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VIETNAM

JAN/FEB 2016



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IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

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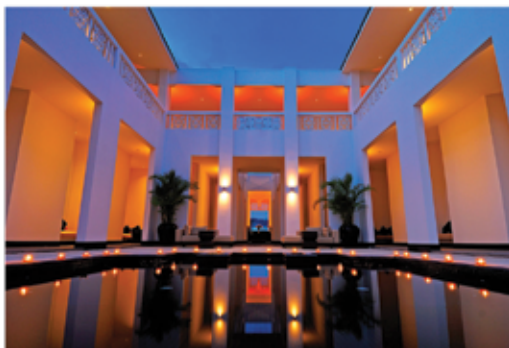
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THE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Join one of the many exciting social clubs Saigon has to offer

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Datebook

What's on this month...

JANUARY 14

What: Pioneers Ho Chi Minh City

Where: Dreamplex (21 Nguyen Trung Ngan, D1); 6pm

About: Global Pioneers events are where entrepreneurs find meaningful connections that lead to partnerships in a fast and sustainable way. It's people helping people to support business growth, meet and connect with local and international entrepreneurs, startups and investors.

Contact: Visit www.pioneers.io for more info

JANUARY 16 & 17

What: Design Your Wedding Journey

Where: Pullman Vung Tau hotel

About: From wedding concepts, culinary delights to bridal gowns, bridal beauty, wedding favors and honeymoon destinations, more than 10 wedding professionals in Vung Tau and Ho Chi Minh City will be on-hand to help plan extra touches to make every wedding a special event.

Pullman Vung Tau seaside hotel can accommodate 800 guests for sit-down banquets and up to 1,300 guests for grand cocktail receptions. The hotel also offers exclusive wedding perks when the bride and groom-to-be book their wedding banquet on the day. Wedding packages starts from VND460,000++.

Contact: Find more info about the event as well as bridal contest "Bride in Style" on facebook.com/pullmanvungtau.

JANUARY 17

What: Nomad List — Ho Chi Minh City Digital Nomads Meetup

Where: Decibel Lounge (79 Phan Ke Binh, D1); 8pm

About: Meet other digital nomads, and if you're not one yet, learn from others how to live and work remotely. Interested but can't join? Be there remotely through our #nomads chat community at <http://hashtagnomads.com/>!

Contact: Visit www.nomadlist.com for more info



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JAN
19



What: Lydmor live in HCMC

Where: Cargo (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 8pm; VND150,000 advance/VND200,000 at the door

About: Lydmor is 25-year-old Danish singer, songwriter and producer Jenny Rossander. She has toured most of mainland Europe and Southeast Asia on her own, where she performed, lived and slept in the homes of her fans, collaborated with renowned artists such as Arsenal (BE), Alle Farben (DE), Amanda Palmer (US), Bottled in England (DK), and finally established herself as one of the most promising underground artists in her native Denmark. Her new album, *aya*, portrays a woman far beyond her age, telling stories of love, intoxication and deprivation with Lydmora's fragile and yet breathtaking voice, on top of an ambient and oddly catchy, electronic soundscape.

Contact: Purchase tickets at www.ticketbox.vn



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The Pride of Léman Luxury Apartments Owners

TEXT AND IMAGES BY LÉMAN

LÉMAN, A RECENT luxury brand on the market, offers customers three wonderful services at a time: luxury apartments in the city, a luxury golf course on the outskirts, and a mountainside and seaside resort adjacent to the city. Not many premium brands on the market these days have such a perfect combination of all three as Léman does.

The Three-In-One Luxury Life

The roofs on the Léman Luxury Apartments will be built shortly. The team at Léman is working on the 16th floor, finishing one floor every eight to nine days given a number of obstacles, such as the restriction of truck access in the inner city, stringent regulations on environmental protection and limited time. Despite the fast

construction progress, Léman still ensures a meticulous and professional working style to bring its customers a beautiful, high-quality building.

Apart from wonderful services at Léman Luxury Apartments and a number of other privileges offered, Léman residents will be invited to enjoy a three-in-one luxury lifestyle with a 36-hole golf course at Léman Golf on the outskirts of HCMC and a space to indulge in the natural landscape of the mountains and sea at Léman Cap Resort in Vung Tau City — a 90-minute drive from the city. Thanks to the link between the golf course and apartments, residents can choose plants and flowers from the nursery at Léman Golf to grow in the hanging gardens in front of their apartments.

Residents of Léman Luxury Apartments are famous local and foreign entrepreneurs, celebrities and diplomats. In the final months of the year, the number of foreign customers buying Léman apartments had increased sharply with the pinnacle of sales reaching double digits worth VND8—VND10 billion a day. According to customers, Léman apartments are truly rare and while they tried to find these apartments at different locations they couldn't. When they came to Léman, they were convinced.

Léman Luxury Apartments, A Destination For Retail Investors

With a luxury three-in-one living standard, Léman Luxury Apartments is not only an affluent living destination in a prime location close to landmarks such as the Notre Dame Cathedral, Reunification Palace, Con Rua (Turtle) Roundabout and Saint Joseph Major Seminary, it is also an ideal choice for retail investors who want to invest in housing projects to lease apartments because most foreigners prefer leasing apartments in downtown Saigon. With its advantages regarding location, a community of upper-class residents and high-quality apartments, Léman will attract foreigners in leasing its apartments at a price between USD3,000—USD4,000 per month, ensuring a safe investment with high liquidity and profitability. Léman Luxury Apartments, a meticulous product created from thousands of hard-working hours, will bring pride to its owners.

Léman Luxury Apartments

117 Nguyen Dinh Chieu Street,
District 3, HCMC

Hotline: 0963 86 68 78 / 0945 86 68 78

Website: www.lemanluxury.com



Rooftop swimming pool – a typical Swiss highlight at Léman



Léman, a new architectural icon in the heart of District 3



**JAN
22**

What: Boutique Tasting

Where: Wine Embassy Boutique (41 Quoc Huong, D2); 6:30pm-8:30pm

About: The wine bar is inviting oenophiles to join them for a tasting event where half a dozen of wines from around the world will be experienced. Wine Embassy is a boutique wine bar that captures the essence of good wine for connoisseurs in Saigon, and is the first in Vietnam to introduce specialized wine dispensers.

Contact: Free entry but seats are limited. Register now at we.boutique@wineembassy.com.vn or call 6296 0552

JANUARY 22

What: Saigon Loves Jungle

Where: Saigon Ranger (5/7 Nguyen Sieu, D1); 10pm

About: Saigon Loves Jungle is hosting their fourth charity fundraiser for Green Youth Collective. An emcee competition will test the city's talents and a custom lighting rig with live visuals will add to the authentic rave atmosphere. Entry is VND100,000, (half price for Saigon Reggae Festival ticketholders). Profits will be donated to Green Youth Collective - Vietnam.

Contact: Visit www.saigonrangerbar.com for more info



**JAN
23**

What: Saigon Reggae Festival 3

Where: Cargo (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 5pm-5am

About: Saigon Reggae Festival will feature 20 DJs and MCs to make you travel through the Reggae Universe. The 12-hour long event will also include visual animation, a dance showcase, food and drinks and a whole lot more.

Contact: Visit Facebook: "Saigon Reggae Festival 3" for more info

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JANUARY 23

What: Kanban in Action

Where: An Nam Café & Restaurant (52 Truong Dinh, D3)

About: The getKanban board game is a physical board game designed to teach the concepts and mechanics of Kanban for software development in a workshop setting. It has been described as the most effective way to teach Kanban. It's hands-on, engaging and fun.

During the workshop, teams construct charts based on data from the game including a Cumulative Flow Diagram, and a Statistical Process Control Chart.

Contact: Visit www.agilevietnam.org for more info

JANUARY 24

What: HCMC Run

Where: Crescent Plaza (105 Ton Dat Tien, D7)

About: The event encourages people who love running to get over their limitations and experience race divisions because running is never just about reaching the finish line but also about the vibe, the excitement and the beautiful scenery along the way. With the route around Crescent Lake and Phu My Bridge, get ready to enjoy the view when you reach the top of the bridge.

Contact: Visit www.hcmcrun.com for more info



JAN
29

What: Tom Trago

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

About: An internationally-renowned DJ, producer, live performer and label owner with three critically-acclaimed albums to his name, the Dutchman divides his time between all-day studio sessions, DJ gigs and live shows all over the world, and a steady stream of musical collaborations.

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

FEBRUARY 14

What: Without Brian Jones, There'd Be No Rolling Stones

Where: Saigon Ranger (5/7 Nguyen Sieu, D1)

About: Brian Jones, born Lewis Brian Hopkin Jones (February 28, 1942 - July 3, 1969) was a founding member and a talented multi-instrumentalist of The Rolling Stones, one of the most influential rock and roll bands of all time. On February 14, Mikey and the Grey Jackals + Friends will play a set of 24 favorite hits of the 1960s to celebrate Jones' 73rd birthday.

Contact: Visit www.saigonrangerbar.com for more info



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**JAN 22-
FEB 29**



What: Passers By

Where: VinGallery (6 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2)

About: A solo exhibition of new watercolor paintings by Vietnamese artist Ho Hung. Hung's watercolors capture the ephemeral and the subtle sensuousness of the everyday. Dappled light, warm colors and empty spaces characterize his style. Traveling from place to place and painting on the street, Hung records people passing by and is himself a stranger and a passerby to his subjects. The fragility of these encounters surfaces in the free flowing and unpredictable quality of the watercolors. Similarly his views of Old Saigon and its weathered buildings remind us that everything is temporary and life itself is just passing by.

Contact: Visit www.vingallery.com for more info

**What: Kiteboarding Tour Asia
Coming to Vietnam**

Where: Ninh Chu Bay, Southern Vietnam

About: Professional kiteboarding is returning to Vietnam, and this time it is coming to Ninh Chu Bay in south central Ninh Thuan. The Kiteboarding Tour Asia (KTA) will kick off the exciting new X-Champs Series tour in one of Asia's newest kitesurfing paradises. Ninh Chu Bay Beach Club (www.ninhchubay.com) will host the event, which includes multiple disciplines in both men's and women's kiteboarding. The Vietnam event will be followed by KTA events in Thailand and China.

Contact: For more info, visit www.kiteboard.asia



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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

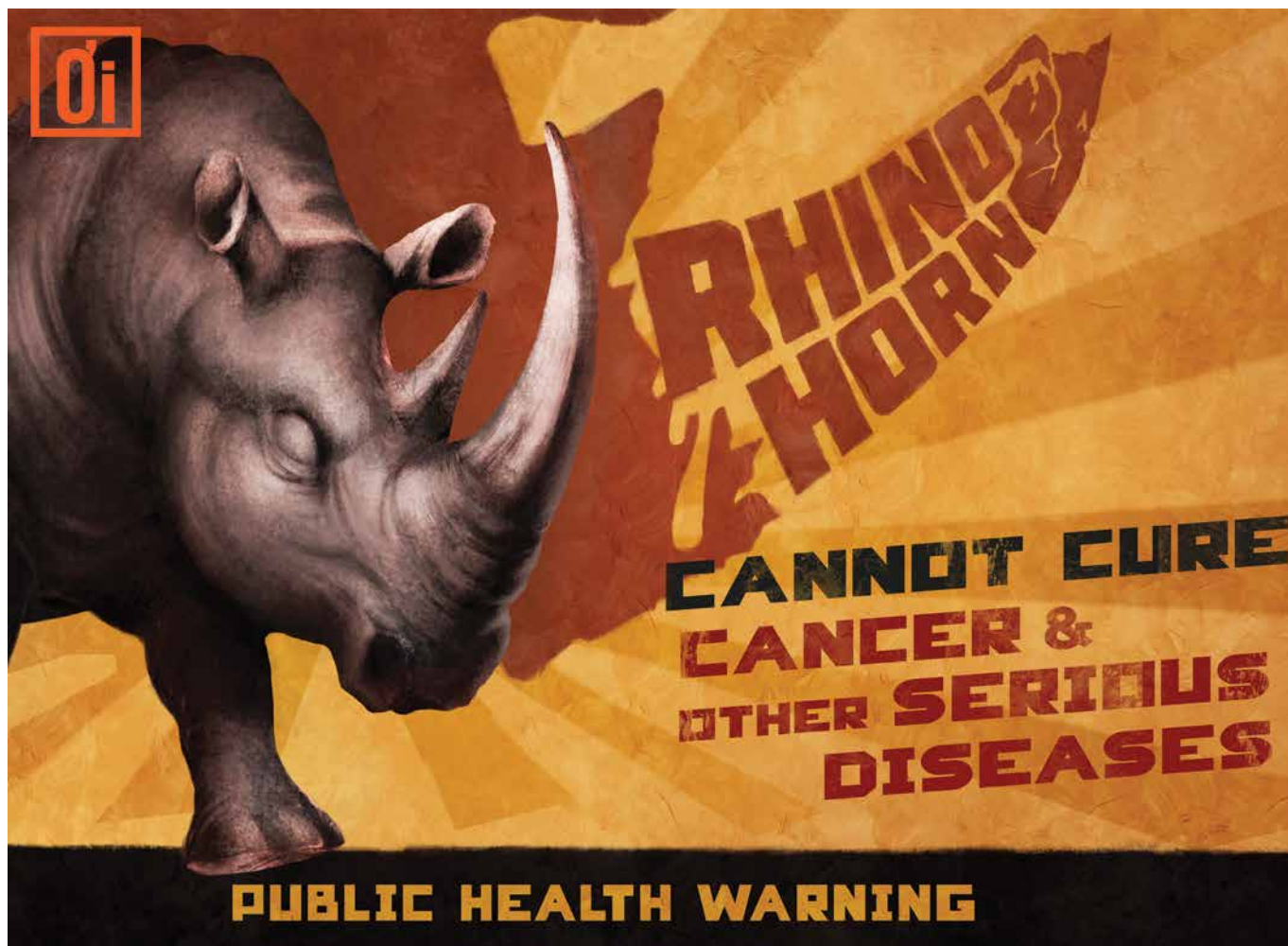
CANADA STEAKHOUSE OPENS

There are fully grown adults who suffer through vegetables on a daily basis, but save their delight for when their mouth meets a heavenly piece of beef. For those adults, the steakhouse was created and the recently-opened Canada Steakhouse (219C Pham Viet Chanh, D1; 10am-11pm) fits perfectly into that category. "We specialize and import our beef from Alberta, Canada," says Ho Ngoc Tien, the fine dining restaurant's Director. "That is where the best beef is from, it's the highest quality. We are the first restaurant to serve imported Alberta beef in Vietnam."



LE MERIDIEN SAIGON PROMOTIONS

From January through February, Latest Recipe restaurant (M Floor, 3C Ton Duc Thang, D1) will run a seafood promotion every Friday and Saturday night highlighting seafood from around the world, priced at VND1.2 million++. Spend Sunday at Latest Recipe overlooking the Saigon River while enjoying a buffet of Vietnamese and international dishes that includes Canadian lobster, mud crab and oyster "Fine de Claire." Priced at VND1.2 million++ per person including soft drinks, illy coffee and Ronnefeldt tea or VND1.4 million++ per person including free flow Taittinger Champagne, beer, wine, soft drink, illy coffee and Ronnefeldt tea. Email 03529.LatestRecipe@lemeridien.com to book.





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ELEVEN CAFÉ PROMOTION

To celebrate the New Year, Eleven Café (29 Le Anh Xuan, D1; 11am-10pm) is having a promotion where customers receive a free spring roll dish when purchasing a bottle of wine. January also marks the debut of their new menu, which includes grapefruit salad shrimp, salted crab eggs, pigeon wrapped with fillings, crispy fried fish, and Le's macarons.

