded and busier parts.

Hotel Royal Hoi An

Hotel Royal Hoi An joins the MGallery collection of memorable hotels in Vietnam

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY HOTEL ROYAL HOLAN

HOTEL ROYAL HOI AN, a member of the MGallery Collection, has opened as Accor's first upscale property in the ancient port city of Hoi An, celebrating a romantic journey at a crossroads of cultures.

Accor, the largest operator of international hotels in Asia-Pacific and Vietnam, has announced the opening of Hotel Royal Hoi An, the latest addition to the MGallery Collection in Vietnam. Standing majestically on the banks of the picturesque Thu Bon River, the upscale property has taken pride of place in the UNESCO World Heritage town of Hoi An in Central Vietnam. The hotel is blessed with the wonderful vista of the low-rise cityscape, once a cultural crossroads and a key maritime port that still retains much of its old-world charm. Only 35 kilometers from Danang City, Hotel Royal Hoi An is

a 25-minute drive from Danang International Airport.

"We are delighted to add Hotel Royal Hoi An to Accor's MGallery Collection of memorable hotels," said Patrick Basset, Chief Operating Officer of Accor Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines, adding: "This hotel combines the excellence of its services and individual attention with its historical roots, making every stay a memorable experience. This is an ideal accommodation for upscale travelers who enjoy staying in a hotel with a unique story and a distinguished concept."

MGallery is a collection of unique hotels selected on the basis of their individual personality and characteristics. MGallery hotels are categorized under three key themes – Signature, Heritage and Serenity. Stressing Hoi An's historical roots as an ancient town and its serene location on the banks of the Thu Bon River, Hotel Royal Hoi An is regarded as one of MGallery's "Heritage" hotels, itself the fourth MGallery hotel in Vietnam.

Tangi Le Grand, Hotel Royal Hoi An's General Manager said, "The theme of Hotel Royal Hoi An is wrapped around the 16th century romantic legend between the Japanese merchant Sotaro Araki and Vietnamese princess Ngoc Hoa who fell in love and married before moving back together to Nagasaki, Japan. The princess – still well loved and admired by the people of Nagasaki these days – changed her name to Wa Ka Ku, but she's also known by her Japanese nickname "Anio-san." To celebrate this "romantic journey at the crossroads of cultures," the hotel's theme, names of room











types and F&B outlets are based on this timeless story of true love."

Hotel Royal Hoi An is essentially a true reflection of Hoi An (literally "peaceful meeting place"), incorporating the values of historical tranquility and memorable hospitality into its grand design as a destination where its sophisticated guests – from honeymooners to family and leisure travelers – come to meet, rest and relax amid its beautiful surroundings. The hotel's architecture draws upon ancient Vietnamese and Japanese influences in a dramatic display of a quasi-European style with a contemporary twist.

The hotel's 119 guestrooms induce total relaxation as a serene haven of peace and tranquility, each exhibiting an antiquated yet romantic touch. The rooms are adorned with dark wood and handcrafted furnishings and fixtures that bring the city's storied past back to life. On the balcony, guests will be captivated by a magnificent view of the river that meanders leisurely and the age-old communities that thrive along its banks. Room types are named as follows: Sotaro Suites on the top floor facing east to Japan, Anio Suites on the top floor facing west to Vietnam, and two Deluxe Suites, Yasu and Tau. "Yasu" is Sotaro and Ani-o's daughter while "Tau" means "boat" in Vietnamese.

Hotel Royal Hoi An celebrates decadent dining through its several top-notch food and beverage venues. At Faifo Café, guests are treated to a full breakfast buffet and delectable a la carte dishes of Asian, American and European cuisine for lunch and dinner. The chef at its Japanese-food outlet Wa Ka Ku exhibits his prowess in the fine art of sushi and yakitori with sumptuous dishes using the finest local ingredients. Classic cocktails, chic design and a relaxed vibe are the order of the day at the poolside River Bar with cool lounge sounds filling the air.

Hotel Royal Hoi An's opulent Thu Bon Ballroom is the perfect meeting and events venue that can ensconce medium to large groups of up to 250 guests. The Woosha spa provides a superb royal spa experience to rejuvenate and revitalize body and mind while the Royal Fitness is equipped with state-of-the-art fitness equipment complete with the marvelous views of the Thu Bon River.

Historically known as "Phai Pho or Faifo," Hoi An grew from a small port town to become a major trading port from the 16th to 18th centuries when many Chinese, Japanese, Dutch and Indians merchants came to set up shop and made the town their home. Hoi An is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site that is home to well-preserved historical buildings displaying a fusion of local and foreign architectural styles. Hoi An is a 25-minute drive from Danang International Airport while Danang is an hour's flight from Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City.



HOTEL ROYAL HOLAN'S INTRODUCTORY PACKAGE

To celebrate its grand opening, Hotel Royal Hoi An – MGallery Collection is offering a special launch promotion with rates starting from just VND2,600,000++ per Deluxe room, per night, including daily breakfast for two and free WiFi internet access. This special promotion is valid until September 2015. For more information about the package, please visit: www.mgallery.com or email reservation@hotelroyalhoian.com.



My Thai

Eating through Thailand's northern-style food in Chiang Mai

TEXT AND IMAGES BY ALANA MORGAN

BEFORE VISITING THAILAND, I dreamt about its flavors. Reading my guidebook before that first trip, I glanced at where to go and what to do before reading the (brief) food section over and over. I couldn't wait to be in a placed filled with my favorite kinds of dishes and ingredients – spicy crushed chilies that have a way of catching you in the back of your throat while still making you want more, tangy lime, salty fish sauce and slightly sweet coconut milk... My book said all this was fresh. Everyone ate and snacked throughout the day. What destination could be better?

