



VIETNAM

SEPTEMBER 2015

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Managing Director **JIMMY VAN DER KLOET**  
jimmy@oivietnam.com

Managing Editor **CHRISTINE VAN**  
christine@oivietnam.com

Deputy Editor **JAMES PHAM**  
jpham@oivietnam.com

Associate Publisher **KHANH NGUYEN**  
khanh@oivietnam.com

Graphic Artists **KEVIN NGUYEN**  
kevin@oivietnam.com  
**NGUYEN PHAM**  
nguyen@oivietnam.com

Staff Photographer **NGOC TRAN**  
ngoc@oivietnam.com

For advertising please contact:

**NGAN NGUYEN**   
ngan@oivietnam.com  
090 279 7951

**CHAU NGUYEN**   
chau@oivietnam.com  
091 440 0302

**HANH (JESSIE) LE**   
jessie@oivietnam.com  
098 747 4183

**HANNIE VO**   
hannie@oivietnam.com

General **advertising@oivietnam.com**

Inquiries **info@oivietnam.com**



## This Month's Cover

Model: **Thanh Truc Truong**

Photographer: **Chanh**

Stylist: **Kien Ng**

Clothing: **Thuy Design House**

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IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

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COVER STORY

## A-LINE TO FASHION

*Conversations with fashion industry experts and trendsetters*

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

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# Datebook

What's on this month...



SEP  
9-25

**What:** Barbara Pellizzari Solo Exhibition

**Where:** ei8th gallery (8 Phung Khac Khoan, D1)

**About:** Barbara Pellizzari is an Italian artist based in Ho Chi Minh City. Her work is a fusion of Italian and Vietnamese atmospheres through the use of different techniques. In her third exhibition in Vietnam, Barbara explores and masters the traditional Vietnamese lacquer technique which surprisingly has a lot in common with the Italian Renaissance paintings that she used to work on in her previous career as painting conservator.

**Contact:** Visit [www.barbarapellizzari.com](http://www.barbarapellizzari.com) for more info or phone ei8th gallery at 3824 8490.

## SEPTEMBER 12

**What:** Pete Herbert

**Where:** The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 10pm (free before 11pm, VND150,000 after)

**About:** One time proprietor of the infamous Atlas Records shop in Soho, London over a decade ago, Pete divides his time these days either behind the wheels of steel at clubs and parties around the globe or in the studio working solo or on various musical projects. For Eskimo Recordings in Belgium, Pete has released as Reverso 68 with Phil Mison releasing recent classics such as *Tokyo Disko*, *Especial* and *Piece Together* as well as remixing the likes of Juan Maclean, Grace Jones, Ajello, Tosca, Bent and Badly Drawn Boy amongst others. Pete's sound has seen him traveling overseas and to play at the huge Goa Electronic Parties in Madrid, and regular slots in Paris, Marseille, Belgrade, Moscow, Copenhagen, etc. Pete also hosts his own Music for Swimming Pools radio weekly show on Sonica FM Ibiza ([www.ibizasonica.fm](http://www.ibizasonica.fm)).

**Contact:** Visit [www.theobservatory-hcmc.com](http://www.theobservatory-hcmc.com) for more info

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SEP  
12

**What:** Tech Insider Expo

**Where:** Grand Palace (142/18 Cong Hoa, Tan Binh)

**About:** The idea is to showcase innovative technology services and products, discuss the hottest tech topics and connect IT candidates with job opportunities from the biggest tech employers. The event will gather 40 of the biggest technology companies, most-wanted tech speakers/influencers and more than 3000 IT job candidates who have two to five years of experience in Vietnam.

**Contact:** Visit [www.techinsider.vietnamworks.com](http://www.techinsider.vietnamworks.com) for more info



SEP  
12-13

**What:** Two-day Conference with  
Sir Richard Branson

**Where:** Quan Khu 7 Stadium (202 Hoang Van Thu,  
Phu Nhuan); 9am – 7pm

**About:** Bringing You The World's Masters of Success is an annual two-day conference that features international speakers who are industry leaders and highly sought after experts who will share their experiences and success strategies on one stage. This year will bring for the first time on stage entrepreneurial legend Sir Richard Branson. Sir Richard Branson is founder of the Virgin Group. Virgin is a leading international investment group and one of the world's most recognized and respected brands. Conceived in 1970, the Virgin Group has gone on to grow successful businesses in sectors including mobile telephony, travel & transportation, financial services, leisure & entertainment and health & wellness. Virgin has created more than 400 branded companies worldwide, operating in over 50 countries.

**Contact:** Visit [www.movevietnam.org/RichardBranson](http://www.movevietnam.org/RichardBranson) for more info



SEP  
19



**What:** Above & Beyond

**Where:** Ho Tram Resort Casino Vietnam

**About:** The Ho Tram Resort Casino Vietnam will host a one-night only show with headlining trance-trio

Above & Beyond. The London trio, comprised of Jono Grant, Tony McGuinness and Paavo Siljämäki formed in 2000, and has become a staple of world's top DJ lists ever since. Their hit was remixed from Madonna's original and took the charts by storm. Follow up efforts have become Billboard top albums, and established the group at the forefront of electronic dance music. The Above & Beyond show at Ho Tram Casino Resort will feature all of their hits, promising to bring a whole new experience to the electronic dance music community. This is Above & Beyond's first visit to Vietnam. Alongside them will be a roster of international and local support acts in a six-hour music festival expected to wow up to 6,000 revelers at the beachside site located around two hours from Ho Chi Minh City. The event is co-organized by Escape Music Festival and BelieveEvent. Tickets are already on sale; early bird prices start at VND550,000 for the first 1,000 tickets and will start at VND800,000 once those are sold. Packages including transportation and accommodation will also be announced in due course. Tickets are available from TicketBox, the Ho Tram Resort Casino's official website, Escape Music Festival and at various venues around Ho Chi Minh City.

**Contact:** Visit [www.thegrandhottram.com](http://www.thegrandhottram.com) for more info

SEP  
19



**What:** Telephones

**Where:** The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 10pm (free before 11pm, VND150,000 after)

**About:** As a DJ and producer, Norwegien Telephones has steadily gained a reputation for his eclectic curveball-mix of house, cosmic, italo-disco and Balearic tutti-frutti, paying less attention to genres and more to the vibe. He has released a sparse, but highly sought after discography on quality underground labels like Full Pupp, Sex Tags UFO, Love On The Rocks and Running Back. In his productions as well as DJ-sets, he ventures in the twilight between organic-equatorial heat and Scandinavian-synthetic cold. The last year has seen him DJ'ing all over Europe, and producing several acclaimed releases, his biggest so far being *The Ocean Called EP* on Running Back, along with a hand full of other 12"s, remixes and collaborative projects.

**Contact:** Visit [www.theobservatory-hcmc.com](http://www.theobservatory-hcmc.com) for more info

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## SEPTEMBER 19-20

**What:** Two-Day Kids Yoga & Mindfulness Teacher Training Course

**Where:** ISHCMC (28 Vo Truong Toa, D2); 8:30am – 4:30pm; USD395, groups of four or more receive a 10 percent discount

**About:** Join instructor Suzanne Vian RCYT, E-RYT, for a weekend of learning to teach yoga to kids. Inspire the children in your life to build strength and stability while keeping them engaged and stimulating their imaginations through the practices of yoga and mindfulness. This experiential training will teach you to share the practice through yoga stories, movement, music and games geared to teach kids how to be more mindful and aware.

**Contact:** Visit [www.suzannevian.com](http://www.suzannevian.com) for more info



SEP  
25

**What:** Max Essa

**Where:** The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 10pm (free before 11pm, VND150,000 after)

**About:** Max Essa made his debut as a producer on the legendary Warp Records label in 1993. Throughout the '90s he went on to record for some of the seminal house music labels of the era including Paperecordings, D.i.Y Discs/Strictly 4 Groovers and D-Vision in Italy. From 2006 until 2013 Max worked with the London-based label, Bear Funk. During this period he produced three solo LPs for the label (*Continental Drift* in 2009, *White Shoes Blue Dreams* in 2010 and *Won Ton Sunrise* in 2013) and three collaborative albums with Stevie Kotey (Soiree's *Zim Zim Zah Zah* and *Let's Play Tennis* and *The World Of Progressive Disco* which was produced under a number of different aliases).

Since 2008 Max has been living in Japan and can be found playing every week at a variety of Tokyo venues and in cities such as Sapporo, Nagoya, Osaka and Fukuoka. In 2014 he completed a world tour including dates in New York, Los Angeles, London, Venice, Croatia, Bali and Hong Kong. In between flights Max also managed to complete several studio projects which are due for release in 2015 on Is It Balearic?, Palms & Charms, and Catune (Japan) to name but a few.

**Contact:** Visit [www.theobservatory-hcmc.com](http://www.theobservatory-hcmc.com) for more info

## SEPTEMBER 26

**What:** Alex From Tokyo

**Where:** The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 10pm (free before 11pm, VND150,000 after)

**About:** Alex is a Paris-born, Tokyo-raised, NYC-based eclectic French DJ, producer and international coordinator. Having lived in Tokyo for more than 20 years since he was a kid, he has developed into one of the strongest crossover DJs in Tokyo and also became a key person connecting the world and Japan. Alex has also been active producing music under the name Tokyo Black Star with his partner Isao Kumano, releasing original material on the Berlin-based label Innervisions, as well as on the joint label Reincarnation by Italian tastemakers Slam Jam, and on DJ Deep's deeply rooted house music records label. Besides the club scene, Alex has been recently doing some music coordination, consulting and production work in fashion for brands like Y-3 and Louis Vuitton.

**Contact:** Visit [www.theobservatory-hcmc.com](http://www.theobservatory-hcmc.com) for more info

## SEPTEMBER 27

**What:** Skrillex

**Where:** Lush (2 Ly Tu Trong, D1)

**About:** Sonny Moore found club and mainstream stardom beginning in 2008, when he swapped his gig as the frontman in post-hardcore band From First to Last for the dance floor-oriented project Skrillex. He originally used the name for live DJ sets, but in 2009 the project moved into the studio with Skrillex remixing the likes of Lady Gaga (*Bad Romance*) and Snoop Dogg (*Sensual Seduction*). In 2010, the self-released digital download EP *My Name Is Skrillex* appeared, combining the Benny Benassi and Deadmau5 styles of electro with the same type of over-the-top samples and giant noise of electronica acts like the Chemical Brothers and Fatboy Slim. His second proper full-length, *Recess*, appeared in March 2014 and promptly hit number four on the Billboard chart. In 2015, he collaborated with Diplo for the album *Skrillex and Diplo Present Jack U*.

**Contact:** Visit [www.skrillex.com](http://www.skrillex.com) for more info



# Moving in Together

Is marriage a prerequisite to cohabitation? Find out



After having obtained legal experience in his home country the Netherlands and in Cambodia, **Marijn Sprokkereef** is currently an associate of **Audier & Partners**. Audier & Partners is an international law firm with presence in Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi), Myanmar and Mongolia, providing advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

Dear Marijn,

**My name is Simon and until very recently I was enjoying Ho Chi Minh City life as a single foreign language teacher. Things have changed since I met this wonderful Vietnamese girl. I think she could be the love of my life! But now that I want her to come live with me in my apartment, the landlord is causing trouble. According to him, he cannot register us with the local police in Vietnam because we are not married. I am completely flabbergasted. Could this be true, and is it even compulsory for us to be registered?**

FIRST OF ALL, congratulations on finding the love of your life! Let's straighten this issue out immediately: the law does *not* prohibit an unmarried Vietnamese and foreigner couple from living together. The issue that you describe is not uncommon and you are not the only foreigner who has been faced with this situation.

The Vietnamese Law on Marriage and Family explicitly recognizes the principle of "co-habitation," and no distinction is made between Vietnamese couples and "interracial" couples. Cultural sensitivity and tradition aside, it remains a common misunderstanding that it would be illegal for unmarried couples to live together in Vietnam - so don't try to use this as an excuse not to ask for your girlfriend's hand!

Having said that, the same Law on Marriage and Family does clearly – and obviously – prohibit one from living together with a person who is already married, as well as the cohabitation as husband and wife between people of the same direct blood line, between relatives within three generations, between adoptive parent and adoptive

child, et cetera.

To answer your second question, as a foreigner who is permitted to stay in Vietnam for a limited period of time, Article 33 on the Law on Entry, Exit, Transit and Residence of Foreigners in Vietnam does indeed require you to register your residence. The same Article states that it is the responsibility of your landlord to fill out the relevant declaration form and to submit it to the local police authority in the ward where you live. That is why when you check into a hotel in Vietnam, the staff will always ask to see your passport for exactly the same reason.

Even though a different law applies to Vietnamese citizens, they too are required to register their permanent and/or temporary residence with the local police. Both Vietnamese citizens and foreigners must inform the authorities of any changes in their residence situation.

When moving into a new apartment, or when your girlfriend moves into yours, you are both required to register with the local police in your ward, however, your landlord must help you with the

registration and, since no law in Vietnam prohibits the two of you from living together, there shouldn't be a problem.

Applying Vietnamese law into actual practice is a different matter. Approach your landlord with what you have just learned and see whether he is now more willing to cooperate. If things go well, you may find that convincing the local police is not as difficult as you may think and your registration will become smoother.

In areas where many foreigners live, the police are supposedly more accustomed to situations like yours and is often more willing to help. So if you find yourself dealing with a stubborn officer, consider moving to a more foreigner-friendly area of town, steering away from situations that may nip your love in the bud...

*Every month, **Marijn Sprokkereef** answers legal questions from Oi readers. If you have any legal question you want answered, send them to [legal@oivietnam.com](mailto:legal@oivietnam.com). ■*



# Troi Oi

## The country in numbers

90

people get rabies vaccination every day in Ho Chi Minh City. The city saw 16,410 people bitten by domestic animals and

then inoculated against rabies during the first six months of the year, with an average of 90 people given rabies injections per day. Over 3,600 of the victims were children, according to the Preventive Medicine Center of Ho Chi Minh City. More than 83 percent of the victims were bitten by dogs and nearly 10 percent by cats.

Vietnam sees on average 300,000 people bitten by domestic animals per year, 40 percent of who refuse to get vaccinated, although a dose of the rabies vaccine is cheap, around VND10,000. As many as 26 people across the nation died of rabies during the first half of this year, according to a report by the Department of Animal Health.

1,000,000TH

Vietnamese-language domain issued last month. The Vietnam Internet Network Information Centre (VNNIC) under the Ministry of Information and Communications on August 25 celebrated the issuance of the 1,000,000th Vietnamese domain name. The achievement is attributable to VNNIC's free registration of domain names in the Vietnamese language, which was first initiated in late April 2011. According to Tran Minh Tan, VNNIC Deputy Director, domain names in Vietnamese belong to Internationalized Domain Name (IDN). It is used for non English-speaking countries, helping local people use their own languages when accessing the internet. The Vietnamese-language domain name is aimed at protecting ideas, product names, services and trademarks of Vietnamese enterprises on the World Wide Web.

USD148.3 MILLION

will be spent relocating residents for a nuclear power project in

the south-central province of Ninh Thuan. Under the plan, which has been approved by the Prime Minister, a total of 1,288 households with over 4,900 people will be removed from their current residence in the province. The plan is estimated to cost over VND3.235 trillion, which will be granted by the Vietnam Electricity Group. The cost includes VND1.408 trillion for compensation for displaced residents, VND1 trillion as expenses for building the infrastructure of the three resettlement areas, and the remainder for other expenditures.

Of the resettlement areas, one will be located in Tu Thien Hamlet, Phuoc Dinh Commune in Thuan Nam District; and the two others will be built in Thai An Hamlet, Vinh Hai Commune, Ninh Hai District. The first plant is expected to be completed in 2024, while the second is scheduled to be operational in the following year.



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Phu Quoc Airport expansion is planned as passenger growth exceeds forecast. The expansion will increase the airport's capacity by more than 66 percent to four million passengers a year, and raise the number of boarding gates from four to 12. Opened in December 2012, Phu Quoc Airport saw a stronger than expected growth of passengers, between 28 and 46 percent a year, thanks to the island's increased popularity.

Businesses have been rushing to the island, which is about 120 kilometers off the coast of Kien Giang Province, to open resorts, hotels and many tourist facilities. Statistics from local authorities showed that over 586,000 tourists visited the island last year, up 37.6 percent year on year. Foreign arrivals accounted for 21.3 percent, or 125,000 tourists, an increase of 21.5 percent from the year before.



# ~4,500

traffic deaths occurred in Vietnam in between January and June, down 4.5 percent. The number of traffic accidents and resulting deaths and injuries all decreased in the six months ending on June 15 compared to the same period last year, the National Traffic Safety Committee reported.

During the six-month period, police also dealt with 94,766 violations of waterway regulations around the country and collected VND48.5 billion worth of fines. On average, road accidents kill around 9,000 people in Vietnam every year – almost 25 deaths per day – and leave hundreds of thousands of others with lifelong injuries, Transport Minister Dinh La Thang said.



# 7,200

people in Ho Chi Minh City have the same ID card numbers, a situation which has created problems when it comes to their passports, bank accounts and tax codes. A survey by the city police revealed that the problem started in 2007 and resulted from mistakes by the local police departments that issued the cards.

A woman with initials TTTN, 60, in Phu Nhuan District discovered that the serial number on her ID card is the same as that of a man in District II when she applied for a passport. She said she had to contact the police department of administrative management (PC64) in the city to verify that the information on her ID card matches her personal files kept in the archives of local police. She had to wait for months and contact police officers many times to obtain their verification before being able to get the passport. "I am still worried and wonder if I will face any more troubles in the future when I apply for other documents," she said. "I have only one ID card number despite being re-granted it several times for expiry and loss."

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# The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

## MARKS & SPENCER NOW AT CRESCENT MALL

Marks & Spencer (M&S) unveiled its second store at Crescent Mall, and is operated by M&S's long-term franchise partner Central Retail Corporation. "We're delighted to be opening our new store at the Crescent Mall in Ho Chi Minh City with our franchise partner Central Retail Corporation. Featuring our latest fashion collections across womenswear, lingerie and beauty, our second Marks & Spencer store in Vietnam enables us to offer more of our exceptional quality, stylish products to customers. We are looking forward to welcoming customers to the new store," says Mark Koprowski, Regional Director for MENA and Asia Franchise at Marks & Spencer.

All M&S collections take inspiration from the international runways, customer research and feedback to create chic, wearable and high quality ranges that reflect the key seasonal looks. Some Autograph Womenswear styles feature for summer including smartwear, casualwear, footwear and accessories. M&S Crescent Mall will offer five lines of the latest lingerie, sleepwear and hosiery including the popular Rosie for Autograph collection, designed by international supermodel and actress Rosie Huntington-Whiteley. In addition, the new store will feature a dedicated beauty offer which combines the best of nature and science. This includes M&S's own brand beauty products such as Floral collection which has a natural and eco-friendly proposition and its popular body care beauty product.



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## KABIN MOONCAKES

Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon celebrates the Mid-Autumn Festival with its collection of mooncakes: Green Tea Custard Azuki (imported Japanese green tea mixed with custard and Azuki bean), Pearl of Harmony (lotus paste added with sesame powder), Grand Ruby (red yeast, lily bulbs, olive oil and dried olives), and Cheesy Choc Oreo (Chocolate Oreo with Cheese). Priced at VND800,000+/- package, place your orders from now to September 27 and enjoy the following discounts: 10% for any order of 10-49 boxes, 15% for any order of 50-99 boxes, 20% for any order from 100 boxes. To place your order, call 3822 0033.



## PULLMAN DANANG BEACH RESORT BBQ

The resort's all-you-can-eat BBQ Buffet dinner (from 5:30pm, every Sunday this month) is served right on the beautiful beach at the Azure Beach Lounge, featuring local grilled seafood, grilled and roasted meats, a salad selection, special Vietnamese dishes and fantastic desserts. The Beach BBQ Buffet is the perfect weekend treat for family and friends. Priced at VND690,000++ with free flow beer, house wine and soft drinks. Bookings are essential. Email [bookings@pullman-danang.com](mailto:bookings@pullman-danang.com) or call (05) 11 395 8888.

## BRUNCH AT LE MÉRIDIEN SAIGON

Le Méridien Saigon (3C Ton Duc Thang, D1) is getting ready for its official grand opening on September 17, but ahead of that the hotel is introducing their Sunday Brunch program at its signature restaurant, Latest Recipe. Overlooking the Saigon River, Latest Recipe features an open showcase kitchen that allows diners to enjoy freshly baked pizzas and made-to-order dishes as well as a collection of international specialties such as Canadian lobsters, live mud crabs, and a "Fine de Clair" oyster bar. The Sunday Brunch is available from 12pm to 3:30pm, priced at VND1,300,000++ per person and includes free flow wine, beer, soft drink, Illy coffee and Ronnefeldt tea or VND1,400,000++ per person to also include Taittinger Champagne. Children from 3 to 12 years old are charged at VND650,000++ and free for those under 3. Star Privilege Vietnam members receive a 20% discount on Sunday Brunch until the end of October. For reservations, email [03529.LatestRecipe@lemeridien.com](mailto:03529.LatestRecipe@lemeridien.com).

## FULL MOON LANTERN FESTIVAL AT ANANTARA HOI AN RESORT

Experience Hoi An's lantern festival, where the skies above the Old Town are lit by magical multi-colored lanterns. Enjoy buffet breakfast for two at your leisure before creating your own lantern to take home with you as a memorable souvenir. Take a cruise on the Thu Bon River to see the full moon lantern festival when the city is bathed in candlelight. Step off the water into historic Hoi An's Old Town and dine by the riverside at Anantara's Lanterns restaurant. Dine in opulent French colonial surroundings with a food and beverage credit to enjoy. Package includes: two-night stay in a room or suite, breakfast for two, roundtrip transfers between Da Nang International Airport and Anantara Hoi An Resort, a 60-minute Thu Bon River Cruise for two people per two night stay, VND1,122,006 food & beverage credit, and a lantern making class with souvenir to take home. Rates start from VND4,488,000 per room per night, applicable only for stay on the 14th and 15th of the lunar month. The promotion is valid until July 2016 and for more info, visit [www.hoi-an.anantara.com/Full-Moon-Lantern-Festival](http://www.hoi-an.anantara.com/Full-Moon-Lantern-Festival).

## BINH AN VILLAGE RESORT DALAT PROMOTION

Created as an intimate boutique resort in the heart of Tuyen Lam Lake, Binh An Village Resort Dalat ([www.binhnavillage.com](http://www.binhnavillage.com)) has 10 suites and seven villas located on top of a pine forest hill that offers a lakefront view. The resort is having a last minute summer offer where guests can receive a 50 percent discount on published room rates and free standard meeting room set-ups. The promotion expires September 30 and is not valid on public holidays.



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## THE REVERIE SAIGON OPENS

The 286-room property anchors the 39-storey Times Square building in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City's District 1. While the exterior exudes sleek contemporary appeal, the interior is an exploration of Italian extravagance, from rooms and suites individually appointed by the finest Italian decorators. The hotel houses three restaurants – The Royal Pavilion (Chinese), R&J (Italian) and Café Cardinal (French). Another venue – The Long @ Times Square – is a ground-floor café with a 48-metre bar counter that vaults the distance between Dong Khoi and Nguyen Hue.

The Spa, located on two floors, has 10 treatment rooms and a beauty salon. The hotel's gym contains a 24-meter pool along with outdoor Jacuzzis, indoor steam rooms and a sauna. There are 15 function spaces, including the La Scala Grand Ballroom – named for its silk and onyx-lined walls and Swarovski crystal chandeliers. Additionally, the Times Square building is home to The Reverie Residence – 89 one- and two-bedroom, full-service, extended-stay apartments whose residents will have their own separate entrance and private lounge.

## FURAMA PROMOTION

Built in a unique combination of French Colonial and Vietnamese architectural styles, the Furama Resort Danang is located on an idyllic stretch of white sand beach a short drive south of Danang center. There are a range of restaurants at the hotel serving both International and Asian cuisine, while the spa offers relaxing treatments and a fully equipped fitness area. Spacious rooms are traditionally furnished and look out over the beach or lagoon and the tropical gardens.

Get VND5.5million to VND11 million per night as a 50 percent refund of the room charge while staying at the Furama Villas to redeem for food and beverage at the Furama Resort's dining outlets, including the Seafood Market Buffet dinner at the Café Indochine. The promotion is for a minimum stay of two nights. The promotion is valid until December 19, 2015. Email [reservation@furamavietnam.com](mailto:reservation@furamavietnam.com) for more info.

## VIETSTAR RESORT & SPA PROMOTION

Spread across 50 hectares of picturesque landscapes, Vietstar Resort & Spa ([www.vietstarresort.com](http://www.vietstarresort.com)) features an 800sqm outdoor pool with a waterfall and hot tub. Other than a private beach, it has a spa, tennis courts and a fitness centre. The resort is nestled on Thom Hill, a 10-minute drive from Tuy Hoa City, Phu Yen Province and a 20-minute drive from Tuy Hoa Airport. The resort is offering guests 50 percent discounts on published room rates and free standard meeting room set-ups until September 30, excluding public holidays.





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# Rated PG

Filmmaker Charlie Nguyen talks about Hollywood, the Vietnamese movie industry and his controversial movie

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

IMAGE BY GLENN RILEY

VIETNAMESE CINEMA ENTHUSIASTS will be pleased to learn that Charlie Nguyen, the filmmaker who should really be credited with kicking off the contemporary commercial movie industry in Vietnam, is not actually about to pack his bags and leave the country for good. He may have been conspicuously involved in a number of international projects of late (including the much-anticipated *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon 2*) but despite the allure of prestigious work overseas, Charlie Nguyen remains as committed as ever to Vietnam.

Observers who've followed Charlie's bittersweet ride here over the past several years should probably give him a point or two for sheer tenacity. Two years have passed since his much-publicized failure to get *Bui Doi Cho Lon* – popularly expected to be his action masterpiece – past the national censors, even after a string of box-office successes had enthralled the Vietnamese public for bringing the graces of Hollywood to an emerging cinematic tradition. In the space of less than a decade, Charlie has been both the darling and the scourge of the local media for doing pretty much the same thing all along – making relatively successful movies that Vietnamese people have been paying to see.

While Charlie wasn't the first of the troupe of Vietnamese-American arthouse filmmakers to return to the country to make a picture, it was really his 2007 martial arts flick *The Rebel* (*Dong Mau Anh Hung*) that validated the potential of Vietnamese films produced for a general popcorn audience. Strictly monitored by cultural officers throughout filming, the movie was tough to produce but extremely well-received – with sell-out audiences at every screening. Despite this, it's only several years after its release that the USD1.6m investment is coming close to paying off.

"There weren't enough theaters," Charlie explains. "You'd show it for two or three months to a packed audience every night, but it was just two hundred people, and the ticket was two or three dollars, so you're getting nothing back. After the split 50/50 with the theaters, and after all the expenses

of marketing and PR, even though each theatre is packed you still don't make any money."

It was only after *The Rebel* had been picked up in 88 territories worldwide that the film began to show financial promise, but by this stage Charlie was already proving a commercial success here with his following films – *Fool For Love* (*De Mai Tinh*) and *Big Boss* (*Long Ruoi*) – which drew enthusiastic praise and impassioned criticism respectively from the media, despite both doing extraordinarily well at the box office.