AUSTRALIAN TUCKER NIGHT

Celebrate Australia Day in true Aussie style with Pullman Danang Beach Resort's (www.pullman-danang.com) Australian Tucker Night on January 23 (starting at 5:30pm) at Restaurant Epice. The Aussie buffet is filled with a wide array of Australian and local delights, including barbecued meats and seafood, crabs, oysters, sausage rolls and much more. Guests with a sweet tooth will be treated to an assortment of Australian favorites, including delicious Pavlova and lamingtons, along with traditional Vietnamese sweets. Priced at VND770,000++, including free-flow house wine, beer, juice and soft drinks.

FUSION RESORT NHA TRANG OPENS

Spread over 13.6 hectares on a 12-meter high sand dune, Fusion Resort Nha Trang (www.fusionresortnhatrang.com) brings a new level of luxury to the coast of southern Vietnam while catering to the needs of spa and beach lovers. The resort boasts 72 suites and pool villas with open spaces overlooking the ocean. Following the unique all-spa inclusive concept, Fusion Resort Nha Trang provides guests relaxation with at least two complimentary spa and wellness treatments guaranteed daily. To celebrate their grand opening, guests who stay a minimum of three nights will receive 20 percent off the best available rate. Rate includes all spa treatments, breakfast any time any place, free round-trip airport transfer, free shuttle bus from the resort to Nha Trang at scheduled times. This limited time offer is valid until April 29, 2016, and is not available during public holidays or combinable with any other promotions.






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PRINCESS D'ANNAM RESORT & SPA TET PROMOTION

The Lunar New Year is once again upon us and, as always, Princess D'Annam Resort & Spa (www.princessdannam.com) offers front-row seats overlooking the East Sea. Festive menus are available February 7-13, including Madam Vo's sugarcane prawns, prawns & pork meat with lotus salad, stewed pork with bamboo & duck egg. The dessert specials will include traditional Vietnamese caramel flan and Vietnamese sweet soup with lotus seeds. On February 8, go for the eight-course set dinner menu (auspiciously priced at VND988,000) which includes Yee Sang shredded vegetables, Tasmanian salmon, "Xoi Gac" sticky rice, fresh Ke Ga prawns and wild-flock-potbellied-pork ribs with golden honey. Combine your dinner with a stay at one of their Mandarin Villas or splurge a bit by booking a Princess Villa with a private pool. For reservations call (84 62) 3682 222 or email info@princessannam.com.

PULLMAN VUNG TAU OPENS

AccorHotels announces the opening of Pullman Vung Tau (www.accorhotels.com). Featuring spectacular views of Back Beach and Front Beach, the hotel is designed for business travelers, MICE guests, weddings and locals looking for a getaway from Ho Chi Minh City. The hotel has 356 spacious rooms and suites. Restaurants include Riviera, Corniche Ultra Lounge, Tapas by Pullman, Vinoteca by Pullman, Lobby Bar and Pool Bar. The 2,036sqm space includes two Grand Ballrooms, four multi-functional meeting rooms and a Chill-Out Area. Pullman Vung Tau also provides guests with a running map of the beach, separate swimming pools for adults and children and a fitness center.



VIETNAMESE FOOD AND WINE PAIRING BOOK LAUNCHES

In an easy-to-read book, *Vietnamese Food and Wine Pairing*, Alfredo de la Casa takes readers through the art of pairing wine with Vietnamese cuisine. The author starts with the basics of wine tasting, aromas and flavors, along with recommendation on pairing wines to 100 of Vietnam's most popular dishes. Each dish has a picture, brief description, as well as an explanation of the main ingredients and how the dish is cooked, followed by wine recommendations.

The book also contains three indexes: names of the dishes in Vietnamese, in English and a final one where dishes are listed by grapes. Alfredo de la Casa is a member of the Society of Wine Educators and is *Oi's* monthly wine columnist. He is the author of 13 books, including *Sherry wines: from origins to food pairing* and *Introduction to wine and wine tasting*, which were both winners of the international gourmand award. Born in England to Spanish parents, Alfredo currently lives in Vietnam with his wife. The book is available for purchase online at Amazon and Createspace.

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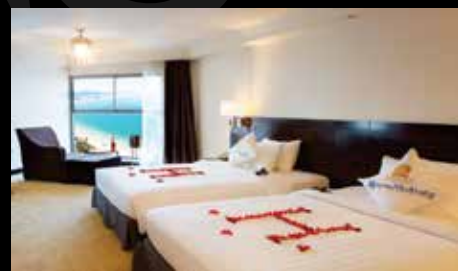




Happy New Year 2016

Located perfectly in the heart of Nha Trang Bay, Best Western Premier Havana Nha Trang is the ideal destination for your luxury getaway. Inspired by the beautiful harmony of Western and Asian styles, the hotel features a uniquely modern charming design concept, leaving you a warm welcome from the moment you enter the Hotel Lobby through to different rooms and suites.

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- ✧ Private underground tunnel leading from the hotel to the beach.
- ✧ Infinity swimming pool with panoramic ocean view.
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Troi Oi

The country in numbers

USD70-USD100

per kilogram for one Da Lak farmer's "elephant coffee," which will be distributed throughout the country starting 2016. Dang Nang Long, who owns the largest herd of domestic elephants in Vietnam's central highlands region, discovered that his elephants enjoyed ripened coffee beans when taking them to graze in the forest. Initially, he thought nothing of this revelation, but while on holiday with his wife in Thailand in 2012 he saw the locals enjoying elephant coffee, which was priced at around USD1,000 per kilo. Long and his wife received their elephant coffee brand registration certificate from the Intellectual Property Bureau of Vietnam in early 2015. To create elephant coffee, Ba first feeds the animals pineapple, sugarcane and bananas. This encourages the formation of a special type of digestive enzyme that imparts a distinctive flavor and smoothness to the finished brew. After a few days of this diet, the elephants are fed 20-50kg of coffee beans per meal. After two days of digestion, the elephants discharge around a kilogram of beans for every three ingested, and workers pick through the animal's dung to collect the valuable beans. The beans are washed with mineral water and wine and then left outside for 24 hours to absorb sunlight and moisture. The beans are then roasted in chicken fat in cast iron pans before being ground to finish the process.

VND100 BILLION

mansion and villa complex will be dismantled in Da Nang, after authorities refused to consider the plea of the tycoon who built the illegal property. Ngo Van Quang, director of a gold company based in Quang Nam Province, built the complex at the foot of Hai Van Mountain without any permit, and has repeatedly delayed court orders to dismantle the property, winning repeated approvals to extend the deadline set for dismantling. The property was constructed in 2013, and was discovered in early 2014 alongside a 4,000-hectare villa built without permission by a Major-General. More than a hundred workers will take at least six months to dismantle the villa complex, which consists of five wooden houses and 13 other houses in a leafy walled compound.



A festive red greeting card for Tet. It features yellow cherry blossoms and a large yellow '2' with the text 'Chúc Mừng Năm Mới' (Happy New Year). The Wine Embassy logo is at the top. Text on the card includes 'wishes you a happy TET', 'Personalize gifts for your clients, friends, and colleagues...', 'Exhaustive selection of wines starting at 270,000 vnd', and 'The price starting from 270,000 vnd'. At the bottom, it shows a basket of gifts including wine, coffee, and food. Contact information for Wine Embassy Boutique is at the very bottom.

WINE EMBASSY
wishes you a happy TET

Personalize gifts for your clients, friends, and colleagues...

Exhaustive selection of wines starting at 270,000 vnd

The price starting from 270,000 vnd

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O fees will be paid by students living at or below the poverty line who study at universities, colleges and vocational schools. Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung recently approved a proposal that will see poor students have their educational fees waived and that will also provide financial assistance for travel and essentials. From early 2016, beneficiaries will receive VND1 million per year for purchasing essentials such as school books, pens and pencils, and VND2-VND3 million for travel expenses with an additional VND150,000 for Tet expenses. Disabled students, high school graduates who lived in boarding schools for ethnic minorities and students who live in disadvantaged areas or ethnic minority regions are also eligible for the benefits. The program will help address high dropout rates in rural areas.

2,000

year-old Dong Son drum has been found in Timor Leste. The Vietnamese Dong Son culture existed between 700BC to around 100AD, and was the last great culture of Van Lang (the name of Vietnam during that period). The Dong Son people traded and spread their influence across Southeast Asia, and the large Dong Son drums are their most lasting cultural heritage. The bronze drums can weigh more than 100kgs, and are intricately decorated with geometric patterns, animals, boats and scenes of daily life. The drums were both musical instruments and cult objects, important in the social and martial rituals of the Dong Son people. The drum unearthed in Timor Leste measures more than a meter in diameter, and weighs 80kgs, and was discovered during construction efforts. It is one of the best-preserved Dong Son drums ever discovered, and will soon be sent to France where sophisticated dating techniques will determine its precise age.

18,000

ton jack-up drilling rig launched in Ba Ria, Vung Tau. The Tam Dam O5 oil rig, financed by Vietsovpetro and built by PetroVietnam Marine Shipyard JSC (PV shipyard), is the largest locally-produced jack-up rig yet launched in Vietnam. Tam Dam O5 cost around USD230 million, measures 70.4 meters in length, 76.2 meters in width, and 9.4 meters in height, and can drill in 120-meter-deep water to a depth of 9 kilometers, and can withstand Category 12 storms. Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai spoke warmly of the launch of the rig, and the development of Vietnam's industrial prowess. Hoang Trung Hai said that it demonstrated Vietnam's capacity in heavy industry, and hoped that it would stimulate growth in other sectors, as well as hoping that PV shipyard and the domestic oil-manufacturing sector expand their reach to foreign markets. The rig will become operational after a further nine months of construction, furnishing and testing.

VND100 MILLION

was paid to own a high-quality hunting shotgun. Many people supplement market-bought produce with fishing in Saigon's many waterways, or hunting and trap setting in the more vegetated parts of the city, but hunting for sport is also growing popular among wealthier residents of the city. Most weapons sold in Vietnam utilize compressed air, and prices start at around VND20 million, but Saigon is home to a number of dealers in high-end weaponry, whose rifles and shotguns can cost several thousand dollars. Nguyen Xuan Luu, head of the Ho Chi Minh City Forest Ranging Department, says that the use of shotguns to hunt animals is strictly illegal, and poses a serious hazard to human life. The Forest Ranging Department does not, however, have the authority to confiscate such weapons. The production and use of firearms can be punishable under Governmental Decree 167, with a fine of up to VND4 million, while repeat offenders can face imprisonment.



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Pitch Perfect

Meet the man building his own sound diffuser panels for better listening

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH**
IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**

IN THU DUC District in Ho Chi Minh City, 43-year-old accountant Pham Khac Tuong is turning discarded wood into one-of-a-kind, handmade sound diffuser panels worth thousands of dollars. Used by professional musicians or the most discerning music lover, a sound diffuser is an acoustic panel used to treat echoes and reflections. If that sounds similar to sound absorption panels, then it is – because on the base level the sound diffuser and sound absorber function on the same acoustic principle of using certain materials to affect sound waves. Instead of absorbing sound energy, however, a diffuser disperses sound waves on particular frequencies, thus giving extra depth to and increasing the musical quality of sounds.

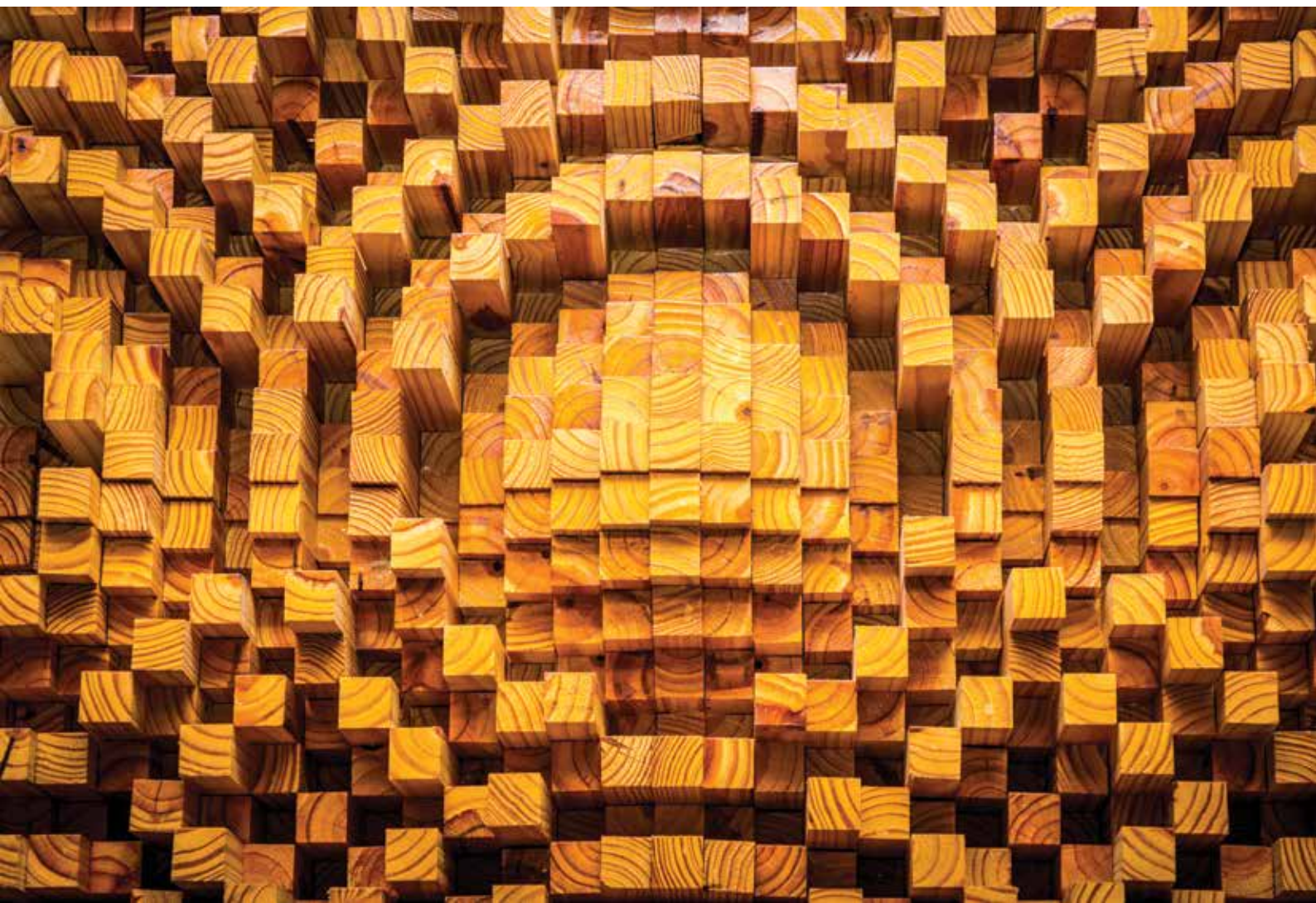
“It filters, magnifies and enriches sounds all at once,” explains Tuong. “That may not sound very impressive on paper, but in real practice that is the difference between listening to an old cassette tape in a cramped shoebox apartment and listening to a full-blown orchestra in an auditorium.”

There are a number of different diffusers, with each specialized for specific sound ranges, from bass to soprano. The more popular ones include maximum length sequence diffusers, quadratic residue diffusers, primitive-root diffusers, and

hemispherical diffusers.

Sound diffusion is an exact science. High-quality sound diffusers, like expensive bespoke ones, are custom-designed to a specific space and sound range. Tuong says the idea of making his own came out of necessity. “You cannot buy diffusers in Vietnam,” he claims, “because nobody sells them. The closest manufacturer is in Europe. And even if you are willing to shell out USD600 plus 40kg worth of global shipping charges per panel, those generic store-bought panels are not going to fit the acoustics of your room to a tee.”