Fast forward five years from that first trip and I've now spent the past three years living in the northern town of Chiang Mai – a wonderful community and arguably one of the best places for food in the entire country. Sure, you can get excellent curries, zesty salads and restorative noodle soups throughout the country, but nowhere else

is the access to food so easy, the quality so high and the prices so cheap. Thanks to Chiang Mai's compact layout, farming history, tourism draw and thousands of university students, the city seems to have incredible food wherever I look. I can't go more than a few meters without coming across another street cart, market stall or restaurant - day or night.

A number of Thai dishes are common throughout the country, but each region boasts its own distinct flavor, ingredients and meals based off of the area's crops and cultural influences. In the south I'll find dishes doused with turmeric and coconut milk and plenty of seafood, while favorites like *somtam* (spicy green papaya salad), *gai yang* (grilled chicken served with sweet chili sauce) and *khao neiow* come from the country's northeastern Isaan region, close to Laos.

In the north, an area where recipes have

been influenced by Burmese and Chinese dishes, I'll see heartier dishes filled with jungle herbs, pork and often bitter or sour flavors. A good example of this is the highly popular *khao soi*. A creamy yellow curry soup with a touch of coconut, *khao soi* is Northern Thai food's shining star and a hit with locals and foreigners alike with chewy egg noodles topped with the rich curry, sliced shallots, lime, pickled cabbage and a sprinkling of crispy fried noodles.

Other must-try dishes include *gaeng hung lay*, a Burmese-influenced curry using pork belly, *khanom jeen*, fresh sticky rice noodles bathing in watery curries then topped with chilies, bean sprouts and other greens, and *yum moo yor*, a Thai-style salad made with steamed pork sausage. Along with *moo yor*, flavorful pork sausages known as *sai oua* and *naem* are common cooking ingredients or standalone

snacks. Stuffed with lemongrass, galangal (a kind of ginger) and kaffir lime leaves, sai oua is a great example of Northern Thailand's earthy, and funky, flavors as is naem, a tangy fermented sausage. Thick chili dips such as naam prik ong, a roasted tomato and pork concoction, and naam prik noom, made from onion, garlic and plenty of green chilies, are popular snacks and drinking foods eaten with steamed vegetables and another one of the region's specialties, keb moo – fried pork rinds.

So where do you find all these Northern Thai treats?

Local Fresh Markets

Chiang Mai is packed with fresh markets selling meat, produce and some prepared foods 24/7. The trick to finding Northern Thai staples like grilled sai oua, fresh naam prik noom and packaged naem ready to cook is knowing what you're looking for or being willing to try some unrecognizable treats. The chili dips will be ready to go in little single-serving bags and you'll notice the dark sai oua coiled in large spirals. Additionally, at markets where there are street stalls set up for dinner, like at Chiang Mai Gate, you'll be able to order dishes including khao soi, kanom jeen and fried rice with naem - delicious!

Northern-Thai Restaurants near Nimmanhaemin Road

There are restaurants specializing in Northern Thai cuisine throughout the city ranging from street stalls to sit down family affairs, however one of the easiest areas to find Northern favorites is in the Nimmanhaemin neighborhood located on the west side of town. Restaurants like Tong Tem Toh, Little Lanna and Khao Soi Nimman, which specializes in different versions of the famous curry, are all safe bets. While they cost more than your average street stall eats, you're still getting a deal and a great meal.

Thai-style Bars

Between the locals, college students, expats and tourists, Chiang Mai has a wide range of drinking establishments to fit most tastes and in Thailand you do as much tasting as you do drinking during a night out. Thais love to nibble while they're throwing back the whiskey and salty, crispy Northern Thai snacks like the *naam prik noom* with *keb moo*, and fried chicken ligaments known as *en gai tod* do just the trick. Larger bars will usually have their own kitchens cranking out the goods, but even at smaller places you won't go hungry thanks to entrepreneurial food carts bringing popular snacks straight to you.

BIO: Originally from Seattle, *Alana Morgan* has been living, working, writing and traveling in Thailand and Southeast Asia for the past four years with no plans to settle down anytime soon. Read more at *Paper Planes* (www.paperplanesblog.com)







FROM TOP: Gaeng Hung Lay; Packaged Naem at a local market; and Thai aromatics and ingredients

Travel Blogging 101

Want to travel the world for free? Read this first



Having visited nearly 60 countries as a travel writer and award-winning photographer, James Pham blogs about his adventures at FlylcarusFly.com



WITH THE ADVENT of the internet, now anyone can be a published writer with a few clicks of the mouse. Even though blogging didn't really take off until the late 1990s, it feels like every other person I meet has a blog of some kind and the stats seem to back that up. I've seen estimates saying there are anywhere from 150 to 450 million blogs in English, with Tumblr hosting 227 million blog accounts and Wordpress almost 75 million. A significant portion of those are travel blogs.

People start travel blogs for a wide variety of reasons — as a way to remember a trip, to keep in touch with family and friends, and, of course, to score free travel. How many of us have seen photos of someone on a deserted

beach or pristine mountain summit, a laptop open, a fruity drink of some kind to the side, and the caption: "My office for the day"? For many, trading in the desk job for a glamorous globetrotting life of free travel, free products and a healthy income sounds like heaven. A friend of a friend asked me how she could get sponsors for her upcoming trans-America road trip. She had started a blog literally just a few weeks before with hardly any readers and zero journalistic credibility, but was already convinced that there were companies out there wanting to leverage her corner of cyberspace. The reality, though, is that somewhere around 95 percent of blogs eventually die out, according to a 2008 survey by a search

engine for blogs that found that out of 133 million blogs it tracked, only a little over 7 million had been updated in the past four months. Blogging is indeed hard work. Becoming successful at it, whatever your goal, requires patience, perseverance and a modicum of talent.