With a background as a college indie filmmaker, Charlie's successes with filming comedy movies were perhaps unexpected – but they were enough to get the attention of Korea's film conglomerate CGV, who got in touch with a proposal to collaborate on productions of a larger scale.

"The executive came over and we had a meeting," says Charlie. "They were making movies everywhere, millions of dollars. So I said, 'Why would you want to go into co-production with us? We're making half-million-dollar movies, and the process is the same. The writing process takes just as long. Pre-production takes just as long. Shooting takes just as long. Everything is the same work. It's not like you're making a small movie and your work is less. Your work is even more, because you don't have money!'"

"He said, 'The reason we're here is because Vietnam is 15 years behind Korea right now,'" Charlie explains. "They could only sell 30,000 tickets when they first started out. Everyone was watching Hollywood films. They had to reorganize the whole industry. After that, they built it up again, and they said, 'Our dream is ten million admissions.' Then they hit ten million, and now that number is even higher."

"So we got all excited," Charlie remembers, "and were saying yeah! We want a million admissions! I asked him, how long do you think it'll take us to sell a million tickets? He said, 'I'm gonna say three years.' About 14 months later, we did *Little Teo*, and we did over a million. So, it was only 14 months."

At that point, however, CGV made a

second, rather more worrying prediction – that the local industry was poised to collapse.

"They said, it will happen, just like Korea," says Charlie. "It happens to every young film market. When you sell a million tickets, everybody wants to make a movie, mostly business people. They're not like us, where you're dreamers, you're passionate. We made movies when we were kids. These people see a business opportunity, they look in and go woah! They just made over five million dollars! But their budget was only USD600,000! Oh my God! We gotta make some movies!"

"So therefore, the collapse," he says. "The reason is that the audience will turn away. Because a movie has to be art first and money is the reward. It cannot be money first. It's an artistic medium, so you have to be an artist to make it. The audience will make a choice, and their choice is always with the film made by a good filmmaker."

## On the Cutting Room Floor

Despite a general wariness towards the changing industry, nothing could have prepared Charlie and his production team for the stonewalling of *Cho Lon*. A raw gangster film set in suburban Chinatown, the original version was considered too violent by the national censors – who wanted the graphic fighting scenes substantially cut. They also asked that new scenes be filmed to demonstrate a police presence in the region, believing that a pure focus on gangsters would misrepresent and disrespect the real *Cho Lon* serving as the film's location.

"It's always been the case that I'm very protective of the material," says Charlie. "So when I cut, I cut very little. So I showed it again, and they said, 'No, there's still this, this, this.' We cut more, and they still said no. So the producer kicked me out of the editing room. He said, 'We're bringing our guys in to do the cuts.' And they cut away everything. They cut away all of the action. It's an action movie. The movie just jumped, it made no sense. We said, 'What the hell are you doing?' They said, you know what, we're going to get this movie screened. If it's ten minutes, we're



going to screen it ten minutes. So they cut everything away. There was 60 minutes left of a two hour movie. We turned it in – still no.”

Finally, the board of censors decided that no amount of reworking would salvage the material and decided to ban the film outright. While the decision bitterly disappointed Charlie, he remains philosophical.

“In retrospect, we were too outspoken, we were being too American,” he admits. “You have to have a relationship, and I do have a good relationship with all of them, the whole board. Recently I had lunch with one of the board of censors at a film seminar. She said ‘yeah, you guys come from the States, you have to change your way of thinking. Because Vietnam is not like the US. You should know that by now, you’ve made seven or eight movies already. We’re willing to accommodate you guys, we’re willing to open up a little – but you guys need to close down a little bit too, so we meet somewhere in the middle.’”

When *Bui Doi Cho Lon* was leaked online shortly after the ban, Charlie’s production team were among those most bewildered – despite popular theories suspecting Charlie himself of having anonymously uploaded

the file in a move of defiance.

“We don’t know who leaked *Cho Lon*,” insists Charlie. “If we’d leaked that movie, we would be arrested. Right away. Within an hour of posting it. That’s what we know.”

More importantly, Charlie claims, he wasn’t actually in possession of a copy of the film. “There was one copy,” he says. “I don’t have any copies. It’s very important that we have just one copy for censorship. When we finish editing, the computer is not online, it’s always offline. Then the producer puts a watermark on the copy when they give it to Galaxy, the distribution company. We’re the production company, we don’t handle that, we just make the movie.”

“There’s no reason to make two copies with two watermarks,” he explains, “because then we would never be able to track it. Galaxy took that copy to Hanoi. It was hand-carried – fly out, hand it in. They watch it, give it back, and Galaxy brings it back. Keeps it with them. They have to protect the movie, because this is their business. Their logo goes right before ours.”

After reporting that the leak had been traced to an IP based in the US, the censorship board eventually announced that the perpetrator who had illegally

uploaded the banned movie had been apprehended. While no further information has been given, Charlie has emerged from the experience having learnt much about pursuing his work in Vietnam.

“You self-censor,” Charlie concludes. “There’s a good side to that. You challenge yourself to work within that boundary and still tell a good story, and still be able to develop a character that the audience will like and relate to. Because of that challenge, you can find stimulation. You can be inspired by the challenge. I guess if you’re too pissed off, then you can never work. If you’re too talented, you’re too Westernized, then you can’t work. But if you’re not that stubborn, you can still try to find a way to navigate it and go along with the current. That’s what it is.”

“I’ve been evading things a little bit,” he says of the lengthy periods he’s recently spent overseas. “But now I’m looking into producing so that I can help younger filmmakers. It’ll be a while before they can make a movie – but you gotta start somewhere. Now I’m looking at the young kids, I see they have passion, they have love, they have fire. I want to inspire them and keep them on the right track.” ■



# Mommy Dearest

A shoebox baby searches for a happy ending

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM AS TOLD BY CHANTAL DOECKE

IMAGES PROVIDED BY CHANTAL DOECKE



IT WAS APRIL 1975, the final month of the American War, and US President Gerald Ford had a plan, codenamed Operation Babylift. Ahead of approaching North Vietnamese soldiers, displaced Vietnamese infants and children, in particular, mixed race children, were to be evacuated to adoptive families waiting in the US, Canada, Europe and Australia. Eventually, more than 3,300 left, plucked from their homeland, culture and community in a swirl of controversy. Some felt the last-minute, badly organized operation was nothing more than a move to generate sympathy for the war, a photo op for an unpopular president greeting a planeload of children in need of saving. Others saw it as a gesture motivated by guilt. Some claimed that not all the children were actually orphans and were evacuated without the consent of their families. Whatever the case, upon arrival at their respective countries, all received new names and without the benefit of any documentation, fell into an identity abyss with little hope of knowing where they came from or who they really belonged to.

One of those was an infant with a round face and arched eyebrows, accompanied by a birth certificate proclaiming her name

to be Le Thi Ha. However, since her birth certificate was simply a piece of paper bought somewhere to facilitate her leaving the country, Ha is almost certainly not the name her mother gave her. Now 40 years old and living in Australia, Ha (now Chantal Doecke) sports a shock of purple hair and tattoo sleeves to go along with those distinctive arched eyebrows, the same ones from the photo that is the only tangible link to her past. This year, marking the 40th anniversary of Operation Babylift, Chantal has come back to Vietnam in search of answers. This is her story.

\*\*\*

I was born at the Tu Du Hospital in District 1. There was no paperwork, or if there was, it was destroyed. I was told my mother had me and then she left. It could've been hours, it could've been days... I don't know. But she didn't leave anything with me. When they had the evacuation, someone called the hospital to ask if anyone wanted to get rid of any babies, and I was one of them. I was taken to the airport, put in a shoebox and shipped to Australia where my adopted parents had seen an advertisement for anyone wanting to adopt an overseas child

from Vietnam. My mother answered the ad and asked for a baby girl.

Even though I had a really loving, close family, growing up was hard. I had nasty things said to me. You get looks from your neighbors, people at the local supermarket, pointing and thinking: "White. White. White. White. Oh! And an Asian child." There are a lot of Australians who don't like Asian people. Even though I was too young to understand, but you've got these Vietnamese children you're plucking from their culture and putting them into a Western one and you're expecting them to assimilate, grow up the "Western" way and that's really hard. Myself, I'm covered in tattoos, I constantly dye my hair... Part of that growing up helped me live "Western." Not that I was afraid; I'm proud of being Vietnamese. But that was my way of fitting into my family, trying to blend in.

I remember one day asking Mom: "Why do I look different? Where's my mother and my father?" And she answered it in her own way. But it wasn't until I was in my teens that I started to hear stories from people. Mom tried to protect me from knowing the real horrible stories. So I've had to pick up those up along the way myself.



My first time back to Vietnam was in 2004. I must have been 29 years old then. At that stage, I came back purely for a holiday. I didn't think about doing any searching for my birth family. I didn't have any friends who were adoptees at the time. We had always been told that it would be practically impossible to find our families. There was DNA back then, but the tests were so expensive. We just lived the life we had and forgot our old lives, pretty much. A lot of the adoptees find it very hard when they do return to Vietnam and we're surrounded by our people, our culture, and it's almost... not scary... but it's quite upsetting because we've lived in the West but feel we should know something about Vietnamese culture.

It was only when I had my first child (she's 20 now) that I started to think about my birth family. I make a certain facial expression or my kids make a certain expression that I don't, or my husband doesn't, and that's got to come from somewhere. So back then, it was more of an identity issue for me. It's been maybe in the last ten years that I started to get very curious and started connecting with so many other adoptees through Facebook, talking to them, listening to their stories.

It's really hard for me to explain the connection we have with each other. I mean, we're all adoptees; we really don't know each other, but we still call each other "brother" and "sister." It's like when you have an old friend you haven't seen for years, but when you do see them again, you just pick up where you left off. The reunion was like that, even though we didn't know each other.

### So Many Questions

The trip back this year was also for searching. I don't know if there was any paperwork, but when Saigon fell, things were destroyed. The only thing I might have to go on is someone's memory, hoping to find someone at the hospital who worked there 40 years ago and who might remember something. The day I went to the hospital was confronting. I had my youngest son with me and when I was told it was the weekend and that there was nothing to find out, I went out to the courtyard and thought: "I don't know what to do. Do I keep going? Or do I leave it alone? Maybe I'm not supposed to find anything. I keep hitting these brick walls. It feels like there's always going to be something stopping me." So I sat there

and thought: "Mom was here 40 years ago when she had me. How long did she stay on the grounds for? Did she hide behind a tree? Did she stand in this exact spot? Did she watch me leave?" I had never, ever thought of those things before. I could've stayed there all night. But people were looking at me and I felt like a complete outsider, even though I felt like telling them: "Stop looking at me! I was born here!" That was the biggest, biggest low.

All I want to do is find a family member. I don't care if it's my mother or father, and go on from there. There are things I need to know and it's not: "Why did you give me away?" That's ridiculous. I don't hold any grudges against my mother or my father. It was wartime. What other choice did they have? I might walk down the street in Vietnam and see an older woman with tattoos and bleached blonde hair and go: "She's got to be my mother!"

But I never see my birth mother in my dreams. I don't have an idea of what she looks like. That would be one of the questions I'd ask her. "Do I look like you? Do I look like my father? Have you been looking for me?" There are so many questions. I need answers. There are these little things that I need to find out.

I've heard there might be a doctor at Tu Du Hospital who is still working there. Her name is Loan. I've messaged her but haven't had a reply. I just want to find out if she has any memories of the time that I was there. I also had a DNA test done and found that my closest cousin (second cousin) actually lives in Saigon. He's adopted, too. His mother is Vietnamese and his father was obviously a Black American soldier. I only discovered him four weeks ago. He doesn't speak English, so it's very hard. He does know that I exist. I'm hoping to go back in the next couple of months, so I'd love to have a reunion with him because we are related. The DNA test also revealed that I'm actually related to some of the overseas adoptees that I know. When I saw the results and this list of names, I burst out crying. I never thought I would have this, ever, in front of me. Some are fourth or fifth cousins. Nevertheless, they are who I'm related to. As far as I'm concerned, blood is blood.

My older kids are teenagers, so they don't really ask me too many questions. But I decided to take my youngest son back to Vietnam with me because I thought that it was something he'd be old enough to appreciate. It really gave him an insight into how my life could've been and looking at his mother's culture and essentially part of his culture as well. He thought Vietnam was absolutely beautiful and we mention at least every day. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about Vietnam. I see myself settling there one day. Australia is where I live, but Vietnam is home.

*Chantal is hoping to return to Vietnam in a few months and welcomes suggestions on how she can reunite with her birth family. If you can help, email: [editorial@oivietnam.com](mailto:editorial@oivietnam.com)* ■



# Victoria Nui Sam Lodge

Find your spiritual paradise at the Victoria Nui Sam Lodge

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES PROVIDED BY VICTORIA NUI SAM LODGE

LOCATED ON THE side of Sam Mountain, just a complimentary 20-minute shuttle ride from the charming riverside town of Chau Doc, the Victoria Nui Sam Lodge offers beautifully constructed stone bungalows and villas overlooking the plains down below with uninterrupted views stretching into Cambodia. Its unique location makes the lodge feel like a secluded, idyllic getaway, while being a short ride away from Chau Doc's restaurants and attractions.

One of Vietnam's holiest sites, Nui Sam (Sam Mountain) and its surrounds is home to of dozens of temples and shrines, each unique in architecture and style, thanks to its proximity to Cambodia, making the area a melting pot of religions including Cham, Buddhism, Hinduism and mother-goddess worship.

The most famous holy site of all is the Lady Xu Temple. Legends and oral traditions abound of this sacred, slightly larger than life-sized statue with mocha-colored skin, and an enigmatic smile that lights up her broad face. Usually in May, upwards of two million pilgrims journey to the base of Nui Sam for her annual festival, hoping to have their wishes granted by the lady herself. (If you go, don't forget to visit the showroom upstairs where cabinets full of ornate costumes and headdresses are on display. Lucky envelopes containing snippets of one of Lady Xu's dresses are

available in the small alcove to the right of the main statue. Vietnamese view these as worthy gifts, especially if they aren't able to travel to the temple themselves.)

While there is much to see and do around Nui Sam, including a visit to the magical submerged forest of Tra Su and the floating market of Chau Doc, most visitors to the Victoria Nui Sam Lodge come to get away from it all. Surrounded by spacious gardens, Victoria Nui Sam Lodge's 36 stone bungalows and villas enjoy stunning 180-degree views over the rice paddy fields below, and the combination of white stone, terra cotta roofs and green fields are more reminiscent of Tuscany than Vietnam.

Rooms and suites range from 28-42 m<sup>2</sup> and are tastefully decorated in a rustic, country style, each opening out to a private open air terrace overlooking the valley below. Victoria Suite Rooms are located in semi-detached villas where connecting rooms allow for private use of an entire villa, each with a garden area.

Open in October 2013, the facilities at Nui Sam Lodge are designed to highlight the surrounding environment as well as the pursuit of wellness and fitness. Guests can reconnect with nature by strolling the extensive grounds complete with vegetable and herb gardens, hike the scenic "health" trail that winds around the large property or rent mountain bikes (available on-site) to explore the nearby area. An infinity

swimming pool with unobstructed views over the surrounding valley is the ideal place for yoga and tai chi or to simply relax. Free Wi-Fi and free private parking is available on site.

With excellent cuisine in a breathtakingly beautiful environment, guests will be hard pressed to find a reason to leave the property. La Giang Restaurant & Bar serves up all-day dining featuring Vietnamese cuisine, with an international and Asian breakfast, in a spacious indoor dining room with jaw-dropping 180° views showcased by large bay windows. Diners may also sit on the wraparound terrace or in the adjacent gazebo featuring 360° views, perfect for honeymooners, VIPs, private functions, or private dining. The Sky Pool Bar serves juices, cocktails and light snacks by the drool-worthy infinity pool.

Guests can travel in style to Nui Sam via the Mekong Coach, offering first-rate transfers (leather seats, individual tablet computers and complimentary Wi-Fi) between Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho and Chau Doc / Nui Sam exclusively for Victoria guests (extra cost).

*Stay from now until the end of September to take advantage of summer specials at only VND1,108,000 nett per night for a Superior Room plus 20 percent off on all food & beverage outlets. ■*



# Bia Culture

Beer giant reaches for Asia Pacific growth with its first Vietnam brewery

TEXT BY LORCAN LOVETT IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN



THE WORLD'S LEADING brewer has given beer lovers in Vietnam something to celebrate by opening a large brewery in southern Binh Duong province. AB InBev Vietnam, whose parent company AB InBev is known for brands such as Budweiser, Stella Artois, Corona, Beck's, Leffe and Hoegaarden, began producing the popular tippie after opening in May.

Located only 40 kilometers from Ho Chi Minh City, the factory will produce up to 100 million liters of Beck's and Budweiser a year, ensuring more of the globally recognizable products will line the country's bar shelves. Targeting Vietnam was an unprecedented move for the corporate giant, but one that made sense. A burgeoning middle class is leading the consumer charge, making Vietnam the fastest growing beer market in Southeast Asia.

The younger generation is also impacting demand. The Vietnam Growth Report 2015 indicated that Vietnam's 90-million strong population includes a high rate of young people, with 85 percent aged under 40 - a perfect audience for gigantic beer companies.

"Vietnam is the most exciting country out of the four countries I've lived," says Ricardo Vasques, General Director of AB InBev Vietnam. "The market is huge and growing, people are sharp, hardworking and eager for developing opportunities and the government agencies we had contact with were very proactive to support foreign investments. I have come to admire their

enthusiasm and dedication to getting things done efficiently."

Companies have predicted the country will be a major player in the development of Southeast Asia's beer industry within the next few years. AB

**"Brewing beer is one of the finest examples of our ability to use nature's own processes such as fermentation to meet our needs, not to mention this amazing ability to bring people together."**

InBev's symbolic decision to launch an operation here has shown the industry is finally placing its bets.

Ricardo's leadership will be driven by a personal passion for the drink as well as suave business acumen. "I am fascinated about the fact that brewmasters are able

to do so much with barley, hops, yeast and water," says Ricardo, who joined AB InBev 12 years ago in Brazil and moved to Vietnam in February. "Brewing beer is one of the finest examples of our ability to use nature's own processes such as fermentation to meet our needs, not to mention this amazing ability to bring people together. That is why beer has been around for more than 8,000 years. It has been part of the culture of every major civilization throughout history."

Budweiser, touted as "The King of Beers," will be the company's main focus. The US's most iconic brew, enjoyed for its lightness and crisp finish, will have a fight on its hands in a crowded beer market, overflowing with favorites such as Biere Larue, Saigon Red and 333. AB InBev is confident the drink will take off. "Vietnamese consumers have shown a great appreciation for Budweiser in the last few years," says Ricardo. "We are gradually increasing the awareness for Budweiser and marketing its high quality and fine taste to consumers. We believe our presence in Vietnam will effectively enhance customers' preference for Budweiser and boost its sales over time."

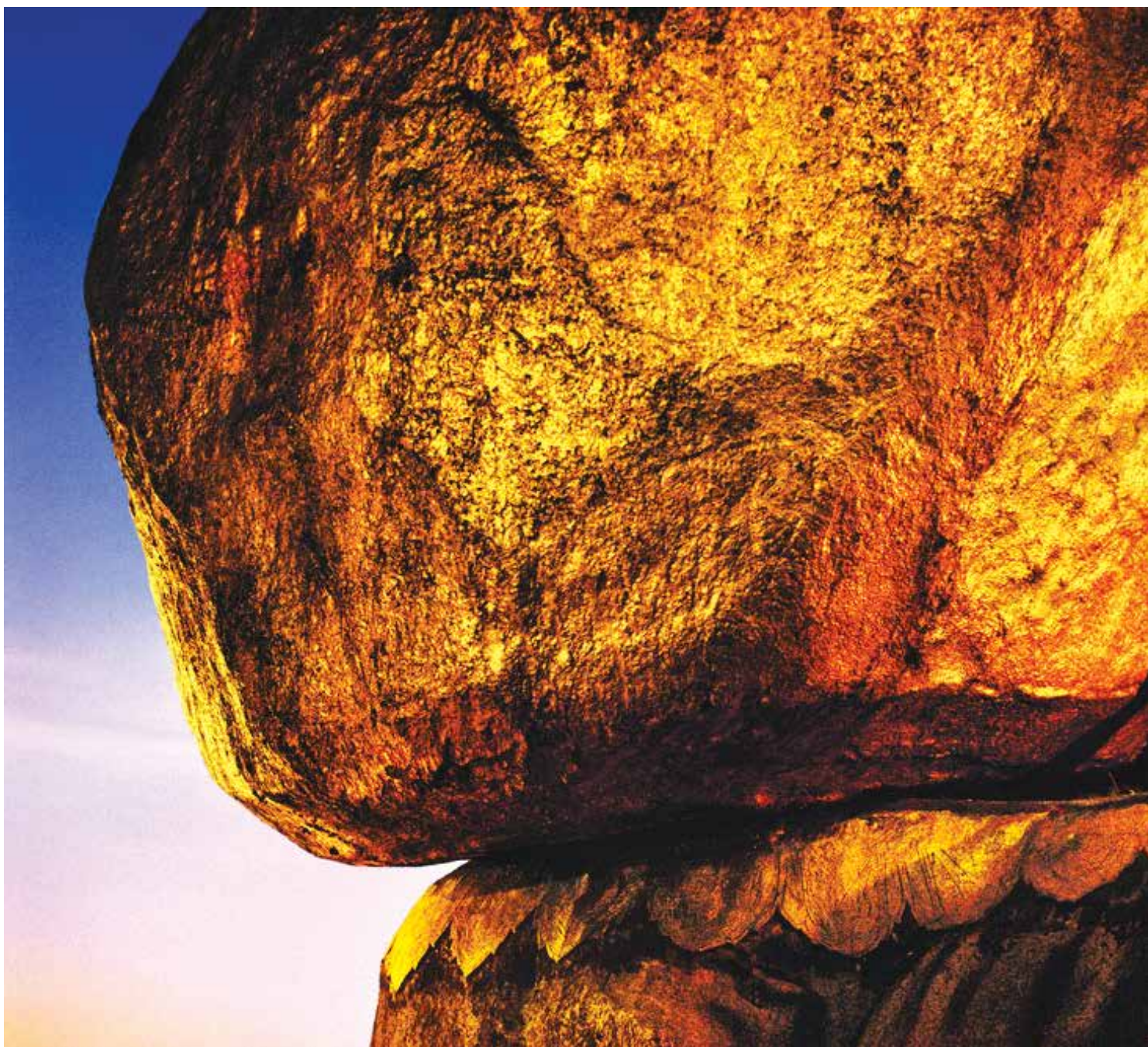
Vietnam is ranked third for beer consumption within the region, partly because of an increase in disposable income and an insatiable thirst for the stuff. As its population grows and workers earn more, there will be a rising demand for premium consumer goods. Over the past year AB InBev has sold more than 42.5 billion liters of beer and recorded revenue of up to USD43.2 billion. With its wide range of products, it's in a strong position to offer Vietnamese beer lovers a choice of international beverages.

"Consumers want to make choices that can offer them new and unique experiences," adds Ricardo. "Vietnam is an attractive investment destination today. With its vibrant economy, business-friendly policies and educated work force, we believe in the long-term growth potential of the Vietnam market."

Initially, the factory at the VSIP II-A Industrial Park, built on an area of 100,000sqm, will serve Vietnamese consumers. However, AB InBev says there's potential for future exports to other countries thanks to Vietnam's location at the center of Southeast Asia. The company cites people as "their most valuable assets" and will create opportunities for locals in the area.

Ricardo further adds: "Our activities in Vietnam will allow us to be much more active in the region, not only with regards to our production facilities, but also by building a local talent pool. With our brewery established here, we aim to bring not only more jobs to Binh Duong and Vietnam, but also offer our talents access to AB InBev's extensive opportunities of training, career development and a safe working environment where they will be rewarded for excellent contributions. I think this is very exciting for everyone." ■





# Dynamic Range

In conversation with *National Geographic* photographers Steve McCurry and Michael Yamashita

INTERVIEW BY **PATRICK CARPENTER**

YOU MAY NOT know them, but you know their work. They've taken you places and sharpened the way you look at the world. You've probably never met them, probably wouldn't recognize them, but that's because their job is to be invisible, to blend in. They belong in the field, and the further afield, the better.

Steve McCurry and Michael Yamashita, two renowned *National Geographic* photographers, take beautiful photographs and capture iconic moments, and their continent of choice for shooting is Asia. They have created their reputations by building the visual standards of the magazines they have contributed to. They're still doing it, but now they freely admit that the market, the places, and the opportunities are no longer what they once were. Over the course of a week of running around shooting, editing and critiquing at a photo seminar in Bangkok, the two





Kyaukse, Myanmar [Monks praying by the Golden Rock], 1994 / Steve McCurry

took the time to share their knowledge and experience about life and profession with a camera.

### Why Asia?

**MY:** I'm Asian-American and I am always coming back to this region. I blend in and I like the food – I say that I only work in countries where I can eat a bowl of rice at every meal. I started in 1989, so we're talking over 30 years, and I'm currently working on my 32nd and 33rd stories for *National Geographic* – both of which are in China.

**One of your first major shoots in Asia for the magazine was on the Mekong shortly after the end of the American War.**

**MY:** I did a story on the Mekong. I was the first photographer to go from the source of the river to its mouth, which of course is in the delta in Vietnam. It was in those days when we had the big assignments and it was a pivotal story for me, with a lot of pages in the magazine; I set a record at that time for double page spreads in the magazine with the story. The story was very 'total access,' meaning not one small photo in the story, but just page after page after page of double spreads. The double page spread is my kind of picture: I always shoot horizontal, I very rarely shoot vertical, so my photos lend themselves to the spread format.

It was pivotal for me not only as a story (and it became a book) but also as one of the very first photographer-writer teams into the Vietnam delta after the war. Literally. It was not easy to get clearance to shoot in Vietnam, nor was it easy in Cambodia, and we were the first to enter Cambodia, and we were there right when King Sihanouk came back. And so there was great interest in this story and we could show everyone what this region looked like, because nobody had done anything there for some time.

For me it was very important because I am an Asian-American and I tried very hard to stay out of the war, both for political reasons and for the fear that because of my features, if I went to Vietnam as a soldier, I could easily be shot by the American side by mistake. That wasn't the first thing on my mind, but it was a consideration. But I protested against the war, along with many others of my generation, and as most young people in America, who were growing up during this time, the war was a defining event in our lives and it left impressions on who we are today. So it was a very powerful experience for me to get to travel to Vietnam for the story, and the research that went into the story, combined with the experience, made me sort of an expert on the subject, and the experience was a very personal one. And it culminated in my wife and I adopting a young Vietnamese girl, so you can see how, from many angles, the Mekong story was a pivotal one for me personally and professionally.

**Steve, you also did a story somewhat recently in Vietnam?**

**SM:** My first trip to Vietnam was in 2007 and I was impressed. Vietnam was such an important part of my growing up, but I found that the people had completely moved on – more perhaps than we have in America. They were very hospitable, very welcoming to me as a foreigner and as an American. I went to do a story on AIDS and I spent a lot of time outside Hanoi with four separate families in separate villages and they were most hospitable. I was with them every day for a month – two trips for two weeks.