The first sound diffuser Tuong made was in 2011 and took him two years of research before the actual project took off. “A hemispherical diffuser is not something just about anybody can build. It takes a lot of skill, knowledge and interpersonal resources,” he points out. With the help of audiophiles in his circle and studying from books such as Robert Harley’s *The Complete Guide to High-End Audio* and John M. Woram’s *Sound Recording Handbook*, Tuong educated himself on topics such as soundstages, harmonics, and the Helmholtz resonator principle. He measured the resonance of his room with equipment borrowed from a friend who worked at the city conservatory and mapped out



“That may not sound very impressive on paper, but in real practice that is the difference between listening to an old cassette tape in a cramped shoebox apartment and listening to a full-blown orchestra in an auditorium.”

an exact configuration using an acoustic auralization software.

After designing was done, the panel itself took a month to complete. For materials, Tuong collected old pinewood crates, broken fences or tables from recycling centers and even waste byproducts from carpenters' workshops. “Pinewood is considered junk by furniture factories, but it is actually the best building material for diffusers. Anybody who knows a thing or two about musical instruments knows that wood conducts sound beautifully. Commercial diffusers in stores are usually made of styrofoam to save cost, but styrofoam is only number three on the scale of sound conductivity.”

The pinewood Tuong collected was laser cut into 841 rectangular blocks of various

lengths by commissioned woodworkers, and then painstakingly assembled piece-by-piece by Tuong and his family over the course of a month into the final product: a hemispherical sound diffuser panel made out of solid pinewood. The panel weighs over 40kgs. Affixed to the wall like a piece of art, the effect the diffuser has on the acoustic resonance of Tuong's listening room is something he says has to be experienced in person.

“The reason I wanted a diffuser in the first place is because I noticed no matter how good the sound system, music from home audio still isn't on the same level as live performances. I won't say having a sound diffuser in your room erases that difference, but it's certainly getting there.”

Since building his first diffuser in 2011,

Tuong has made three more, one of which is a monstrosity as big as four other panels combined. He hangs the big one from the ceiling to further improve the acoustics of his listening room. He likes the sound of guitar clear and deep.

As far as Tuong knows, he's the only one in Vietnam who has ever successfully built a hemispherical diffuser. Friends, acquaintances and those who know about his work have asked if he plans to make a business out of building diffusers. As of now, Tuong's answer is a solid no. “I'm happy with my accounting job,” he explains. “Perhaps in the future when I'm near retirement. In the meantime, I'll gladly share my experience with fellow connoisseurs who want to build their own diffusers.” ■

Ho Tram Open Ushers In A New Era For Vietnam

The Ho Tram Open has come and gone, and now the dust has settled all we can say is... roll on next year!



IMAGE BY ZED

AS A PROUD media partner of the event, *Oi Vietnam* got an up close experience and had the chance to speak to spectators and sponsors throughout the week, who were unanimous in their collective praise for the show the event organizers put on.

So if you didn't get the chance to make it down to the Ho Tram Strip, what did you miss?

First and foremost, one of the most exciting climaxes in the history of the Asian Tour!

THE GOLF

The first four-man playoff in the Tour's history pitted the wits of world superstar Sergio Garcia, who appeared to have thrown away an unassailable lead, Thaworn Wiratchant, one of the Asian Tour Godfathers, Himmat Rai a young star from

India and Lin Wen-Tan from Taipei, who had entertained crowds all week with his colorful on and off-course display.

On two occasions it looked like the young Indian golfer Rai had the Championship in his grasp.

Firstly in regulation play, as Garcia made an uncharacteristic double-bogey on the 17th in plain view of the coliseum-like hospitality on the banks of the 18th green, that gave distant views of Garcia's tribulations.

Rai was safely on the 18th green in two, but faced a challenging two-putt to surely claim the second title in his Asian Tour career. His first putt came up short and was unable to hole-out for what would have been the biggest win, and biggest pay-day of his career.

A par at the last for Garcia triggered a

four-way playoff.

Rai's second chance came at the first sudden-death playoff hole, hitting his approach shot to within 8 feet under the sternest of pressure. Wiratchant stuffed his second into no more than 12 feet. Wen-Tan hit a miraculous recovery from the steep sand dunes and Garcia, after a colossal drive left only a gap-wedge 30 feet short, leaving an almost impossible putt and surely rendering his championship hopes redundant.

As the four gladiators approached what had been aptly termed "Asia's Grandest Stage," the crowd were stunned at the prospect of the mighty Garcia being held off by a once-in-a-lifetime performance by Rai. But there were still 2 others with a chance. Wen-Tan putted first, to within a few feet – tapping in for his par-4. Garcia

next, surely resigned to a tricky two-putt par-4 and a title let out of his grasp?

What happened next is reserved exclusively for true Champions. Garcia's putt tracked the first 18 feet up hill, then swiftly turned down hill and down grain banking hard left as gravity around the steep sided 18th green took hold. The resulting cheer was tantamount to a Major Championship or even a Cup final goal, the crowd clearly ecstatic and amazed at what they had just witnessed. Garcia had heaped the pressure on Wiratchant and Rai, both still with a chance to extend the play-off.

Wiratchant's effort slipped by the right edge of the hole, so was left to Rai. Under the most extreme pressure, the charismatic Rai kept control of his nerves and holed out to extend his dual with Garcia.

The crowd were left breathless as both golfers were ferried back to the 18th tee. It was a pressure cooker environment. Garcia tee'd off first, ripping a 340 yard drive that found the precariously placed fairway bunker – courtesy of golf course designer and golf legend Greg Norman.

Rai's tee-shot found trouble left. Despite a valiant effort, Rai could not stave off the Garcia factor, whose controlled bunker shot settled no more than 10 feet. Rai's par putt didn't find the hole, leaving Garcia to celebrate as inaugural Ho Tram Open champion.

Clearly exhausted, Garcia was drowned in Champagne by some of his countrymen and closest friends, showing the popularity of one of Spain's favorite sons. After the round Garcia was clearly delighted to have won given the quality of his golf through the week.

"Winning is never easy. I was fortunate and you have to be lucky to win. I was fortunate to get a second chance after I pretty much gave it away. I'm very happy as I haven't won in a while. After you've been up there and you don't win, a lot of things go through your mind and this win will help give me a little bit more confidence," said Garcia, who signed off with a three-under-par 68 for a 14-under-par 270 aggregate.

This was billed as Vietnam's richest sports event. It can also now claim to be Vietnam's *best-ever* sports event.

THE ENTERTAINMENT

The Ho Tram Open created something different, the likes of which has not been seen in the region. Not only did the event secure the attendance of world stars such as Sergio Garcia, Darren Clarke, Thomas Bjorn, Geoff Ogilvy and Robert Rock, it created something the world of golf will surely not forget in a while and certainly not the sponsors, guests and players. Being Vietnam's biggest-ever sports event and the richest of its kind, there was much anticipation. The ambition was lofty and on the face of it would have required a superhuman effort to pull-off.

The strap line *Where Golf Meets Entertainment*, which was splashed around Vietnam's major towns, cities and airports,



"The Ho Tram Open has provided us the opportunity to show the world what The Ho Tram Strip stands for. The vision from the very start was to take hold of a sports event and shape it in line with our business DNA... Hospitality and Entertainment," says Michael Kelly, Executive Chairman of the Board. "The great game of golf and our association with it afforded us the opportunity to develop The Ho Tram Open, which in its aftermath was 100 percent the right decision."

Not only can we boast 'The World's Best New Golf Course,' but can now say with confidence that we staged one of the finest events on the Asian Tour roster. We delivered a Championship that will live long in the memory of the players, our event partners and spectators alike, whose positive sentiments will be carried from region to region, singing the praises of the Ho Tram Strip."



lived up to the billing.

The week-long entertainment program would have put any major event to shame.

The Ho Tram Strip has evolved into one of Southeast Asia's pre-eminent entertainment and luxury hotspots, and if the Ho Tram Open is anything to go by, the destination is on an unmatched trajectory.

So what were some of the *must-sees* from the week's entertainment?

THE GALA DINNER

The black-tie affair was regarded as a must attend event for the great and the good from the world of sport, business and celebrity.

Reserved for sponsors, players, VIP guests and officials, the evening kicked off with former Westlife star Brian McFadden performing in front of a backdrop akin to a Bond film opener. Brian was joined by Vietnam's very own stars, Duc Tuan and Tia Hai Chau, who performed a closing duet with McFadden to close the show.

Guests also enjoyed an interview with the headline players from the Golf Channel's Tom Abbott, who shared some of their favorite moments in golf and their excitement at being at the Ho Tram Open.

The executive team from the Ho Tram Strip also celebrated a recent haul of

awards that included the prestigious "Best New Golf Course in the World" from the World Golf Awards.

Post Gala, guests had a wealth of options, from the casino, in-house boutique nightclub, poolside parties and a selection of bars from which to choose.

A good start to the week!

THE PRO-AM

Hot on the heels of the gala, a pro-am place is one of the hottest tickets in town. Traditionally, the money-can't-buy experience of golf, sponsors and VIPs were treated to the five-star service from The Bluffs team, having the chance to play the pristine course just a few hours before the Championship kicked off in earnest.

FRIDAY FIGHT NIGHT

To match any fight night in Vegas, the Friday evening was a showdown at The Grand for some of the regions' top Muai Thai fighters and boxers. Staged in The Grand Ballroom, the evening was a sell-out, with anyone who registered for a ticket enjoying the spectacle free-of-charge.

SATURDAY CONCERT

Brian McFadden was a hit through the week, enjoying the atmosphere and excitement only a destination like Ho Tram can offer up. The amiable Irishman

was a huge attraction. Tickets had been offered up to spectators and guests free-of-charge, encouraging a surge from Ho Chi Minh and Vung Tau, making great use of the free bus service provided by the tournament.

The Grand is *the* perfect concert venue. It has space to accommodate bespoke bars and food stations. It has the right feeling of grandeur to stage these major entertainment outings. It importantly has the amenities to accommodate the after parties for something of this scale.

As you can imagine, the party ran long into the night and was a memorable occasion for all who attended!

So in conclusion, this event has certainly captured the imagination of a broad spectrum of people in Vietnam. To stage such an ambitious event in its first year and to deliver it without a hitch is something to celebrate and something which has set a new precedent.

From what *Oi* understands there are plans to go bigger and better in 2016. With the return of defending Champion Sergio Garcia and a promise of the world's best golfers, The Ho Tram Open has taken a giant leap in becoming one of Southeast Asia's must attend events, but also one of world golf's new stars.

Huge congratulations from *Oi* and more of the same! ■





IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

Ordered Chaos

Artist Will Whitehouse and his human figures

TEXT BY **PATRICK CARPENTER**

WILL WHITEHOUSE'S STUDIO is small. There are beds all over this city that are wider. No matter; space itself is not a prerequisite for art. But good light is, and one wall of his studio has windows open to soft natural light and looks across *Rear Window* style to his neighbor's hallway and living room – close enough to having running conversations without leaving home. The other wall is a floor to ceiling mirrored closet that was there when Will moved in – the mirror tricking you into believing there is more space. For an artist, such mirrors would be handy for self-portraits, but there were no traces of any in his studio. There were sketches and watercolors of figures on the wall, and works of faces in progress on his easels. There are tubes of paint resting on tables and windowsills and an old pair of shorts covered with more oil paint than a Pollack drip painting lying on the floor. There are jars with bouquets of brushes and photos of figure studies on a side table, partially covered by rags and stray brush strokes of color. In opposite corners, the

easels were turned to and from the angle of the sun. In short, the studio is ordered

He is equally fascinated in the dynamics of anatomy: the range of motion in a hand or torso, as he is in the expression such dynamics lend to the story in that human.

chaos, which seems fitting, for wasn't the first creator celebrated for making order

out of chaos?

We sit down just outside his studio, with the door open so that I can see some of his work while we talk. They are all interpretations of the human figure and they are placed in such a way as to seem to be listening to our conversation. But they also serve as points of reference when words don't work.

The conversation begins in Hobart, Tasmania - the island 240km south of southern Australia - a wildly beautiful place to grow up, run around and get out. Will headed to Sydney with a degree in marketing, which was essentially a misguided attempt to play it safe with the idea of a career. He quickly shed that notion and spent the next years in Australia washing dishes in a Sydney hotel at night and revisiting his first passion of drawing the human form during the day. Growing up in Hobart, Will's mother had fostered his talent by taking him along to her art school. In Sydney, it was a teacher in a life

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN



ARTWORK IMAGES PROVIDED BY WILL WHITEHOUSE



Banh Mi Lady #6

"I've done quite a few pictures of this lady. She's got a *banh mi* stand on a corner near where I live. I've been buying *banh mi* from her for a few years now. She is an important part of the landscape of Chung Cu Su Van Hanh. We've all seen versions of this lady around HCMC."



BBQ Man in Red Chair #2

"I've included this painting for similar reasons. This man makes *com suon* every morning on another corner of the apartment blocks. The green wall and the red plastic chair are also iconic images of HCMC."

drawing class that opened his eyes up to the joy of drawing the human figure and form – mastering the proportions and expressions. “It was my first time really trying to capture what I saw in a literal sense, rather than something impressionistic or symbolic,” he explains.

Will would then take this rekindled enthusiasm for capturing the human form and spirit back to Tasmania for three years of art school, where he would struggle with theory and conceptualism but embrace the work of artists such as Manet and Singer Sargent: artists who advanced color and tone in portraiture and in painting the human form. Ask Will about Manet and he will give you ten minutes on the subtle shifts between pinks and greens in the skin of Manet’s people. This will lead to a digression on detecting the different skin tones in people across

different continents and how he is using more purple in his paintings of Asians than he expected.

From the starting points of ‘draw what you see instead of what you think you see’ and ‘get through the paint to find the figure,’ Will’s work evolved in an emotionally realistic sense, favoring an Impressionist approach over a more photographic approach (e.g., Caravaggio). “I was just exploring paint; it was less a focus on trying to represent a figure realistically than trying to paint more expressively, to enhance the emotional context of the work.” This exploration has led Will to begin to experiment with the abstract. Form-wise, his subjects are still realistic, but now he is embracing what he finds interesting in a feature even if it strays from correct proportion. At times, he loses the figure completely in order to

try to focus on painting for the sheer joy of painting “to not have the image hindered by any recognizable form.”

He Likes People

Listening to Will, patterns emerge. There is his work as a dishwasher and, earlier, in a full-service gas station. It’s manual, repetitive, unpretentious work. The dishwashing was instrumental in helping him solidify his desire to be an artist: the repetitive nature of the work allowed his mind to wander off, to sort things out, and to revisit what he’d seen and captured that day. And it is not hard to see his time back in Hobart at art school, where almost all his work was single subject and rarely ever two figures on one canvas, as a time of heavy introspection. His paintings showed the heavier side of the human condition, with loneliness and subjects trudging through life. These patterns come together to find an artist who modestly underestimates his facility with words but that really does not matter – what he wants to say is all there in oil on canvas.

Will is clearly a humanitarian and a humanist. He likes people. He is fascinated by them, both in their unifying form and in their personal internal narratives. Will sees the emotional content of people and the stories his subjects have in their body posture, in the way they tilt their heads or round their shoulders. He is equally fascinated in the dynamics of anatomy: the range of motion in a hand or torso, as he is in the expression such dynamics lend to the story in that human. For Will, the trappings of rank and worth in society are false starts; he’d never do a stiff portrait of a subject shielded by a costume and surrounded by possessions: there’s no air, no life in such statements. To hear Will talk and to see his work is to recognize an artist who is all about the unmanicured feeling in his subjects.