For the sake of full disclosure, let's just establish that I'm a bad travel blogger. Despite my best intentions, I only manage to post once every few months. But somehow it's still working for me. In the past year, my blog has opened doors that have been incredibly unexpected. I once received a frantic email at six in the morning from a BBC producer who needed someone to report live from the newly opened McDonald's... in an hour.

I typed a groggy "sorry, can't!" and took a shower. When I came out, he replied that he'd hold the segment for me. So off I went on my bike flying through morning traffic and went on live radio literally three minutes after pulling into the McDonald's parking lot. It turns out the BBC producer followed my blog, although he had never commented. Just this week, a popular guide book contacted me and ended up commissioning ten articles, again, because they had read my blog. So while there are no ironclad rules to successful blogging, I'd love to share some things that I've learned from the last three years of blogging and from talking to other bloggers.

Finding Your Niche and Your Voice

Blogging isn't an online Field of Dreams where it's a case of "write it, and they will come." Unless you got into the action very early in the game, the blogosphere has become a very crowded place. In most cases, bloggers give up because it takes a long time, years even, for readers to start coming. Oftentimes, there's just not enough reason for people to come back to your blog again and again. That's why finding your niche is so important. Are you looking to write about budget family travel, or traveling for seniors, or traveling the world while playing an upright piano (a real blog, by the way, at pianoaround. com)? Whatever it is, decide on your specialty. What do you do better than most other people? What's going to set you apart from the other hundred million bloggers out there?

Then it's time to find your voice. Are you going to be resource-heavy, with lots of details for someone else who wants to replicate your trip? Or are you going to show some of your personality, building your brand around yourself? When I'm looking to research a destination, I appreciate the former with as many details as possible. But unless there's something more than "how-to" about the post, I won't subscribe or bookmark it. There's no reason for me to read a journalstyle blog unless I plan on visiting that very destination in the near future. Then there are bloggers I read simply because I like their personality, usually because it's humorous, smart or quirky in some way. I love vivid imagery and read a lot of Paul Theroux and magazine-style travel writers like Chris Colin, who describe scenes and behind-the-scenes so beautifully that it's almost like being there with them. I feel smarter just for reading them. In the early stages of your blog, decide on how much you want to reveal about yourself and study and practice the art of writing, even if it means writing and re-writing before you hit that "publish" button.

In upcoming columns, I'll share more advice on setting up a blog, how to market yourself and your site, using social media and of course, how to score free travel.



GEAR REVIEW

BACKJOY

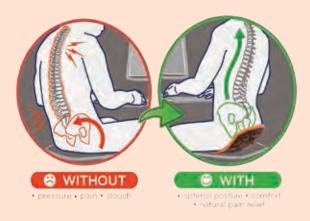
Writing and editing, even freelance, likely means you'll be chained to your computer for long periods of time, writing to deadlines and obsessing over words. I began having back problems a few years ago and found that I couldn't sit for more than a couple of hours without my back getting really sore.

I bought an expensive, ergonomic desk chair, and even purchased a massage chair to encourage myself to take more frequent breaks. On one of my web surfing sessions looking for back exercises you could do from an office chair, I came across a video about a strange-looking seat cushion from a company called Backloy, with their motto, "Change your posture, change your life."

The skeptic in me took one look at this nerdy-looking plastic cushion and dismissed that it could ever work. It wasn't fancy. It didn't involve any electronics. Instead, it simply promised back relief by cupping your gluteus muscles so they couldn't flatten against the seat, thereby avoiding the tightening of back muscles, and tilting your hips upright into a neutral position, moving pressure and strain from your lower back. For every negative reviewer who said the product

was useless, there were ten enthusiastic ones that swore that the product changed their life. At just about USD40, I decided to give it a try.

I didn't see much of a difference the first day or two, but after that, started noticing that I could sit an entire morning without a stiff back, invaluable when trying to write multiple articles on deadline. Within a month, I loaded up on more BackJoy products, including a trigger point massager which has been a godsend to work out kinks and knots that were infuriatingly difficult to reach, a pair of posture sandals and a memory foam travel pillow. It's rare that I'm such an advocate for any one company, but hands down, these products really have changed my life and the way I'm able to work and travel. If you sit for long periods and experience back pain, I wholeheartedly recommending giving BackJoy products a try. Unfortunately, there's no BackJoy distributer in Vietnam yet but there are a few places that sell them in Bangkok. Otherwise, products can be ordered via Amazon or from www.backjou.com.







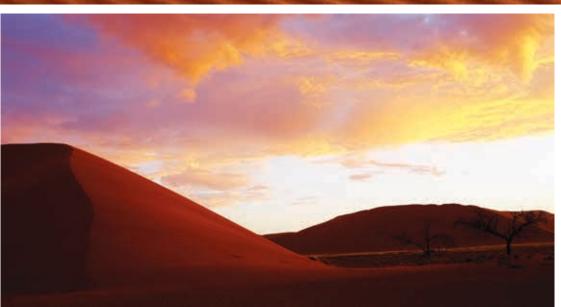
Tambola Mark Dy Mark D





In the Southern part of the Namib Desert lies Sossusvlei, a dry salt lake surrounded by high sand dunes. The landscape is strikingly reddish-orange, due to high concentrations of iron and consequent oxidation processes. Fauna ranges from beetles, rodents and springboks to ostriches and even desert elephants. The most noticeable flora include Acacia trees and shrub-like plants.