I found it very easy to work in Vietnam because people were open to photography, to me, and there was such

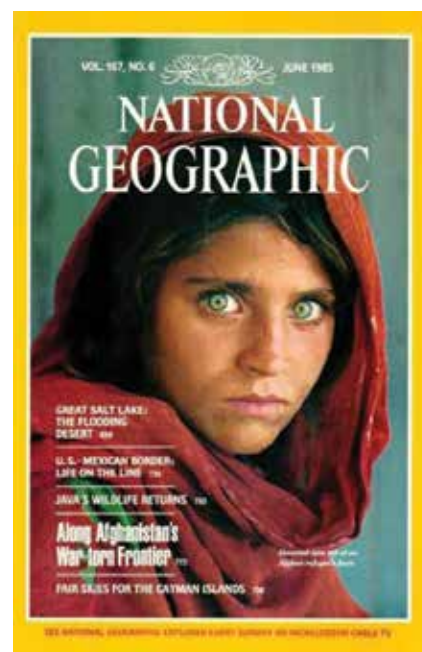
a strong, individual culture and I found it very inviting. I would love to go back to Vietnam because I am interested in Buddhism and I know that Vietnam has a strong Buddhist culture.

### What makes a great photo?

**MY:** A good photograph is one that has great impact. It compels the reader to stop turning the page and it forces them to read the caption and then possibly they will read the story. The portrait or the landscape almost invariably in a *National Geographic* story has a subject and a story combined – each image contains a tremendous amount of information. And the photos are not in the magazine because they are so beautiful. They are there because of their impact, because of this combination that gets you to stop and stare.

### And then how do you frame your subject?

**SM:** Graphically, when you are looking at a scene, it helps to look at the elements more as shapes as opposed to trees or people or whatever it is, and try to organize those shapes into a coherent, pleasing structure or harmony. I think we look at pictures and we subliminally have our sense of what is pleasing to the eye, what has harmony, what has poetry, balance. It's hard to articulate it, but you kind of know it when you see it: a combination of harmony and poetry, balance and emotional content. But then when you look at a picture, and you are asking what it is about, you are looking for its emotional impact – will it make me laugh, cry? These are all elements that come together in successful picture making.

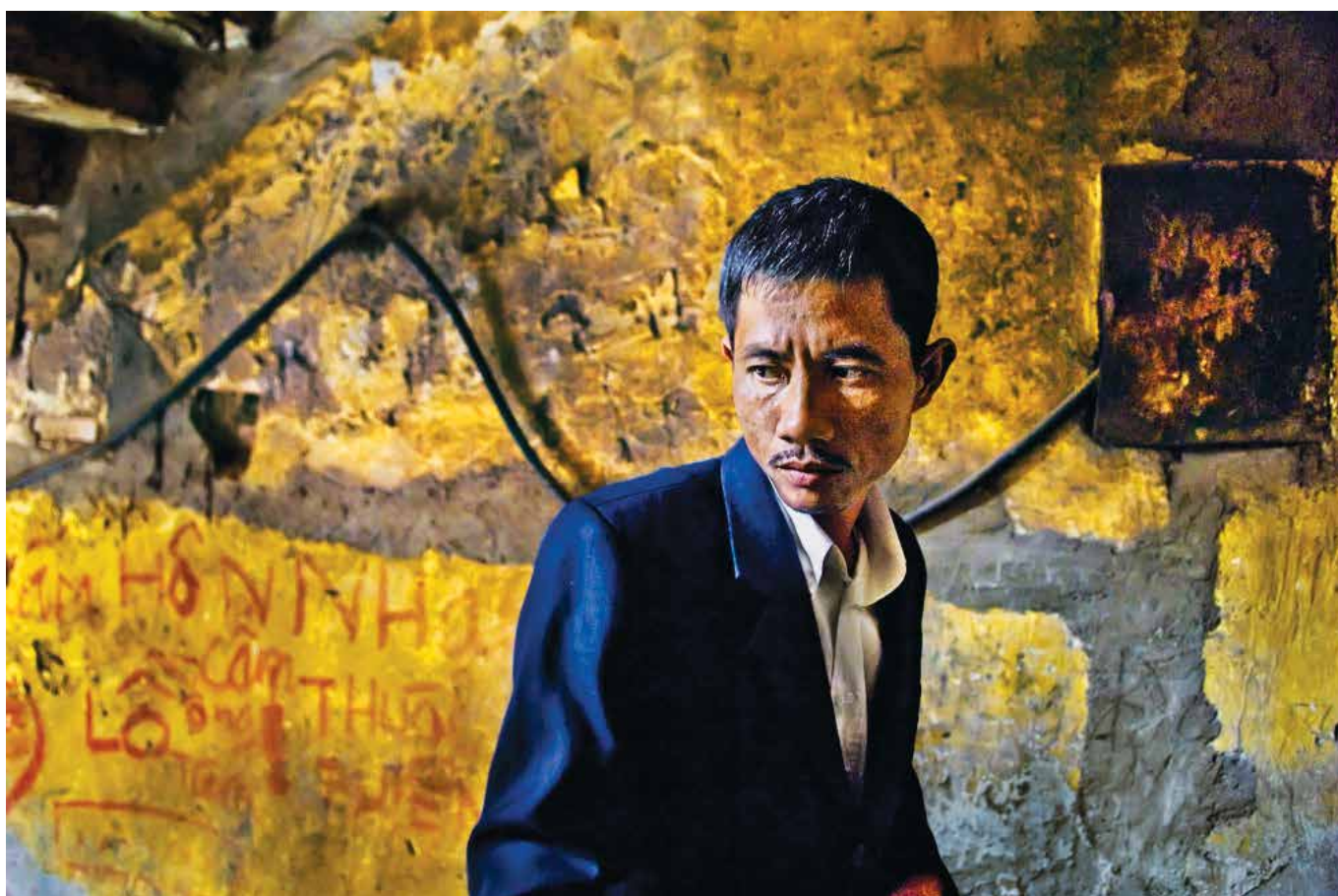


Afghan girl on *National Geographic* cover, June 1985 / Steve McCurry





Flowers for the Tet New Year celebration fill the market at Can Tho [The Mekong, *National Geographic*, February 1993] / Michael Yamashita



Nguyen Quoc Khanh in the stairwell of his tenement apartment in Viet Tri, Phu Tho  
United Nations, Global Fund, Access to Life, 2007 / Steve McCurry



## Do you have any opinion on portraits with the subject looking into the lens?

**MY:** Some of my picture editors will never publish a picture with the eyes focusing at the camera, whereas Steve's style is to have the subject engaging with the camera. It's a subjective thing. I have nothing against a subject's eye contact with the camera so long as there is awareness but still sincerity.

## What of the notion that the way certain images of poverty, war, or hardship are taken by professionals or portrayed in magazines actually make these hardships visually appealing or even romantic?

**MY:** The *National Geographic* style doesn't publish pictures to romanticize poverty or hardship. There's a lot of ugliness in the world, but illustrating it is not the mission of the magazine. There are a number of other sources for those stories if that is what you are looking for. We are storytellers; we are aiming to shock you with lots of storytelling ingredients in the image. And of course, there may be stories that have environmental impact, but our job is to make you look at the photograph, and not in a way that exploits suffering or portrays it as visually attractive.

## Can you share your typical day when working on assignment?

**MY:** I am always up at sunrise and always shooting through the sunset because I'm trying to maximize my chance to shoot with the best light. Photographers are paid to be lucky but we try to make our own luck by working in the best times of the day for sure. So I will have a subject to shoot – either at sunrise or sunset – and I will be in place 30 minutes before the sunrise, in the dark, to shoot the market or the monks coming down the street receiving alms or whatever it is. I want to be there before it starts just to know how it is coming together – how the boats are coming down the *klongs* towards the marketplace, I want to see all that traffic and photograph the whole thing as it develops. I'll be there for whatever and however long it takes – from sunrise through to when the light is getting really hard, and when you are shooting in the tropics, 10am is already hard light.

Then it's time to grab breakfast someplace nearby and to move indoors to shoot subjects that aren't dependent on outside light: somebody's home or some situation where I can shoot in open shade. Often this period is also the travel time; it's the middle of the day, and I have to figure out where I need to go to be at my next destination. If there's time, I'll take a nap – my down time needs to be during that hard, hot light of mid-day when it's just difficult to make pictures. Because in the late afternoon, I'm back out looking to put my subject in the best light or in the afternoon long shadows – what we call the magic hour. So they are long days. Of course now, with digital, I'll be editing what I shot that day when I get back to

my hotel that evening, catching up with any business and going over the next day's itinerary.

## So is there a future for this type of photo-storytelling?

**MY:** Print is dying and there are fewer magazines and newspapers to work for. On the other hand, the ability to exhibit your work is easier than ever. There's an internet and everyone is taking pictures like crazy and, of course, posting their photos and because of that the entire industry is going down, in that the professional cannot make a living anymore. Whereas in the old days, there was a filter, and the filter was the picture editor, who, as a purveyor of quality, would say this picture is good, this one is not good, this one deserves to be printed and so it was printed in some form: magazine, photography magazine, and so on.

Now, of course, anyone can put up pictures, so it is better than ever to show off your work, but the problem is that this also means there is that much more bad stuff out there and it's burying the good stuff. Also, outlets for professional photographers like selling stock are also

dying because magazines are going to the public internet sites and offering people the absolute minimum to use a particular photo in their magazine, and the people are usually happy just to be published, so they help drive down the market price and help eliminate assignments that would otherwise go to professionals.

But it's not all bad news. At the same time, we are also seeing news magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* ramping it up and publishing a lot more elaborate double page spreads or full page quality shots. It used to be that a story would be illustrated with multiple images: detailed shots, environmental shots, etc. But now what we are seeing is the single, best shot speaking for the entire story. Every story is one picture. So there are fewer photos, but what is there is top quality, and a lot of 'bang!' impact. Today you just need one great picture and a caption. The rest of the information you're getting out of the text.

*When not shooting on assignment, Mike regularly teaches workshops around the world. If you'd like to join one of his workshops, watch the Events page at [www.michaelyamashita.com](http://www.michaelyamashita.com)* ■

**“Today you just need one great picture and a caption. The rest of the information you're getting out of the text.”**







# Run, Feddy, Run

Don't sit on the sidelines, come on out and start running

TEXT BY **NICHOLAS SANTALUCIA** IMAGE BY **GLENN RILEY**

FEDDY PHAM WAS getting weird looks on the canal. He was trying out something he'd picked up overseas, but his neighbors back home in Ho Chi Minh City didn't know what to make of it - Feddy was just running. Always athletic, the simplicity of running for its own sake appealed to Feddy when he first encountered it while studying in Singapore, but more than that it was the sense of community he saw in the daily runners that he wanted to bring back to Saigon.

"I started with my family first. My mom, dad, and little brother had no idea about running, so I persuaded them to start running with me and little by little I got my whole family running," he says. From there he went online and started rallying like-minded people together to form a running club. It started out small. "We have a photo of eight members at the RMIT fun run in 2013." That was the Sunday Running Club's (SRC; Facebook: *SRC - Sunday Running Club*) first event and the entirety of the club at the time. The group's name is misleading as they have runs Wednesday nights in Hoa

Lu Stadium, Friday nights on Nguyen Hue Street, along with various locations around the city on Sunday mornings.

Today, they have over 200 active members who take part in events and almost ten times that follow the group's activity on Facebook. But through their rapid growth, Feddy and the club have never lost sight of their original goal of building a community. The group's initials also stand for Sharing, Responsibility and Connection, which have guided them wherever SRC meets. First-timers are always welcomed and new routes are scouted out by runners on their own time. Because its members share the work needed to keep the increasingly large organization active, the SRC is able to remain dynamic, and there's no shortage of important work to be done. As it aspires to be a socially responsible group, they are always looking for new ways to support the community. They've given blood and for the past two Christmases, members has donned Santa hats and run around the city giving out presents to underprivileged children.

Now they're planning more runs near the university village in Thu Duc to promote a healthy lifestyle among the students there. And even more ambitious is their plan to represent Vietnam internationally as a fit nation by hosting an event that will draw runners from all over Asia.

Thanh, a senior member of SRC, only started running when he was 40 and diagnosed with diabetes. The club offered him a way back to health and through it became friends with the likes of Son, who originally just saw running as a way to train for his first sport of badminton, but now helps to lead the SRC and deeply respects running for its own merits.

Feddy chalks up the group's success to the nature of running. "There's no license to earn, no membership. You just run," he says. But Feddy and the SRC have remained as relentlessly focused on their core values as they have on running itself. And they're always looking for new ways to challenge themselves, on and off the track. ■

# The Vietnamese Cinderella Story

What folk tales tell us about culture

RETOLD BY JAMES PHAM ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN NGUYEN



Tam and the genie

WHO DOESN'T LOVE a good bedtime story? Folk stories in particular are a fascinating look into the values and history of a culture, passed down orally from one generation to the next. Part of what UNESCO defines as "cultural heritage," folk tales have the ability to "create a certain emotion within us, to make us feel as if we belong to something — a country, a tradition, a way of life. They are part of living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed down to our descendants."

With a literacy rate above 90 percent, Vietnam has a long history of reading and storytelling. The story of Tam and Cam, better known to some as the Vietnamese Cinderella story, is one such living expression.

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Once upon a time, there were two stepsisters, Tam and Cam. When Tam's father died, Tam lived with her sister and stepmother, an evil woman who made Tam do all the housework while Cam enjoyed a life of leisure.

One day, Tam and Cam were sent to the paddy fields to catch fish and crab. Industrious Tam set right to work, filling her basket while lazy Cam did nothing. On the way home, Cam saw an opportunity to trick Tam. "There's a pond over there. You'd better wash the mud out of your hair or Mother will be angry."

Ever trusting, Tam set her basket down and washed herself in the pond. Cam quickly emptied Tam's basket into hers and ran home. Realizing what happened, Tam sat crying on the side of the road. Suddenly, a genie appeared and told Tam to take the one remaining carp from her basket and

release it into the family well, taking care to feed it rice every day.

Tam took care of the carp, setting aside a portion of her own rice to feed it. Cam began to notice and one day followed Tam out to the well. She told her mother about Tam's beloved carp and not long after, the stepmother sent Tam out to let the buffalo graze, instructing her to take him far away in search of greener pastures. Once she was gone, the evil stepmother and daughter went out to the well and called out to the carp the same way Tam did. With a net, they caught the fish and added it to their rice porridge.

Upon returning home that evening, Tam went out to feed her fish but it was nowhere to be found. Through her tears, she saw the genie appear once more, telling her to take the bones of the fish, place them in four jars and bury them under the four





Cam spies on Tam



Tam tries on the slipper

corners of her bed.

Though Tam searched high and low for the bones, she couldn't find them. A chicken appeared and offered to dig up the bones in return for a handful of rice. Tam complied and buried the bones, just as the genie told her.

Soon, the King announced a festival for the people. All the village girls were excited to go. But the evil stepmother mixed a pile of rice with a pile of chaff and told Tam to sort out the two before she could go. As Tam was working, a flock of swallows flew past and helped her finish her work. But then Tam realized she had nothing to wear to the festival. Again, the genie appeared and told her to dig up the four jars under her bed. He added a stern warning for her to come home before the cock crowed the next morning.

When unearthing the jars, Tam found that the first jar contained clothing, a scarf and a hat; from the second a pair of embroidered slippers; from the third, four tiny horses that turned into big ones as soon as she set them on the ground; from the fourth, a carriage.

At the festival, Tam met the Prince who was disguised as a commoner and the two fell into easy conversation. As the night wore on, though, Tam suddenly remembered the genie's warning and rushed home, leaving behind an embroidered shoe which the Prince's servant brought to him.

The next day, the King sent his servants to comb the country looking for the maiden who could fit the shoe. When they got to Tam's house, her stepmother called Cam out to try on the shoe to no avail. Tam recognized the shoe and after putting it on, produced the other shoe as well. The servants rejoiced, bringing Tam back to the palace in a palanquin, much to the chagrin of Cam and her mother.

When the death anniversary of Tam's father came around, Tam arranged to come back home. But her stepmother devised a plan to kill Tam. "Climb up to the betel nut tree and bring down a bunch for the altar for your father," she said. As Tam climbed up the tree, the stepmother took an ax and chopped it down. Tam fell into a pond and drowned. The stepmother sent Cam back to the palace to take Tam's place as the Prince's wife.

When Tam died, though, she became a nightingale and one day flew back to the palace as Cam was doing laundry. "You'd better wash my husband's clothes clean," sang the nightingale. "And be careful when you hang them up so they don't rip." Cam felt weak, realizing the nightingale was Tam reincarnated.

In the days that followed, the nightingale stayed near the palace, following the Prince wherever he went and singing sweetly to him. Realizing the nightingale was special, the Prince said: "If you are the spirit of my wife, fly into the sleeves of my royal robe." The nightingale obliged and from that day forward, the two were inseparable, with Cam largely ignored by the Prince.

Cam asked her mother what to do and was told to catch the nightingale and eat it. The feathers were scattered in the

garden and turned into two apricot trees. Whenever the Prince would go out to the garden, the trees bent their branches to shade the Prince. Seeing this, Cam sent a servant to cut down the trees and burn them, discarding the ashes in a faraway field. The ashes grew into a golden apple tree, but the luxuriant tree bore only one perfect fruit. One day, an old beggar woman saw the fruit and asked for it to fall into her hands, promising that she would cherish it and not eat it. The woman brought the fruit home where its scent filled her room.

Every day, as the woman left home to beg, from the fruit emerged a woman. It was Tam. While the woman was away, Tam would clean the house and cook food for the old woman. One day, the old woman pretended to go to the market but quickly hid behind a door to see what would happen. Just as she did every day, Tam emerged to help the woman with her chores. Overjoyed, the woman ran over to hug Tam and destroyed the rind of the fruit so that Tam would remain with her forever. With Tam's help, the old woman saved up and opened a small drink shop by the road with Tam helping to prepare betel nut for the customers.

One day, the Prince passed by the little stall and saw a plate of betel nut decorated with leaves like the wings of a phoenix, exactly as Tam used to do. He asked who had prepared the dish. "My daughter," replied the old woman. "Bring her out so I can see her," commanded the Prince. When Tam emerged, the Prince recognized his late wife and had her brought back to the palace in a palanquin.

The King handed over the throne to the Prince and made Tam his Queen. The newly installed King wanted to put Cam and her evil mother to death, but Tam convinced him to pardon them, expelling them from the palace back to the countryside.

However, Cam just couldn't leave things alone. She wondered how her stepsister, even after going through all she did, remained so beautiful. "Bathing every day in boiling water helps me stay beautiful," Tam answered. "I'd be happy to help you if you want." So Tam prepared a bath of boiling water and poured it all over Cam who was promptly scalded to death.

She then called her servants to take Cam's flesh and pickle it in a jar to send to the evil stepmother who was completely unaware of everything that had happened. Thinking that the pickled meat was a present from her daughter, the woman ate it with relish.

As she was eating it, however, a crow landed on a branch beside her window. "What a tasty dish! Mother eating daughter. If you have any left, please give me some," said the crow. "You stupid bird," replied the stepmother. "This pickle is from my daughter, sent straight from the palace. It's delicious!" And she kept on eating until she got to the bottom of the jar where she discovered a skull. Realizing that the crow spoke the truth, the evil stepmother fell dead from grief.



Tam emerges from a magic fruit

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Variations of the Cinderella story are found in numerous cultures, spanning millennia. The oldest version of the story is considered to be from the first century BC about a Greek courtesan who marries the king of Egypt in an age-old story of Good versus Evil.

The Vietnamese version touches upon many facets of traditional life — from catching shrimp and crab in the paddy fields and taking the buffalo out to graze to celebrating death anniversaries and offering a plate of betel nut to guests as a form of hospitality.

There are a few religious elements in the story as well including the belief in karma, that those who do good will eventually be rewarded while those who do bad will be punished, expressed through the common Vietnamese phrase “*Ở hiền gặp lành*” (similar to “One good turn deserves another”) or the alternative “*Gieo gió, gặp bão*” (“Sow wind, reap storm”). Being scalded to death by boiling water is reminiscent of scenes from Buddhist Hell, where people being dipped in hot oil are

common, perhaps a not-so-subtle reminder for children to always be on their best behavior.

“I remember feeling frightened when my mom used to tell me that story as a child,” remembers Oanh, a third-grade teacher. “And I’ve always wondered why Tam is considered the good one because she did kill her stepsister in the end. Why didn’t she help Cam become a better person? But I guess she had had enough. My mom always told me that if Tam had allowed Cam to live, Cam would’ve continued doing bad things to Tam. Still, when I tell the story to my own children, I keep those same gruesome details. After all, it’s a story for the generations.”

*In this ongoing series, Oi will explore Vietnamese culture, traditions and beliefs and at times, compare them to Western ones to see where our cultures intersect and diverge. In the end, despite barriers of language, customs and beliefs, we will likely find that we’re more similar than we realize. If you have a topic you’d like to see explored or have ever wondered why Vietnamese do / say / think a certain way, email us at: [editorial@oivietnam.com](mailto:editorial@oivietnam.com) ■*



# Eclectic Avenue

This playful, personal home design style shakes up conventions and bridges the gap between different looks



David J Campbell is the Design Director at Villa Royale Treasures and Tearoom ([www.villaroyaltreasures.com](http://www.villaroyaltreasures.com)) in Thao Dien, District 2, Saigon.



THERE'S A METHOD to the madness of eclecticism – a design style that combines many types of styles to a room leaving it inviting and appealing – forget the all encompassing same look. Styling a room with different furniture, colors and patterns truly reflects your personality. Not to say that a mishmash of clutter won't work, but it's better to choose only key pieces from different eras and design styles while keeping some unity either in form or color palette.

Eclectic decor and design has been around forever, however it's only recently that it's being embraced. Careful though, this style is not a free-for-all. If you toss a little of this, a little of that and a dash of 'the other' into a room at random, it'll look like exactly what it is – a mess. The liberty and leeway that make an eclectic style so appealing can also make it tricky – you'll need to be careful not to trip over the thin line between contrast and chaos. This style secret can best be described as methodical mismatching. Eclecticism wears its lack of pedigree proudly and draws its energy from contrast. The trick is to find enough common ground to

make a space gel.

Choose a few must-haves to anchor the space, then experiment with rugs, artwork, lighting, accents and other elements. Play light against dark, honed against glossy, rustic against elegant – but look for opportunities to create parallels. When you find the right balance, you'll feel it instinctively.

Once you have your anchor pieces within your room, consider which elements you can repeat. An example would be to focus on a circle motif into the room, perhaps a round vintage mirror, an antique oversized railway wall clock or a large centered collection of colorful carpet boules. Be sure to add in a few contrasting shapes for balance and you've got a marriage made in heaven.

There's no other decorating style where you could make a pre-loved sideboard, an oriental rug and a collection of vintage ads get along. The beauty of eclectic style lies in the element of curiosity and surprise. This is the time to get personal: Showcase mementos from your trip to Cambodia last year; bring out your collection of favorite band prints; stack books inside your now shelved and mounted

childhood canoe.

Play by the rule of opposites. If you have shiny pieces, add matte ones. Offset metal with wood and pair smooth silk with coarse linens. Use your sense of touch as much as your eyes to gauge the level of textural contrast you've achieved. Perfecting an eclectic look is like seating guests at a dinner party – put the rowdy loud ones next to the shy types and everyone's happy. This style begs for a blend of strong, singular pieces, so keep the backdrop (walls, floors, windows) simple in order to avoid competition.

Keep the palate neutral and build the background from there. You'll rarely go wrong with pure white walls in an eclectic space, but if they look too bland for you, use unassuming colors such as pale salmon, smoky gray or eggshell blue. Still not enough? Choose a color that's already in the room and try it out on an accent wall or on the ceiling. Or you could just hang more artwork, mount colorful window treatments and add a vibrant rug or throw – all easily added that can be reversed as the room evolves.

If you have a old mannequin next to a vintage dentist's chair, next to a totem pole next to a... well, you get the picture. Use really unique pieces as you would exclamation points: calculated. Juxtaposing them with a few simple, classic pieces will heighten the look without diluting its charm.

OK, so you have a piece that you love, but it doesn't seem to gel within the room? The solution's easy – give it pride of place. Don't try to blend it into the background. Think of it as the room's odd one out. You love it for its quirkiness, so why try and blend it into the background and hide it?

In an eclectic room, you almost have carte blanche with the color wheel. Conventional wisdom wags its finger at you? Bah, we say. Most importantly, the scheme needs to make sense. If you try to bring in every single shade you love, or if you pile up patterns with no restraint, you'll be left with disarray. When figuring out your design style, just remember your space should always be unique, individual and sometimes as mysterious as you! ■

# Bull & Bear

Top stocks to watch in Vietnam



**Sven Roering** is a partner and financial planner at Total Wealth Management PTE. Ltd ([www.t-wm.com](http://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've been living in Saigon for a number of years now, and have always been interested in using a bit of my money to buy shares in the Vietnamese stock market. I've read that the government will lift the restrictions on the purchase of local stocks by foreign investors starting September 1. I feel that this new development, coupled with the new decree allowing foreigners to purchase property in Vietnam for the first time will have a positive effect on stock prices. Could you help me with a brief description of which stocks to look out for, and how to go about investing?**

STARTING SEPTEMBER 1, 2015 the government will lift the previous cap of 49% ownership by foreign investors on listed stocks, which could bring a large amount of fresh capital into Vietnam, and can indeed have a positive effect on stock prices. It is, however, important to note that this will not apply to certain sectors, such as banking and real estate, where the government is likely to maintain a certain amount of control.

This is Vietnam's biggest easing on foreign capital inflows since 1990. The country realizes that it has to remain competitive when it comes to direct foreign investment to compete with other ASEAN countries, and to be considered a robust emerging market. Vietnam is making a strong case for being granted emerging market status by global equity index providers, pushing for an upgrade from frontier market status. After years of macroeconomic mismanagement, economic growth picked up to 6% in 2014, and is expected to soar above 6% again during the course of 2015, making Vietnam an attractive location for foreign investment.

There are two stock exchanges in Vietnam: the Ho Chi Minh City stock exchange, and Hanoi stock exchange.

Most consumer goods and real estate companies trade on the HCMC exchange, while it seems many financial services and oil companies trade in Hanoi.

After doing a bit of research on stocks listed in HCMC, I've found a few individual stocks which might be considered a relatively safe option for newbie investors in Vietnam. Number one is Masan Group. This company has a market capitalization of over USD1 billion, meaning it is less prone to price risk. Many local analysts project the company's earnings to increase in the next few years, and forecast stock price growth for the remainder of 2015. The company operates in the consumer goods sector, which is benefitting by an increase in consumer spending due to wage and employment growth. Second is Vinamilk. Another consumer goods player, the company has a market cap of over USD1 billion and has earnings growth projections for the next few years, which are positive. Thirdly, VinGroup, which operates in the real estate sector, is another big company that is projected to perform positively.

If you are looking for something a bit more risky, then Nam Long group (real estate) might be for you. This company

has a lower market cap and price than the three previously mentioned, however it is also projected to have positive earnings growth.