This preference for the unguarded, honest pose has made Vietnam a perfect destination for him. Every street, every shop house offers a story to someone with eyes practiced enough to find it. There is plenty of pretension here, with incomes rising and urban populations keen on consuming accessories that advertise wealth. But there are far more who still live life more modestly, more openly. Will’s canvases show Vietnam as it truly is, and the people as they really are. They are poignant without slipping into sympathy or nostalgia. Vietnam’s hotels and nicer homes are filled with paintings that show Vietnam as a cliché: *ao dais* and bird cages and falling autumn leaves. They are postcards of saccharine landscapes – and they seem to sell well to tourists. But if you ever want to have the real flavor and expression of Vietnam, to recognize the entire country in a single subject, you would do well to find Will Whitehouse’s work. He has plans and they involve a transplant to the desert, so catch him now. It would be a pity to discover him after he’s left, and the easiest place to find it is at VinGallery (6 La Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2). ■

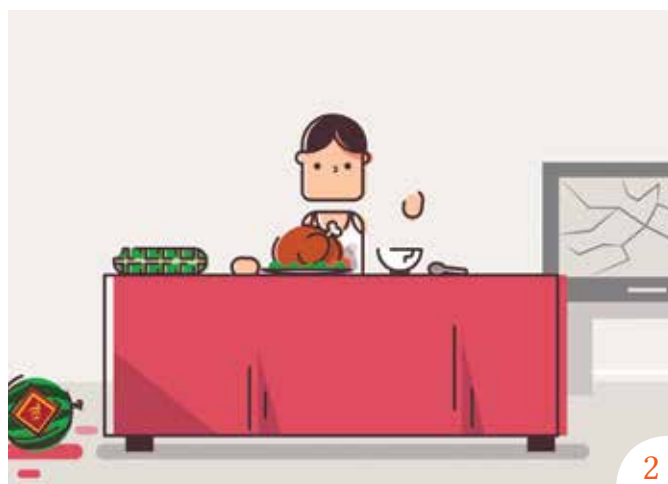


Denise in Kitchen

“I’ve included this one for some variety in terms of the composition. There’s a bit more of the environment than most of my other paintings. Maybe it’s just because the subject is my wife? But I feel there’s something atmospheric and poignant about this painting. Maybe a little melancholy?”

An Illustrated Guide to Tet Superstitions

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DUC TRAN AND TU BUI



ALONG WITH TET celebrations come a litany of superstitions that can either make the incoming year a success or a disaster. Here are some of the most common superstitions, playfully illustrated in a short animated film entitled *10 Things Not to Do in Lunar New Year* by Tu Bui and Duc Tran.

1. Don't sweep the house during the first three days of Tet because you'll also sweep your luck and good fortune away. On the eve of Tet, no matter how busy everyone gets, Vietnamese families will take the time to clean the house, garden and altar - and during Tet, be extra careful to keep everything nice and tidy.

2. Be careful not to break anything because it symbolizes damage or loss, possibly to family or societal ties. Grownups will caution kids to be extra careful with bowls and plates.

3. Don't hold funerals during the first

three days of Tet. Tet is cause for national celebration, so grieving families are expected to put aside their sorrows for the time being. If someone dies on the eve of Tet, the family will try to hold the funeral that day. If it's on the first day of Tet, they'll delay to the second day. Grieving families usually don't go well-wishing; instead others should come to their home.

4. Avoid wearing white or black. White and black clothing are associated with death and grieving, so people will opt for colorful clothes befitting of celebration.

5. Don't swear or fight. Everyone should be on their best behavior during Tet towards neighbors, friends and family. Losing your temper or shouting will bring bad luck for the year.

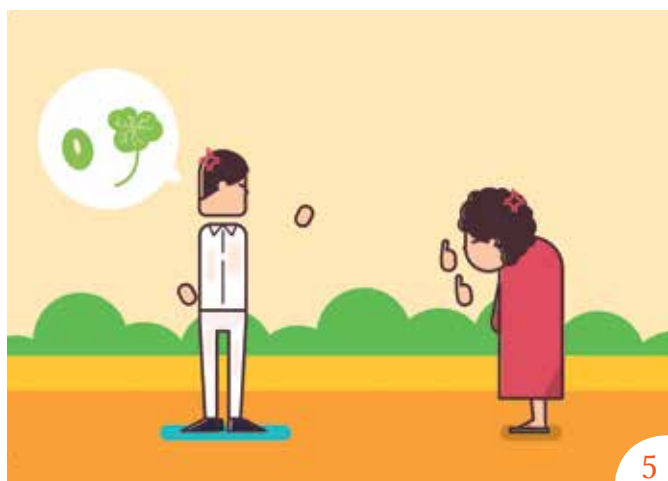
6. Don't give away water or fire. Both water and fire, essential elements, are viewed as auspicious: fire because it's

red, the color of luck, and water because an urn full of water symbolizes fortune and bounty. The Vietnamese also say that "money flows like water," so homes will make sure they have plenty of water and stoke their fires so as not to run out.

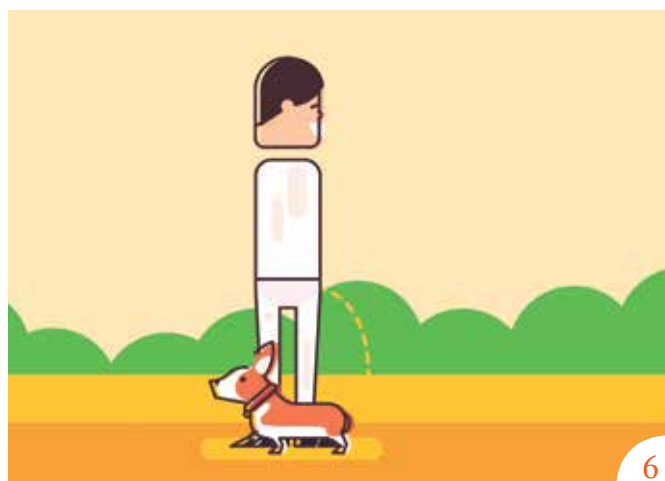
7. Don't be the first caller on the first day of Tet. For Vietnamese, the first person to visit their home in the new year will affect the family's fortunes for the whole year. Lots of thought will go into finding someone very successful or otherwise fortunate to invite as the first caller. If unsure, only visit very close friends or family.

8. Don't borrow money. Vietnamese will avoid borrowing or lending during Tet. Borrowing means you'll be poor all year whereas lending (money or other items) means you're giving away your luck.

9. Avoid taboo foods. Certain foods, like



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duck or dog, are traditionally viewed as bad luck during Tet. Other food might be considered unlucky because of its nature (eg. shrimp, because they swim backwards meaning your plans for the year will stall) or because of its name (eg. bitter melon in Vietnamese is *kho qua*, and *kho* can also mean “suffering”).

10. Be happy! No one wants to be around a downer during the happiest time of the year. So put your worries aside and join in the fun!

In addition to things to avoid, Vietnamese will surround themselves with auspicious omens – heavily flowering trees and shrubs that signal prosperity; blooming yellow and red flowers, the colors of gold and luck; and

visits to the pagoda.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATORS: Saigon-based Duc Tran and Tu Bui collaborated on this animated short entitled *10 Things Not to Do in Lunar New Year*, with Tu Bui supplying the graphics and Duc Tuan adding animation, sound and text. Duc initially moved from Hanoi to Saigon to pursue a degree in Economics/Law, but realized in his third year that he was more interested in Design. When the animation industry took off, Duc found work as a Motion Graphic Designer and is now Creative Director at Starseed, a digital communication agency. “We made the viral clip for a Tet-themed viral clip competition,” explains Duc. “We

brainstormed whether to illustrate what to do or what *not* to do during Tet and found that the taboos were more interesting.”

As for a Hanoi vs. Saigon Tet, Duc prefers Hanoi. “Because of the cold weather, Tet in Hanoi somehow just feels warmer. The city is alive, whereas in Saigon, everyone goes back to their hometown because many people aren’t actually from here. For me, Tet means being at home with family, watching movies and cooking together as a family.”

For more of their work, including animated clips on what to do during Tet and the history behind the Tet envelopes, visit www.behance.net/ducktran and www.behance.net/xoyooxox. ■

A Countryside Tet at Grandma's

ILLUSTRATIONS BY YEN NHI LU

FOR MANY VIETNAMESE, Tet is synonymous with family. Wherever you may be, it's the one, and often the only, time during the year to hop on a bus, boat, train or plane to return to your hometown to spend time with loved ones you haven't seen for far too long, bearing gifts to make up for time away.

Growing up in the rural Cape of Ca Mau, Vietnam's southernmost point, freelance illustrator Yen Nhi Lu was inspired to capture the joy of homecoming in her children's book, *A Countryside Tet with Grandma*, dedicated to children of the city. Her fanciful multimedia illustrations were first drawn in pencil before being scanned and colored via computer. Her simple yet heartwarming tale is loosely based on her uncle's family who lives in the city. "One Tet, my little cousin came to the countryside and was mesmerized by the frenzy of Tet preparations. We didn't go out to buy Tet stuff like people do in the city; we made everything from scratch, from cakes to decorations. This simple story is about the joy of a city cousin who comes home to be with her country family during the holidays."

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Tet was only a few days away, and Com's parents were busy working late. She was often at home alone, with her dog Milo as her only company. When she got hungry,



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Com would go into the kitchen and warm up the food her mother had made that morning. She always remembered to share some with Milo. One afternoon, Com's mother came home earlier than usual and they both got ready for the trip back to the countryside. Com excitedly packed her best clothes. On the journey back to her grandma's, Com was thrilled to see the endless fields of green.

When they got to Grandma's, Com saw that everything was different than her home in the city. There were lots of shady green trees and she saw her cousin, Gao, swinging from a jackfruit tree. Grandma called Com and her cousins into the yard to grill rice paper until it puffed up, a tasty Tet treat. More and more delicious Tet foods were prepared. Grandma made sticky rice, beans and pork and everyone helped wrap Tet rice cakes. Com loved carrying great big bundles of them to the pot. The whole family sat around waiting for the cakes to cook.

The next morning, Com and her grandmother ferried watermelons to the market. Everyone was buying and selling and in just a little while, all the watermelons had been sold. Com and her grandmother bought some flowers and lots of other goodies.

On the eve before Tet, everything was ready, and Com and her cousins helped Grandma arrange all the food before the ancestral altar. On the first day of the new year, the children put on their new clothes and wished their grandmother a happy Tet. In turn, she gave them little red envelopes to ring in the new year!



BIO: Yen Nhi Lu is a Saigon-based freelance illustrator and graphic designer. She enjoys illustrating books and creating images for teens with a hint of romanticism. More of her work can be seen at www.behance.net/LUYENNHI. Contact her at chuonchuondiboi@gmail.com or by phone at 01262 627 628 ■

The Legend of the Tet Pole

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THAO NGUYEN



ONCE UPON A time in Vietnam, demons ruled the land. People had to work very hard for the Demon King, giving him a portion of their harvest every year. The Demon King noticed that the people were planting rice and eating the wonderful food at the tips. So one year, the Demon King said that he would take the tips of the rice plants and the humans could have the rest. When it came time to harvest, all the humans had left were the scraggly stalks and roots. The demons were fat and happy while the humans were reduced to skin and bones.

The kind Buddha wanted to help the humans against the cruel demons, so he told them to plant potatoes the next year. When the Demon King came to collect his tribute, all he got were the worthless vines and leaves while the humans feasted on the tubers below. The Demon King was furious, but a deal was a deal. He decreed that next year, the demons would take both the tips and the roots, thinking that whatever the humans planted, the demons were sure to get the best parts.

Again, the Buddha came to the humans and told them to plant corn instead. The humans listened to the Buddha and when harvest time came, they gave the Demon King the silky tips and the roots and kept the delicious hanging ears of corn for themselves. Seeing that he had been tricked again, the Demon King forbade the humans from planting anything the next year.

The Buddha appeared to the humans and told them to call the Demon King to negotiate another deal. The humans gathered all the money they had and asked the Demon King to buy just the land under the shadow of a cloak hanging off a bamboo pole. Whatever was under the shadow would belong to the humans. The land outside the shadow would be the Demon King's. Thinking it was a good deal, the greedy Demon King agreed, and both sides signed an agreement.

The people planted a bamboo plant and the Buddha created magic. He made the bamboo grow higher and higher towards the sun and the cloak expanded wider and wider. As the bamboo grew close to the sun, the cloak cast an ever wider shadow until it covered all of Vietnam. The demons had to retreat farther and farther back until there was nowhere to go but into the sea.

Seeing that they were thwarted, the demons regrouped and returned to take back the land. The war was fierce. But the Buddha helped the humans and they won many battles. The demons then sought to find out what the Buddha was afraid of. The Buddha let it be known that he was afraid of fruits, rice cakes and bananas.



The Buddha also discovered that the demons were afraid of dog's blood, pandan leaves, garlic and calcified lime.

In the next battle, the demons brought fruits, rice cakes and bananas and threw them at the Buddha. The Buddha instructed the humans to gather everything up as food and then chase the demons, sprinkling dog's blood and throwing lime at them while whipping them with pandan leaves. The demons were again chased into the sea. Accepting defeat, they begged the Buddha to allow them to return to the land a few days every year to visit the graves of their ancestors. The merciful Buddha agreed.

That is why, every year at Tet, people erect bamboo Tet poles with little bits of fabric, noisemakers and a few pandan leaves, to remind the demons not to encroach on the land of the humans.



BIO: "I like children's stories," says 23-year-old illustrator and web designer Thao Nguyen. "So I found a folktale that was cute but had a lot of meaning and was not well-known to most people." Thao sketched out her illustrations of the *Legend of the Tet Pole* in pencil before scanning and adding colors and texture via computer. Her dream is to become a children's book author and illustrator. "The world of children has so much color, fantasy and imagination," says the Saigon-based illustrator who grew up in Ca Mau. "These types of stories are important for children to learn about Vietnamese culture. The more they know, the more open-minded they'll be."

For more of Thao's work, visit www.behance.net/ndpthao ■





Take Me to The River

With Tet just around the corner, Vietnam's waterways will soon be busier than ever

TEXT BY **ALEX GREEN**
IMAGES PROVIDED BY **KEN PRESTON**

THE GENTLE 'PUT-PUT' of a single-cylinder Chinese diesel engine is the soundtrack to the waterways of Vietnam. While large, modern, metal-hulled freighters and sand barges have taken over much of the heavy lifting required for Vietnam's rapid modernization and industrial development, the more traditional wooden boats, skiffs, barges and coracles still ply their trade along Vietnam's thousands of miles of rivers and canals.

American Ken Preston has dedicated himself to studying the large variety of Vietnamese boats, and regularly makes

trips across the country to seek out relics of Vietnam's maritime tradition. It is a quest that began almost half a century ago. "I was born in August 1946, which made me just about the perfect age to tour Vietnam for free as soon as I finished college. Fortunately, I had an easy war compared to many. Nobody killed me, or even made a very serious attempt at it. More importantly, I didn't kill anyone else," he recalls. Despite such inauspicious beginnings, Ken has an enduring relationship with Vietnam and its people, aided by his bodyguard and interpreter, Mr. Mui. After several years examining

boats in North America, looking for the "perfect boat," a work that grew from Ken's childhood experiences as a fisherman and boatman in Alaska, he set off for Vietnam in December 2004, with the aim of "photographing every type of boat in the peninsula." Unsurprisingly, he remains engaged with the task to this day.

The freighters of the Mekong Delta are particularly iconic; almost all have red-painted bows with a pair of large oval eyes to watch for traffic and help the captain find his way back to safe harbor. While there is a lot of variety to the Mekong Delta freighters: some with large deckhouses to transport dry goods, some with a floodable central live well for fish transportation, others simply with a flush deck for loading more robust cargo, all are built to a similar plan. "All start with an exquisitely curved barrel stave hull. The hull is built right up to the deck edge with no frames whatsoever, formed entirely by the curve of the planks, which are pre-bent at each end. These boats are as well-fitted together as a lute or a whisky barrel, and are endlessly adaptable," he explains.