>>The List

Travel



Ana Mandara Villas I Dalat

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www.anamandara-resort.com www.anamandara-resort.com



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Havana Nha Trang will leave you an unforgettable experience. Spacious suites with breathtaking ocean-view, massive outdoor pool 3-faced to the sea, underground tunnel connecting to the beach from the hotel, Sky Bar on the roof of the City and more. Come and enjoy your time! 38 Tran Phu Street, Loc Tho, Nha Trang

Hayana Nhatrang

T: (058) 388 9999 / Fax: (058) 388 9900 www.havanahotel.vn info@havanahotel.vn



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Bhaya combines oriental style with contemporary
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cabins and suites accommodating more than 400
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www.bhayacruises.com 093 344 6542



A unique and exciting fusion of resort and spa where spa treatments are inclusive and a part of daily living in this beach resort. It's the first all pool villa style resort in the destination and offers 87 pool suites, spa villas and beach villas each with modern, open-plan living and private courtyard with swimming pool. 'Freedom' options such as spa treatments and breakfast available at multiple locations are a few of the surprising offers in store. maiadanang.fusion-resorts.com



InterContinental Nha Trang

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(058) 388 7777 www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com



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Pullman Danang Beach Resort

Located on the stunning white sands of Danang beach, the stylish Pullman Danang Beach Resort is an oasis of activities and facilities for the modern traveler. With an idyllic setting on the silver shores of Central Vietnam, this luxury resort is perfect for a family holiday or romantic

beach getaway.

Vo Nguyen Giap, Khue My, Ngu Hanh Son, Danang
0511 395 8888 www.pullman-danang.com



Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa

With 280 ocean view rooms and suites and six signature restaurants and bars, including Altitude – the highest bar in Nha Trang. Amenities include outdoor swimming pool with infinity edge and reflection pool area, Shine Spa with 9 luxurioxus treatment rooms, Sheraton Fitness with 24-hour access, Sheraton Club Lounge, Link@Sheraton, Sheraton Adventure Club, and a purpose-built Cooking School. 26 - 28 Tran Phu, Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa

058 2220 000 www.sheratonnhatrang.com



The Island Lodge

Newly-opened, The Island Lodge is a 12-room Indochine-themed lodge set on Unicorn Island (Thoi Son). Mekong River view rooms and bungalows are scattered around the grounds, but the jewel is the open air restaurant/lounge fronting 50 meters of riverfront along with a French restaurant. There's also an infinity swimming pool and Jacuzzi.

390 Ap Thoi Binh, Thoi Son, My Tho 073 651 9000 www.theislandlodge.com.vn

>>The List

Health & Beauty

DENTAL



2000 Dental Clinic Trung Tam Implant

Established in 1999, 2000 Dental Clinic now has 65 dentists serving 3 locations offering the full range of dental care, including surgery, implants and

125 Le Thi Rieng, D1

Also try ...

Dr. Hung & Associates Dental

A centrally located dental center that uses the latest modern equipment with a team of skilled specialists. Services include cosmetic implant braces, prosthodontics, pedodontics

and more. Expect high quality service at a reasonable price. Building 244A Cong Quynh, DI 3925 7526 / 3925 7527 nhakhoadrhung@gmail.com www.drhungO1.com

Elite Dental Group

Elite Dental is an international and well-equipped clinic that provides a wide range of dental services including general dentistry, cosmetic dentistry, Implant, pediatric dentistry and orthodontics. Luxury design and their dental experts will bring you an extremely comfortable

57A Tran Quoc Thao, D3

European Dental Clinic

Offering state of the art technology, competitive pricing, and supreme quality, this dentistry is truly dedicated to their patients.

17-17A Le Van Mien, D2 www.europeandentalclinic-asia.

German International Dentistry

German International Dentistry offers excellent consultation services from experienced, international dentists so that you can make informed decisions about your dental care. 1489 Nguyen Van Linh, D7

With a group of experienced doctors and professional staff trained to do teeth cleaning, dental work and other teeth enhancing procedures.

96 Tran Nao, D2 6674 4255

Smile Dental Center

Quality dental care with whitening, cleaning, and orthodontic services. Japanese equipment and

173 Ton Dat Tien, D7

Starlight Dental Clinic

Award-winning quality care and personal service in clean premises, offering general dentistry, whitening and cosmetic surgery, implants, orthodontics, pediatric, and preventive dentistry.

2 Bis Cong Truong Quoc Te, D3

<u>/eștcoast International Dental</u>

Large, international team of dentists and support staff from Canada, Australia, Japan, France, Italy, Thailand, and Vietnam. The clinic regularly hosts visiting dentists from many other countries

27 Nguyen Trung Truc, D1



District 7's Premium Boutique Salon. Two floors providing full beauty services nestled in a quiet residential area in Phu My Hung's Garden Plaza 2 Complex. Equipped with a café, nail bar, 2 VIP rooms, and a spacious massage room - this boutique salon is like no other in Ho Chi Minh City.