If you want to buy shares directly on the market, you could get in touch with some local brokerages. The main ones are: Saigon Securities, Thang Long Securities, Sacombank Securities, and UP Bank Securities. They could probably set up an online brokerage account for you, or possibly assign you a personal stock broker.

Although there are many attractive aspects of the Vietnamese market for prospective investors, it is important to note that the proposed new laws have been described as vague, and the effect on the market might only be fully understood after a prolonged period of time. If the Vietnamese market behaves anything like some Asian markets (China is a great example), which are driven by herd sentiment and consist of mainly individuals and speculators who participate in the market, it could be an extremely risky place for an individual to park money. It might be better to stick to seasoned, value-driven markets like the US and Europe. ■





A person is standing in the center of the frame, wearing a dark, textured, A-line dress that reaches down to their ankles. The person's face is not visible. The background is a solid, deep red color. The overall mood is dramatic and artistic.

# A-LINE TO

*Much like the middle class in Vietnam, the fashion industry here is expanding and fashionistas are demanding more and more when it comes to being trendy. And for those who are not entirely fashion-savvy, the September issue is not just like any other regular edition rolled out every other month. For every fashion magazine, the September issue is the most important as it's about the shifting of seasons, a drastic adjustment from the soul-sucking heat of summer to the cooler months of fall. A period when everyone seeks to give their image a complete overhaul – sandals and shorts give way to boots, hats and coats – yes, even Saigon residents start layering (recalling January 16, 2014 when the city hit a record low of 64°F).*

*Because Oi is not a fashion magazine, we decided to get up close and personal one-on-ones with fashion folks – designers, models, photographers – experts in the field for insight into the industry.*

# FASHION



A man with glasses and a ponytail, wearing a dark suit and bow tie, stands in a workshop. He is leaning against a white mannequin on the left and a vintage sewing machine on the right. The background shows a window and some wooden crates.

# MAKE IT WORK

*Meet Tung Leo, Project Runway  
Vietnam's mentor, judge and producer*

*Interview by James Pham  
Images Provided by Multimedia JSC*



# TUNG



# LEO

IT'S EARLY EVENING at the workroom on the set of *Project Runway Vietnam*, now filming its third season set to debut in December of this year on VTV3. Inspirational fashion quotes adorn the walls, including Ralph Lauren's stern reminder: "Fashion is over quickly. Style is forever." Scraps of fabric from the day's challenge litter the room, as do bare mannequins waiting for their next creation. The show follows the reality TV format of its hugely successful American counterpart, using weekly tests to whittle down design hopefuls in order to crown a single winner. While contestants film their monologues in front of a green screen, exhausted crew members are sprawled out catching a bit of shuteye before resuming work. Overseeing everything is Nguyen Thanh Tung, better known as Tung Leo (nicknamed after his zodiac sign), the show's mentor/judge/producer extraordinaire.

## HOW DID YOU GET YOUR START IN FASHION?

When I was a child, I was good at literature, especially traditional literature. And in Vietnamese literature, we have so many stories that involve clothes. I used to imagine what they would look like. But it wasn't until after my second year in university when I had to choose my major that I realized I was falling in love with fashion design. After graduating, I received a scholarship to study fashion in Shanghai and then interned in Hong Kong. I came back to Vietnam to become a lecturer in fashion design at the architecture college, and after 10 years, I transitioned into media. When *Project Runway Vietnam* started, the producer wanted to find one person who could combine fashion and media and that was me! That's how I became a mentor on the show.

## REALITY TV IS A RELATIVELY NEW CONCEPT HERE. WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU HAVE TO OVERCOME?

So many challenges! First, people didn't really know what reality TV was. They assumed that everything they saw in the show was fake, that everyone is an actor. But that's not true. It's all real, but we have to push the reality to be bigger. For example, in real life, you're always going to meet some bitches that make you angry or upset. Reality shows push you into a stressful situation where everything goes "boom" [mimes an explosion with his hands], and it becomes real. Everyone goes out in public with a mask on. But in reality TV, the 'real' you comes out. It's not fake.

## HOW DOES YOUR OWN BACKGROUND IN DESIGN HELP YOU BETTER MENTOR THE CONTESTANTS?

As a mentor, it's all about working with the designer. A good mentor isn't necessarily a good designer. You're there to help them improve on their ideas, not your own. In the show, I'm probably the person who's closest to the contestants, but I have to always maintain a distance. Instead of saying, "I love/hate your design," I ask questions. "What do you think about...?" I just give them advice, not necessarily my opinion.

## AT THE AUDITION STAGE EARLIER THIS SEASON, A CONTESTANT UNVEILED AN OFF-THE-SHOULDER GOWN DESIGNED FOR MEN (PICTURED LEFT BOTTOM), AND YOU REACTED PRETTY STRONGLY AGAINST IT, IMPLYING THAT SOCIETY HAS A RIGHT TO DICTATE FASHION, WHEREAS THE DESIGNER FELT THAT FASHION HAS NO BOUNDARIES. ARE THERE LIMITS?

First, I love creativity. It's the most important characteristic for designers. That's why I believe that if you are a unique thinker, you will be a very good creator. If you have a look at the fashion world, when miniskirts first came out on the runway, people said that they were distasteful and too short. But now, we have microshorts.

So it's the creator who is the first to do something. Maybe he lives in a society where people judge [his creations] in a bad way, but after, they may realize that it was a good idea. I love people who dare to do new things. For Nguyen Thanh Tai, he dared to do the right thing, but at the wrong time. Vietnam is very traditional, very closed, not open-minded. People think the way others think. So it's not the right time to create something too unique. If you create something new, it has to be perfect. Men wearing women's clothing wasn't the perfect design for males. It was very feminine. If it is a perfect design, then people will love it.

## WHAT'S THE OUTLOOK FOR THE VIETNAMESE FASHION INDUSTRY?

Right now, the fashion industry in Vietnam is not yet developed. To have a big fashion design industry, you need to have a very good lifestyle, with the whole of society being developed. This isn't yet the right time. There are a few good designers in Vietnam, but I'm not worried because we're on our way. At the beginning of the year, I went with [*Project Runway* Season 2 winner] Ly Giam Tien to New York Fashion Week. He was a tiny designer in New York, but as he was pulling out his clothes at rehearsal, lots of people and models came to look and were really surprised. After the show, he received a standing ovation. People were surprised that Vietnam could produce such fashion. We have very good talent here but fashion education isn't very good so we need to have outside support.

## BECAUSE THERE'S NOT YET A BIG FASHION INDUSTRY HERE, WHAT CAN BE DONE TO EDUCATE PEOPLE ON FASHION?

I educate the public about fashion through *Project Runway*. Each episode, I convey a message about fashion. For example, when I give the contestants a challenge to use rubbish, that tells the audience that everything in your life is fashion. Not, "This is cheap. That is expensive." No. Even if it's cheap or dirty, but you have a good idea, it can become a good design. Or there was a challenge about sport couture, combining sportswear and haute couture. I wanted to convey the message that sportswear isn't just clothes you wear when you play sports, but if it has a good design, it can become haute couture. Every episode over the past two seasons has had a message about fashion. That's the most successful thing that *Project Runway* has done in Vietnam.

## WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO PEOPLE WHO VIEW FASHION AS A USELESS PURSUIT?

It would be a very long explanation for people who don't love fashion. [laughs] I would ask them to look in the mirror or in a photo album to see who they were day to day, month to month, year to year and how the styles have changed. That's fashion. You might not realize that you're wearing fashion every day, but it's your second skin.





# THE

*Iconoclast designer Vo Viet Chung  
deconstructs the traditional ao dai*

# LONG

*Text by Michael Arnold  
Images Provided by Vo Viet Chung*

# DRESS



## VO VIET



## CHUNG

IF YOU WERE watching the 2015 New York Couture Fashion Week earlier this year, you'd probably have been intrigued by the sole Asian collection featured out of those 300 that were showcased at the event. Vo Viet Chung, who is popularly thought of as Vietnam's foremost *ao dai* designer, presented a total of 30 jet-black creations that seemed a world away from the figure-hugging traditional gowns most Westerners would associate with Vietnam – a fascinating series of garments in shimmering ebony, scuttling back and forth along the catwalk as if in open defiance of the white uniforms of Saigon's schoolgirls.

If designs like these could ever be labeled *ao dai* – and Chung is weary of constantly hearing the term paired with his name – then they've undergone a staggering transformation. Most designers wouldn't dare to mess with Vietnam's national costume, but Chung has made it work, and he's now on the cutting edge of authentic Vietnamese fashion to the extent that he's arguably the leading figure in the whole industry. If you're skeptical, take a closer look at his oeuvre and you'll spot his game-changing insight: take a highly-specialized garment, break it down, and use those elements as the starting points for all other styles of clothing – evening dresses, party gowns, blouses with pants – as if they'd actually evolved from Vietnamese precursors. It's not just a matter of slapping a swallowneck collar on a Western shirt and calling it Vietnamese – these are quintessential reconstructions of the fashion spectrum reformed with Vietnamese aesthetics.

Vietnam is still a traditional country for the most part, and there are voices claiming that this kind of monkeying with the national dress is disrespectful. Chung himself is dismissive of such claims: "There are many people who see the *ao dai* as something spiritual," he says. "I feel the same way, but I don't see it as being something like a monopoly. My wish is that women all over the world can wear it if they like it, just like you can wear a *qipao* when you're in Shanghai."

He wouldn't be the first to overturn the national costume. If we're being honest, the *ao dai* isn't really this country's traditional garment at all – that would be the *ao thu than*; or if you're from here in the south, the *ao ba ba*. The *ao dai* actually has its origins in an ethnic Cham tunic that was originally adopted to defy the Chinese; it was modified in the '30s by an artist from Hanoi to reflect French graces, and then again in the '40s to de-Westernize the garment and instill a more Oriental sensuality. The modern version of the *ao dai* essentially dates from that time, a convergence of the country's cultural forebears and colonial past.

### MATERIAL THINGS

Part of the reason why the gown stirs up such patriotism is that, from a tailoring perspective, it's an extremely complex and highly personalized garment. This hasn't stopped the advent of cheap ready-to-wear cotton varieties you'll find at Ben Thanh Market, which probably represent far greater travesties against the sanctity of the Vietnamese costume than Vo Viet Chung – whose showroom sits hidden in plain sight just behind the market on 115 Ly Tu Trong. Here, the designer is only too pleased to demonstrate his creative process to visitors at the store.

"This is a regular design for an *ao dai* as you can see right away," he says, pulling out a stunning classic form – priced, incidentally, at several thousand US dollars. "And this one is also an *ao dai*, but I've cut it as a dress. As you can see, it has no collar, but it's of the

same form. This one is also an *ao dai*. It looks like a gown, right?"

"Foreigners who visit my store seem to sense that the *ao dai* is very important," he says, "very spiritual. I know that, but for a designer just like me, I choose to make it look more relaxed, more open, like these ones I've shown you. I can cut it shorter to make it into a dress; I can make it longer so that it becomes a gown; but all my pieces are made of materials that are exclusively used for *ao dai*."

In fact, if you do take a closer look at the fabric, you'll see the broader dimension of his work that Chung would much rather be associated with than merely being known as a designer of *ao dai* fashions. Just as he's brought the innocent subtleties of the traditional dress into full, wild maturity, so too has he rediscovered a forgotten cultural resource and brought it back to life. If Chung is to take his place in history, then he should above anything else be remembered as the reinventor of *lanh my a*, *mac nua*, and *tan chau* silks.

"It was a matter of chance," he says of his rediscovery of the materials. "I noticed in our family photos that my grandmother and my mother wore *ao ba ba* and the Mekong-style black pants. I asked my mother about the fabrics, and she explained that they had a long history, but were no longer available in our modern markets. *Lanh my a* is particularly amazing – I remember examining my late grandma's *ao ba ba* and realizing that it was something really special. The material is dyed with the resin of a kind of wild fruit named *mac nua*. The rainwater makes it look more beautiful, stronger, and it also becomes smoother over time. At that time, I had my mother and our relatives in the Mekong, Tan Chau, and An Giang help me to figure out how I could reproduce them all."

"When I watched *Fashion TV* or read magazines like *Elle*, I realized that Vietnam had definitely never acknowledged a traditional material and brought it to the modern world," he says. "We always import our materials from overseas. So I thought that it would be great if I could bring out a forgotten traditional material comparable to modern ones all over the world, and upgrade it to an international standard. So that's exactly what I did."

"Maybe the path I chose is different from other designers," he admits. "I love renewing these materials, I love taking these ordinary things that were once connected to the peasantry, and elevating their status to make them high-class materials comparable to Chanel or Valentino products. That's why I like to revive these materials and give them a new look, a new context, at the fashion weeks of New York or Paris."

Despite the unique qualities of the Vietnamese materials, Chung's greatest hope is to make them more accessible to buyers overseas. "I've found that in order to introduce the Vietnamese culture to the world through the *ao dai* or *mac nua* silks, it shouldn't be done on a rigid framework," he says. "Instead, it needs to be more relaxed and open. A foreign guy looking at my designs should feel that his wife, his sister or his mom could wear it. I think that five or ten years ago, it was necessary to wear an *ao dai* to introduce Vietnamese culture to the world, but now that's no longer true. I believe that in order to attract people to love our traditional materials, we should create a non-particular costume. It just shouldn't be confused with other cultures and should be made from our own materials. It should give people a feeling that 'that could really work on me.'"





# SEW

*Breaking into fashion and  
design one stitch at a time*

# WHAT?

*Text by NPD Khanh  
Images by Ngoc Tran*

## HUY



## VO

“EVERYONE WANTS TO learn about fashion and clothes these days. They want to know how to design clothes, how to choose clothes, how to wear clothes. But the truth is, there aren’t that many qualified to teach,” says Huy Vo. Along with Do Manh Cuong, a Vietnamese designer renowned for his work with Christian Dior and Dominique Sirop, Huy is part of a new wave of up and coming young designers to watch.

There are 14 public and semi-private universities, countless private vocational schools, international academies and specialist courses teaching every aspect of design and

fashion business in Ho Chi Minh City alone. “It’s true that there are many classes and fashion academies these days. But, it’s more or less an industry fact that outside of a rare handful, these classes and schools are really not worth the money spent on them,” says Huy. “Look at all the big name young fashion designers in Vietnam right now, the ones born in the 80s and 90s. Do you know how many of them graduated from a local fashion school? None. All the best in the business are those who studied overseas in cities like New York, Paris or Milan, whereas the Vietnamese schools combined have not produced





one designer of note.”

Huy is an alumni of the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising in California, US and according to him, fashion classes and curriculums in Vietnam lack sound educational methodologies and systematic knowledge, a result of wanting to ride the wave of popular trends rather than evoking critical thinking and forward planning. “The students who come from these courses and schools,” says Huy, “have a tough time surviving the cutthroat industry. Most won’t make it and will have to find other careers.”

There are two types of fashion courses in Vietnam and each has their own distinct flaws. The first one is the design-heavy bachelor or diploma programs in fashion universities or academies. “They’re flight classes for dreamers,” he shares. “The teachers teach their students how to fly. They would tell the students to design whatever they want, to design without cautioning them of the reality of clothes making. Indeed students from these classes have beautiful designs, but the problem is, they lack the skills to execute their own visions, so when they graduate, they have absolutely no survivability in this industry.” Fashion designs coming from these graduates, notes Huy, also tend to be at best impractical and at worst impossible to recreate in real life.

On the other end of the spectrum, are fashion courses that teach short-term tailoring taught by trade schools or working tailors. One would think these technically heavy courses would provide what the first type lacks, but according to Huy, they are far from adequate. “They would teach you how to make a dress or a shirt

*“I make no grand promises. I’m not going to tell people that if they join my class they can make such and such money or land so and so job.”*

in these classes, they would tell you where to cut and how much to measure and where to tuck in the fabric, but they would not explain why and how these techniques are always used together and why this cut and not that fits a particular body shape better than any others. The results of these classes are simple tailors who don’t actually understand the nuances of fashion design, aesthetics and clothes making. All they can do is make clothes to order. It is frustrating for me to watch because I think if you are going to do something, you should do it right, not halfway like that.”

#### NO PROMISE POLICY

Huy’s frustration with the lack of proper training within the industry has fueled him to take matters into his own hands, literally, with scissors and a sewing machine and start Fashion Course by Huy Vo (Facebook: *fashioncoursebyhuyvo*). “It happened by accident,” Huy shares. “My opinion is not popular with many people in the industry, but I’m still very outspoken about it. Many of my friends, because they have heard talk about this so many times, asked me why don’t I show them how to do it right. So I started giving people lessons. At first it was just friends and acquaintances and very informal. Then we made a Facebook page and before I knew it, I was approached by people outside of my circle wanting to know how to create fashion the right way.”

Huy holds informal classes in a three-storey building at 14 Ton That Dam in District 1. The same building holds his design studio and is the headquarters of his fashion company. His courses are for beginners to advanced and can cost anywhere from VND500,000 to VND1.5 million, depending on levels and the exact focus of each class. Typically a single course comprises of eight sessions that takes place over a month. “But if I see that my students need more time to learn, I will give more sessions,” he adds.

A single class has a maximum of six to eight students, most being owners of their own clothing store or employees of local fashion companies sent by their employers. A few are young locals with an interest in fashion but not the pocket or time for big programs from established academies. “I make no grand promises. I’m not going to tell people that if they join my class they can make such and such money or land so and so job. I’m not one of those big schools that promise the world and then bail out when all is said and done. I want to be honest with my students. If they give me their best, I will give them my best too.” Despite his no promise policy, some of his best graduates have already joined his fashion company or he has found job placements for them within his network.

“A fashion designer is both an artist and craftsman. He or she must know both the abstract and practical sides of fashion. If you want to succeed as a fashion designer,” he says. “You must first learn how to crawl, then how to walk, then how to run, and maybe then you will find out if you have what it takes to fly.”





# MODEL

*She is a supermodel, author, UNICEF Vietnam  
Goodwill Ambassador, singer and television  
host, but who is the real Ha Anh?*

# BEHAVIOR

*Text by Michael Arnold  
Images Provided by Vu Ha Anh*

HA



ANH

AS THE LIGHTS above the catwalk begin to sparkle, the evening's big names strut forward in pairs, all leather and dusky cottons and denims. It's launch night for Harley-Davidson's Black Label fashion line – and the hottest name on stage is supermodel Vu Ha Anh, a tower of curves and confidence with her cherry-red locks and big shades, her hips cycling ahead like pistons as she flashes her metal salutes at the crowd and belts out the brand's catchphrase with a maniacal cry, “*Are you ready to live outside the lines?*”

As the event's host, she's the focus of every single guest, every high-profile celebrity and lucky media invitee transfixed by the show – and yet, just 24 hours beforehand, she was only mine, plain-faced and worn-out after her six-hour crimson dye, nothing of the slinkiness and sultriness of her public image – a different woman entirely. I wasn't there to ask her about her latest big fashion shoot or to milk her for juicy gossip – instead, during our hour together over coffee, we chatted about writing. The real Ha Anh, as it turns out, isn't at all about high heels and bikinis. In fact, she's a bit of a book nerd.

“I love writing,” she enthuses, as she tells me about one of her proudest achievements to date – not modeling for Madame V Lingerie or taking to the runway for the Paris Ethnic Fashion

Week, but rather publishing her first book, *La Toi, Ha Anh* (It's Me, Ha Anh). In part an emergence from her blog of the same name, the book is rare in the celebrity world for not having been written by a ghostwriter, and it reflects the model's literary background – she's the granddaughter of Vu Tu Nam, formerly the head of the Vietnamese Literature Association and a famous author; her grandmother Thanh Huong was the editor of a woman's magazine, while her father works in the film industry and her mother is a journalist.

“As a kid we were always encouraged to write, when we were little, to read and to write,” she says. “We would write poems and short stories. My grandparents desperately hoped I'd be a writer. Or a journalist like them. But part of me wanted to be different... I thought, I'm not going into a specialist literature class. I'll go into the English class. But I love literature.”

“My book is actually a lot of different stories,” she explains. “It's random stories; it doesn't have a structure. It's broken down in chapters, like how you feel, like finding your destiny. A chapter about traveling, a chapter about love, a chapter about family. That as a whole – it's me. A lot of people said, ‘Oh, you're very arrogant, why would you write a book about yourself?’ I say well, everyone's looking for themselves. The way I say ‘It's Me,’ I hope that everyone will find their own identity in my stories about everyday life and how I see it. My stories are very gentle and loving, and through them, people see a different me.”

It's hard to reconcile the smoking hot images of Ha Anh that even a cursory web search will bring up (do not try this at work) with the charmingly goofy aspiring author sitting across from me at coffee. She agrees completely that she has a split personality – but it's a very conscious divide.

“I see my public life very much as work,” she admits. “It's work – and I'm not faking it, but when I give people energy when I perform, it's just what I do. I treat it very seriously. But when I'm out of the

public light, I'm a very intimate person, and I only want to share things with the people whom I like or love. I don't like to go in public places and hang out or meet lots of people. Sometimes I think of myself as being very antisocial. I don't want to sit and smile with people, I just want to be in my own zone.”

#### GROOMED LIKE A MAN

Actually, the divide between the glamorous Ha Anh and her plain-Jane alter ego couldn't be more distinct. Far from being groomed as a model or entertainer, Ha Anh's English studies and good family background saw her enrolled in a very fine British school, where she read in marketing. Initially with zero interest in fashion or makeup, the thought that she might actually be beautiful never even occurred to her – and being rather taller than average was initially nothing she was particularly thrilled about. It wasn't long, however, before she became aware that the opportunity was there to follow a different path than the one her studies were taking her down – but with a grounding in core marketing principles, she arrived on the modeling scene pre-packaged with a full understanding of how the business works.

“I see myself as a brand,” she admits. “I think that nowadays being a beautiful face or having a beautiful figure doesn't count for much. A brand nowadays, that's the global idea of the supermodel, having a celebrity there to represent a lifestyle. To achieve that lifestyle, you need to have character and personality. That's what you bring to the table. Can you influence people? Do people admire the way you live, the way you think, the way you present yourself, the way you love, what you eat? That's all a money-making business.”

“Actually, I never thought before that I was beautiful or attractive at all as a teenager,” she adds. “But being a model, you start to be more aware of your body, of who you are as a woman, what kind of beauty you have. So it makes you more confident, it makes you more aware of how to keep your figure, and then you make yourself look better as you grow.”

Looking at Ha Anh's body of work, with all its sensual gravity, it's somewhat jarring to understand it all as a marketing exercise. That, it has to be said, is part of the mystique of the fashion business, just a function of how it brushes its glamor on top of everyday lives – especially those of its own models. That's far from saying that Ha Anh's performances are disingenuous, however – on the contrary, she's probably more passionate about the business itself than you'd expect from her pictures.

“I feel like when I'm committed to something, I don't look at other options,” she says. “It's like when you're in love with someone, you don't look at another person, right? I'm very focused in how I see things, and to me although modeling wasn't my first choice, at the same time I didn't know what else I could have become. I studied marketing just because I felt that I wanted to be creative, so I thought that maybe I'd work somewhere in advertising so that I could fit in, so that I could bring my ideas to the table. Now, looking back, would I be able to cope with an office job? I don't think so. I think I'm not built for it.”

As one of Vietnam's more international figures – one of the country's very few showbiz exports – she's not always viewed kindly back here at home. She has no hesitation in saying that there





*“I see my public life very much as work. It’s work – and I’m not faking it, but when I give people energy when I perform, it’s just what I do. I treat it very seriously.”*

is no fashion industry in Vietnam, and she claims that her assertive nature is not always understood in this country.

“People who’ve not worked with me, because they see you in magazines all cold and looking as fashion portrays you, they mistake you for that,” she says. “I have a different way of expression from other Vietnamese women. I’m a woman who can speak my mind and is sometimes not afraid to talk back. It’s not in our culture to speak back to anyone at all. People say you’d better just sweat it out or shake hands and not say anything to keep face. I think that for me, I’m quite an idealistic person. Maybe it’s because of my grandparents. Sometimes I ask myself why I can’t just be quiet about something – because I know that sometimes if you can swallow things in certain situations, it will be economically better for you.”

“But my belief is that Vietnam is very young in terms of fashion,” she continues. “I’m lucky enough to have the exposure of living abroad for ten years, and I know what it takes to be a model, to do casting, to be rejected, walking around and doing different jobs. I know that, and I want to tell people that this is a serious job, like being able to appreciate a creative person in any other field. To me,

it’s important to me to speak up and get fairness for people who are in a lesser position than me who don’t know what they should get, what they deserve to get for different things. Sometimes I feel it’s my duty to speak up, although I know that sometimes it goes against my personal benefit.”

If our coffee and the fashion show have proved anything to me, it’s that there are two Ha Anhs. There’s the performer who is very clear about the pomp of the business, and then there’s the somewhat reclusive writer figure. I have to admit that I like the latter more, but it seems that in mild-mannered Ha Anh’s next book the two will meet at last – although perhaps not quite in the way one would expect.

“It’s about living in a man’s world,” she enthuses, back on her favorite subject. “The world I live in is men. All men. I act like a man, because it’s a business world, a world where you have money, where you travel excessively. Sometimes I think exactly like a man, because that’s how I’m groomed to be.”

There you have it – Ha Anh, groomed like a man. Google her fashion shots and see if you can believe that.

# [BE]SPOKEN

*Discussing menswear, Neapolitan tailoring  
and Fall trends with Luis Antonio Torres*

## LIKE A TRUE

*Interview by Christine Van  
Images by Ngoc Tran*

## GENTLEMAN

LUIS ANTONIO



TORRES

ANTONIO LUIS TORRES has an alter ego named Massimo Ferrari. "Mass," as he's sometimes called, travels the world but is at home at Cafe de Paris as he is in some smoky back room in Macau. Born to an Italian winery father and French-Brazilian heiress mother, Mass's actual age is unknown but ranges from 35 to 46 depending on which passport he shows you. He is often seen in Switzerland during the winter months. You will regularly see his parked Mercedes Benz Gull-wing outside Fer A Cheval, his favorite restaurant. He routinely summers in Capri, stepping off a private jet with his tie stuffed in his jacket pocket, but it wouldn't be a surprise if Mass hitchhiked from London to Cambridge after a night at the Clermont Casino simply because he wanted to... However, this year sees Antonio taking back his identity as he sits down with *Oi* to explain the evolution of his brand and the fashion industry's dos and don'ts.

### TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF.

I am the Creative Director and Founder of the Massimo Ferrari brand in HCMC. Seven years ago I acquired my own factory with my partner Ken Ly and we ventured into developing our own men's brand. We started this brand because at that time there weren't any quality men's boutiques to buy clothing from. We carved ourselves into a niche market and our reputation has earned itself the highest accolades in the local market as well as being one of the first pioneers to embark on producing a domestic luxury brand within Vietnam.

THERE ARE MANY WELL-KNOWN VIETNAMESE DESIGNERS LIKE NGUYEN PHAM ANH TUAN, VO VIET CHUNG AND NGUYEN CONG TRI WHO DO WOMENSWEAR, BUT NONE THAT DO MENSWEAR. WHY?