The freighters are most commonly between 40 to 60 feet long, and are built in a scant three months. "While the hull is an exquisite piece of construction, they are often rather frumpy looking when finished. They are generally powered by a long-tailed outboard motor, a wonderfully



simple unit that is ideal for the shallow and often rubbish-laden waters of the Mekong Delta, tangled with rafts of water hyacinths. The whole unit can be picked off and rebuilt as needed, and the prop can easily be hoisted out of the water to clear any blockages. The outboards are almost always started in the air, an unnerving sight when in close company!”

Many of the larger boats also have covered living quarters for longer journeys, extending over the stern. Protruding beyond this is an area for hanging laundry and for slinging hammocks that provides some respite from the sun. Despite the various additions to the superstructure, when cruising light these boats are fine river crafts, nosing along at a good pace. They are, however, more often than not seen loaded right down to the waterline, trusting to their exquisite construction to carry heavy cargo without foundering.

Overloaded

One of the most common cargos, especially at this time of year, is sugarcane, though the crop is providing bittersweet sustenance for farmers. Due to bumper harvests earlier in the year, sugarcane prices have plummeted to around USD40 per ton, sometimes dropping even lower than that, while yields have dropped significantly due to adverse weather conditions. Still, sugarcane is ubiquitous, and the VND5,000

nuoc mia refreshes and revitalizes Saigon’s busy commuters at almost every street corner. The Mekong’s wooden freighters constantly serve this demand, piling their boats high with sugarcane loaded crosswise, to be sold at waterfront markets or taken to refineries on the outskirts of the city.

For the captains who work these boats, it is a life that is at once lazy and full of industry. Floating soporifically downstream under the beating heat of the sun is work in itself, and this easy motion is only achieved with a lifetime’s knowledge of the river and its traffic. Working a heavily-laden freighter in narrow waterways, navigating between dozens of other craft, requires constant vigilance and careful management of the engine and tiller bar. It is a privilege to watch a skilled captain at work. The Saigon River is incredibly tidal, and when the tide is coming in, it is difficult for any large boat to make any progress. Many instead choose to anchor, which can be a complicated process in itself amongst so much traffic.

It is unsurprising that the Mekong freighters, so characteristically Vietnamese themselves, play a leading role in one of Vietnam’s most iconic celebrations, Tet. For Tet, the sugarcane and scrap metal cargoes are replaced with brightly colored bouquets of chrysanthemums, marigolds, bougainvillea, *mao ga* flowers, lavender, kumquat trees and, particularly in southern

Vietnam, the ochra integerrima or *mai vang* (“Mickey Mouse plant”). Even the smaller ferries can carry more than 500 small flowerpots, while larger boats handle the kumquat and *mai vang* trees. Together, the gathered boats create a riotous explosion of color, bringing together plants from across the Mekong. One of the most notable gardening regions is Sa Dec, located near the Tien River and once known by the French as *le jardin de Cochinchine*. Sa Dec boasts 400 hectares of land on which more than 2,000 different varieties of flowers are cultivated, and the months before Tet are the busiest of the year for this fragrant and beautiful little town.

The assorted transport boats of the Mekong bring the produce of Sa Dec to the banks of Saigon, and one of the most vibrant flower markets of the Tet period takes place along Tau Hu Canal in District 8. The captains moor their craft over several kilometers, and hundreds of boats blooming with all manner of flowers line the bank of the canal, nosing onto the street. Saigon explodes with color and fragrance in January, and the blooms spill onto the street in front of the boats. Every Vietnamese family bedecks their home with flowers for Tet, some of the larger kumquat trees can be sold for up to VND5 million - traders make a good profit at this time of year, made all the better for carrying such a pleasant cargo. ■

Understanding Vietnamese Culture and Customs

Reviewing the 2016 edition of *Vietnam - Culture Smart!*

TEXT AND IMAGE BY JAMES PHAM



IN THE RECENTLY released eighth edition of the HSBC Expat Explorer survey, Vietnam placed 25th overall out of 39 popular expat destinations based on economics, experience and family, according to responses collected from almost 22,000 expats across the world. Vietnam ranked highest (2nd) for the ease of making friends and socializing and scored well for savings and having disposable income, but bottomed out in regards to health and childcare quality. Specifically, though, when it came to quality of life, respondents put Vietnam almost at the bottom of the list, at number 33.

Glance through any expat forum and you get the sense that for every one person in love with Vietnam, there are five others who wax vitriolic about how difficult, backwards or confusing Vietnam and its people can be. For those determined to make Vietnam their home, though, it often takes months or more likely years to break through the bamboo curtain of cultural

differences to get to a point of mutual acceptance, or at least understanding.

This month, the 2006 version of *Vietnam — Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture* is getting a long overdue update. Written by Geoffrey Murray, a former Australian army war correspondent and current freelance book and magazine editor for the Chinese government, *Vietnam — Culture Smart!* is part guidebook, part etiquette manual on Vietnam.

The book begins with chapters giving an overview of Vietnam's history and people. "Kind and generally helpful toward strangers, [the Vietnamese] are industrious, determined to improve their living standards, relatively honest, but always ready to seize any advantage that might come their way," Murray states in the introduction. While written for newbies to the country, the first few chapters contain interesting tidbits, such as the origins of the Viet people as determined by etymologists and anthropologists. "The Viets were a

race known since antiquity as a migratory, hunting people, perpetually moving and spreading beyond their frontiers of origin, carrying bow and arrow, axe and javelin," Murray writes of the Mandarin ideogram for "Viet", conveying "to run" with elements signifying a lance or javelin.

The book has tips useful for foreigners looking to interact with locals. "One should never offer to share the costs" of a Vietnamese dinner, says Murray. "Simply make a silent vow to reciprocate in a good restaurant at the first opportunity." And for those of us who cringe when remembering the first time we were invited to a formal meal in a Vietnamese home, some of these words of advice would've come in handy: "You may refrain from taking something you don't like, but, if the hostess serves it to you unknowingly, force it down if at all possible" and "a little something should be left in the bowl to indicate to the host that there was enough food and everyone is satisfied."

Vietnam — Culture Smart! is also

peppered with humorous anecdotes from Murray's travels, for instance on the country's love affair with karaoke: "I have often been embarrassed, for example, after my hosts have delivered a selection of traditional love songs in beautiful tenor voices, to be reduced to something like 'You are my sunshine, my only sunshine...'"

But it's Murray's analysis of the Vietnamese psyche that expats will find most interesting. "The Vietnamese are a people who place great emphasis on relationships radiating out from a central family core; protecting the family honor and avoiding the loss of face accompany a sense of modesty and decorum in all public dealings," begins the chapter on Values and Attitudes. He further discusses the enigmatic and eternal source of expat frustration: the Vietnamese smile which often is the "direct opposite of what it normally indicates in the West." Most of us have probably had an experience somewhere in our early days where a seemingly inappropriately timed Vietnamese smile only served to worsen an already aggravating situation. The "Business Briefing" chapter also touches on the Vietnamese smile as a way to mask the fact that someone may simply not understand something that was said. Murray discourages confronting the issue directly, but instead apologizing for being unclear and trying to explain it in a different way, while avoiding any showing of irritation or anger.

As to the reason behind the update, publishing house Kuperard told *Oi*: "Vietnam has opened up hugely politically and socially since the first edition was published in 2006, and actively encourages foreign investment and tourism. Westernization and a free market economy is changing the role of women, the nature of the family, and traditional social networks. Also, all the statistics have been updated."

Indeed, while some of the new numbers are interesting (eg. 115.3 percent of households own a motorbike, from a 2014 survey), the update falls short of re-writing certain broad statements that are obviously no longer true, for example: "officially, tipping is not allowed", "there are no highway service stations" or "there are no crosswalks in Vietnam." The book also paints Vietnamese beliefs with a broad stroke, failing to distinguish what beliefs may now only apply to rural Vietnam versus the increasingly Westernized cities. Admittedly, though, in a country as dynamic and varied as Vietnam, to accurately portray the Vietnamese mind would require a scope far beyond the book's 168 pages.

On the eve of the release of the new edition (January 7, 2016), *Oi* spoke to author Geoffrey Murray.

How did you research this book?

After my war reporting assignment ended, I felt I knew so little about the country and so I set out to remedy that

deficiency. I read everything I could find on Vietnamese history and on the war. My chance to revisit came in 1996 when a UK publisher who had handled my book on doing business with China asked me to do the same for Vietnam. Again, I did a lot of preparatory reading and then conducted numerous interviews with officials and business people.

A lot has changed about Vietnam since your writing the book in 2006. What is the biggest challenge in writing about a country that is changing as quickly as Vietnam?

You highlight a very unfortunate fact. When Kuperard wanted to publish a fresh edition of the book, they couldn't find me and so asked an official in the Vietnam Embassy in London to help. She simply updated some statistics, but did nothing else. It's not surprising that some things are out of date but I hope this is outweighed by the general theme of an ancient proud country full of dynamism and potential. As you say, it's changing fast and an author always risks being out of date. The business book, for example, was ruined by a financial crisis hitting Asia that nobody could have foreseen.

What Asian nation do you think Vietnam will most resemble, businesswise in 10 years' time? Do you agree with the "younger brother" analogy – Vietnam as a country forced to display tenacity and attention seeking as a result of being pushed around by a much bigger northern neighbor?

I quite like the 'younger brother' analogy, reflecting the feisty character that enabled Vietnam to endure prolonged war and almost total destruction and recover in such a remarkable way. In the 1960s, despite the war, I felt it was a beautiful country with vast potential and that has proved true. With innovative policies, the government is creating a country that will stand out in Asia in the years to come, especially through entities like ASEAN and APEC. I see some of the best features of Japan's economic boom in the 1960s and 1970s, and Singapore's many achievements over the decades, as being mirrored in Vietnam. The spirit to win in the war years still seems present.

Tourism numbers indicate many foreign visitors may come once to Vietnam and never again. What would you like to see changed to make Vietnam a more visitor-friendly destination?

I am aware of some of the negative publicity generated by visitors' bad experiences. I am sorry about this as I think Vietnam has the conditions to be one of the world's great tourist destinations. It's an expensive place to visit and if you add in the scams etc. then you won't get people coming back. The tourist industry needs an overhaul and creation of a strict code

of conduct plus education to make people realize bad behavior is self defeating.

Vietnam remains the country that has played a huge role in my life, with memories undimmed by time. I really want to see it prosper and wish the Vietnamese people every success.

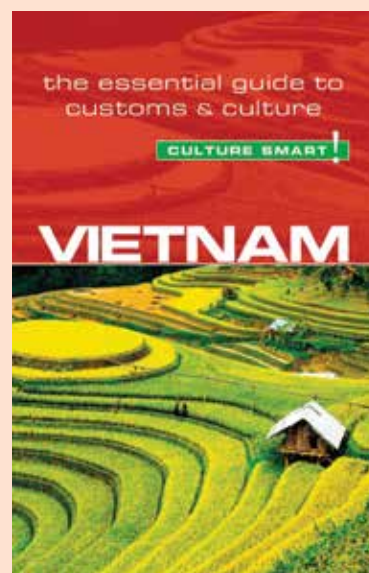
The "Culture Smart" series are guides to customs and culture and are published by Kuperard. The series consists of almost 100 countries and is available as eBooks for Kobo, Kindle and iBooks. See www.culturesmart.co.uk ■

TRADITIONAL TABOOS

There are many traditional taboos and omens of bad luck that continue to be observed to varying degrees. They include the following:

- Gifts for brides and grooms are usually given in pairs, including blankets. A single item indicates that the marriage is not expected to last long. Two cheaper items will be accepted with more pleasure than one expensive one.
- Don't express lavish admiration for a new baby, because the devils might hear you and steal the child because of its desirability.
- Mirrors are often placed on front doors. If a dragon tries to get in, he will see his reflection and think that there is already a dragon there, and will go away.
- Single bowls of rice and chopsticks should not be served. Always place at least two on a table. One bowl is for the dead. Do not pass food from your chopsticks to those held by someone else — this is part of the funeral ritual.

Excerpted from *Vietnam - Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture*



Keeping it Ku

Meet fashion designer and restaurateur Chuong Dang

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

CHUONG DANG LEANS back and flashes yet another smile of absolute and easy conviction. The man has a warm, observant gaze, as if he sees everything in slow motion, and he has the uncanny ability to change the way people look at things.

“I don’t know if you realize this,” he answers – I’ve been asking him about his distinctive work in fashion design, featuring reinventions of traditional Vietnamese garments not in silks, but in cotton and denim – “but when a woman is wearing an *ao dai*, she moves differently. The dress will flow, and it creates a breeze of its own. A beautiful *ao dai* can shimmer like a flowing breeze. The secret of making an *ao dai* beautiful isn’t so much the material, but that motion. So when a woman moves, you feel breezy. That’s it. That’s the beauty of it.”

I find that I tend to believe Chuong when he shares his observations on the subject of beauty. I’ve sometimes heard it said that if you could just slow down for long enough, if you could stay absolutely still for one moment and take a good look around you, you’d notice things that other people never see. This is Chuong Dang’s truth: As a young child in rural Bao Loc, he was stricken with polio and locked in total paralysis for two or three years. In an area where children thrill in boisterous play and are often seen darting through the local forests, Chuong could only watch as a loving brother would carry him around, silently observing the childhood he could not share. With no other alternative, his mind opened and began to take in details invisible to others. To this day, he remains an astute judge of what is beautiful – and in every case, he can tell you why.

Chuong’s work with traditional Vietnamese fashions grew out of his early work with embroidered denim for a British jeans firm experimenting with Vietnamese production. After that project closed, he realized that denim and similar fabrics could actually make sense when applied to the *ao dai*, and so established his own brand, which he called Kujean by Chuong Dang (47 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3). While other designers would dismiss denim as something cheap and impractical for the Vietnamese heat, Chuong saw something different entirely.

“When you work with jeans, with denim, you come to realize that they look the best after a year of wearing them,” he says. “Why is that? Because all the movements of your entire body will work together to

create its form, and the color will wash out, so you’ll see a story written on it. That is why I make my *ao dai* with cotton. To me, a woman looks sexy in denim because you can read what positions she holds most often, you know what’s happened to her from the jeans she wears. That is a kind of fashion fact for me, and that’s why I have the drive to make this kind of outfit.”

“The pattern is quite loose and elegant,” he explains. “What I’d call creative from my part is in using a new material that is friendlier to a woman’s body. In Vietnam, we use that very shiny silk from China, which is not friendly to human skin. It absorbs all the heat, so it feels really hot to wear. I don’t feel that we’re very rich, so I use a very common cotton, and then I add some embroidery to make the material look more expensive and to soften it. I’ve designed a two-layered *ao dai* to create the breeze. To achieve that effect normally, a woman will have to slow down the speed of her movements. Women nowadays have no time to do that – they work in an office, they’re businesswomen. So making an *ao dai* with two layers supports their walk. Even when walking briskly, it’s still very sensual, a very charming movement. It looks confident and powerful.”

When Chuong recovered from his childhood illness, he found himself naturally drawn to fashion, at first working with the *tho cam* fabrics preferred by the ethnic Cham of his hometown area. But the sense of beauty that had unfolded within him during his paralysis led him along a much broader creative pathway. He consumed the English language and became a very successful tutor in his hometown, before deciding to use his earnings to pursue fashion studies in France. In Paris, however, things took a different shape than he expected.

“You know I was born in the countryside,” he says, “where people really don’t feel confident when they move to a big city. But I had no feeling of shame at all. When I first went to France and lived there, I felt very confident. I loved French, I loved French food, I loved the people there, their lifestyle and everything. I got a part-time job and lived very comfortably there.”

“But I didn’t study fashion,” he admits. “When I was in France, I was preparing for college. I studied French, I learnt a lot of new things. I thought, wow, they have a great new way to teach a language. I found that the French are very creative, and that they really encourage the student to study. And then one day I woke up and I thought,



I want to go back to Vietnam. So I returned to my hometown and then I opened an English center.”