Garden Plaza 2 Complex 8 Ton Dat Tien, D7 5412 4773



Located in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City, five minutes from Ben Thanh Market, they offer top notch services that include acrylic, gel shellac, mani/pedi using only luxurious brands such as O.P.I., Morgan Taylor, Le Chat and more - all at an affordable price. With a modern facility, Cham Nail Spa is the latest in trendy nail treatments and therapy with a private and personalized touch

60M Le Thi Rieng, D1 093 762 0965 www.chamnailspa.com Facebook: "chamnailspa"



Moc Huong Spa is supported by top-ranking professional physiotherapists who combine Eastern with Western techniques resulting a full body wellness. Reasonably priced with a wide range of services that include manicure, pedicure, facial, both body and for your complete well being.

9C Ton Duc Thang, D1



Villa Aesthetica Cosmedi Spa &

One of HCMC's finest newly-established spa and beauty centers, Villa Aesthetica is the only venue in Vietnam to offer premium-class LPG Endermologie treatments, erasing localized fat and imperfections
Also known for their unique Turkish Hammam

54 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien, D2 6264 3388 www.villaaesthetica.com



The spa is intimate and beautifully decorated. The staff consists of both highly-skilled men and women. Sweetspa serving you from hand to toe to give real spiritual and physical relaxation. As well as sport injury therapies. After hours of meetings or full days of working, treat yourself to a relaxing massage or

soothing reflexotherapy. 204B / 12 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2



Orient Skincare & Laser Center

Founded in 2005, Orient is currently known as the leading center in laser treatment in Ho Chi Minh city. The center offers non-surgery aesthetic treatments by the certified dermatologists as well as pampering services for any type of problem skin. A variety of treatments includes: wrinkle removal, acne 6 scar treatment, rejuvenation & pigment augmenting treatment, slimming treatments, permanent hair

removal and massage therapy. 244A Cong Quynh, DI 3926 0561-62-63-64

Kids & Education



Spoiled Brat

Raising a balanced international child

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD



PEOPLE SOMETIMES WONDER what the difference between an expat and a migrant is. It's fairly straightforward – if you call yourself an expat family rather than an immigrant family, you're making a distinction based on privilege. People who choose to live abroad and who can afford a far higher standard of living than the locals do will always find themselves in a class above the rest, and it only follows that their kids will sense this as they grow and develop in their adopted country.

This can be a blessing and a curse. Some of the most balanced, eloquent, and engaging conversationalists I've met are children from expat families whose parents have somehow managed to get the balance right. I once met a 12-year-old Australian girl who had lived in seven countries, and who spoke with humility, humor, and authority on international topics. I've seen the opposite too - kids for whom a life of luxury has given them a false sense of entitlement. They're badly-behaved, disrespectful, and occasionally even deeply offensive. This is most obvious when they speak to local people, often treating them with open disdain. They've absorbed a sense of the class divide as a social given, and their attitudes towards other people reflect that constant factor in their lives.

One of the biggest issues for expat parents in dealing with their own children's behavior is that it's very difficult to have an objective viewpoint. It's no secret that there are plenty of spoiled expat kids right here in Ho Chi Minh City, but the vast majority of their parents wouldn't see it for what it is. Some of that can be blamed on consumer culture – it's very affordable now to bring a new book or toy home for your kids every day, which is a sure-fire recipe for brat-

raising. Regardless of where you point the finger, however, it doesn't help if a mom or dad simply can't see that their kids are picking up some ugly social biases, and assigning blame doesn't make it any easier to deal with.

Neither is there any value in a rant against wealth and privilege here. If you're comfortable in this town, there's no question that you should make every effort to give your children every benefit that comes with it. If you can afford an international schooling, pony club, designer kidswear, whatever – definitely do that. These opportunities and rich life experiences are not to be passed up on, because they're rare and they're precious, and these things are exactly what we all want to provide for our children.

So the real question then, for an expat parent, is what you need to do to help your kid stay on the right side of an international childhood. Having the opportunity to rear your child in an atmosphere of privilege is something to be grateful for, but if you want your kids to grow up to be the best that they can be, then this is the time to make sure they're learning the right lessons.

The difference between kids for whom the expat experience is stimulating and those ruined by it is influenced by a number of factors, but in the home it's usually a matter of how much power they experience at a very young age – before they become aware of the proper limitations we all have to deal with as adults. In families living abroad, a child's sense of self-importance can be exaggerated by an over-coddling local nanny, the constant attention of strangers outside the home, and by noticing the urgency with

which parents rush to overprotect them from perceived risks (such as hygiene concerns at local play centers).

Other factors are more universal, but they tend to be warped by the experience of growing up abroad. Lots of parents have issues with enforcing their authority when it comes to their own children exhaustion and overwork making it all the more difficult - and this contributes to a child learning that persistent misbehaving (tantrums, whining, disobedience) will eventually result in getting their own way. Spoiled kids under these conditions are those who don't get the opportunity to learn how to handle disappointment early on, and who are at risk of never understanding delayed gratification and how to behave within limits.

Unspoiled

Most parents who have trouble judging whether or not their kids are being spoiled by their expat childhood will at least recognize some behavioral issues in their children – talking over adults, demanding their own way, behaving wildly in public to the extent you'd rather keep them at home. The good news is that if this is the case, it's not too late to put things right – but the bad news is that it takes a little discipline on your side.

'Unspoiling' a child is entirely feasible, and it starts by setting those limits that you know you should be enforcing, and sticking to them this time. You can keep the rules simple so that they're easy to follow, but the key is not to compromise on them. Some parents advocate waiting out the inevitable tantrums, but if letting your kid cry himself or herself to sleep seems like too much, you can also follow diversionary tactics – distracting your kids from what they're misbehaving about can have the same effect.