The men's market here is not booming because of fashion training and education, and the fashion business is not teaching men how to dress and why [there is a need] to spend money on clothing. For the men who do shop with us, it has been an education for them in color, quality, cut, style, lifestyle and understanding. Getting into the mind and lifestyle of the client are key. Trust is also the key factor to win over the local men's market here. If you say you're a luxury brand you had better own it. Because it's very easy to see what is real quality and what is not. Many men here have never really had to put a suit or a nice pair of shoes on in the past, however, nowadays, they are having to realize that they must match their wives or their girlfriends or their thriving businesses.

**A LOT OF DESIGNERS THROW IN THE WORD "BESPOKE" TO JUST ABOUT ANYTHING THAT NEEDS A LITTLE TWEAKING SO THEY CAN CHARGE MORE, SO THE WORD HAS LOST SOME OF ITS TRUE MEANING. WHAT DOES "BESPOKE" MEAN TO YOU?**

First of all, the word "bespoke" has become a bastardized word. The true meaning of this word is 100 percent handmade and created for you, which means the patterns made are created for each individual customer. Each individual client has a meeting with the head designer and tailor, consults on the fabrics, weight, constructions of the jackets and fit, then we take the vital measurements. Once this is completed, we then draft a pattern of the jacket and pants or shirts then begin to make a muslin or try-on garment. This garment is then marked and chalked in the first fitting, taken back to the atelier for adjustments and corrections then sent back to the store for another fitting. The process may seem daunting to some but for those who want a truly "bespoke" experience this is the way it is done. Bespoke takes time. It's a journey down a sartorial path to create the perfect cut.

**YOU IMPORT YOUR MATERIALS FROM OVERSEAS BUT HAVE THEM ASSEMBLED HERE, WHY? IS CRAFTSMANSHIP IN VIETNAM CONSIDERED LOW QUALITY?**

All of our leathers, fabrics, buttons, hardware, etc are all imported from Italy, France, UK, Japan or Spain. These countries have had hundreds of years of experience making fine quality fabrics and leather tanning and, quite frankly, they've kept that knowledge in Europe for centuries. The materials of a garment are nearly 95 percent of the entire game. If I were to sew a local cloth with completely handmade stitch work, it kind of makes no sense to sew that level of quality on shoddy fabrics. We have been looking for local fabric and leathers here for many years. We have tried a few prototypes, but we can't ever say that it looks or feels like luxury.

Vietnam is perceived as having an inferior fabric industry or catering to mass volumes and low quality brands. Most of the yarns needed to produce fabrics are not even coming from Vietnam; no cotton plantations are here to support that in Vietnam. Therefore, all the yarns must be imported, which takes months and also requires huge minimums, so most local fabric retailers a) don't have a customer base to sell this and b) cannot reach the minimums to buy from the mills. So unless your fabric and brand business is focused on luxury production or high quality weaving, it makes no sense to import high grade yarns into Vietnam. Then there is the investment in machinery and water treatments that are required to produce high grade fabric like the ones we buy from Europe. Very little investment has been put into the luxury sector in Vietnam, and that is why most of the manufacturing that is done in Vietnam is mostly labor, not full package.

**YOUR BACKGROUND IS IN NEAPOLITAN TAILORING, DESCRIBE WHAT THIS MEANS. AND HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM HOW MEN DRESS IN VIETNAM?**

Neapolitan tailoring is, in my opinion, the art and essence of fine handcrafted Italian tailoring and style. Neapolitan tailoring, first

of all, is all made by hand not with machines. There are many techniques to these jackets that cannot be done by machine and therefore, this is why a lot of makers here don't know how to do these sorts of jackets. Most all of the jackets we make are all handmade in every aspect. We are not just talking about a few decoration stitches, we are talking about the inside, the linings, the canvas, the chest pieces, button holes, the collars, everything. The next most critical point about the Neapolitan jacket is the softness and the weight. The Neapolitan style is always soft, supple and deconstructed. We use 1/2 canvas or full canvas chest pieces for structure, but the thickness and application of these components are super light. Hence, you have a tailored jacket or suit that looks the money, but are soft and lightweight and natural to the wearer.

There are also key Neapolitan nuances on the shoulder line, sleeve heads and sleeve setting which earmark a Neapolitan jacket. Most of the men in Vietnam, I would say, are wearing suits in the American or British cuts. Those cuts are nice to some, however, they oftentimes have too much padding on the shoulder. They are heavy, bulky and have no drape. They fit very boxy, and they are stiff and robotic looking suits. Once men try a Neapolitan style jacket that is made for them, I can say that 90 percent of them will never turn back to the ones they were making before or buying off the rack. Once they try this drug, they are hooked for life.

**DO YOU THINK SAIGON WILL EVER BE ON THE SAME LEVEL AS MILAN, HONG KONG, NYC, PARIS, OR SHANGHAI?**

I do believe Vietnam has the potential to become one of Southeast Asia's fashion hubs in the future, however, more than anything else, in order to get that status, the government and the apparel industry in Vietnam must boost the local industry and brand Vietnam as a country where luxury and high quality products are made and are being sold. Throughout Asia, Vietnam is looked at as cheap among other Asian countries so the industry first has to work on removing this idea, then we can start to see the fashion industry here boom. The next problem is the tax levy on imported luxury brands. Consumers in Vietnam with dollars to spend go overseas to buy luxury goods because they are sometimes 40 percent less than the prices in Vietnam for the same products. How does that help build a luxury and a consumer market domestically? It doesn't. In fact, money that could be spent here is now going into Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong and many other developed Asian markets. In order for Vietnam to ever see the retail and fashion light, there is so much that needs to be done in these two aspects. The real question you should be asking is: Will people, brands and designers be patient enough for things to change or will they just move on to other markets that understand how retail and country promotion of branding works? And if that happens, then what is the result? That's the course Vietnam is on now.

**IF YOU CAN THROW AWAY JUST ONE ITEM OF CLOTHING THAT EVERY VIETNAMESE MAN WEARS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

The plastic cream color slipper. Turn it back into some other rubber product.

**WHAT'S TRENDING THIS SEASON FOR MEN?**

Lots of tweeds for Fall. Green, orange and blue are the colors to start picking up as they are this season's colors.

**WILL YOU EXPAND INTO WOMENSWEAR? WHAT'S NEXT FOR MASSIMO FERRARI?**

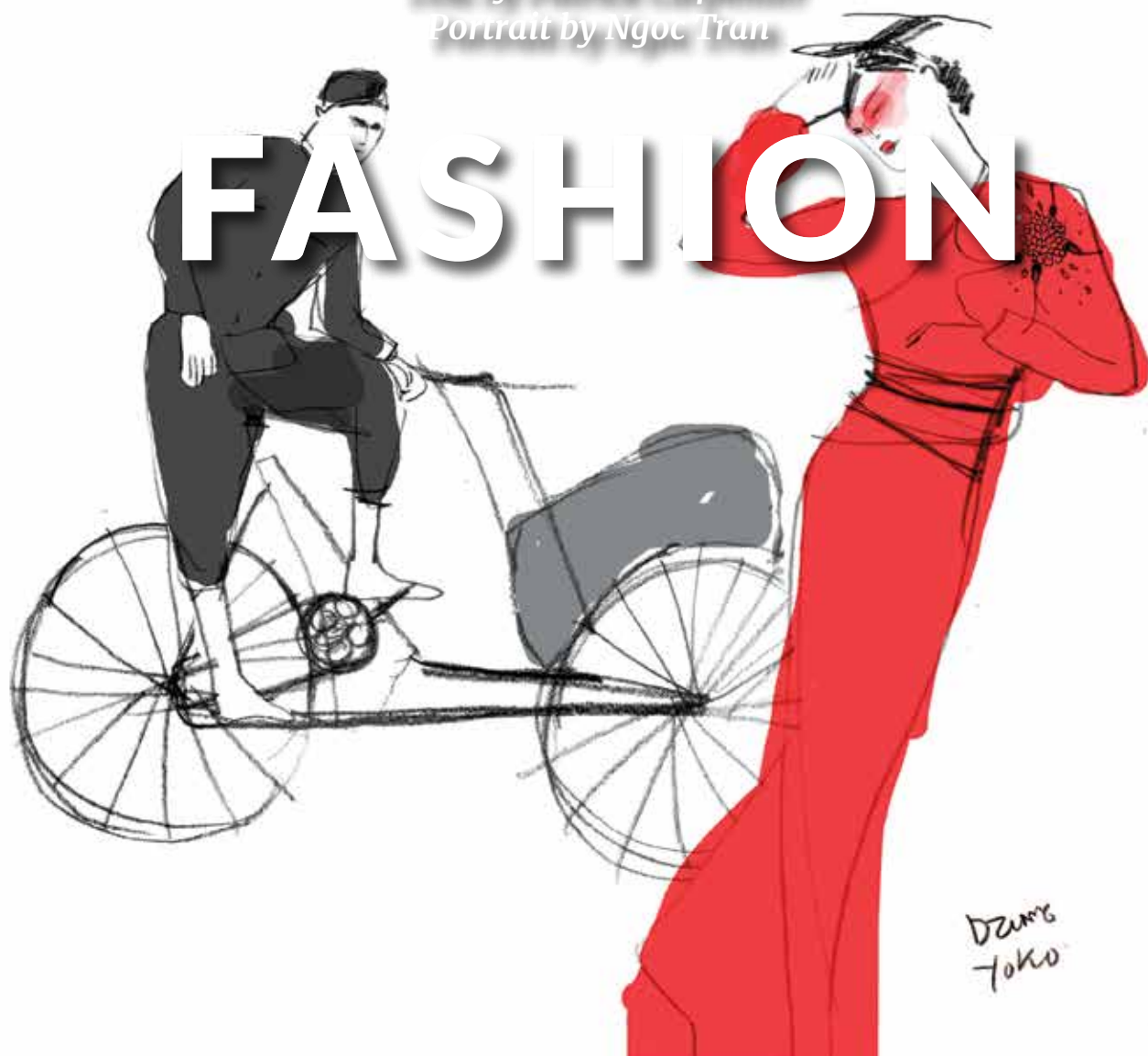
For now our focus is totally on menswear. Not to say that we don't do women's already because we do - it's only in bespoke ranges. The next move for Massimo Ferrari is rebranding the name to Antonio De Torres. This will take place this fall as we expand the brand internationally to Singapore and Shanghai.



*Exploring the connection between art and fashion with  
award-winning fashion illustrator Dzung Yoko*

# WHEN ART MEETS

*Text by Patrick Carpenter  
Portrait by Ngoc Tran*





# DZUNG



# YOKO

DZUNG YOKO WALKS in and before he gets to the third table, our table, he is stopped by three fashionably dressed men who fawn over him and congratulate him on his success. He thanks them genuinely and comes over. For a man so influenced by movies, it's appropriate to pull a line from an old Humphrey Bogart film: "He's like any other man, only more so." Dzung is neither tall nor short. He wears his hair short but not too short. There is something slightly more than a shadow on his chin. His clothes are the unprepossessing comfort and color uniform of many creatives: dark t-shirt and jeans. Unlike others in the fashion world, what you see reveals little of what's in store. But once he shares pieces from his creative process, it's easy to marvel at all that's stored inside his head.

Dzung was going to be an architect. That was the plan. But one day, on a trip to Thailand in 2003, he went into a bookstore where there were imported fashion magazines from floor to ceiling. Vietnam didn't have anything like this at the time. The magazines were not about products as much as they were about atmosphere and aesthetics, showing that one could live a life of art, could live a life in art.

"The first magazine I bought was *L'Officiel* from Italy. The photos were not just photos, they were stories. Every feature was a narrative. I found this very striking, very beautiful. It was life elevated by passion," says Dzung. "Every time I traveled I bought these magazines and soon I had a large collection. I just absorbed them – all the photos, the features. They were art and they fascinated me. So I moved on from studying architecture to graphic design and fashion. That is how it all began."

Dzung may have left architecture behind, but if you look carefully at his work, you can see the training in arranging space and light is still very much with him. His compositions are carefully balanced between subject and setting, color and space. "After studying architecture, I started designing CD covers and artwork. I worked with singers that were out of the mainstream, who made very unique, personal, experimental music. For the artwork, I always used the space to set the mood. A lot of singers start with the styling; I started with the atmosphere. From there, I created the concept and then the styling. It was this work that brought me to the attention of *ELLE* magazine, which had just arrived in Vietnam. They saw me as a concept artist and asked me to work with them. One year later, I said OK."

Architecture is not the only influence that is evident in his work. There are traces of other visual masters: the films of David Lynch (*Mulholland Drive* a particular favorite), the grand playfulness of Tim Walker, and the graphic pen and brush work of Edvard Munch and Egon Schiele – two early 20th century European artists known for their intense emotionalism, vivid color and distorted lines that made their subjects seem more alive and confrontational.

Dzung aims to do the same. "Good composition is not enough. There must be more in the photo. I always start by sketching the space in order to know how I will manage the work. And I send my sketches of the space to the team, so that we can all

start with confidence and a common understanding. From this, we are free to explore the real emotion of the scene, to give it passion. When you have passion, your work has impact."

What Dzung saw in those first magazines he brought back to Vietnam nearly 12 years ago still pushes his work today. "What I have learned in working in fashion is that it is not about the product as a product. That is only a shallow idea. It is about everything around it – the particular world and the values and life experiences that go into it. Every product began from an inspiration: nature, or art, or a particular culture, for example. From this inspiration came the development of its character. And my challenge is to show in one photo or one series of photos all the qualities and values of this character to the reader, so that they can be so inspired. By working this way, you also educate yourself in terms of living a life of quality. You learn to see, to appreciate, and be inspired. It becomes a life philosophy."

It is this life philosophy that he is taking, after more than three years as Art Director with *ELLE*, to *L'Officiel* Vietnam as Creative Director. "It was very difficult to leave *ELLE*. It was a great place to work and to learn. With *L'Officiel*, I can continue to explore, to blend art and fashion, but to take it deeper." *L'Officiel* Vietnam is getting in Dzung a talent self-taught from Western products and perspectives, but with an exceptional sensitivity to Asian and local pulses. "Many Western magazines often take a minimalist approach to their features, their content. I don't think minimalism works so well in Asia. Perhaps because of the way life is lived: the culture, the style, the layers of history, the life on the street – this all translates to photos and features with many layers. Not a lot of stark, sharp images. I think we prefer layers and atmosphere over absolute clarity."

The coincidence here is that Dzung's on-the-job education has been mirrored by the growing sophistication of the Vietnamese consumer and local fashion industry. Ten years ago, there was little available – both in terms of international products and media. Incomes were only starting to rise, and with them the opportunity to travel outside the country and beyond the region. The Vietnamese fashion industry was in its infancy and trying hard to get noticed. There were plenty of fashion shows but the products had trouble finding customers. There were talented designers, but few were able to put the whole package of identity, customer, publicity and production together. But what a difference a decade makes.

"From ten years ago, Vietnam's fashion scene has become very current. The designers and the customers have seen more through travel and through more international products coming here. It has opened their eyes and minds, and inspired new creativity. And I am seeing now that customers, both men and women, from every level are looking for individuality, not just brand status. This is good for our designers – if they can figure out their place in the market. But they have to be quick and they have to have a real feeling for where the market is going. If they can do this, then you see they are really appreciated by the customer. And it is a real pleasure to work with such designers."





# PHOTO

*Meet one of Hong Kong's premiere fashion photographers known for his surreal compositions and success in bridging commercial with fine art photography*

# FINISH

*Text by NPD Khanh  
Portrait by Ngoc Tran*



# OLAF



# MUELLER

OLAF MUELLER MAY be best known in some Saigon circles for his successful catering business, but he just may be fashion photography's best kept secret. A name frequently associated with top brands including Christian Dior, Lancome, Cartier and Vacheron Constantin, the acclaimed fashion photographer has purposely chose to keep a low profile in his adopted home of Vietnam, preferring to take on photographic projects elsewhere. All that may be about to change come September 1, when Olaf is set to open his own photographic art exhibition and boutique event space.

Born to German and Korean parents in 1980, Olaf spent much of his younger years traveling the world, living in Saudi Arabia and studying in India and Singapore, and eventually earning a degree in real estate from the German European Business School which led him to Hong Kong. However, as it turns out, fashion was to be his calling.

"My first contact with the world of glamour and fashion photography was in Singapore," Olaf remembers. "I worked as a commercial model during my teen years. That was when my interest in photography was piqued. I'm also half German by blood and full German by my father's teaching, and you know Germans – we don't do things by half. Before I knew it, I was fiddling around with my father's old camera and experimenting with techniques I'd learned from working with professionals on the job."

Olaf developed his craft during an interesting time in photography – the transition from analog to digital cameras in the early 2000s. To Olaf who had spent years learning the ins and outs of film photography, from the snap of an image to the developing of negatives in a dark room, the change was both frustrating and liberating. "On one hand, suddenly there were a thousand other photographers who had spent maybe a few days learning photography all snapping shots whenever and wherever they pleased. On the other, digital camera brought with it many opportunities and many photo processing tools that the analog camera simply didn't have."

In an effort to differentiate himself from the rest, Olaf learned to combine the detailed techniques and fine execution of the analog camera with the powerful photo processing capabilities provided by digital tools. This blending of both worlds would later on become his professional signature, enabling him to become the first Western photographer to really succeed in Hong Kong, previously a market reserved for Asian photographers.

In 2004, he founded Icebreaking Advertising Limited with a friend as partner. In 2009, sponsored by Prestige Hong Kong and AIDS Concern, Olaf held a solo photography exhibition featuring Sharon Stone and 26 premier Asian celebrities to raise money for the charity foundation. His images, with their artistic vision and bold creativity, immediately captured the attention of art lovers and collectors in Hong Kong.

A fan of Salvador Dali and Annie Leibovitz, Olaf similarly blends dreamlike and realistic visual elements, and is known for his elaborate set designs and borderline obsessive attention to details. In one of his early works, he shot American actor, director, and producer Daniel Wu standing in a suit in a forest with twenty umbrellas suspended from a leafy canopy. "I want viewers to be captivated by the vision they see," he explains. "I want them to not

know if what they are seeing is real or the product of Photoshop. I want that uncertainty, that suspension in between."

Olaf went on to found his own company, OM Studio (later on to become OM Production) specializing in photographic visual production. Through OM Production, he participated in both big name commercial contracts with fashion houses and prestigious magazines as well as photographic art projects such as Dragon Garden Heritage and Cat Street Gallery in 2010.

By the time Olaf arrived in Vietnam for the first time in 2013, he had worked in Hong Kong for over a decade and had shot more than his fair share of Hong Kong urban beauty. "I've dried up all the places I can shoot in Hong Kong," he confesses. "Vietnam is a new place, full with inspiration, and that's the most important thing to an artist – inspiration."

"Saigon has a unique energy," Olaf continues. "It's young but it's laidback. It has an open space about it, unlike Hong Kong where everything is built upward. Each district also has its own air, its own aesthetics. District 1 looks and feels different from District 4. District 2, where I live, is a completely different country from District 3, and they are only a short bike ride away."

Despite having been approached by many big name brands in Vietnam, Olaf has taken on few photographic contracts with local clients. The reason, says Olaf, is that he feels the local industry is not ready for someone like him. "They like to play it safe in Vietnam," he explains. "The Vietnamese clients have little trust in the photographers they hire. They want the photographers to shoot beautiful pictures... according to *their* direction. In other words, they want a finger clicker and that's something I don't want to be."

That may soon change as the Vietnamese industry matures and clients and art lovers become more demanding and acquire increasingly bolder tastes. With the opening of his private photographic art exhibition space, Room 37 (37 Ky Con, D1), Olaf hopes for the opportunity to soon put his own spin on fashion photography in Vietnam.

*"I want them to not know if what they are seeing is real or the product of Photoshop. I want that uncertainty, that suspension in between."*

# MY LIFE AS

Text by Kuynh Chi

# A MODEL

KUYNH



CHI

I STARTED MY modeling career at the age of 17 in Seattle, US with Totokaelo, a store featuring designer Jill Sanders and other edgy clothing brands. It was the first retailer I modeled for. It was difficult juggling school and this very demanding part-time job. I always had to be ready. I carried around a humongous bag, inside would be shoes, my makeup kit, a change of clothes, not to mention things that would help me through the rainy weather in Seattle.

I signed with Heartbreak Management for three years, a modeling agency based in Copenhagen, Denmark. I've been working in New York and around Europe, and once in a while I visit Vietnam for fashion shows and shootings.

My parents have always worried about me, and my entrance into the industry really made them even more nervous. They often told me how working as a model can distort one's priorities as well as one's real value of themselves. I've always been grateful for their insights and the guidance they have given me throughout the years.

There are two things I love: cooking and traveling. I'm fortunate to have a job that allows me to fulfill the latter, and whenever I have time I research new recipes and my family are the guinea pigs for my food experiments. I try to do things that can help me balance a very hectic career and building up who I am.

There are a lot of mysteries surrounding a model's diet, but to me a healthy body boils down to three things: food intake, exercise and peace of mind.

I don't have a specifically strict diet. I try to eat a lot of fruits and vegetables, avoiding carbohydrates, and eat a hearty, meaty meal three to four times a week - I think that's how I keep binge eating in check.

Vietnamese food is a real escape if you want to eat flavorful, fulfilling food with little calories. I'm extremely grateful to have a Vietnamese heritage; I find recipes from the street foods I've tried and recreate them with maybe less noodles and rice and more filling things like lean meat and greens. My all-time favorite Vietnamese

dish is *bun rieu* - a crab meat noodle soup with crab, tofu, tomato, morning glory and shrimp paste. I find that it has everything to fill you up and it's an explosion of flavors. I usually eat this at Ngon restaurant on Pasteur. Beside Ben Thanh market there is also a small *bun rieu* stand but they stop selling around 5pm - I find it a bit too hot to eat on the street before 5pm so I usually miss it. I'm on a constant quest of finding the best *bun rieu* spot in town.

One important thing I've had to learn was to find low-calorie substitutions for my favorite foods. For example, I used to chow down on mac and cheese but after realizing the amount of calories I was taking in, I switched to small servings of fresh cheese cubes and slices of melon. I don't beat myself up whenever I fail to control the craving for unhealthy foods, but I'm much more aware of what I'm eating and how it really affects my health and weight.

The biggest trouble with dieting or eating the right amount is cravings. I find that only a busy schedule can keep me away from overeating. I understand very well how terrible unhealthy foods can be so I try to fill up my time and keep them out of my apartment, not having them available helps me maintain my weight.

As a model, perhaps the most important skin care step is makeup removal. After each shoot, I sometimes have to spend half an hour doing this. If not, the residues cause my skin to break out. Besides that, I also use sunscreen religiously. I try to keep foundation and blemish base cream at bay because they can cause a viscous cycle - the more makeup you put on, the more your skin breaks out, thus the more makeup you will need to use.

I find that exercising makes me feel more energized and better about myself. It's not the biggest part about keeping an ideal weight, but it tones up my body and teaches me discipline. It's not easy to do and it's not something I can do on my own, so I sign up for local aerobics classes three times a week.

Forget all the drama and catfights you've seen on television or in movies, this is the life of a model.



# Wine & Dine

■ IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN











Forefront: Chicken *tikka masala*, Background: Goa fish curry

# Gravy Train

A nostalgic food journey back to India

TEXT BY JOEL ZORILLA IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

AN OVER-EXCITED INDIAN who grew up in England, a tired American who had just survived two months in India and I, a foodie who had also visited the South Asian country, walked into the newly relocated **Tandoor** (39A - 39B Ngo Duc Ke, D1) to once again explore our fascination with Indian cuisine. As we sat down we noticed the decor was a seamless blend of Islamic touches like arched windows along with statues of Hindu gods and goddess. Another thing we observed was, despite the restaurant's high-end appearance, their prices were reasonable. Take advantage of their set lunch that includes two starters, two mains, bread, rice and salad for VND145,000 (Monday – Friday; 11am - 2:30pm).

My friend Narinder, a proud Indian whose family hailed from Punjab, insisted that the only way to test a restaurant's culinary skills with his motherland's cuisine is to taste their chicken *tikka masala* (VND169,000), which we happily obliged. To my surprise it may have been the best chicken *tikka masala* I've eaten.

The chicken was so tender it seemed to melt in my mouth, perfectly seasoned with *tikka*, probably my favorite Indian spice, doused in a wonderful tomato, butter and *masala* gravy - this was the winning star at Tandoor. Together with the Kashmiri music serenading us we were transfixed in time and place on this nostalgic food journey through one of the richest and most complex cuisines on the planet. Where in the West we rely on salt and pepper to season a dish, Indian cuisine is layered with many spicy inventions, taking one's taste buds on a roller coaster ride never to be forgotten. Tandoor does what most Indian restaurants outside of India reluctantly must do - tone it down - however, Tandoor toes the line between originality and necessity extremely well, even leaving my Punjabi friend satisfied.

I must preface by adding that prior to our dishes arriving, the friendly staff brought out two sauces - tamarind and green chutney - that set the tone for our meal. The green chutney was a spectacular add-on when drizzled on most anything. My

companions and I devoured the large mixed platter (VND169,000) of fried delicacies that included vegetarian *samosa*, vegetarian *pakora*, and egg *pakora* with abandonment, smothering the pieces unceremoniously with green chutney a must. Usually not a fan of *samosa*, I have to admit this was one of the best I've encountered: a mix of crunchy fried shell with coriander-filled potato stuffing - a great first taste along with the *pakor*as (different mixes of vegetables, spiced, dipped in batter and deep fried). All were satisfying in a way most deep fried comfort food are. Our second appetizer, another one of Narinder's insistence, was a new experience for me, the *shami* kebab (VND169,000). The dish originates from Punjab and is essentially meat patties perfectly grilled in a tandoori oven infused with various spices and served with an onion salad.

Of course I couldn't leave without ordering one of my favorite dishes - the Goa fish curry (VND139,000). Unlike most Indian curries, the Goan style comes with coconut milk. The fish was white and flaky, cooked well and the curry sauce was a wonderful mix of spices with a creamy texture left by the coconut milk. I could have gone on eating it for days on end. The Goan fish curry and chicken *tikka masala* had a gleam to them, which as explained by Narinder, is due to just the right amount of butter added to both sauces - butter being another reason why Indian food is so heavenly.

As we sipped our refreshing mango *lassi*





(VND65,000), a yogurt-based shake found throughout India, we ordered breads baked in the restaurant's in-house tandoori oven - fluffy butter garlic *naan* (VND45,000) and the phenomenal *aloo paratha* (VND55,000). Bread is something India does exceedingly well along with France, Italy, Germany and most countries in the Middle East. The *naan*, if done correctly, has the consistency of airy, light pizza dough covered in roasted garlic and dripping with butter and Tandoor does it well. The *aloo paratha* is a splendid mix of unleavened dough and spice-infused mashed potatoes baked with plenty of butter. Doused in either green chutney or tamarind sauce, you will be screaming for more. Finally satiated, this was where our culinary ride back to India ended. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: *Shami kebab*; *Samosa*; and *Mango lassi*



# Prost!

Bavarian comfort food  
in the heart of the city

TEXT BY JULIAN AJELLO

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

WHEN CONTEMPLATING GERMAN food, one conjures up images of Oktoberfest and all the stereotypes that accompany the famous festival. Men in lederhosen singing on top of long wooden tables, heaps of bratwurst and sauerkraut, and massive steins overflowing with ale served by beautiful young maidens are de rigueur. As stereotypes go, they're not so bad. However, German cuisine exists beyond the early weeks of October as well.