“It wasn’t for students to come and study,” he explains. “We had a table where we made chocolate for drinking during the class, and the children could come and talk to the teacher or anyone working there, so it was really a platform for students to realize that there are new ways of learning. When the parents came to pick them up and saw how we educated their children, then they learned from that too. That’s how I realized that it was working. So when I create fashion, that too should represent myself, it’s also part of my unique brand, and I know that there aren’t a lot of people doing that.”

‘Real’ One Is Not Real

Chuong’s school was the first move in a series of businesses that saw him establish himself as an entrepreneur in Saigon, all of them loosely linked by a concept he calls ‘lifestyle’ – perhaps best understood



as a form of urban mindfulness. Since working again in fashion design after moving here several years ago, he has gone on to establish several other business lines, all of them fixated on bringing out each product's or venue's essential value, and – just as with his cotton *ao dai* – reinventing the business model to emphasize their essentials.

“With my *ao dai*,” he explains, “I’m trying to make something beautiful that a woman wears for herself and not for a man. With my food, and the concept of being in the present, you need to create something where you really realize what you do. I have a coffee shop – Kujuz Tan Dinh (5 Tran Quy Khoach, D1) – where you have to make your own tea and coffee. There are no waiters. Now we have so many young people who have no concept of how to make their own coffee. They have it every day, but they don’t know if it’s really good or not. Real organic coffee, with its very mild flavor – if you don’t make it on your own, then there’s no takeaway. The

artificial coffee with the chemicals and the strong flavors, we’ve been having it for 20 years, and now we can’t recognize that the ‘real’ one is not real.”

“We live in a country that exports coffee and chocolate,” he sighs, “but we don’t have any good stuff to enjoy of our own. We say chocolate now, and everybody eats m&ms. We export coffee, and everybody has Americano, Starbucks... what’s the point?”

Chuong has now developed several restaurants, all of them focused on simple traditional Vietnamese standards with their original freshness and pure tastes restored and enhanced. The venue locations too are also carefully selected for their character.

“I didn’t originally want to live in Saigon, because I wanted to do something in my hometown,” Chuong explains. “But when I got here, I realized this city is very beautiful. At least part of it is, like deep somewhere that nobody knows about, that even the local people never see. So I found very small places far away from the main streets, and I set up my coffee shops and

restaurants there, and people started to like them. They didn’t think those places were beautiful before. We have a lot of places like that, hidden somewhere.”

Chuong now runs several Kujuz venues as well as Ru.pho Bar (27E Tran Nhat Duat, D1), a fashionable noodle joint specializing in *pho* made with brown rice noodles and other healthy, fresh ingredients. He has also diversified into other natural product lines, such as refined honey and quality soap made with *nin*, a Vietnamese plant known for its antibacterial properties. He continues to lovingly develop beautiful character buildings, and is a patron of the arts. Despite the variety in his work, he still maintains that everything he does is all of a piece.

“How do I explain?” he grins. “I think I have a very good design of living. It’s because I survived many difficulties in life. I finally realized that what kept me up and kept me enjoying things is that I have a different side. So I decided to bring it out and introduce it to people.” ■

Un Espresso, Per Favore

The administrative costs of opening a coffee shop



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,

I used to work and lived in Hoi An with my family before moving back to Italy where we currently reside. Now that our children have moved out to attend universities, my wife and I often daydream about returning to Hoi An. We would love to open a small Italian coffee shop where people can listen to good music, drink Italian coffee and sample specialties from Italy. We would like to know the cost involved in realizing our dream.

I COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND that you would like to have an idea about the cost of doing business in Vietnam before actually making your move to this beautiful part of the world. Needless to say, opening a coffee shop will involve various costs: securing a good location, importing products and the machines, purchasing furniture, hiring of staff, etc. However, as a lawyer, I can only give you insight on the administrative side of things. A good starting point for any foreigner interested in investing in Vietnam is the “service commitments” that Vietnam agreed to when it became a member of the World Trade Organization in 2007. Vietnam committed to opening up its services market, sector by sector, to foreign investment. For the hotel and restaurant sector, Vietnam agreed to pave the way for foreign investors after a transition period of eight years, during which the provision of services by foreigners needed to be linked with parallel investment in hotel construction, renovation, restoration or acquisition.

Now, more than eight years down the line, there should be no more restrictions for foreigners like you who want to open a coffee shop. Having cleared that hurdle, the two most important laws for you to look at are the Law on Investment and the Law on Enterprises. In an effort to

improve the business climate in Vietnam and to encourage foreign investment, the government has recently renewed these two new laws.

As of July 1, 2015, investors need to obtain two licenses: first, they need to present and register their investment project with the Vietnamese authorities in order to obtain a investment registration certificate (IRC). The second step is to establish an enterprise for the implementation of a project, which will grant you an enterprise registration certificate (ERC). Obtaining the IRC is free and the ERC will only set you back VND200,000. Please keep in mind that you may need to spend some additional money on the translation, legalization and/or notarization of the required documents.

Vietnamese law does not impose minimum capital requirements but it is important to know that the authorities may look at the amount of money that you are planning to invest in order to gauge the seriousness of your intentions and the feasibility of your project.

After obtaining your IRC and ERC, you will need to spend some money on post-licensing procedures: 1) publishing your enterprise registration on the National Business Registration Portal, VND300,000; 2) obtaining your company seal and registering it with the Business

Registration Office, around VND400,000; 3) registering the VAT calculation method of your choice and paying the business license tax, VND1 million; and 4) opening a foreign investment capital account and a current bank account, usually free of charge. You can purchase VAT invoices from the tax authorities for around VND200,000 per book.

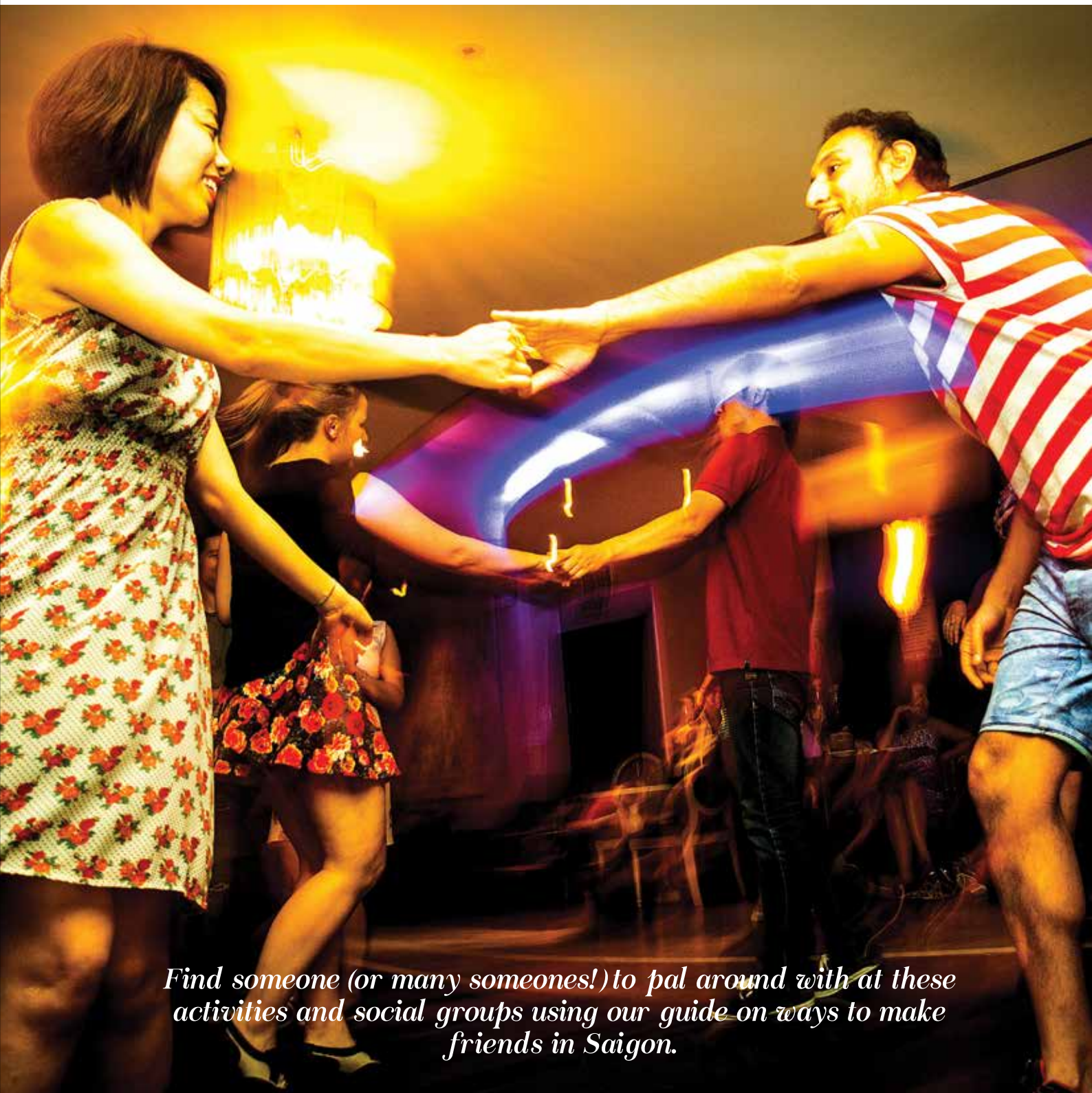
For your specific business, you will need to apply for a food safety and hygiene certificate, which will cost around VND150,000. If you would like to serve your customers some Italian *amaretto* with their coffee, an additional license for that is not required unless you intend to open a separate store selling bottles from wholesalers to your customers.

As you see, when adding all these administrative costs up, starting your own business in Vietnam doesn't have to be very expensive. I hope that this information will bring you one step closer to opening the coffee shop of your dreams. Best of luck to you and your wife and you may see me dropping by in Hoi An for some tiramisu!

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. ■

THE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Images by Ngoc Tran



Find someone (or many someones!) to pal around with at these activities and social groups using our guide on ways to make friends in Saigon.

PAGE ONE

No two persons ever read the same book



Finding a good read can be a daunting prospect for a bookworm. While there is a wealth of street traders selling dog-eared copies of classics and shiny sensational paperbacks, many of these are poorly translated, missing pages, or badly printed. More solid bookstores in Saigon have improved, but demand for English language books is still low.

Enter the expat book club of the International Ladies in Vietnam (www.ilvietnam.com) group. Reshmi Ganguly, the current co-curator of the club, has been a member for two years, as the group embarks upon monthly literary journeys across the world. "Every second Monday of the month, at 12pm, we meet at the Hideaway Café in District 3 to discuss that month's volume. To be honest we are also ladies who lunch, and it can take some time before we get round to discussion of the book," she says.

Books are chosen in the usual manner; each member suggests a title, and each month the group votes on which book they would like to read next. After this, the logistical procurement of the book comes into play. "Our members travel a lot, which is fortunate, because we can make

them our book mules! They'll pick up multiple copies while abroad, or bring one back to copy here. We're currently reading Emma Donoghue's *Room*. Donoghue created the story after hearing about Joseph Fritzl, and tells the story of a boy who has grown up in captivity with his kidnapped and abused mother, only ever knowing the confines of a single room. It is a really harrowing book, but the ending is a hopeful one. Those are my favorite type of books, books that make you confront yourself, but that also offer hope at the end. My favorite book is probably *The Shack* by William P. Young. It is also distressing, telling the story of a family that loses their young daughter to a serial killer, and the father's emotional journey and discovery of a very personal God."

Every member brings a similar enthusiasm for a particular genre or style, creating the great variety (and disagreement) that can be found in the book club. "Book clubs force you to expand your genres, they push you out of your comfort zone, and you can find real enjoyment in books that you would never have thought to read on your own,"

says Reshmi. "We read a wide range of genres, from 18th century classics, to really modern and innovative works, and also occasionally biographies and other non-fiction books." Not everyone has to agree and stylistic differences do often come up. "The person who suggested the book opens the discussion, and we then bounce off each other. We talk about and analyze characters, style, themes, but it does get more personal than that. Many members often feel strong connections to the characters and we can get into some heated debate!"

One member of the book club is even an author herself. J Mairy Dietch wrote *The Neverending Love*, which the club, of course, discussed. "Mariette has written two books, both have been published in French and English, and it's great to have an author as part of our group, it was a really interesting discussion." The book club welcomes all members to contribute and discuss, and the different perspectives that come together in a book club ensure that the story lives on with you long after you turn the last page.

- Text by Alex Green

KEEPERS OF THE FLAME

A gathering place for Zippo lighter collectors and enthusiasts



ZIPPOS ARE MUCH more than simple metal lighters. The ubiquitous Zippo became woven into the fabric of the American War experience. These compact lighters “are the small, speaking, archeological objects that bear witness to great personal heroism, pride, pain and tragedy,” wrote Jim Fiorella in his photo-filled 1998 coffee table book, *The Vietnam Zippo*. In the decades since the end of the war, thousands of people — veterans, military memorabilia collectors and just-plain-old Zippo fans — have put together personal Zippo lighter collections.

In Vietnam, Click Club is one such club dedicated entirely to the Zippo lighter. “Why the Zippo lighter? Why not something else? These are questions a lot of people have asked us over the years,” says Nguyen Quoc Dung, founder of Click. “It’s difficult to answer if you don’t already love the Zippo. But look at it; look at the sturdy and easy-to-use design. Zippos stand the test of time. Even the ones made in the 1930s, if they have been kept by good owners, work perfectly as if they have just come from the assembly line in Bradford, Pennsylvania. Look at the cases. See how beautiful they are and how many designs they have. It’s just a feeling that all collectors have when they see something they want to put in their collection. I’d say, ‘Do we really need a reason for collecting anything aside from that we love it very much and that it has a historical value to it?’”

Named for the sound of the metal lid closing and opening, Click Club is nearly two years old. When Dung first founded it in early 2014, the club had seven members. Now, its meetings are regularly attended

by 20-30 people. Members meet every Saturday morning at 9am to catch up, show off their latest finds and to trade. There is no registration or membership fee required. Click membership is varied with members coming from all walks of life: from college students to blue collar workers to university professors. The oldest member is a 44-year-old salaryman. The youngest has just passed his university entrance test.

The club meets at Click Club Coffee (64/1 Tran Huy Lieu, Phu Nhuan; Facebook: *Click Club Coffee*). The cafe is owned by Pham Viet Ha, Dung’s former boss and the person who introduced him to his first Zippo. “A few years ago, I worked for Ha in his Zippo distribution business. That’s where I learned the particulars of the Zippo and the huge number of fans it has. I guess you could say I was a hard worker, so eventually my work blurred into my personal life and before I knew it, I had gained a group of friends who would only talk about lighters when we came together.”

From that point on, the idea of creating a social club came naturally. According to Dung, the first year was especially tough, but eventually he learned to attract more members and to create bonds within the group through orchestrating a variety of social activities that go beyond the weekly meetings. “We do charities. We would organize a Sunday when we come together and go to nearby orphanages or community houses for the elderly and help out: cook, clean and such. We host holiday parties and birthday bashes for members in the

cafe. It’s easier to come together as a club when the members already see each other as friends they would love to hang out with.”

At the weekly meetings there is also a table displaying a variety of discount lighters for those with a limited budget. “We call this *Truyen Lua* (“sharing the fire”),” says Dung. “The Zippos placed on the *Truyen Lua* table are 50 to 75 percent discounted. The purpose is to make it easy for just anyone to start collecting.”