The important thing is to recognize that your child's behavior isn't an indication that you're a bad parent. There are multiple factors, many of which are innate, that can cause a child to overstep their boundaries and manifest spoiled tendencies. The opportunity you need to take here, however, is to stay firm while making it clear that just because you're not actively placating your child, it doesn't mean you've withdrawn your love. It's only when a child can't tell the difference between punishment and rejection that they run the risk of emotional damage.

An expat childhood is a rare opportunity for a kid to experience a unique life from their earliest of days. It can provide a platform upon which to develop a greater sense of maturity and self-confidence than they could otherwise hope to achieve. Parents need to understand, however, that the sense of privilege that inevitably arises in an expat family obscures the normal social boundaries that would otherwise discourage a child from becoming spoiled. In the absence of those clear social limitations, parents need to establish strong behavioral guidelines to compensate – lovingly, of course.

TAIL TALE SIGNS

Buy, Adopt or Foster

Bringing a pet into your home



With a family that includes six cats, two dogs and a couple of dozen fish, **Wayne Capriotti** is a zoo curator and, along with his wife, publishes Vietnam's first pet magazine *Me Thu Cung* (www.petmagazine.vn).



A PET CAN bring joy into your home but it can also bring hardship if you are not acutely aware of the issues of owning a pet in Vietnam. While it's financially cheaper to own a cat or dog in Vietnam compared to the West, the real problems for both new and experienced pet owners are the unique and somewhat dangerous daily situations that can occur: the threat of dog/cat-napping, munching on grass sprayed with rat poison in public areas without notices, extreme heat and humidity creating constant parasite problems, projectiles thrown at your dog for 'kicks' and other abuse from neighbors that just seem to hate dogs and cats, the lack of quality pet care products and veterinary services, and the list goes on.

There are a few issues to consider before bringing a pet home. Evaluate the security of both inside and outside your residence, including the neighborhood. Is your house adequately ventilated from the extremes of heat and humidity if you're getting a long-haired pet? Who will be home with them during the day if you work? Separation anxiety is a big problem. Do you have a housekeeper/babysitter that is dog-friendly? If you

are considering a small dog, do you have children? Small dogs and children can be lethal unsupervised.

After giving the idea considerable thought with your family or spouse, there are a few options available. You can buy from a local, reputable breeder, adopt a rescue from a shelter or consider fostering a dog or cat.

Buv

People usually buy because they want a specific breed. For a dog, it is best to buy locally from members of the Vietnam Kennel Association (www.vka.vn). They breed their dogs in Vietnam and can provide documentation of the purity and health of the animal. Caution: Do not buy dogs from street vendors, no matter how cute. Avoid the pet shop area around Le Hong Phong in District 10. From street sellers to these shops, the pets they sell are sick and may die soon. However, there are good home breeders that can be found through friends or family, so look around and do your research. And never buy a dog without a proper 'health passport' that records vital vaccinations complete with times, dates, labels (notable brands from Merial, Vibrac

and Bayer) and the signatures of the veterinarians.

Adopt

Adopting a rescue is one of the most unselfish acts in becoming a pet owner. Especially in Vietnam where dogs and cats experience all types of cruelty and are abandoned regularly. Caution: If you're a first time pet owner, a rescued animal may have behavioral and medical problems. They need a stable period of adjustment in their new home with constant supervision and some might require special care.

You will be briefed on the vaccinations and medicines received. There are fees to pay, including the cost of medicine, vaccinations and food. Before making a commitment, visit the rescue a few times, make introductions and observe their behavior. In Saigon, there several adoption organizations: ARC Vietnam (www.arcpets.com), YDV (www.yeudongvat.org), ALC Group (alc.leader@gmail.com) and Vietnam Animal Cruelty (www.vietnamanimalscruelty.com). They all also offer fostering options.

Foster

There are assumptions made that bringing in a foster cat or dog into your home is like renting a pet. This isn't true. A foster pet is a rescued dog/cat that cannot stay in an animal shelter due to lack of space or they require special needs. It is a shortterm homing arrangement where the goal is to re-home the pet into a permanent forever-home. If you do take a foster home and have other pets, slowly introduce the foster and arrange their own room or space for somewhere to hide or stay if they feel intimated. The best part of fostering is that sometimes foster parents become smitten with their new four-legged friend and make them part of the family, and that is a very happy ending for both the foster and the owner. If you are interested in caring for a foster animal contact any of the animal shelters previously mentioned.

What's Your Motivation?

The key to academic success

WITH THE NEW school year almost upon us, and a wave of new teachers arriving at international schools around the city, it's a good time of year to challenge the commonly held belief that good teachers are responsible for children's academic success.

There are many attributes that schools look for when hiring new teachers. And parents, quite rightly, want to know that teachers are qualified and experienced enough to teach their children, but what makes the difference between children achieving *good* results and achieving *great* results? A teacher's qualifications? Their experience? Their enthusiasm? Or is it something else altogether? At a time when teachers are under immense pressure to deliver good results, it is a question teachers, themselves, would like to know the answer.

Looking back to my days as a student, I achieved great results with some teachers but not with others. When I think about the reasons why, it was simply because I worked hard for the teachers I liked, and not for the rest. That suggests that likeability is a big factor. For some, it might be that they work hard at the subjects they like. For others, it might be a fear of failure that motivates them to put their nose to the grindstone. Clearly then, there are many different types of motivation, some positive, some negative. A common factor, though, is that students must be motivated if they are to learn. However, not all motivation leads to enduring success.

I was an undergraduate before I realized the key to my own academic success; suddenly, it dawned on me that my success was solely dependent on how motivated I was, as a learner, to do well. Thereafter, it no longer mattered what the subject was or who my teacher was – I knew that being self-motivated was all I needed.