For the denizens of Saigon who wish to explore the hearty world of German gastronomy, **Brotzeit** (Kumho Link, 39 Le Duan, D1), a high-concept restaurant chain from Singapore, offers a great place to get started. My companion, who is of German descent, and I sauntered in on what we thought would be a quiet weeknight to see how well it measured up. What we found was a bar and eatery filled with folks from the German Business Association drinking and cavorting at decibel levels not quite rivaling those of an Oktoberfest celebration, but enough to display just how lively Brotzeit can get.

We were greeted promptly and warmly by one of their managers, Daniel, who made sure we had two half-liters (VND121,000 each) of Paulaner draught beer, one dark and one blonde, both unfiltered. Filtered versions are also available as are full liters (VND242,000), and 300mL glasses (VND79,000). The dark unfiltered one was unquestionably my favorite, but all are worth a try.

With beers in hand we started making our way through a surprisingly extensive menu that includes salads, pizzas and dessert in addition to traditional fare. We opted to begin with a fresh pretzel (VND39,000) and an order of deep fried emmental cheese. Brotzeit bakes its own pretzels and bread, so there is no questioning freshness. Soft and encrusted with the right amount of salt, the pretzels beg to be doused with tangy mustard for every bite. Sharing works, but only amongst the closest of friends. The portion of emmental cheese is quite satisfying and served with a dipping sauce concocted from cranberries and cream, which provided a fun and unexpected contrast. Of course, the cheese went well with the mustard, too. If there are two things the world can always enjoy more of, it's mustard and cheese.



Pretzel



Smoked pork sausages





Sauerbraten



Oven roasted pork knuckle



Fried cheese

With many wonderful offerings on the menu, I insisted we also sample some sausage in addition to a few dishes that were recommended by our host as well as my companion. In what proved to be an overwhelming amount of food, we ordered the smoked pork sausages (VND230,000), sauerbraten (VND285,000), and the oven roasted pork knuckle (VND450,000).

The smoked sausages, imported from Germany, were served with German potato salad and sauerkraut. I find German potato salad to be the best of all potato salads. Brotzeit's version is mild, but very tasty. The sauerkraut, also imported from Germany, is aged well and not the least bit dry, although a bit on the mild side. The sausages were spot on and had the right amount of snap to them. Dipped in mustard, they are every bit what I hoped they would be. Sauerbraten, which my companion was keen to try right from the jump, was fantastic. Using imported American beef, Brotzeit's sauerbraten is braised, slow roasted, and smothered in thickened red wine gravy, accompanied by a mound of stewed red cabbage and napkin dumplings. Everything about this dish will bring people back for another twirl on the dance floor. The beef is tender and savory, the cabbage very tender, and the napkin dumplings are excellent. They also help to sop up the extravagant amount of gravy.

Nothing prepared me for the arrival of the oven roasted pork knuckle, which happens to be Brotzeit's signature dish. Coming with generous sides of sauerkraut and potato salad, this menu item is not meant for one person, no matter how voracious an appetite; it's monstrous. They serve it with gravy made from braising pork bones, and there's plenty to make sure every bite gets a dab. Although, you should make sure to order up some extra mustard because this piggy likes to roll around in that, too. The meat itself is tender and juicy, while the skin and rinds are crispy and crunchy, providing a great contrast in textures. There is seemingly no end to the amount of meat one can cut off the knuckle, as you will find it clinging to the bone everywhere. This should be enough to satisfy two people, or perhaps four who are looking for an ambitious bar snack.

For those looking to try German food that isn't just sausages and pretzels, or if you're simply in the mood for some Oktoberfest fare during the middle of summer, Brotzeit can accommodate (although Daniel admitted they are going to celebrate Oktoberfest this year). They're also equipped with plenty of large screens to watch soccer matches, particularly those with German rooting interests, so it doubles as a place to view a good game. With a new location looking to open up in District 2, Saigon should be able to get plenty familiar with one of the heartiest of cuisines for some time to come.

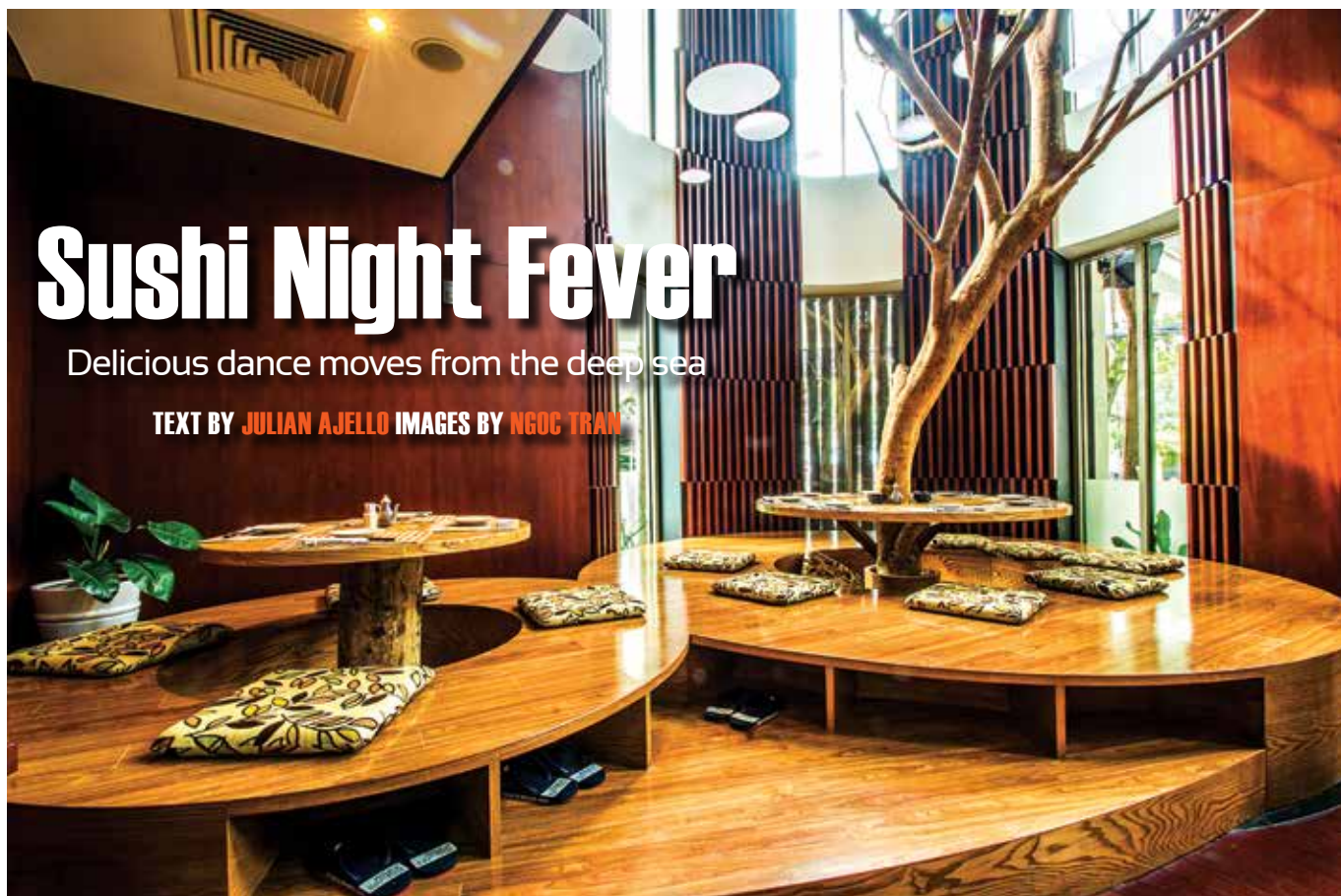
*Brotzeit will be celebrating Oktoberfest on October 2 & 3 with a German buffet and free flow of imported German beer for VND1,650,000 per person. ■*



# Sushi Night Fever

Delicious dance moves from the deep sea

TEXT BY JULIAN AJELLO IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



MOST EVERYONE KNOWS what sushi is and that it comes from Japan. What many probably *don't* know is that the original sushi, called *nare-zushi*, originated in Southeast Asia somewhere along the banks of the Mekong. *Nare-zushi* is still prepared today in Japan, but bears little resemblance to what is recognized internationally as sushi. A man named Hanaya Yohei is credited with creating the contemporary version of sushi sometime around the mid-19th century. As with many cuisines, they are adapted to suit particular tastes. Sushi is no exception as it was adapted to Western preferences in California and it has continued to evolve since.

It wasn't long ago that Saigonistas seeking to indulge a sushi craving had only one or two venues from which to choose. Now options other than the usual suspects and conventional haunts include ritzy rooftop settings complete with elegant cocktail bars, louder atmospheres that boast music and go go dancers, and street sushi served al fresco on some of Saigon's sidewalks that once catered strictly to snail lovers.

Then there is **Sushi Dining AOI** (pronounced ah – oi; GF Saigon Pavilion, 53 - 55 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, D3), named for a species of flower native to Japan. Electing to leave opulence and gimmicks to others, AOI exhibits an understated sensibility that offers a minimalist, yet very functional setting. Temporary screens separate tables in the main dining room while larger groups may congregate at circular tables built around trees, giving patrons an atmosphere that feels distinctly

Japanese. Not content with supplying merely the proper surroundings, their chefs all trained in Japan for several years before returning to Vietnam to apprentice alongside Japanese chefs for a further two years before taking the reins.

While the environs may be understated, the sushi most certainly is not. With my dinner companion having canceled on me, I asked Tu, the assistant manager, to order for me. I was treated to several rounds of delightful creations from both their cold and hot kitchens (the sushi bar was under repair that evening). The meal began with a selection of sashimi, which included special imported Japanese tuna (VND349,000), fatty tuna (VND479,000), yellowtail (VND310,000), and scallops (VND189,000). Each one was wonderful and worth going back for, but the Japanese tuna was most remarkable in taste as well as tenderness. I can't recall ever having any tuna sashimi so sublime. The scallops also proved to be so delicate they weren't very long on the tongue. I wished there had been a few more to savor! I enjoyed the yellowtail immensely, if for no other reason than its rarity around town. Fatty tuna has never been one to light up my palate, but devotees of *toro* tuna will be delighted with AOI's imported variety.

Accompanying the sashimi was an order of *maguro yukke* (VND98,000), which is raw tuna in spicy sauce. Presented in a shaped mound and topped with a perfectly formed raw egg, the eyes are the first to feast. While the sight of a bright yellow egg yolk in all its uncooked glory may give pause to many, a moment of courage is

all that's required to take the plunge and bask in what is one of AOI's most popular menu items, especially amongst their large Japanese clientele.

The lineup of raw *nigiri* sushi included surf clam (VND112,000), flying fish roe (VND52,000), shrimp (VND48,000), ark shell (VND72,000), soused mackerel (VND48,000), and *kobujime* (VND60,000). If there is ever a cut of sushi that could be termed *al dente*, it's the ark shell. It has a firmer texture than most and is worth sampling. The soused mackerel was oily and strong and another that will reward those who can tear themselves away from the tuna and salmon habit. The *kobujime* is lined with kelp and a special *ume* sauce. The finished product is a bit chewy and a stronger taste, but discovery is part of the sushi experience and this certainly

## HOW TO EAT SUSHI PROPERLY

- *Nigiri* sushi is best eaten with the fingers. Dip it into the soy sauce fish side down.
- Rolls and sashimi should be eaten with chopsticks.
- When served rolls, sashimi and *nigiri* sushi, eat the *nigiri* first as it tends to dry out, followed by rolls, then sashimi.





enhanced my visit.

Asking a sushi chef to serve you what he enjoys making is always a wise strategy. Chef Hieu prepared a selection of his favorites, admonishing me not to dip them in soy sauce or wasabi. They included some cooked versions of salmon belly (VND76,000), *kohada* (VND38,000), yellowtail belly (VND149,000), and grouper (VND46,000). I admit a bias against the cooked sushi and prefer to order raw, but each was delicious and an eye-opener. AOI is the only sushi bar in Saigon where one can order *kohada*, making it nigh obligatory. If you've never sampled it, you'll enjoy discovering it, and if you have, you don't need any convincing. The yellowtail belly and salmon belly were revelatory for me. They're certainly worth reconsidering one's stance on raw versus cooked sushi. The grouper, also delectable, was excellent.

Items from the hot kitchen were the last to arrive at the table. Deep-fried oysters (VND124,000) that would make any New Orleans po' boy aficionado nod in approval were served with a sweet dipping sauce. A delicious surprise, they may be habit forming. And last was the tempura. A selection of vegetables and seafood lightly battered and served with a delicate sauce capped the evening and stretched the limits of my waistband.

AOI's breadth of menu does not hamper their ability to deliver quality, service, or taste, making return trips as necessary as they are anticipated. One of the more attractive features of sushi may be that even if your friend cancels, your date stands you up, or you just feel the need for some alone time, there's a seat waiting at their sushi bar where you can sidle up and ask Hieu what he wants to serve you. ■



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Tempura assortment; Sashimi assortment; Special sushi selection; Rainbow roll; Seaweed salad; Spicy tuna salad with raw egg; and Deep-fried oysters



# Cool Food

A chic underground supper club with fabulous food for famous people

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD**  
IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**



FROM TOP: Litchi Chilitini; and Tom yam bisque

LET ME TELL you how to get into the ‘in’ club in Saigon. First, wander down Ky Con past all the squalid hardware stores, then slip inside the old colonial facade at number 37, and take your position at the bar alongside all the other beautiful people who’ve discovered the city’s latest diamond in the rough, **Saigon’s Lookout** (37 Ky Con, D1). Seemingly designed solely to be as freaking cool as possible, the venue is a

destination-from-scratch that serves as a restaurant, gallery space, whisky & gin bar, and intimate nightclub for the young and the creative.

Officially launched last month by its seriously stylish owner – international photographer and fine artist Olaf Mueller – the venue manages to consciously convey a consistency of concept and attention to detail that breathes visual and culinary

art. Intended both as a hub for networking artists and an outlet for the artistic flair of its owner and its young, energetic staff, Saigon’s Lookout is perhaps the city’s first true underground supper club, an enclave of fine dining for the famous, the fabulous, and perhaps the otherwise curious.

While the restaurant is still new, it shoots for a personal touch so as to generate a sense of community. You’re likely to bump into Olaf himself at the bar – he’s intent on building up the service to the point where regulars can sit themselves down and be welcomed by name, their ‘usual’ served right on arrival. Relax and take some time to enjoy the specialty cocktails (all VND160,000) – they’re the result of in-house experimentation with local fruits and flavors set off against international standards. While the hands-down popular favorite is the Litchi Chilitini, which is a vodka-based tropical heatwave in a martini glass that carries a serious burn, you may also be tempted by the Berry Sensitive – a fresh concoction of berry juice and a splash of sprite with light and dark rum for the kick – or the Saigon Summer, a take on local streetside botanical drinks with cucumber, lychee, gin and ginger ale.

If the drinks menu seems fairly colorful, it’s part of the overriding aesthetic that influences everything on the menu – which Olaf calls the “twist.” Rather than aim at straightforward fusion recipes, SL’s chef Hoang has been given license to break new ground with ‘twists’ on every dish, experimenting with various cooking traditions, ingredients, and a range of Asian tastes.

At a venue where creativity seems to be permanently dialed to 11, you can expect your meal to be extraordinary right from the first dish. We started with a pairing of two polar opposites – a *tom yam* bisque (VND110,000), with all the hot and sour tastes of the classic Thai staple cleverly blended with the creaminess of a French seafood soup. Following on, the foie gras terrine (VND380,000) was enthusiastically presented as a blend of two distinct and contrasting preparation techniques and served with a subtle Hue apricot spread rather than the typically sweet fruit sauce – and with a crown of caviar placed on top almost as a flourish of jewelry.

For main courses, Saigon Lookout’s kitchen starts from a Vietnamese base and looks outward to other Asian traditions. A good example is the countryside salad (VND120,000) which is somewhat like a rocket salad – although where some classic recipes would call for bacon or anchovies, SL uses a tastier snakehead fish cheek – and the central herb, known as pepper elder, is one that is fondly remembered by many local Saigonese. The dish swaps in century eggs to stand in for bland boiled ones, and the cracker of parmesan cheese and Vietnamese dried beef is so popular that this dish is often ordered for that feature alone.

We enjoy a poached sea bass on a bed of creamy guisse leaf with brown rice and

pumpkin flower (VND220,000), a take on a northern dish cooked sous-vide to retain the flavor and fried in milk and cream. It's straight comfort food, immensely easy on the palate – while the duo of pork leg & pork belly with mixed bean ragout and pickled mustard leaf (VND250,000) is more of a welcome challenge. The chunks of pork are very reminiscent of Saigon circa 1976 when trays of braised pork and bread were carried on the shoulder by vendors across the city – anyone who's lived in Vietnam a while should know that taste. Paired with a distinctly Indian fennel-based mustard, it is very pleasantly aromatic and one of the most unique items on the menu.

We polish up our mains with the beef/short rib with Vietnamese-style ratatouille (VND280,000). It's the only concession to imported ingredients – the beef is sourced from Australia/New Zealand because of the way the meat stays fresh and pink. It's beautifully tenderized with a tamarind & fish sauce in beef gravy, and served with pepper elder on a potato mousseline.

You'd be correct to presume that Saigon's Lookout saves its best surprises for last. While an intriguing *tom yam* ice cream is available, we went for a variety made with Phu Quoc myrtle wine (which tastes similar to a good port) and tangerine peel ice cream (VND100,000), deliciously exotic with a side of sweet potato and braised

pear. We followed up with one for the road – a smoky sin shooter (VND120,000), all fresh tropical fruit juices soaking in gin and infused with lavender smoke that hits all the senses at once.

If you just want to stop by for lunch, Saigon's Lookout has an equally interesting menu on offer – with feature items based on the beloved hamburger, but with a distinctly Eastern take without tomatoes or lettuce. Essentially, the dishes and décor both are reflections of the humble elegance that serves as the heart of this impressive and yet unpretentious venue – it's open to all, but try not to be too boring when you get there, or you may just miss out on the whole vibe. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Foie gras terrine; Countryside salad; Poached sea bass with creamy guisse leaves; Braised pork belly; Beef short rib with mousseline; and Myrtle ice cream



# Don't Burst My Bubbles

Pop the cork, it's time to celebrate with Champagne



EVEN THOSE WHO don't usually drink hardly ever say no when offered a glass of Champagne. Champagne has launched thousands of ships, toasted billions of weddings and special occasions; flutes attended countless parties, and shared untold special moments between two people. Champagne is the wine of celebration. No other wine is so associated with joy and festivity. Its meaning and appeal are universal.

The world's most famous sparkling wine was discovered by chance in France centuries ago and now there are roughly 300 Champagne houses, many with distinguished international reputations. However, what most people don't know is how different and

unique the Champagne making process is compared to still wines. While still wines are made by pressing grapes, getting the must, and then waiting for it to ferment and generate alcohol (OK, is quite much more complex than that!), Champagne winemakers start with the same process as with still wine but once the wine is bottled, which is still high in acid and low in alcohol, the winemaker will add a precise amount of yeast and sugar to the wine, which is immediately capped. This will lead to the start of a second fermentation that takes place inside the bottle, and takes around 30 days to complete. This second fermentation will generate carbon dioxide but as the bottle has been closed it cannot escape, hence it will dissolve



**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](http://www.wineinvietnam.com).

with the wine, creating the famous bubbles.

After aging, an elaborate procedure is used to collect the sediment in the neck of the bottle and dispose of it. The wine is then topped up and then released for sale. However, Champagne must spend a minimum of 15 months maturing in the winery cellar, with at least 12 of those months aging on the lees (dead yeast). Vintage Champagne (which guarantees that it has been produced only with grapes from a particular year) must be aged for a minimum of three years, but most producers exceed this minimum.

Vietnam is spoilt for choice when it comes to Champagne options, with famous brands like Pol Roger, Gosset, Tattinger, Lanson, Moët and Nicolas Feuillate available in most major cities. My best recommendation is to forget about reputation and try what you like, as quite often we end up paying a high price not necessarily due to the quality of the Champagne but to cover the high advertising costs that make some so famous.

One of my favorites, Nicolas Feuillate, is affordable and gorgeous. And if you want to spend more money, try one of their premium Champagnes like the vintage, which is absolutely delicious.

## What I am Drinking this Month

Bellingham Basket Press Shiraz (South Africa). Wow, wow, wow, this is a real big wine from an unknown winery in a non-popular country, but wow again! So expect an incredible aromatic nose: violets, caramel, red and black fruits, and a little leather. On the palate it is gorgeous, great balance, rounded, decent length and an amazing complexity, especially considering it is a New World wine. Plums, hint of figs, red and black fruits, and, yes, lots of complexity. Best paired with beef, but roast pork, lamb and some Thai spicy curries will also do. Distributed in Vietnam by the Wine Warehouse. ■

# Raise the Steaks

With lots of steak smothered in melted cheese, it's easy to see why Philadelphia is proud to put its name on it



Vietnamese chef **Jack Lee** ([www.chefjacklee.com](http://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, D1). His biography *You Don't Know Jack* by O! writer NPD Khanh will be released later this year.

LIVING FAR FROM home is never easy. After being away from the States for an entire year now, I've found there's a whole lot of stuff I really miss. Out of all of them, the one thing I find myself craving the most these days is a decent Philly cheese steak sandwich.

They're not impossible to find around here, but the problem is that I've already been spoiled by the best.

Three years ago I visited Geno's Steak in Philadelphia, famous for its perfect Philly cheeses. Their sandwiches are flawless in execution, with just the right proportion of cheese melted over the beef, making every bite gooey and flavorsome with the sweetness of the onion – and crunchy with the crispness of the crusty bread.

I have missed the taste of that sandwich so much that I've been looking for its equal all across town for at least two months now, but it's not easy to find such a restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City. It's unfortunate that Vietnam lacks the proper authentic ingredients to make a great Philly cheese steak, and in any case they're not as straightforward as they seem when you try to put one together in the kitchen.

It's an elusive quality you're looking for. A certain richness in the cheese. A moist tenderness in the meat. The bread needs to be just the right kind to avoid any sogginess before it hits the plate.

When the craving refused to subside, I felt compelled to give it a shot myself. To put together the ultimate HCMC Philly cheese steak, I did my best to source the closest locally-available components I could find to recreate this delicious sandwich right here. I went on the lookout for bread with crispy crust, rib-eye beef with some marbling fat, a nice caramelized onion and some decent cheese. Instead of a Hoagie roll, I use a local-style baguette. All of these ingredients needed to be as easy on the wallet as they are on the palate.

It may not be Geno's, but I present to you Jack's Cheese Steak Sandwich. ■



IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

## JACK'S CHEESE STEAK SANDWICH

- 1 (12-ounce) boneless rib-eye steak, chilled in the freezer for 45 minutes
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 medium bell pepper, cored, seeded, and thinly-sliced (optional)
- 100 gm medium yellow onion, thinly sliced
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 4 ounces provolone cheese, thinly sliced (or cheddar)
- 2 baguette rolls, split horizontally and toasted

Makes: 2 sandwiches with seared strips of steak, sautéed onions, and plenty of cheese on a crusty baguette.

Push all of the vegetables to one side of the pan. Add the sliced steak in a single layer, and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the meat is no longer pink (about 3 minutes). Reduce the heat to low.

Divide the steak into two piles roughly the size of the baguette. Place half of the vegetables on top of each steak portion. Lay half of the cheese over each portion of steak and vegetables. Cover the pan with a tight-fitting lid and let it cook undisturbed until the cheese has melted (about 3 to 4 minutes).

Using a flat spatula, scoop each pile into a roll and serve immediately.



# >>The List

# Wine & Dine

## BARS



### Blanchy's Tash

Known for its cool house music, live DJs at weekends and innovative range of cocktails. Downstairs is a trendy bar where the glitterati 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**



### Chu Bar

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

**158 Dong Khoi, D1**



### Harry Casual

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**



### Last Call

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**



### O'Brien's

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 have live music.

**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 & beverage. We also have a enclosed relaxing garden for the family.

**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 Tung.

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

### Donkey Bar

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 glass or bottle.

### 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**

### onTop Bar

Located on the 20th floor of Novotel Saigon Center, onTop 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**  
**3822 4866**

### 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 Bar

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 pizzas.

**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, Q'vans from 9pm Wednesday to Monday.

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

# CAFÉS



## Bach Dang

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 upper levels.  
**26-28 Le Loi, DI**



## Café RuNam

No disappointments from this earnest local cafe consistently serving exceptional international standard coffee. Beautifully-styled and focussed on an attention to quality, Café 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, DI**  
[www.caferunam.com](http://www.caferunam.com)



## Chat

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**



## MOF Japanese Dessert Cafe

Matcha Zen Garden - Peace, Serenity and Beauty. MOF, Saigon's 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) 3823 9812 / [www.mof.com.vn](http://www.mof.com.vn)**



## 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**  
**3520 9099**  
[dine@icasianasaiagon.com](mailto:dine@icasianasaiagon.com)



## The Workshop

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 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, DI**



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# CHINESE



## Dragon Court

The 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**



## Dynasty

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](http://www.saigon.newworldhotels.com)



## Kabin

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**



## Li Bai

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](http://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 Guangdong.

**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, D1**  
**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, D1**  
**3911 8822**

### 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](http://www.7kyquan.com)

### Shang Palace

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 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](http://www.intercontinental.com/saigon)





# SPANISH



## La Habana

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, D1

[www.lahabana-saigon.com](http://www.lahabana-saigon.com)



## Olé

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  
012 6529 1711



## 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, D1  
090 399 25 39



## Tapas Saigon

Tasty 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.

53/26B Tran Khanh Du, D1  
090 930 0803



## VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill

VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill only 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



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49D Xa Lo Hanoi, District 2  
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"Baba brings India to Vietnam"



# FRENCH



## Augustin

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

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 Saigon.

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



## Le Terroir

Le 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, D1



## Ty Coz

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 choices.

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, D1  
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, D1  
3821 3056

### La Villa

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, D1  
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



For full review, please visit: [www.oivietnam.com](http://www.oivietnam.com)

# INDIAN



## Ashoka

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

### Ashoka I

17/10 Le Thanh Ton, D1  
33 Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2



## Bollywood

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)



## Ganesh

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

### 38 Hai Ba Trung, D1

[www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com](http://www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com)



## 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



## Tandoor

Tandoor has recently moved to a new location. The restaurant serves authentic South and North Indian cuisine, with set lunches available, in a spacious dining area. Offers free home delivery and outside catering. Halal food.

39A - 39B Ngo Duc Ke, D1  
39304839 / [tandoor@tandoorvietnam.com](mailto:tandoor@tandoorvietnam.com)



## The Punjabi

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



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# ITALIAN



## Ciao 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.saigonrestaurantgroup.com/ciao

*Ciao Bella*



## Inter Nos

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 guests can taste the honesty in the food.

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



## La Bettola

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 CRI-07, 103 Ton Dat Tien, D7  
5413 7932



## La Hostaria

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

Mediterranean food meets the Italian flair at LovEat. Home made scrumptious 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...