Every year, the company releases a registry of every product it has made within that year. However, models missing from this list, such as prototypes never released in the common market, are highly sought after by collectors. Zippos made in particular years such as in the 1930s also fetch a particularly high price. “A mint condition 2015 Zippo is priced at VND280,000. A solid gold Zippo is over a VND100 million. The vintage series from 1934 to 1937 are priced around USD2,000,” shares Dung. “And, of course, there are the legendary 1933 Zippos which are a collector’s dream.” The 1933 Zippos are first generation Zippos made by company founder George Blaisdell himself.

Dung hopes the club will eventually be officially recognized by Zippo USA. “Becoming recognized is also quite tricky, of course, and will require us to attain a certain level of scale, membership or activities. We may be only two years old and are only a casual club, but it’s something we will gradually work towards.”

- Text by NPD Khanh

THE LANGUAGE OF FRIENDSHIP

More than a language exchange, Mundo Lingo fosters community



IT'S JUST AFTER 7pm on a Tuesday night and two giggly 20-somethings nervously walk up to a small desk in front of the narrow Cube Bar (31B Ly Tu Trong, D1; free; 7pm every Tuesday) in downtown HCMC. They pick out some flag stickers, adjust their outfits and plunge into the animated crowd. This is Mundo Lingo (www.mundolingo.org/saigon).

Started in 2011 by sociologist and entrepreneur Ben Moreira in Buenos Aires, the language social events put on by Mundo Lingo have now been franchised to 14 cities on five continents, from Montreal to Melbourne, from Cologne to Copenhagen. At heart, the organization aims to promote stronger ties between locals and foreigners through language exchange based on the principles of total inclusivity (all ages, nationalities and language levels welcome), not-for-profit (free of charge, no registration, no outside marketing) and consistency (same place, same time, every week).

Tonight, the organizer of the Saigon chapter, Ciaran Dwyer, is manning the welcome desk, explaining the protocol to some Mundo Lingo newcomers: place a sticker of your native flag on your chest with other flags below in descending order of language ability; stand up to show you're willing to meet new people, sit for a

private conversation; welcome others into your conversations as they will welcome you. "How about providing a question of the night?" suggests Kyle, a Los Angeleno who's only been in Vietnam two days and found Mundo Lingo via the CouchSurfing website.

Tall and slightly gawky to the point of being endearingly socially awkward, Ciaran, 21, recalls his first Mundo Lingo experience in Melbourne: "I saw people going on Facebook and went by myself. I was super shy. That first night, I literally didn't talk to anyone. I wasn't really open to it. That kind of describes me a bit socially. But the second time, I saw the flags as an ice breaker. You've got to be willing to make that first connection, be willing to smile back. These Mundo Lingo events give you an opportunity to interact with people. Now, I actually go around and introduce people!"

With its very first Saigon event organized in mid-November, tonight's outing draws a crowd of about a hundred split at around 60-40 Vietnamese to foreigners, with most of the locals being university students. "I tell people that it's like an English Club," says Saigon co-organizer Mai Tran, an English major in her final year. "Everyone's really sociable. All you have to do is walk up and say 'hi'". Through

frequent hosting of CouchSurfers, Mai is comfortable around foreigners, but says she knows it's not the same for most Vietnamese who have little opportunity to speak English.

Towards the back of the bar, a salmagundi of people are seated around one of the few tables available (the venue was chosen partially for its lack of seating). Among them are a Vietnamese life coach who majored in Business and Yoga abroad, two uni students looking to practice their Japanese and a few Westerners learning Vietnamese. "What do you do when you have free time?", the life coach asks one of the foreigners who's only been in Vietnam two months. He answers back in broken Vietnamese and the locals clap enthusiastically. "Wow! You're a DJ!" they exclaim. "No! No! *Toi thich di choi*," he enunciates to a burst of laughter as everyone realizes the misunderstanding.

"There are lots of Vietnamese who want to practice English, but there aren't a lot of places where foreigners can practice Vietnamese," says Ciaran. But he's quick to point out that the organization is more than simply a place to practice languages. "The face of Mundo Lingo is the language exchange, but it's more about becoming a community. That's been one of the hardest things to convey. The tagline for Mundo Lingo is 'language and cultural exchange' which sounds airy but there's not many words to describe what it really is which is a space for people to just come and talk. There are other events and meetups out there, but they're irregular. The Mundo Lingo staple is that it's the same place, same time, every week, whether it's Christmas or World Cup Finals, we're here. I think Saigon needs something like this. When people arrive in Vietnam, they're looking for a way to meet locals and other people in their situation who don't really know what's going on. Here, there's no registration, no sign up. The idea is so simple and I'm excited by simple ideas."

"Just open your mind to it," adds Mai. "Come join the event. It's like a village. Everyone knows each other and everyone can be friends."

Tip: Get there between 7pm-9pm for excellent VND60,000 cocktails and snack specials

- Text by James Pham

SAIGON SINGLES

“Too much of anything is bad, but too much good whisky is barely enough.” - Mark Twain

STEPHEN THOMAS IS clearly a gourmand of considerable refinement. When I met him, he swiftly began debating the terroir and bouquet of various wines with the affable French proprietor of our meeting place. He studied oenology while at university in Paris. Stephen laughs off the label of expert, asserting that “when you have been around as long as I have, you tend to remember a few little things.” However, today’s meeting isn’t to discuss wine, it’s about another beverage that also starts with “w” – whisky.

First created by Jim Ackerley sometime in 2002, Stephen has been running the Saigon Single Malt club (www.saigonsinglemalt.com) since 2009. It boasts a large online membership and a dedicated core following who meet monthly to sample single malts from around the world.

“The science of a good whisky follows many of the same rules as that of wine,” Stephen explains. “The quality of the water used is of prime importance, and the special nature of Scottish water in whisky production is almost mythical, as are the local terrain, the types of wood used to make the casks, and the shape of the casks themselves.” The whisky absorbs soluble materials from the wood, imparting subtle flavors, while the burned inner surface of the casks acts as a charcoal absorbent, removing less palatable aromas. The position of the cask in the distillery, the particular humidity of its locale, the rate at which it expands and contracts with temperature, all these and a plethora of other factors contribute to the unique tastes produced in each cask. Different casks are then blended and diluted by skilled practitioners to give the desired flavor and alcohol content. Some distillers offer a “cask strength” whisky, bottled before dilution at around 60 percent ABV. These bottles are rare, but the club does occasionally source some, allowing members to sample aqua vitae as it was originally drunk. “It is very, very intense, and I have to cut it with water, which I find expands the flavor and allows more nuance. It is certainly a very different experience to the usual fare.”

The Saigon Single Malt club hosts tasting sessions every third Thursday of the month, from 6:30pm-8pm at the Elbow Room. Attendees sample eight to 10 different single malts with a format very similar to a sommelier’s evening. Members are first and foremost encouraged to enjoy themselves. “You

can learn as much or as little as you want, we all drink whisky for enjoyment. I always like to provide a broad range of single malts: Japanese, French, Scottish, of course, and even Tasmanian,” says Stephen. “All of these have distinctive color and flavor. Honey, cherry, smoke, peat, charcoal, mint and cough drops; all these notes can be discerned during an evening. Glenmorangie, for example, has prominent citrus and orange notes, while Laphroaig is well-known for its richly peaty and smoky taste.” The tasting evenings cost VND500,000 per person, and VND400,000 for members. The membership fee is a one-time payment of VND500,000.

They also host three or four dinners per year, which call for intense preparation. “It is quite a challenge to pair a five-course meal with the appropriate whiskies; single malt has such an intensity to it that many dishes would be overwhelmed. We begin with a young whisky, aged less than 10 years. Younger whiskies are paler in color and simpler in flavor, and these go well with crudités and light appetizers. As we progress to older vintages, the complexity and depth of the drink increases, and the food is necessarily heartier. What to have at the close of the meal is an easier

decision to make; good whisky and good chocolate is a match made in heaven, and the mollifying effects of the chocolate on the palate allow you to better detect and savor more subtle notes of flavor in the single malt.”

These larger events cost VND1-2million and often include the privilege of listening to the histories of the whisky and the whisky making process in speeches delivered by visiting distillers. The next such dinner is a fittingly Scottish celebration, a Burns Night supper. Single malt is the only suitable tippie for such an occasion, complementing hearty haggis and providing the necessary fire for the address to the lassies and reply to the laddies.

“Finding great single malt is about trying new things,” Stephen adds. “I’ve had fantastic bottles for USD30, and I’ve had underwhelming bottles at USD300. With the club you can find some real hidden gems, and as a group you can enjoy malts you may balk at buying yourself. We have even brought to Saigon a USD4,000 bottle of 40 year Glenfarclas. You almost feel bad for drinking it! Almost.”

- Text by Alex Green



GIRL POWER

The women-in-business network



IN 2006, Kim Moore and Robin Austin started Network Girls (www.networkgirlshcmc.com) to give female working professionals in Saigon an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas on life and business. "The idea to form a group for female professionals actually began a little earlier, and there have been a number of informal meetings for more than a decade," says Pamela Haake, one of Network Girls' current coordinators. "A lot of women here are in Saigon because they have followed their partners' work commitments, and initially there wasn't much to help those of us looking to further our own careers."

When it first began, the group was a very ad hoc affair, meeting together over breakfast to chat casually and offer mutual support for career building and everyday life in a bustling and ever-changing Saigon, but Network Girls slowly became a more dedicated organization, with a core group of regular members. "We started out before social media had really become as big as it is now, and there were far fewer resources for female professionals in

Saigon, so we were a really vital service," adds Pamela. "You can wind up feeling quite isolated in a new and strange city, and for me, Network Girls helped change that. We are proudly a women's only group because it allows us to offer us something different – we are very open and nurturing, and we offer a more relaxed atmosphere where professional women can talk and understand each other without feeling excluded."

Network Girls' contact list includes more than 700 professionals and is growing and renewing steadily. "Our members represent companies such as Air France, East Meets West, Ernst & Young, Ipa-Nima, RMIT University and many more, but we welcome anyone," says Pamela. "If a backpacker thinking about jumping into professional life in Ho Chi Minh City wants to come along to one of our evenings, then they are very welcome."

Adding: "We try to be open and reactive to the needs and wishes of our members, and as the need arises we may have a particular theme for one of our meetings. During last year's International Women's

Month, we had a gynaecologist come to give a speech and run a question and answer panel on women's health. For Tet, we went out for dim sum... so the theme varies." This diversity is one of the most useful aspects of the club. Members bring their business cards, make useful contacts and develop working relationships, but also have the chance to enjoy some of Saigon's hottest venues. "We have hosted events at luxury hotels, at destinations like Chill Skybar, and at restaurants and bistros across the city. I work closely with our venues to ensure the best atmosphere for our clients, who get to sample the best this unique city has to offer."

Network Girls meet on the last Thursday of each month for a 7:30am-9am breakfast or cocktails, or canapés from 7:30pm-9pm. The breakfast meetings are VND250,000 per person, and normally attract 30-40 professional women on a rotating basis, while the evening events are VND500,000, and have 50-70 attendees. Both include food and a drink.

- Text by Alex Green

ALL THE CATS JOIN IN

A little bit of Swing, a whole lotta fun

SWING MUSIC BEGAN in 1930s America and swiftly took the world by storm. The associated dance actually had older roots, in the jitterbug music of the 1920s African American dance scene, which then developed alongside the big sounds of bandleaders such as Cab Calloway.

Swing is experiencing a newfound popularity in Asia, with many students returning from studying abroad bringing back a passion for vintage style and hot jazz tunes. Thuy Uong first got involved with swing dancing nearly a decade ago when she met Michele Toso, a French-Canadian involved in swing dancing clubs across Southeast Asia. Michele ended his involvement in 2010 but Thuy, and her partners Ben West, Stéphane Laporte, and Haley Bartar, have kept Saigon Swing Cats (www.saigonswingcats.com) alive and jiving ever since.

"I just really love the music of that era, great songs like *Jumping at the Woodside*, *New Baby C Jam Blues*, and charismatic leaders like Count Basie," says Thuy. "A lot of people in Vietnam when they think jazz they think lounge music, candlelit dinners, but swing is just so joyful! One of my favorites is *All the Cats Join In* by Benny Goodman and his Orchestra. It's such an approachable tune, fantastic for getting newcomers involved."

While you aren't expected to turn up to your first rehearsal in a full zoot suit, the club does insist on appropriate footwear for dancing, and encourages all members to dive into the snazzy style of the swing era. "Vintage style is really in vogue in Europe and America, but unfortunately we don't have the same vintage stores over here; there's a growing niche of vintage enthusiasts in Vietnam, but it's still quite small," says Thuy. What Vietnam does have, however, is a plethora of tailors. "We either get our clothes custom made or we look around flea markets. Shopping for trinkets is all part of the fun, it's another hobby in itself! It's great all dancing together, dressed up in lacey fashion and sharp shoes, and it's quite a sight whenever we put on performances. Obviously that's a lot of effort, so on our Wednesday and Sunday sessions we often have a particular theme, where we encourage people to wear more casually."

"We do two or three big shows a year, our next one is for the British Business Group Vietnam Winter Ball, and we'll be dancing a Christmas Charleston. We do a lot of collaborations with the Saigon Big Band and with other dance troupes. We have a good relationship with a number



of cafés and bars, and will often put on smaller performances there, either to a backing band, or to music played over the speakers. The larger nights with a full backing band are great experiences, they really take you back to what it must have been like at the time. Swing is all about fun, and we also put on a lot of impromptu and improvised lunchtime sessions where we dance on the street or outside cafés."

For the more adventurous devotees, the group also travels to weekend workshops across the region to learn under international instructors and share their love of swing with other like-minded dancers. "Hong Kong in particular has a lot of jazz bands, so there are some great events." As an originally American phenomenon, swing is obviously most prominent in North America, and the biggest event that Saigon Swing Cats has been to was one in New York. "It was a full week of swing, with over 3,000 attendees. There were workshops each day, with dancing in some of New York's best bars at night."

Saigon Swing Cats runs two classes a week to get you up to speed with the groove. You'll be a "hepcat" in no time. "Our Swing 1 Class, taught by myself and Ben, runs each Tuesday from 7pm-8:30pm

at La Habana, and will get you started in the basics of Swing Dance, setting you up for the Lindy Hop, Balboa and more," Thuy continues.

The more advanced Swing 2 class, run by Stéphane and Haley, helps you to expand upon the basics — teaching cool variations on the Swing Out 8-count, how to switch from 6 to 8 counts, and many other tips and tricks including some awesome moves to spice up the inimitable Charleston. Swing 2 runs every Wednesday from 7pm-8:30pm at Caffe Molinari. The classes run for six weeks and are VND590,000 per person or VND900,000 per couple for the whole course. If you're already confident in your ability to get down, then Saigon Swing Cats runs weekly social dances at the same venues. Wednesday's social at Caffe Molinari runs between 8:30pm-11pm and costs VND75,000 for entry, while Sunday's social, from 7pm-9pm at La Habana is free.

While the Swing scene isn't quite as developed just yet in Saigon, Saigon Swing Cats is hoping to change that. In the words of Benny Goodman, "Swing 'til the rafters ring, and all the cats join in!"

- Text by Alex Green

MASTER YOUR TOAST

Stand up and get in front of the crowd. It's time to tell your story, to give a speech. But first, take a deep breath...



FIVE YEARS AGO, a group of friends got together and realized they had always wanted to do something different. They wanted to take on new challenges, to find something that would define who they really were. It was that spark of motivation that led to the establishment of the Saigon Toastmasters Club (www.toastmasters.vn) in May 2010. Part of Toastmasters International, Saigon Toastmasters Club is the first community-based Toastmasters Club in Vietnam. The club aims to develop self-confidence and personal growth for its members by equipping them with public speaking and leadership skills.

"Our typical meetings, which are currently only available in English, consist of three main sessions: prepared speech, table topics and evaluation," says Linh Phan, the club's Vice President of Public Relations. "The members usually choose their desired topics two weeks in advance. The choices of topics are up to them, but they will need to stick to guidelines and objectives proposed in the manual given to them from Toastmasters International."