So what makes a teacher 'good'? Perhaps, a good teacher is one who inspires their students to be selfmotivated and instills a desire to be the best they can be.

Logically, if you juxtapose a good teacher with motivated students, you would expect those students to do well. Likewise, if you put a bad teacher with poorly motivated students, you would expect them to perform badly, but what happens if you allocate a good teacher – someone with a strong teaching history – to a class of poorly motivated students? Would they too perform well? I would

Having taught in schools at both ends of the socioeconomic spectrum, for me, the biggest variable in the level of academic success is the motivation of the students themselves. As the old saying goes, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.

Certainly, children that attend international schools are very privileged, but teachers at these schools are privileged too. My personal experience has been nothing but fantastic; I teach children who want to learn, who want to do well, so teaching them is a real joy. I am the same teacher but, at Saigon Star, achieving great results is far easier. An incredible 42 percent of our students are working at least one year ahead of national expectations. To me that comes as no surprise at all. Certainly, there are other factors involved, but far and away the biggest difference is the students' own motivation.

Sadly, not all children are empty vessels, passively waiting to be filled. The resistance of some children can be frustrating. Others stun us with their



Brendan Hearne is the Deputy Headteacher at Saigon Star International School. He moved to Vietnam in August 2013, having previously taught at two award-winning schools in the UK.

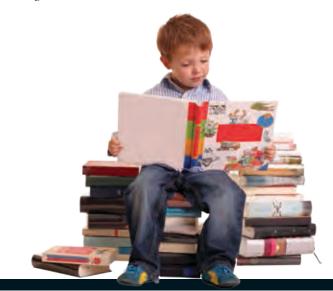
eagerness to learn, but trying to teach someone anything is difficult unless they actually *want* to learn. Even as adults, we learn things far more easily if we are motivated to do so. If it feels like a chore, or we lack interest, even the best teacher in the world would struggle to teach us. Learning is hard work; it requires effort, commitment, repetition and resilience.

In any class of children, some children learn a lot and others not as much, because each child is ultimately responsible for how much he or she learns. Yes, some children are inspired by their teacher to work harder, but what happens when those children get a new teacher? Will they continue to try their best? That depends.

When a child's motivation is to do well for their teacher, that, for me, is dangerous. A more desirable state is children who are motivated to do well for their own personal satisfaction, not to work towards external praise from others, which, if not forthcoming, results in a feeling of deflation.

So, in answer to the question: Are good teachers responsible for good results? The answer is... not necessarily.

But self-motivated students will always do well. Therefore, instilling in children a lifelong, positive attitude towards learning is the key, something which both teachers and parents alike should aim to achieve.



>>The List

Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



ABC International School (ABCIS)

Inspected and judged an outstanding school by British Government Inspectors (October 2013), the ABCIS is one of the few schools worldwide



Foundation & Early Primary Campus: 4, IE Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC Primary & Secondary Campus: 2, IE Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC 5431 IB33/34/35/36 office@theabcis.com



British International School (BIS)

Inspected and approved by the British Government, BIS provides a British



An Phu Primary Campus

225 Nguyen Van Huong, D2 3744 4551

apprimary@bisvietnam.com

An Phu Secondary Campus 246 Nguyen Van Huong, D2 3744 2335

apsecondary@bisvietnam.com

Tu Xuong Primary Campus 43-45 Tu Xuong Street, D3 3932 0210

txprimary@bisvietnam.com www.bisvietnam.com



BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL



Deutsche Schule Ho Chi Minh City International German School

Deutsche Schule (IGS) offers a German curriculum from Early Years to Grade 12 which is

approved and supported by the German government. IGS is staffed by native German, Vietnamese and English speakers who have many years of teaching

We offer a link between Vietnamese and German culture, an international program with German standards and the immersion of German culture into everyday life.

12, Vo Truong Toan, An Phu 08 37 44 63 44 info@igs-hcmc.de www.igs-hcmc.de



DEUTSCHE SCHULE



EtonHouse International Pre-School @ An Phu

An Phu Eton House

Following an international

curriculum for children aged 18 months to six years, in the early years, an Inquire-Think-Learn approach is followed, inspired by the Reggio Emilia Project of Northern Italy. It is a play-based, inquiry model in which children co-construct their learning in close, respectful collaboration with their teachers. This helps us provide an environment where children take responsibility for their own learning, allowing them a head start in life.

Ist and 2nd floor, Somerset Vista, Hanoi Highway, An Phu, D2 08 6287 0804

www.etonhouse.vn/schools/hcmcinfo@etonhouse.vn





EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City

The EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City is an IB World School offering an academic and supportive English language education

for students aged 2-18 years. EIS is committed to educating students to become creative critical thinkers and problem solvers. Students are immersed in a multicultural learning environment which values multilingualism. Language programmes at EIS include Spanish, German, French and Vietnamese.

730 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, District 2, HCMC www.eishcmc.com





International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP) is an elementary school catering for ages 18

school catering for ages 18 months to 11 years. With 90% of our teachers having master's degrees, we are able to promise a vigorous American curriculum whilst including specialist subjects such as music, art, sport and the languages. ISSP focuses on developing the whole child within a purpose

built campus. 92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh 2222 7788 / 99 www.issp.edu.vn





The Montessori International ool of Vietnam

For children 6 months to 9 years old. A registered member of the American Montessori Society Montessori uses an internationally recognized educational method which focuses on fostering the child's natural desire to learn. The aim is to create a sense of self and individuality through an encouraging and learning environment. Available are Extra-curricular Activities, Summer camp and immersion programs in Vietnamese, French and Mandarin.