### Casa Italia

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

### Opera

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

Achaya Café 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, spaghetti, pizzas, steak and special Japanese sweet desserts.

90 Le Loi, D1  
093 897 2050  
11am - 10:30pm



## Ebisu

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 good sakes.

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



## Gyumaru

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

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



## Monde

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

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

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

### Chiisana Washi

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

River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2  
6683 5308



### K Cafe

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

74A4 Hai Ba Trung, D1  
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.sushidiningaioi.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 all-you-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



## Lee Cho

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 street-style 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



## Seoul House

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 grills.

**33 Mac Thi Buoi, D1**  
3829 4297



## Won's Cuisine

One of the city's most important Korean venues – not 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 taste.

**49 Mac Thi Buoi, D1**  
3820 4085



# 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

## Koh Thai

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, D1**  
3823 4423

## Lac Thai

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

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, D1  
3829 5368 / [www.norfolkhotel.com.vn](http://www.norfolkhotel.com.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, D1.  
5D Nguyen Sieu, D1  
Unit CRI-12, The Crescent, Phu My Hung, D7  
[www.elgaucho.asia](http://www.elgaucho.asia)



## 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



## Nossa Steakhouse

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.

36 Pham Hong Thai, D1  
[www.nossa.vn](http://www.nossa.vn)



## Pho 99

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  
536-1 Bui Bang Doan, D7



# foodpanda

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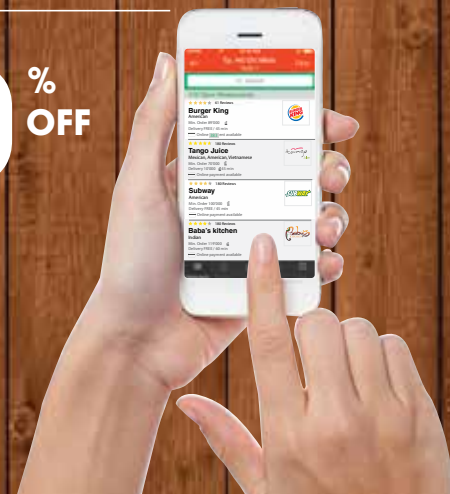
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# VIETNAMESE



## Five Oysters

Five Oysters serves authentic and excellent Seafood & Vietnamese food with draught beer at VND10,000 as well as a promo of VND10,000 per fresh oyster daily. There's also a rooftop, a great place to start or end the night! Recipient of Certificate of Excellence 2014 from Tripadvisor and Top Choice 2015 by Lianorg.com. Recommended by VNexpress.net, Lonely Planet, Utopia and Saigoneers.  
**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**



## Papaya

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 Chan, Binh Thanh**  
**6258 1508**  
**papaya@chi-nghia.com**  
**www.chi-nghia.com**



## Quan Bui

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**



## Quan 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

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...

### 3T Quan Nuong

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**

### Com Nieu

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 traditionally-styled 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 universal palate.

**101 Vo Van Tan, D3**  
**www.highway4.com**

### Hum

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**

### May

Fine 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, 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 cuisine.

**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 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

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



## Brotzeit German Bier Bar & Restaurant

Brotzeit serves authentic Bavarian cuisine such as Schweinshaxe or Pork Knuckles, Nürnberger sausages, Weisswurst - Bavarian white sausages and more in a chic and contemporary setting. Brotzeit also has the widest selection of premium German beers, made according to time-honored German beer-brewing traditions. The restaurant is ideal for chilling-out, business meetings or get-togethers with friends.

**Kumho Links, 1st Floor,  
39 Le Duan St., Ben Nghe Ward, D1  
(08) 3822 4206  
www.brotzeit.co**



## 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. Offering unparalleled panoramic views from nearly every table, the restaurant brings exquisite Western and Asian cuisines from locally sourced produce and top 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 & 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

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

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, D1  
382 48358**



## Zombie BBQ

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, District 2  
6685 3756 / 09 1851 0139  
4pm - 11pm  
Facebook: ZombieBarbequesaigon**



## Also Try...

### Boathouse

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

**40 Lily Road, An Phu Superior Compound,  
D2  
3744 6790  
www.boathouse.com.vn**

### Boamarang Bistro

Located in The Crescent by the lake, the spacious Boamarang Bistro Saigon serves Australian and other Western food in the most pedestrian friendly, relaxed part of town.

**107 Ton Dat Tien, D7  
www.boamarang.com.vn**

### Cali Burrito

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  
(E006), Phu My Hung, D7  
Delivery: 090 255 0533  
Facebook: Cali Burrito**

### Chit Chat

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 cakes.

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

### Deutsches Eck / German Corner

The 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 König Pilsener, Bitburger, Koestritzer Black Beer, HB-Hofbrau Weisse, Schwarzbrau Exquisit, and Schwarzbrau Weisse.

**A001 Nguyen Van Linh St., Phu My Hung, D7 / 54106695**

### GreenS

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**

### Hog's Breath

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

**Ground Floor, Bitexco Financial Tower  
2 Hai Trieu, D1**

### Khoi Thom

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 new-

world 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**

### TnT BBQ

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/tntribbqvietnam**



# Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY LINDSAY JUBECK













# Cape Chicken

Swap clouds for clear skies, noise for silence and streets for sand at the northernmost point of South America

TEXT AND IMAGES BY **LINDSAY JUBECK**

PULL OUT A map of the world, find South America, put a finger on the northernmost tip of Colombia - this is the Guajira Peninsula. At the very end, surrounded by the Caribbean Sea, lays Punta Gallinas (Cape Chicken) - dry, hot and seemingly barren - inhabited only by lobsters, spiky succulents, the tough indigenous Wayuu people and their goats. Punta Gallinas doesn't resemble its home country or its neighbor Venezuela. It is a place where the desert meets the sea. Miles of arid plains and an unforgiving rainy season makes the already unkept roads impassable part of the year. Regardless of what month, this is not an easy place to reach and these days, only the most intrepid of travelers make it here.

*The Lonely Planet* Colombia guidebook paints the area out to be a traveler's 'holy land': "Punta Gallinas is the kind of mystical place you read about in books...or

see in movies...Those that make the effort will be rewarded with one of the most dazzling landscapes in South America, a sanctuary of solitude that equals travel Nirvana."

While traveling in the area, it was an easy decision to join a few newly met friends from my hostel who were also heading to this isolated part of the world. A light daypack replaces my heavy bag, which, along with my valuables, I've left safely at my hotel in Santa Marta. Based on the advice of those who went before, we scribble a rough plan on notebook paper. This provides breadcrumbs to guide us on our way.

We catch a bus to the rugged city of Riohacha, mentioning to the driver we're heading for Cabo de la Vela. He drops us at a hectic intersection just outside city limits. Here, men working at the bus stop

usher us into a covered pickup truck filled with barrels of water, bottles of oil, sacks of onions, Wayuu women and children, and a couple of other backpackers.

The overfilled truck bobs and squeaks as it speeds over roads in various states of disrepair. At this point, the scenery begins its dramatic transformation. Any amount of tropical vegetation once visible, morphs into brown and orange soil spotted with cacti and livestock. Dry and dusty desert air replaces the suffocating humidity of the Caribbean. We've now entered an eco region referred to as xeric shrublands, characterized by prickly, leafless trees and succulents. Though this landscape seems harsh and unforgiving, it is home to surprisingly abundant flora and fauna.

Nearly an hour's ride from Riohacha is Uribia, a hectic little town resembling a wild frontier outpost. According to travelers and locals, this is the last stop in "civilization," the last chance to use an ATM and to buy water and supplies for a reasonable price. According to legend on the Guajira, beer is cheaper than water. Those venturing any further must stock up and catch a 4x4 truck to the remote fishing village of Cabo de la Vela. The next ride is significantly longer and bumpier than the last. Passengers are crammed into the back of another pickup loaded with supplies. And finally after four hours, we arrive.

Spanish explorers first set foot on this cape in 1499, making it, along with coastal Venezuela, the first place on South American mainland ever seen by European eyes. Gazing across Cabo de



la Vela's wide empty dirt roads, treeless red earth and rows of tiny houses made of sticks, lining a wide-open coast, the area appears untouched by time. In this part of the world, with limited internet and a budding tourism infrastructure, there's little choice for accommodation. Most visitors opt for a USD5 shared room featuring rustic dirt floors, hammocks and a communal bathroom. People don't visit these parts for luxury. In addition to adventure opportunities, miles of breezy, desolate beaches make Cabo a haven for kiteboarding fanatics. For those heading to the edge of the peninsula, this is merely a halfway point.

Now the real adventure begins - finding a way to Punta Gallinas. Two main options currently exist: catch a direct boat or hire a driver with an all-wheel drive vehicle. We quickly learn boats do not operate this time of year because of the dry season, so we're left with the task of locating a truck and driver. It's best to follow basic human instincts in these unconnected parts of the world, which can be tough after years of smartphones, Google Maps and high speed internet. We seek 'Guajira water,' and head to a local *tienda* (shop) for a few cold dollar beers. Here, we meet a friendly English-speaking Colombian man who offers his assistance. This begins an old-fashioned wild goose chase starting with "Paco, the juice man," and ending with the bar owner on the edge of town, who offers to take us for a fair rate. Knowing he will earn far more chauffeuring a group of foreigners, our driver closes shop for a few days and picks us up early the next morning.

### Candy Bandits

The ride to Punta Gallinas is a wild adventure, a living example of every cliché ever written and spoken claiming the "journey is the destination." The roads on the peninsula are nearly indistinguishable from the barren land. We see nothing but the flat land surrounding us. A herd of horses run alongside our truck, a man on a motorbike trails behind. We see Wayuu

people riding their bike across an endless horizon, seemingly coming from nowhere, pedaling to nowhere. The Wayuu people are descents of the Arawaks, a tough ethnic minority group who successfully drove away conquistadors during the Spanish Conquest, allowing their continued inhabitation. Today, the Wayuu are known for their matriarchal social structures and for their skillful weaving, evident in their high-quality handmade bags and hammocks.

Our driver stops for a quick stretch at the base of a large saline lagoon surrounded by mudflats. He points to wild American flamingos in the distance, balancing on stick legs and feeding on brine shrimp snatched up from the soupy mud.

Traveling farther into the Guajira, we arrive at a roadblock - a chain running from two cacti on both sides of the road. Traditionally in Colombia, roadblocks such as these are reason to fear - visions of drug cartels and armed thieves fill our heads. The driver slows to a stop while the passengers cautiously survey the surroundings as a gang of small Wayuu children appear from behind a patch of prickly trees. Candy Bandits! Luckily, we were warned of these young mobsters and had picked up some cookies in Uribe. A particularly scruffy boy approaches the passenger side window and our driver hands over a few treats. The boy looks satisfied and scurries away. A little girl removes the chain and the truck passes.

We drive until the first major stop - La Duna. Here, mountains of golden yellow, silky sand cascade dramatically into the wild turquoise sea. We run and climb over the dunes and into the sea, rinsing our dusty bodies, basking in relief from the relentless heat.

All the traveling made us hungry. In Punta Gallinas, menu items are limited to lobster or the local catch of the day, and most opt for lobster. The novelty of an overflowing plate of minutes' fresh lobster for around USD5 is too tempting to resist.

We spend the night in a Wayuu *rancheria*, or settlement, situated on the

edge of the crumbly yellow coastline on a calm, green bay. These settlements, typical to the area and the Wayuu people, are made up of five or six structures for eating, sleeping, cooking and bathing. To better control their goat herds and prevent unwanted mixing, *rancherias* remain very isolated from the other communities in the area. The natives do not sleep on beds in the Guajira, so neither do we. Instead, carefully woven and vibrantly colored hammocks, called *chinchorros*, hang from simple, open-air, corrugated metal roof dwellings. The luxuriously soft and warm *chinchorros* make surprisingly cozy beds.

We sit on the cliffside near our accommodation and watch as the sun sets into the sea. No sounds but the wind, no distractions from modern technology. The only entertainment for the night is our lively conversation. After 11pm, the generators abruptly switch off and darkness falls on camp, leaving little choice but to sleep. We doze off to the lulling soundtrack of the blowing wind, under the bright, clear constellations above.

Because the dwellings have no true walls, the most pleasant alarm clock awakens us - the morning sky illuminated by a vibrant sunrise. Now we may choose to pay our driver another wad of cash and spend another day exploring isolation, or embark on the long ride back to the city. Running out of money, and far from the nearest ATM, we choose the latter. We leave with a feeling of gratitude that, in an increasingly connected world, these pockets of adventure and solitude still exist, and return to our big bags in Santa Marta.

If you'd like to visit Punta Gallinas, fly to northern Colombia and seek out the advice of fellow travelers in the know or friendly locals - telling you anymore would ruin the adventure. Emerson once wisely wrote: "Life is a journey, not a destination."

**BIO:** A perpetual traveler, Lindsay Jubeck is constantly seeking out adventures in new corners of the world. Follow along on her blog [www.lindsayleaps.com](http://www.lindsayleaps.com) ■



# Mercure Hoi An Royal

For a truly memorable experience in Central Vietnam, choose between a modern hotel room or a poolside suite and pamper yourself with the most comfortable accommodation in Hoi An

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY **MERCURE HOI AN ROYAL**



MERCURE HOI AN ROYAL is ideally located between Hoi An Ancient Town and Cua Dai beach. It is only minutes away from Thu Bon River, the historic Japanese Covered Bridge, and the local markets and tailors of Hoi An. The hotel features 96 spacious rooms with 42 Standard rooms and 40 Superior rooms, respectively 30 and 34 square metre in size, and fourteen 50 square metre Junior suites. The elegant interiors exhibit traditional flower motifs and vivid local colours with an air of vintage chic. The 14 luxury Junior suites have private terraces with direct access to the hotel's brand new swimming pool and garden. Each spacious room is accompanied by tea and coffee making facilities, a safe, a large bathroom, a balcony, a flat-screen TV with satellite channels and complimentary Wi-Fi internet access.

Mercure Hoi An Royal was designed in a boutique style that blends in perfectly with the local ambiance. It can accommodate all types of visitors. After refurbishment, the hotel looks set to attract leisure visitors with its range of quality facilities, appealing especially to those looking for a hotel brand that they can trust.

Among other key facilities, the Royal Restaurant offers all-day buffet-style and à la carte dining with international cuisine, while the Pool Bar is an ideal place to unwind with its selection of cocktails, coffee, tea, and tasty snacks served all day.

To meet the business-traveller demand for meetings and conferences, the hotel boasts a fully equipped boutique function room ideal for private and corporate functions of up to 20 attendees. It comes with a range of meeting facilities and technical support that ensure smooth event management.

Hoi An, historically known as "Phai Pho" or "Faifo", started as a small port town that developed into a significant trading port during the 16th through 18th centuries when many Chinese, Japanese, Dutch and Indians merchants made the town their home. Hoi An is now one of Vietnam's most delightful towns, boasting well-preserved historical buildings displaying a fusion of local and foreign architectural styles. Hoi An is 30 kilometres from Danang International Airport, while Danang is an hour flight from Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City. ■



## **MERCURE HOI AN ROYAL** **INTRODUCTORY PACKAGE**

To celebrate its grand opening, Mercure Hoi An Royal is offering a special introductory offer with rates starting from just VND 1,290,000 per room, per night with daily breakfast for two and complimentary Wi-Fi internet access. This offer is valid from now until 31st October 2015. For more information, please visit: [www.mercure.com](http://www.mercure.com) or email [reservations@mercurehoianroyal.com](mailto:reservations@mercurehoianroyal.com)



# Windy City Wonders

Chicago has more to be famous for than just the weather

TEXT BY NATHANIEL LIEBL



IMAGE BY ZAMEER ABEDIN

View from the Signature Room at Hancock Tower

A VISIT TO Chicago is perhaps best prefaced by a couple of things you shouldn't do. Don't only eat deep dish pizza. Don't limit yourself just to downtown. Don't visit when it's cold (approximately six months of the year). And don't even think about putting ketchup on your hot dog.

With those rules, you're good to go. Living just 235 kilometers northwest of Chicago, I make it a priority to visit the city several times each year. It's a trip I'm obligated to make (in-laws), but always look forward to, despite my disdain for the city's hectic traffic and its sports teams (Go Badgers and go Pack go!).

That's the last crack you'll hear me make about Chicago. Despite being America's "Second City," New York casts a very long shadow and the "city of big shoulders" often gets overlooked by west coasters. Midwest charm is still alive and well; Chicagoans are more down-to-earth and friendlier than coasties. Its citizens are proud and they'll talk your ear off if you let them. Just mention often controversial Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Spike Lee's new joint *Chiraq*, or Jay Cutler's pouty face and you'll find yourself engaged in deep, stimulating conversation.

A great place to start sightseeing is at

The Signature Room, the 95th floor of the John Hancock Center (875 N. Michigan Ave). Though the Willis née Sears Tower is taller and has a see-through walkway, it is overpriced and usually has absurd lines. A trip to The Signature Room costs you a cold beverage, which is easy to enjoy looking down at Lake Michigan, spotting the Wrigley Building and Soldiers Field. It's a great start to getting the city's bearings.

Just below is the Magnificent Mile, an overrated but obligatory stretch of Michigan Avenue filled with posh shops like Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Barneys New York. Start your architectural tour by checking out the Wrigley Building, Tribune Tower, and the Chicago Water Tower. And whether you love or hate Donald Trump, his eponymous 98 storey skyscraper (401 N Wabash Ave) is a marvel to behold. However, many Chicagoans weren't particularly pleased when Trump plastered his name on the tower last year.

Though the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 devastated much of the city, it also presented an opportunity to get urban planning done right. *The Devil in the White City* by Erik Larson details the city's rebuilding after the fire, leading up to the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and makes an excellent reading companion any

Chicago visit. Thanks to the foresight of 19th century urban planners, development stayed directly off Lake Michigan resulting in the impressive lakefront trail.

Constructed in 1916, Navy Pier (600 E Grand Ave) is the city's number one tourist attraction. The views of the city's skyline are sublime though most everything else about Navy Pier is forgettable. One thing not to miss is an architectural boat tour. Several operators cruise down the Chicago River out of the pier. It might sound touristy and kitschy, but the tour is a fascinating way to take in more of the city's history and its architectural splendors.

If you need a respite from the concrete jungle, meander down to the 300-plus acre Grant Park (337 E Randolph St). "Chicago's Front Yard" hosts Lollapalooza annually and was the site of President Barack Obama's 2008 victory speech. If you ask where to find Cloud Gate (AT&T Plaza at Millennium Park in the Loop community area) you will likely receive some befuddled looks. Mention "The Bean" and everyone will know what you're talking about. Join the masses in taking a silly selfie. Millennium Park and Buckingham Fountain can be found here as well as the Art Institute of Chicago. It would take a week





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Magnificent Mile; Navy Pier; Lake Michigan; Grant Park; The Bean; and Chicago Botanic Garden

to give the Art Institute its due justice, but if pressed for time don't miss iconic works like *American Gothic* by Grant Wood and *Nighthawks* by Edward Hopper. Do like Ferris Bueller and take in Georges Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. An extensive Impressionist section and collection of Van Goghs are also part of the Institute's permanent works. It just might be the best museum in the world. That's not hyperbole.

Museum Campus is on the very south end of Grant Park and home to the Adler Planetarium, Shedd Aquarium, and Field Museum, which houses "Sue," the largest and most complete *Tyrannosaurus Rex* skeleton in the world. A half day can easily

be spent in each museum.

### Ditching Downtown

At this point we desperately need a break from the Loop. The city's neighborhoods are not to be missed and each has its own eclectic vibe. If you didn't yet get your shopping fix, Bucktown and Wicker Park have better offerings than the upscale Magnificent Mile. Retro and vintage gear can be found in Boystown. Though known for its deep dish pizza and hot dogs, culinary options are in abundance. During the summer months, life spills out onto Chicago's patios. A myriad of international food and drink choices await in each neighborhood. Grab a spot on the sidewalk

and watch the world go by.

To get further out of the city and take in some green, head to the Chicago Botanic Garden (1000 Lake Cook Rd, Glencoe). The living plant museum features 26 gardens situated on nine islands. On your return to the city, swing through Evanston, home to Northwestern University. It is well worth taking a stroll through Evanston's charming downtown and exploring the ivy-covered buildings on campus.

Don't skip Chicago on your way through the States. Chicago might be smack in the heart of the Midwest, but it proves this is not flyover country. The people are nicer too. Just don't go putting ketchup on that Chicago dog. ■



# The “It” Factor

Inside Nha Trang’s Diamond Bay Resort & Spa

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES PROVIDED BY DIAMOND BAY RESORT & SPA

THE YEAR WAS 2008. Barack Obama became America’s first Black president, Usain Bolt took home the double-double and Michael Phelps racked up eight gold medals at the Beijing Olympics and *No Country for Old Men* cleaned up at the Oscars.

That year also marked Diamond Bay Resort & Spa in Nha Trang putting Vietnam on the world’s radar for hosting the 2008 Miss Universe pageant in its colossal Crown Convention Center. The first major US-based television production to take place in Vietnam since the end of the war, the brand-new resort welcomed hosts Jerry Springer and Melanie Brown (aka “Scary Spice”) and featured a fresh-faced, 21-year-old Lady Gaga debuting her hit single

*Just Dance* for a televised international audience, launching her global domination. The rest, they say, is history.

Fast forward to the present day, and while other newer, glitzier hotels have stolen some of Diamond Bay’s limelight, the property has still got the “it” factor, being one of the first to stake a claim to the shoreline halfway between Cam Ranh International Airport and Nha Trang proper. The more than 14 hectare property boasts a long list of “Biggest (fill in the blank here) in Nha Trang”, including the biggest swimming pool (free form and hugging the bay at 3,000sqm) and the largest convention center in Vietnam (with seating for 7,500) and additional Banquet Event Halls with seating capacities of up

to 1,000 as well as conference rooms for meetings and smaller presentations.

## Sleep

I’m staying in a Diamond Ocean Bungalow, named “Miss Argentina,” one of 164 bungalows scattered around the lush gardens, half with sea views and some with steam baths and Jacuzzis. The room is a spacious 68sqm, simply but tastefully decorated in tones of brown and gold. It’s when I throw open the bathroom door that a gasp escapes me at the sight of a gigantic granite sunken bathtub next to a shower underneath a huge skylight, palm trees fluttering in the wind, bringing the outdoors in. The resort also has 176 rooms in four 3-storey hotel blocks spread out



over the property, all connected by wide, beautifully landscaped paths.

## Swim

Nha Trang's white sandy beaches have been immortalized in song, and Diamond Bay Resort & Spa has not one, but two stunning bays to call its own. The beach right on the property is adjacent to the massive swimming pool, but it's actually Nhu Tien Beach, a complimentary 5-minute shuttle ride away, that's the jewel of this complex. If Nha Trang's city beach can be likened to Hawaii's Waikiki with its fun vibe and nearby shopping, restaurants and tourists galore, Nhu Tien is more than an adequate substitute for the quieter, more picturesque Kauai or Maui, a gorgeous stretch of bay lined with palm trees and backed by verdant mountains. Nhu Tien Beach is managed by the same parent company as Diamond Bay Resort & Spa and there is a dedicated area for resort guests complete with beach huts and loungers to while away the day. (Tip: Nhu Tien Beach is operated on a cash system, so remember to bring enough for drinks and snacks and beachside massages. Also, grab a towel from the pool before you head over.)

## Eat

Even with the many restaurants of Nha

Trang just a 20-minute complimentary shuttle ride away (available 5 times per day), why bother leaving the resort when there are five restaurants on-site to cater to every taste? Rosy's, the 500-seat open air restaurant serves up buffet breakfasts and dinners and hearty set lunches (both Western and Asian menus), whereas Banana Leaf is perfect for mid-day snacking as it's just by the pool with pizzas, pastas and Vietnamese-style paninis stuffed with roasted pork among other sandwiches to accompany the cocktails from the swim-up bar. The upscale Vista Grill House makes for a beautiful dinner venue, serving up grilled seafood and Australian and US-imported meats at reasonable prices (think: 200gr of Grilled Australian Beef Rib Eye for less than VND300,000) whereas Omai Restaurant features traditional Vietnamese with favorites like Papaya and mango salad with seafood and Grilled prawns with honey and garlic. However, resort guests soon discover that the Sandy Bottom Restaurant is *the* place to be on Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights for an all-you-can-eat seafood BBQ. Some things just taste better in situ, like a baguette in Paris or Pad Thai in Bangkok. At Sandy Bottom, seafood has never tasted as good as when there's sand between your toes on a private beach with a live band churning out the

hits alternating with high-energy fire dancers.

## Play

From hunkering down with the summer's latest best-seller on one of the two quiet private beaches to playing a round at the 76 hectare, 18-hole golf course on the adjoining property to seaside tennis courts and complimentary yoga, kayaking or aerobics, there's something for everyone at Diamond Bay Resort & Spa. Beach lovers will appreciate the wide range of water sports on offer including jet skiing, banana boating and snorkeling, whereas land lovers can find bliss with a Purva Karma Four Hands Synchronized Spa treatment in the serene Song Lo Spa or perhaps even a day soaking in healthy mineral mud at the 100 Egg Mud Bath, also managed by the same group.

It's rare to find a resort in one of Vietnam's most popular beach destinations that has so much room to spare that it gives off an island vibe all its own, no matter how many guests there are. With one of the best locations on the Nha Trang coastline, far from the madding crowd, Diamond Bay Resort & Spa is like a vacation within a vacation.

*To take advantage of current promotions, visit [www.diamondbayresort.vn](http://www.diamondbayresort.vn).* ■



Jacuzzi Bungalow



Resort Beach



Free form swimming pool



Beach Wedding

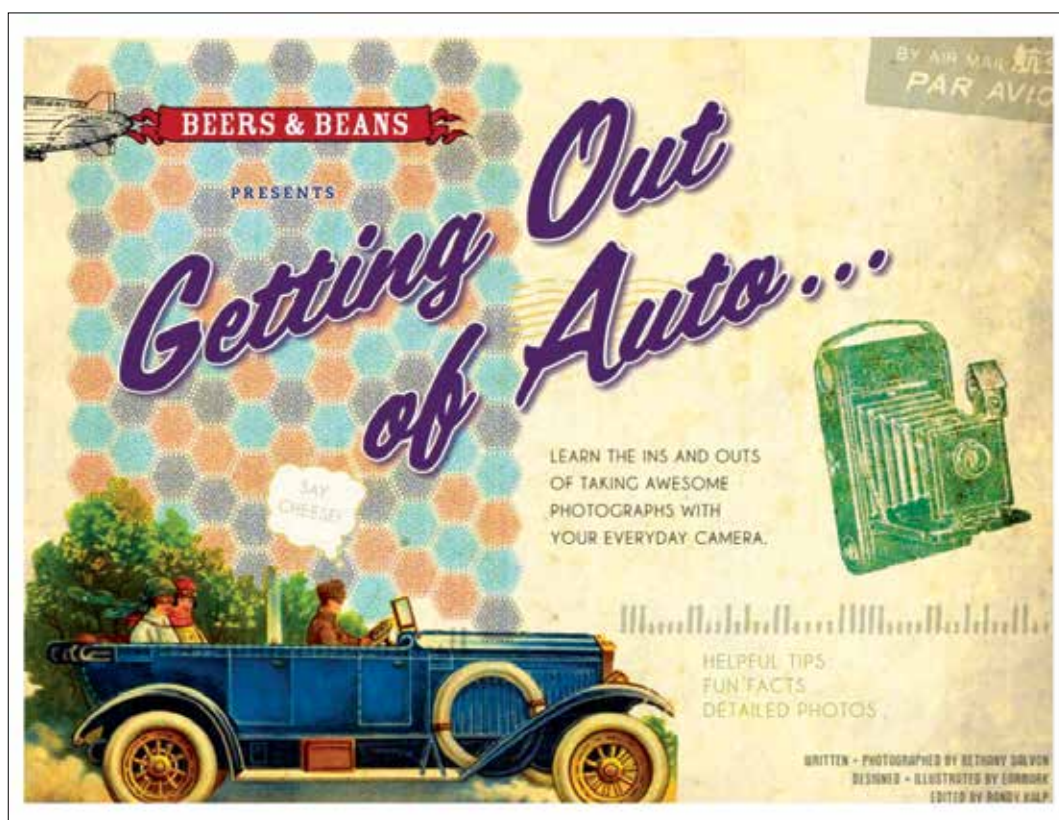


# Mastering Travel Photography

Reviewing *Getting Out of Auto* and the G-Drive ev ATC



Having visited nearly 60 countries as a travel writer and award-winning photographer, **James Pham** blogs about his adventures at [FlyIcarusFly.com](http://FlyIcarusFly.com)



I USED TO be afraid of DSLR cameras. There were too many buttons, dials and confusing terms. I was perfectly content with my dinky CyberShot DSC-U20, an ultracompact 2 megapixel point-and-shoot that came with an 8MB memory stick. Not gigabyte. Megabyte. It was cute. It was non-threatening. It fit into my shirt pocket.

As I began to travel more, though, I realized that a point-and-shoot just wasn't going to cut it. There was no way I could get photos with the "wow" factor I wanted while dealing with all the limitations my simple camera had. I should point out,

though, that in the decade since, point-and-shoots have come a long way, as have mirrorless camera systems (smaller, lighter and less expensive than most DSLRs but with the capability to swap out lenses). Eventually, I broke down and bought a used DSLR, kept it in "Auto" mode and resisted reading any kind of manuals or tutorials that inevitably made my eyes glaze over. With more travel, however, I realized that I would need at least a working knowledge of my camera. Travel requires that you be an incredibly flexible photographer. You don't have the luxury of time to set up shoots like a wedding

photographer. Instead, you often only have a fleeting moment to capture a scene while dealing with weather conditions, tricky lighting or other challenges. Oftentimes, travelers are only passing through a place and it's either get the shot now or not at all. Travel photography is also an amalgamation of so many kinds of specialized photography: portraits, street, nature, landscape, food, and the list goes on.

I've finally come to terms with getting the most out of my camera, and coupled with the magic that is photo editing, am beginning to feel more at ease with



travel photography. But the process definitely took years, and not without a healthy dose of frustration. So it was with a teensy bit of bitterness that I recently read *Getting Out of Auto* with its easy-to-understand style, humor and example photos, all the while wishing that I had read something like this 15 years ago.

Written by Bethany Salvon, *Getting Out of Auto* is really a gem, consolidating a Bachelor's in Photography and more than 10 years of photography experience into a 71 page e-book. The book is purposely low on tech speak and uses everyday examples to illustrate teaching points. For example, Bethany uses a window with curtains to explain the notoriously tricky relationship between aperture, shutter speed and ISO. "The window is the aperture or f/stop," she writes. "The larger the window (aperture), the more light will come in to the interior of your home... Think of the curtains as shutter speed. The quicker you open and close the curtains the more you limit the light that comes in. The type of glass used to make your window is your ISO... If you have a thin, clear piece of glass as your window (a higher ISO), it will let a lot of light in."

*Getting Out of Auto* is mainly aimed at the novice photographer, explaining things like the Rule of Thirds and depth of field. While most of the instruction is for DSLR users, Bethany thoughtfully adds what mode in point-and-shoot cameras can achieve the same effect. I also appreciated the little tasks Bethany sets for the reader, from the basic ("look for light in your day-to-day activities and notice how it makes you feel") to the bizarre (like tossing a camera into the air while it's exposing and see what kind of photo your self-timer will take). All in good fun, though.

The first three sections of the book cover the basics of photography:

exposure, composition and light, while generously using images (both examples of what to do and what not to do) to illustrate various concepts. For those of you who immediately throw away the instructions and start fiddling with a new product, skip to the final section on tips, tricks and cheats. Here Bethany shares tips on avoiding camera shake (including shooting in quick burst mode while holding your breath), how to piece together a HDR (High Dynamic Range) photo and weighs in on the debate on whether to shoot raw or in jpeg. I've been more interested in photographing food recently (yes, I'm one of those annoying people who has to style their food before taking a photo, even if it's just for Instagram), so I read with pleasure her tips for shooting food which covered using a reflector to bounce light from the rear to create back lighting and how to manipulate the background, depth of field and perspective to get the perfect food shot. The end of the book also comes with cutouts for aiding in composition and cropping and tear-away "cheat sheets" illustrating the main instructional points of the book.

While serious photographers aren't the intended audience of the book, those who love photography but aren't quite sure how to get the exact image they want will enjoy *Getting Out of Auto*. At just over 70 pages artfully laid out with a vintage vibe, you can comfortably get through it in an afternoon (including the little snippets of photography trivia and quotes) but you'll probably find yourself re-reading sections as you're working out your camera's functions which it turns out, aren't as scary as they might seem.

The book is available for USD9.99 at [www.beersandbeans.com](http://www.beersandbeans.com), which is also where Beth and her partner, journalist Randy Kalp, blog about their world travels. ■



## GEAR REVIEW

### G-DRIVE EV ATC BY G-TECHNOLOGY

There's nothing like that heart-stopping moment when you see an error message on your camera's screen, especially after having taken a few days' worth of photos and realizing you haven't backed them up anywhere. It's only happened to me once, the result of a corrupt memory card, but once was enough and now I strive to follow the computer Rule of Three (aka the Backup 3-2-1): Have **three** copies of anything you care about, including **two** formats (like a hard drive and memory card) and **one** in the cloud (or off-site).

Even when I'm traveling, I'll take time to copy photos to my computer's hard drive in the evenings before bed. But as a travel photographer, it's not always pristine hotels and ideal weather conditions. Enter the G-Drive ev ATC by G-Technology, a product I've been testing for the last month or so. Basically, the G-Drive ev ATC has two parts: a removable 1TB G-Drive ev R4W inside an All-Terrain Case (ATC).

The drive itself works with G-Tech's ev system and can withstand a 1.2 m drop (think: desk height) on a carpeted concrete floor, while the hard plastic case with blue rubber bumpers further protects the drive from dust, pressure and shock, including a 2 m drop and 30 seconds in a pool of water up to 1 ft. I tested it by taking out the drive and replacing it with a paper towel then submerging the whole thing in water (it floats). The inside remained bone dry. This sort of protection does come at a weight cost of 372 g and the unit is slightly bulky but solid at 16 x 11 x 3 cm. The unit comes with a built-in USB cable (a Thunderbolt version for Macs is also available) so you never really need to open the case itself. The hard drive comes formatted for use with Macs, but I was able to follow the instructions to reformat it for use with Windows in about three minutes.

All in all, the G-Drive ev ATC is a well-designed, well-made product for those who find themselves working in suboptimal conditions. There's also a definite "cool factor" with the drive and case that cheaper versions simply cannot match. The G-Drive ev ATC with tethered USB cable is USD179.95 (the Thunderbolt version is USD229.95) via Amazon or [www.g-technology.com](http://www.g-technology.com) and comes with a 3-year warranty.



# >>The List Travel



## Ana Mandara Villas | Dalat

Ana Mandara Villas Dalat comprises 17 restored French-style villas from the 1920s and 1930s, preserving the original design, décor and charm; and set in the cool climate of the rural highlands of Central Vietnam. Striking views of the surrounding town and countryside abound from all areas of the gently sloping hillside property. Some of the villas have been converted into 65 guest accommodations, with each villa comprising between three and five ensuite rooms.

[www.anamandara-resort.com](http://www.anamandara-resort.com)



## BEST WESTERN PREMIER Havana Nha Trang Hotel

Situated in the center of Nha Trang, the biggest five star hotel in Vietnam – Best Western Premier 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**  
T: (058) 388 9999 / Fax: (058) 388 9900  
[www.havanahotel.vn](http://www.havanahotel.vn)  
[info@havanahotel.vn](mailto:info@havanahotel.vn)



## Bhaya Cruises

Bhaya combines oriental style with contemporary luxury to create an unforgettable experience cruising Halong Bay. The Bhaya fleet (Bhaya Classic, Legend Halong and The Au Co) offers a total of 178 luxury cabins and suites accommodating more than 400 passengers for Ha Long Bay cruises or hosted events (weddings, corporate retreats, incentives, meetings, and more).

[www.bhayacruises.com](http://www.bhayacruises.com)  
093 344 6542



## Fusion Maia | Danang

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.

[maidanang.fusion-resorts.com](http://maidanang.fusion-resorts.com)



## InterContinental Nha Trang

InterContinental Nha Trang is a luxurious modern beachfront hotel where an enriching urban retreat harmonized beautifully with its surroundings. Right in the heart of Nha Trang, a 40-minute scenic drive from Cam Ranh International Airport, experience the perfect blend of local charm and nature.

**32 - 34 Tran Phu, Nha Trang**  
(058) 388 7777  
[www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com](http://www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com)



## Mia

With its own private white sand beach, cliff-top ocean views and jungle clad mountains as a backdrop, Mia resort has carved out its own little piece of tropical heaven in Nha Trang. Mia features a variety of accommodation options, each with fantastic ocean views, nestled among manicured gardens. There are great dining options, a relaxing spa and gym.

**Bai Dong, Cam Hai Dong, Cam Lam, Khanh Hoa**  
0583 989 666  
[www.mianhatrang.com](http://www.mianhatrang.com)  
[info@mianhatrang.com](mailto:info@mianhatrang.com)



## 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](http://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 luxurioux 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](http://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](http://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 extractions.

125 Le Thi Rieng, D1

## Also try ...

### Dr. Hung & Associates Dental Center

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, D1  
3925 7526 / 3925 7527  
nhakhoadrhung@gmail.com  
www.drhung01.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 experience.

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.com

### 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

### Saigon Smile

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 techniques.

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

### Westcoast International Dental Clinic

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  
3825 748

## SPA



### Maison Mikio Boutique Salon

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



### Cham Nail Spa

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: "chnamnailspa"



### Moc Huong Spa

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  
3911 7118



### Villa Aesthetica Cosmedi Spa & Laser Center

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 massage.

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



### Sweet Spa

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  
www.sweetspa.vn



### 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 & scar treatment, rejuvenation & pigment augmenting treatment, slimming treatments, permanent hair removal and massage therapy.

244A Cong Quynh, D1  
3926 0561-62-63-64



# >>The List Business

## INSURANCE



### Blue Cross

Blue Cross Vietnam is a Medical Insurance Administrator specializing in Health and Travel insurance in Asia. Our competitive advantage is in our design and administration of modern travel and medical insurance plans; plans built for people living and working in Vietnam.  
**Continental Tower, 4th Floor, 81 - 83 - 85 Ham Nghi, D1 3821 9908**



## Also try ...

### ACE Life Insurance

One of the world's largest multiline property and casualty insurers, insurance products include universal life insurance, term life, whole life, riders, and global personal accident.  
**21st Floor, 115 Nguyen Hue, D1**

### Baoviet Insurance Corporation

BaoViet is now the leading financial insurance group in Vietnam with more than 145 branches across 63 provinces.  
**23-25 Thai Van Lung, D1**

### IF Consulting

IF Consulting has for 20 years provided advice to individuals and businesses in assessing health/accident risk and finding the best suitable solution. The company is independent and Vietnam-based.  
**IBC Building, 3rd Floor, 1A Me Linh Square, D1 www.insuranceinvietnam.com**

### Liberty Mutual Insurance

Liberty Mutual is a 100% US-owned general insurer licensed to provide insurance services directly to Vietnamese individuals and state-owned enterprises as well as motor insurance.  
**Kumho Asiana Plaza, 15th Floor, 39 Le Duan, D1 3812 5125**

### McLarens Young International

McLarens Young International is a global claims service provider that helps our clients achieve timely and equitable claims resolution.  
**9th Floor, Yoco Building, 41 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D1 3821 3316**

### Prudential Vietnam

Prudential Vietnam is one of the leading life insurers nationwide, also providing a variety of financial solutions, with over 200 customer service centers, branch offices and general agency and business partner offices.  
**Saigon Trade Centre, Unit 25F, 37 Ton Duc Thang, D1**

## REAL ESTATE AGENCIES

### Colliers International Vietnam

Globally, Colliers International is a leading commercial real estate services company offering comprehensive expertise to investors, owners and tenants around the world.  
**Bitexco Office Bldg, 7th Floor, 19-25 Nguyen Hue, D1 3823 3529**

### Cushman & Wakefield Vietnam

Their primary focus is on consultancy, brokerage, and investment across the retail, office, and hospitality sectors.  
**Vincom Center, 14th Floor, Unit 16, 72 Le Thanh Ton, Ben Nghe ward, D1 3823 7968**

### House Link

House Link offers a wide array of apartments and houses for lease all over Ho Chi Minh City.  
**23 Phung Khoan Khoan, D1 3824 5271**

### JLL Vietnam

JLL is a professional services and investment management firm offering specialized real estate services to clients seeking increased value by owning, occupying and investing in real estate.  
**26/F Saigon Trade Center 37 Ton Duc Thang Street, District 1 Ho Chi Minh City 3910 3968**

### JVK International Movers

Focused primarily on the international and local movement of household goods since 1979, JVK has established itself as a leader in this unique transportation field.  
**1st Floor, Saigon Port Building, 3 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4. 3826 7655**

### Realty World

Focuses on real estate business, consulting, managing, and marketing. Currently they specialize in apartments, office buildings, and villas.  
**111 Nguyen Huu Canh, Ward 22, Binh Thanh 3899 4979**

### Savills

Savills PLC is a global real estate services provider listed on the London Stock Exchange.  
**Avalon Bldg, 53 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D1 3825 8598**

### The Nest

The Nest is a customer-dedicated property company focusing on leasing luxurious properties in Saigon. French-Vietnamese managed with over four years of property experience.  
**369/6 Do Xuan Hop, Phuoc Long B, D9**

### Vietnam Sotheby's International Realty

Vietnam Sotheby's International Realty is the exclusive representative of the prestigious Sotheby's International Realty® brand in Vietnam. With luxury properties and professional sales agents in Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City.  
**Suite 1905, Bitexco Financial Tower 2 Hai Trieu Street, District 1 3520 2000**



## RELOCATION



### Allied Pickfords

For almost 400 years our name has been synonymous with high quality home moving. From the packhorses of the early seventeenth century, to the most advanced shipping and transportation methods of today, with over 600 locations in more than 40 countries Allied Pickfords has grown to become one of the largest providers of moving services.  
**8th Floor, Miss Ao Dai Bldg, 21 Nguyen Trung Ngon, D1 (+84) 8 3910 1220 www.alliedpickfords.com.vn**



## Also try ...

### AGS Four Winds (Vietnam)

Global leader in international removals & relocations, with 128 offices in 78 countries, they can move you to/or from any location worldwide.  
**5th Floor, Lafayette De Saigon, 8A Phung Khoan Khoan, D1 3521 0071 ags-vietnam@agsfourwinds.com www.agsfourwinds.com**

### Asian Tigers

Pan-Asian moving firm with a perhaps unrivalled level of experience and expertise in packing, storing and moving a family's treasured belongings throughout this region and beyond.  
**9th Floor, Unit 9.3, 9 Doan Van Bo, D4 3826 7799**

### CBRE

CBRE Group, Inc. is the world's largest commercial real estate services and investment firm. The group has been operating in Vietnam since 2003.  
**12th Floor, Me Linh Point Tower, 2 Ngo Duc Ke, D1**

### Crown Line

Crown Line is a well-known Japanese moving firm now operating out of Ho Chi Minh City.  
**HPL Bldg, 7th Floor, 60 Nguyen Van Thu, D1**

### Logical Moves

They offer your belongings the best protection available with the latest technology, experienced staff and equipment. With door to door services, Logical Moves is all

about quality service, best prices and well-arranged time. They have moved offices and household goods for many well-known international companies in Vietnam.  
**3941 5322 www.logicalmoves.net**

### Santa Fe Relocation Service

Door to door relocation service which promises to take the stress out of moving personal possessions from one city - or country - to another. Also offers pet relocations, records management, home search and immigration help.  
**www.santaferelo.com info@santaferelo.com.vn**

# Kids & Education

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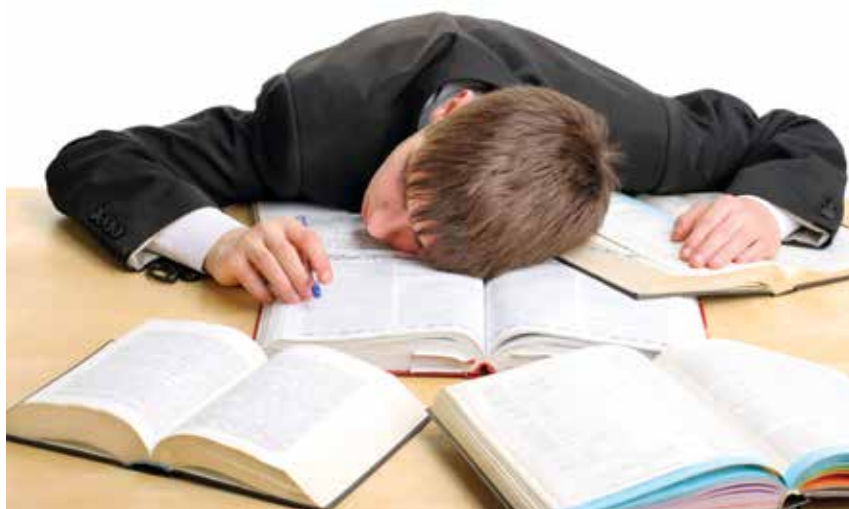


# Ready to Learn?

Tips for parents to help their children learn better in school



**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.



PARENTS, BY THEIR very nature, want the best for their children and that means helping them grow up to be healthy, happy and successful – and a large part of that is helping them to do well at school. Perhaps frustratingly, once a child goes through the school gates, there is very little parents can do, leaving many feeling helpless and completely reliant on the school and teachers, whom parents have entrusted to educate their child. However, there are many things parents can do before the school day starts to give their child the best chance of having a good day of learning.

While Abraham Maslow's book *Hierarchy of Human Needs* was written some 80 years ago, it's still relevant to children and learning today. Put simply, it states that all humans have basic physiological needs, for example food, water, clothing, sanitation, sleep and shelter, which, unless met, mean we lack the motivation to pursue anything else. Children are no different. A hungry child is unlikely to learn as well as one who has a full belly.

Even as adults we are guilty of taking these basic needs for granted at times, until of course we are forced to go without water for a week because we tried to change the faucets on the bathroom sink and caused a major leak (my DIY skills are not what they should be). Yet even with these basic needs

fulfilled, getting the balance right when trying to satisfy them all is critical, and not always that easy.

A child who stays up too late will find it difficult to concentrate in class the next day. Likewise, a child who skips breakfast or doesn't drink enough water will also have problems. Schools are acutely aware of this. The introduction of breakfast clubs is not simply to make parents' lives easier – it is intended to make sure that every child has been well-fed before entering the classroom. Therefore, children are encouraged to have a bottle of water with them at all times. But getting them into the habit of using it is slightly trickier. As the saying goes: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink."

In class, I often refer to our brains as sponges designed to hold lots of water, but if left untended, dry out. And when they do, we become dehydrated, find it more difficult to concentrate and become more susceptible to headaches.

## How Much Sleep is Necessary?

For adults, the recommendation is eight hours and this is common knowledge. Most parents probably would admit that they don't know exactly how much sleep their child should be getting or how much they should be eating. I'm sure feelings of guilt and anxiety fill every parent's mind when they compare

notes with others. Whatever the topic, we assume that we are the ones getting it wrong. Unfortunately, children don't come with a manual and their needs continually change as they get older, so it is difficult to get it right all the time. As long as parents are mindful of these issues, that is usually enough to 'get it right.'

What is important to remember is that every child is different. The amount of sleep a child needs each night can change depending on the activities they've done that day. But they should have fairly standardized bed and wake up times. As a rule of thumb, if your child appears tired during the day, at times when you wouldn't expect them to, they probably need more sleep. Avoiding technology for the last hour or two before bedtime will also help your child to get to sleep faster, easier and to sleep more deeply. Reading a bedtime story to them is a better option.

## Healthy Lifestyle

Helping your child to get the right amount of sleep is just one of many ways to help them perform well at school. Providing nutritious and healthy food is another. Getting enough exercise, regular washing and regular medical checkups are still more. And even when all of these physiological needs are met, there is another level of need before children become motivated to learn – the need for safety. Take the example of the playground fall-out that spills into the classroom at the end of break-time – a scenario I'm sure every teacher can relate to. Nowhere in the lesson plan does it say "deal with playground incidents"; but for children, the need for justice and reconciliation is far higher at that moment than anything else, and so the teacher has to deal with it as promptly and effectively as possible so that the loss of learning time is minimized.

While your child's education is the responsibility of their school and teachers, it is incumbent upon parents to ensure that they eat, sleep and exercise well so that they are 'ready to learn.' ■

# Vetting Vets

## Finding a good veterinarian in Vietnam



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](http://www.petmagazine.vn)).

IN MY LAST article I outlined three choices to consider in bringing a cat or dog into your home - buy, adopt or foster. Another important factor in owning a pet is finding a good veterinarian clinic offering an acceptable level of health care services for your pet, hopefully near your home. Selecting the right vet is a personal decision as you should be looking for a balance of trust in the doctor, good 'bedside' manners, experience, training and a well-managed clinic. Unfortunately, this is not an easy task as the vet care service industry in Vietnam is still developing - the first consumer vet clinic for small companion animals (pets) only opened in 2003. Furthermore, there is no formal organization in Vietnam, like the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), that can guide you in selecting veterinary practices based on the quality of pet care services, facilities and personnel.

So, who do you talk to and where do you go to find a good vet here? First, contact friends or trusted neighbors that are current pet owners and have direct experiences with a clinic. However, the resulting discussions will invoke passionate debate about their credentials and you will encounter varying, conflicting opinions. Many controversial issues associated with a clinic's history are sometimes the result of a lack of understanding of preventive care by a pet owner in spotting signs of a major illness. It might have been too late as a pet was diagnosed as critical and died in the care of the vet, or shortly after. The clinic is blamed. Get all the facts right before making judgment on any veterinarians from peers, especially from what you read online.

You can also find suggestions on Facebook's pet related groups and pages. The "Dog-Owners in Saigon" Facebook group is filled with ongoing discussions on vets along with details, so make a list of names and contact

information mentioned. Also search Google for "expat in Vietnam" websites using keywords "living with pets in Vietnam." Another suggestion is to contact members of any animal rescue organization in your area as they can introduce you to the vets that manage their pets, as many have their own Facebook pages as well.

Remember, you will encounter language issues as most clinics are managed by Vietnamese-speaking vets. Good, clear communication is key because you will need to discuss your pet's current problems and their history for a good prognosis. So, search for foreign-managed clinics that offer services in many languages.

Once you've compiled a short list of potential candidates, visit first *without* your pet. Ask the vets about their

training, education and practice. While some will think this is intrusive, others will welcome your questions. Ask for a tour to get an overall feel of the clinic, looking for order, a well-stocked pet shop, cleanliness and proper staff management. Inquire about their customer service: What is their policy on answering the phone during business hours and after hours, and do they reply to emails within a reasonable amount of time? Finally, ask if they have some form of ambulance for home pick-up and does the vet provide home visits, as most pet owners in Vietnam may not realize that dog thieves loiter around vet clinics.

Contact Wayne directly at [wayne.c@digiescape.com](mailto:wayne.c@digiescape.com) for his recommendations in Saigon, Hanoi and Da Nang. ■





# >>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 awarded this Department for Education rating. Progress of students puts the ABCIS among the top 8% of schools in the world. Providing education for 2-18 year olds in a supportive and friendly environment, it delivers a culturally adapted version of the British National Curriculum supported by Cambridge & AQA IGCSE and AS/A levels. Students are prepared for Universities in the UK, USA, Australia, Korea and Canada.

#### Foundation & Early Primary Campus:

4, 1E Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC

#### Primary & Secondary Campus:

2, 1E Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC  
5431 1833/34/35/36

office@theabcis.com

www.theabcis.com



### British International School (BIS)

Inspected and approved by the British Government, BIS provides a British style curriculum for an international student body from pre-school to Year 13. The school is staffed by British qualified and trained teachers with recent UK experience. Fully accredited by the Council of International Schools and a member of FOBISIA, BIS is the largest international school in Vietnam.

#### 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



### 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 experience. 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



Science behind play

### EtonHouse International Pre-School @ An Phu

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.

#### 1st and 2nd floor, Somerset Vista, Hanoi

Highway, An Phu, D2

08 6287 0804

www.etonhouse.vn/schools/hcmc

info@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 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



International School



### The Montessori International School 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.

#### 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 School Saigon

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, mini-pool, 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 additional ESL support.

Residential Area No.5,  
Thanh My Loi Ward, D2  
3742 STAR / 3742 7827

www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



### 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.  
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 over 50 different nationalities.

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



## 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, D1)

Middle School (35 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh)

High School (781/C1-C2 Le Hong Phong, D10)

### 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.aivietnam.com

### The French International School Saint Ange

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 six-hectare, well-equipped campus.

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



# Faces & Places



## Ice Blue Relocates

After having been on Dong Khoi for 21 years, the popular bar for expats and darts aficionados has moved to 24 Hai Ba Trung, D1.

IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**



## World of Weddings

InterContinental Nha Trang organized a wedding fair in their 747sqm Grand Ballroom to showcase the latest in wedding trends and banquet designs.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY **INTERCONTINENTAL NHA TRANG**





## *Ancient Charm and Modern Living*

*82 rooms and villas, private balconies with stunning views of the sea and garden, spa facilities, large swimming pool and gym, superb restaurants and bars, free internet and personalized services.*







# Seaside elegance amid Vietnamese charm



Expertly blending Vietnamese tradition and legendary Anantara service, Anantara Mui Ne Resort offers a tropical retreat, worlds away from Vietnam's urban bustle. Take in the splendour of the sunset from the pool deck. Sample fine international dining and mouth-watering cuisine at our restaurants that are amongst the best Mui Ne hotels have to offer. Wander down garden paths to your own private villa. A cherished holiday within a setting to remember forever in our exceptional getaway in Vietnam.

For reservation or more information,  
please contact us via +84 62 374 1888  
or email [muine@anantara.com](mailto:muine@anantara.com)

**[anantara.com](http://anantara.com)**

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Mozambique • Thailand • United Arab Emirates

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