Montessori

Thao Dien Campus: 42/1 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien Ward, D2 An Phu Campus:

Ground floor, Block B, An Khang/Intresco Apartment, No. 28, Duong 19, Khu pho 5, D2 3744 2639 / 0903 858659 montessorivn@gmail.com www.montessori.edu.vn



Renaissance International

Renaissance is an International British School offering the National Curriculum for England complemented by the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), Cambridge IGCSE and the International Baccalaureate. The school has made a conscious decision to limit numbers and keep class sizes small to ensure each pupil is offered an education tailored to meet their individual learning needs. It's a family school providing first-class facilities including a 350- seats theater, swimming pools, minipool, drama rooms, gymnasium, IT labs, music and drama rooms, science labs

and an all-weather pitch 74 Nguyen Thi Thap, D7 3773 3171 ext 120/121/122 www.renaissance.edu.vn



Saigon Star International School

Saigon Star is a student

focused international school offering a high quality, first class education. Specialising in the British National Curriculum, all of the class teachers hold an international teaching qualification. In our Early Years programme, a Montessori specialist works closely with the mainclass teachers to ensure a high rate of progress and attainment. The school also provides specialists for children requiring

Residential Area No.5, Thanh My Loi Ward, D2 3742 STAR / 3742 7827 www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn

additional ESL support.



SAIGON STAR



The American School

The American School (TAS) is an international school that has been granted candidacy by the Western Association

of Schools and Colleges (WASC), representing 20 nationalities. TAS provides an American-based curriculum with rigorous performance standards and a variety of academic offerings including Advanced Placement courses, university credit courses through our partnership with Missouri State University, and an Intensive ESL Program for English Language Learners.

THE AMERICAN SCHOOL

177A, 172-180 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2 08 3519 2223 / 0903 952 223 admission@tasvietnam.edu.vn www.tas.edu.vn



The International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)

The most established international school in HCMC and recently celebrating 20 years of success. ISHCMC is a fully accredited IB World School, authorized to teach all 3 programs of the International Baccalaureate curriculum to students aged 2 to 18 years. ISHCMC is fully accredited by both the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), two of the most prestigious international accreditation organizations. . ISHCMC has over 1000 students from

28 Vo Truong Toan, D2 (08) 3898 9100 admissions@ishcmc.edu.vn www.ishcmc.com

over 50 different nationalities.





Also...

American International School

Founded in 2006, American International School (AIS) is a private, coeducational, university-preparatory school for students from preschool to grade 12. The language of instruction is English. The school offers standard American curriculum with a complement of performing arts, visual arts, music and sport programs.

Elementary School (102C Nguyen Van Cu DI) Middle School (35 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh) High School (781/CI-C2 Le Hong Phong,

Australian International School (AIS)

The Australian International School is an IB World School with three world class campuses in District 2, HCMC, offering an international education from kindergarten to senior school with the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP), Cambridge Secondary Programme (including IGCSE) and IB Diploma Programme (DP).

Xi Campus (Kindergarten) 190 Nguyen Van Huong, D2 Thao Dien Campus (Kindergarten & Primary School) APSC Compound 36 Thao Dien, D2

Thu Thiem Campus (Kindergarten, Primary, Middle & Senior School) East-West Highway, D2 3742 4040

www.aisvietnam.com

[he French International School Saint

Saint Ange welcomes children for their Kindergarten and Primary School. The school follows the program of the French Education Ministry, and includes English lessons every day. Activities and subjects such as arts, sports and school trips are also an important part of their curriculum.

188A2, Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2. HCMC

0120 304 8875 saintange2.vn@gmail.com www.sa-saigon.com

Saigon South International School

Founded in 1997, Saigon South International School seeks to accommodate an increasing need for American education for both local residents and expatriate families SSIS enrolls over 850 students in Early Childhood – Grade 12 from over thirty-three countries in a spacious sixhectare, well-equipped campus.

78 Nguyen Duc Canh, D7 www.ssis.edu.vn

Faces & Places

























Children are the Future

EtonHouse (www.etonhouse.vn) held an Analytical Thinking Skills session for parents and their children to better prepare kids for life-long learning in the 21st century and to understand that the future of education is soft skills.

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

Back in Black

Maison Ken Ji (18 Ho Huan Nghiep, DI) launched its shopping, dining and cafe concept store that fuses Asian and European fashion designs with French cuisine. Founders Anais Lacouture and Madox Thanh Hoang Nguyen hope to bring minimalism and black back in fashion.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY MAISON KEN JI

Time for Tea

Since its arrival in Vietnam in 2009, MOF has taken ice cream and sweet snacks to another level with its creative variations on both. MOF (www.mof.com.vn) organized a tea party where guests sampled various Japanese teas and sweets.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY MOF



Energized · Engaged · Empowered

Because at ISHCMC we understand that the freedom to be unique empowers our students to discover their passions.

Today's students need to do more than memorize information in traditional classrooms. They need a more evolved approach to education that allows them the freedom to pursue their passions fearlessly. In addition to a strong academic foundation, they need opportunities to be creative, innovative and analytical, all of which lie at the heart of the ISHCMC philosophy.

Come and see the difference we can make in your child's life.



A fully accredited IB World School, authorized to teach all 3 programs of the International Baccalaureate curriculum to students ages 2 – 18 years.

28 Vo Truong Toan, District 2
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Tel: +84 (8) 3898-9100
Email: admissions@ishcmc.edu.vn
www.ishcmc.com







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