According to Linh, these objectives vary from making good use of body language and eye-contact, to making the audience laugh with a short speech in six minutes. "Of course the further the members progress through the levels as instructed in the manual, the more difficult it will be to achieve the objectives," adds Lan Anh, the Director of Toastmasters Vietnam's

Area A3. "But it is the second session that often terrifies our members the most."

In this "terrifying" session, certain members are picked randomly to give a speech about a random topic being raised. "This is a great chance to further strengthen your ability to arrange information and convey ideas," explains Lan Anh. "The pressure is real, really. It's normal to be scared of speaking in front of so many unfamiliar faces, unprepared. But after a while, you will be used to it, and will be so grateful to see how much all these needed skills can actually help with improving your current working experience."

Last but not least, the evaluation is carried out by senior toastmasters who have signed up for the role. "They would give us feedback on what we did well and what could have been better. No one will criticize you for your mistakes, literally. Criticism is not allowed. It has never been and will never be," says Linh.

Lan Anh further points out that it is through these activities that one can nurture and develop leadership as well. "It's not just simply public speaking. It's also critical thinking, effective listening, taking responsibility, organizing events and working in teams."

Members also have the opportunity to join the Executive Club Officer Team (EXCO Team) with only one requirement: be an active and committed member.

"Being a member of EXCO is even more challenging than working at a corporation," says Lan Anh with a smile. "But it's definitely worth it, as you will be surprised to see how much you have grown throughout that one-year term."

HOT COLD MILK

The club has around 70 members at its peak. The members are mostly young Vietnamese, aged 22 to 30, who want to improve not only their English and public speaking skills, but also their self-confidence. Other members include foreigners who were already members in their native countries and wished to continue with the club after moving to Vietnam. With membership enrollment more than they can manage, the Hot Cold Milk (HCM) Toastmasters Club was established earlier this year to cater to half of the current members from the Saigon Toastmasters Club. According to Lan Anh, who is also the President of HCM, both clubs follow the standard guidelines of Toastmasters International, but it is the culture of each club that sets it apart from its sibling. Where Saigon Toastmasters Club is more exclusive, with higher standards and adheres strictly to rules, HCM is simply young, fresh and dynamic.

"It has never been easy, you know," confesses Linh. "Sometimes I just want to give up because it's too difficult to maintain the balance between being an



EXCO member and my job. But I keep hanging in there as I could see how much I have changed ever since that day when I made my first speech. The best part of all this is that I've got to know more about myself than ever before."

Lan Anh nods and agrees as joining the club has allowed her to realize her career path. "I love it so much when I get to stand in front of an audience, witnessing them being inspired by my speech. It made me realize that I've always wanted to work in the training sectors, it's like I've finally found the destination of my life."

The club is looking forward to a promising 2016 with the establishment of the Distinguished Toastmasters Club – a place for senior toastmasters to continue pushing themselves further; as well as preparing for The Championship of Public Speaking international contest.

Membership is open to anyone 18 and older and the fee is USD6 a month. Alternatively, guests can sit in on a session for a "drink fee" of VND30,000 every second and fourth Saturday at ERC Institute (88 Huynh Van Banh, Phu Nhuan) with the Saigon Toastmasters Club. Or every first and third Saturday at Alcove Library Hotel (133A Nguyen Dinh Chinh, Phu Nhuan) with the HCM Toastmasters Club.

- Text by Dang Minh Tuan



Wine & Dine

■ IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN







Steve's Octopus salad



Steve's Sous-Vide egg

The Grand Saigon Café

Café-Restaurant HCMC merges Continental Kitchen with comfy living room chic

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

RENOVATED FROM TWO heritage shophouses on Calmette (171 Calmette, 1st floor; www.crhcmc.com), just south of the Ben Thanh traffic circle, **Café-Restaurant** revives the art of the Grand Café, a stylish place to unwind with a cup of coffee, with the well-executed menu of a European brasserie.

The newly opened restaurant is a mix of modern and classic, both in décor and menu offerings. Century-old tiles meld into cool painted concrete floors in a large industrial-chic space accented by vintage mood lighting and studded seating, juxtaposed against a gleaming open kitchen all set to a backdrop of hip lounge music. The décor is a tasteful homage to Saigon itself — a mosaic of Ben Thanh Market



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Oyster blade steak; Corn-fed roasted young chicken; Marou mousse; and Coconut pannacotta

made from salvaged tiles adorns one wall while contemporary Asian art breaks up the clean white space, including a mural of Dr. Calmette himself, whose quirky experiments inspire a range of playful cocktails like the Poisonous Bloody Mary (VND220,000), a dangerous concoction of tomato juice, Platinum beer, Saigon Charlie's Hot Sauce and a sliver of bacon. Patrons can take a seat around the open kitchen or the softly lit bar area, as well as at tables and sofas throughout the spacious open-plan restaurant.

Café-Restaurant's menu is squarely Continental Kitchen classics like steaks, chops and pasta with touches of Dutch and other Northern European flavors, courtesy of Dutch co-owners Martjin Vermaire and Sander Smits who bring to their first collaborative venture years of experience in the high-end hospitality industry. "The concept is two-fold," explains Sander. "It's a brasserie with very tasty food by passionate chefs who make beautiful dishes and a grand café, a very reliable place that's open from 7am to midnight, where you can go for a coffee and a newspaper near the center of town. We're trying to combine these two concepts to make a modern, classic space that should feel timeless."

Our meal begins with Steve's Octopus Salad (VND160,000), a creation of Executive Chef Steven Long who contributes his 12

years of culinary experience peppered with influence from time spent cooking in the Mediterranean. The star of this eclectic dish is a cold terrine of octopus, simply flavored with its own broth, and a little vinegar, salt and pepper. The mild flavor of the seafood is accented by *advocaat*, a traditional Dutch, almost custard-like concoction of egg yolks, brandy and vodka. The sweetness is provided by a creamy potato salad and sugary sundried tomatoes with the acid coming from a simple green salad in balsamic for a creatively balanced dish. Our second starter was Steve's Sous-Vide Egg (VND80,000), a deliciously unpretentious combination of rather pretentious ingredients: an egg cooked sous-vide for 13 minutes so the yolk oozes out over a bed of spinach and baby asparagus with a side of Hollandaise sauce and local lumpfish caviar for a burst of salty decadence.

The Meatworks Butchery (VND300,000) allowed the ingredients to sing: Australian Oyster Blade steak with a beautiful sear simply adorned with toasted garlic chips, a stack of grilled vegetables and a spicy grilled corn salsa, the very incarnation of summer on a plate. The Whole Corn-fed Roasted Young Chicken (VND360,000) recalled a perfect Sunday afternoon roast in miniature — a succulent bird in a sweet tomato-based BBQ sauce over a bed of roasted autumn vegetables. The sides were

only VND60,000, but we limited ourselves to the Pesto Pasta, a warm, comforting bowl of basily goodness.

Service was some of the best we've encountered anywhere in Saigon, waitstaff discreetly asking whether they could clear the last course and if we wanted dessert served immediately or after a short wait. We opted to allow our food to settle before digging into a rapturous Marou Mousse (VND150,000), impossibly smooth yet firm on a chocolate and almond cookie base with a dollop of whipped cream and tart berries to cut through the richness, a dessert you'll want to leave room for at all costs. The Coconut Pannacotta (VND80,000) was expectedly light but paired with savory-sour Balsamic cherry tomatoes for a pleasant twist on the original.

"We wanted to create a living room mix where everyone can feel at home," says Sander of the space that's at once comfortable yet chic. "Café-Restaurant is a place where you can go whether it's 7am or midnight and find good quality food at reasonable prices. Our Vietnamese drip coffee is VND30,000, just VND5,000 more than downstairs on the street. We love good food and good drinks, so I guess this is in our genes!"

Café-Restaurant HCMC is open every day during Tet. ■

The Elixir of Life

Saigon's newest high-end gastrolounge is all things to all people

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



Vodka martini and Asian whiskey sour

THE FIRST LEAF of *Elixir's* (146-148 Pasteur, D1; www.elixir.vn) menu teases with a somewhat enigmatic definition of the venue's name: "A magical or medicinal potion guaranteed to induce love." It's the first indication that there's more to this restaurant concept than might first meet the eye as you enter the rather dramatically-styled doorway on the Pasteur side of the Rex Hotel, where Elixir has appeared out of nowhere — occupying a heritage building space that has stood disused for a very long time. Its deliberately understated soft opening has only served to add to its intrigue; where there was nothing, now stands a fashionable black and scarlet chamber promising of fine potions — the best in new-wave cocktails — and haute cuisine, all decked out in plush seating and the kind of subtle lighting that feels like it isn't there. If Elixir is something magical, then a stay within its walls will guarantee a heightening of the mood that may well indeed lead to a pleasure not unlike falling in love.

The essence of Elixir lies in the way



Sriracha chicken tulips



Charcuterie board



Pan-fried foie gras

The foie gras is lightly fried to give it a crisp shell; the tropical fruit infuses itself into the meat with every bite, a tapestry of contrasts on the tongue and a uniquely challenging gourmet item.

it plays on the tension between polar opposites. Styled after the 90s era working-class British gastropub (or more appropriately, gastrolounge), Elixir is a like a big-budget reboot of the classic restaurant-in-a-bar, with distinctly-purposed spaces blending into each other across the venue. While a heady cigar lounge occupies the far right, the central area features a modern bar and an array of couches and tapas tables, giving over to a fine-dining area to the left that seats less than 20 patrons. The vibe is classic modern, but the decor is unmistakably Indochinese; the dark polished woods, the French drapes, the cigar drawers like an oriental medicines cabinet.

Elixir's design allows it to serve multiple functions, but it shines as a high-class restaurant. While its menu is not extensive, it is tightly-focused on a range of dishes unified by their dazzling plating and distinctive flavors. Nothing served is purely decorative; every element is purposeful. Where there is an olive or a disc of pâté, it is the best olive and the richest meat. The servings are an exercise in making a striking impression, with pride of place given over to exotic appetizers and specialty steaks – take a heavy tomahawk rib or a thick cut of *kurobuta* pork if you want to be especially inspired.

We begin by toying with the cocktail menu (all specialty cocktails are priced at VND180,000), hand-crafted for this

venue by a world-class Diageo judge out of Singapore, and featuring the latest in mixology fashions such as chili infusion and dissolved smoke. The Asian whisky sour served in a champagne flute, which stands as the venue's signature drink, is nicely tart – although it has some fairly stiff competition in the chili mango margarita with its half slice of fresh cube-cut mango resting enticingly on the spicy liquor.

The appetizer/tapas selections come in generous portions, making them satisfying enough to serve in sharing plates of two or three as a light meal in themselves. We start with the sriracha chicken tulips (wings with the meat tucked to one end, VND160,000) which arrive with an invigorating Thai chili sauce made with ginger, lemongrass, and plenty of honey. This is balanced by a charcuterie board of cheese, gherkin and salami (VND260,000) served with a smooth mustard and crisp slices of cracker baguette. It's a dish that has been put together with great care for the quality of every ingredient – but it is swiftly overshadowed by what is easily the most visually impressive dish of the night, the pan-fried foie gras served on thick pineapple rounds and a palette of juicy berries and diced mango – resembling an upturned mocktail carefully smoothed out onto the surface of the plate. The foie gras is lightly fried to give it a crisp shell; the tropical fruit infuses itself into the meat with every bite, a tapestry of contrasts on the tongue and a uniquely challenging

gourmet item.

Casual diners will find the above sufficient if they've come for the bar atmosphere and seat themselves in the central area; in the fine dining quarter, we move on to mains – selecting a pan fried salmon with mashed potato (VND460,000) and an irresistible grilled tenderloin beef (VND750,000) with red wine sauce. Both steaks are heavy and appetizing – whereas other five-star joints may sacrifice quantity for panache, Elixir is generous with its portions and delivers a working man's meal true to its gastropub roots. This is not to say that the panache isn't there, however – presentation is finely-crafted and as impressive as befits its prestigious location.

Elixir is a curiosity. Not many venues can get away with being all things to all people, but this one manifests a tasteful balance that works. Come well-dressed and prepared to suit your purpose – whether it be to unwind at the bar over a Hoegaarden draft, to enjoy the bracing atmosphere of the DJ sets on Friday and Saturday nights, or to take a fashionable position on the cigar lounge couch. Be sure to make this a preferred dinner venue while you're at it – meals here are spectacular, and like the cocktails, they may have a transformative effect. An alternative definition for 'elixir' inscribed on the menu is "a preparation that is supposedly able to change metals into gold;" and given the atmosphere of this fine venue, that sounds about right. ■



Beef tataki



Fillet steak



Coffee beef marination



Green tea cheesecake

Raising the Steaks

Canadian beef at its best right here in Saigon

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

CANADA HAS A big marketing problem, and it is this: while any Canadian can tell you that their country is home to some of the world's finest-quality beef (much of which is farmed on free-range ranches in the western prairie province of Alberta) virtually no one outside Canada's borders has any clue that this is the case. Albertans find this a particularly inconvenient best-kept secret, as it means that every time they visit a steakhouse in any other country, they just know that they're going to be disappointed.

This is exactly what happened to Albertan stock investor Ho Ngoc Tien, who has been left languishing for the kind of tender rib-eye he enjoys at home for the past three years since returning to

the country of his birth. While excellent Australian, American and Japanese beef isn't all that difficult to find in Saigon, unless you've had the chance to go Canadian, you won't be aware that it stands up remarkably well beside even these most distinguished of cattle lineages. The ultimate solution to the problem, for Tien, was to invest, start importing the meat, and open a venue in Saigon dedicated entirely to showcasing what he believes is the best beef in the world.

He may be right. **Canada Steakhouse** (219c Pham Viet Chanh, D1; Facebook: *Canada Steakhouse*) is a surprising venue that may see diners switching loyalties as they sample cuts that rival the texture of rare Japanese wagyu and the umami

of a thick Aussie barbecued steak. Part of this surprise is down to the location too – slightly removed from the center (although still within the boundaries of District 1), the address may seem more befitting of a casual, local-style eatery. This is, however, nothing less than a premium venue – and while the atmosphere is indeed decidedly relaxed, the service and presentation are distinctly five-star, and the excellence of the cuisine makes this restaurant ideal for getting away from your usual cluster of regular favorites – as well as appetizing enough to ensure plenty of return trips.

Canada Steakhouse will appeal to all fine-class diners, making for an impressive date venue just as much as it does a fun gathering place for groups. Each of the



Stuffed eggplant



Chocolate spring rolls with strawberry ice cream



three floors has its own distinctive décor, the standout of which is the top-level garden with its safely-enclosed yet open-air feel and rows of hanging rosemary and other herbs, providing fresh garnishings for the steaks. This gives away another of the restaurant's surprises – most of what's served is either invented, grown, or made from scratch in-house, courtesy of veteran Chef Vu – formerly of various top-level resort and restaurant kitchens nationwide, and currently a highly-respected teacher of the culinary arts.

Experienced in the exemplary quality of Canadian beef steaks from his earlier training in Singapore, Chef Vu presents a somewhat frisky fusion menu, each dish playing to the finest elements of the beef. A superb introduction is the beef *tataki* (VND205,000), a favorite in Canada that obviously hearkens to Japanese sashimi just as much as to an Italian carpaccio. Although in the Homeland this dish is often served uncooked, here it's pan-fried at the edges to tighten the slices up and give it a deeper shade of red. Think of it as you would sushi – it's served with a Japanese sauce and a touch of garlic – and make your first bite the moment when you decide Canadian beef is for you. This will help to elevate your anticipation for the moment

when the steaks roll out. Before they arrive, do freshen up with one or two signature cocktails from the restaurant's high-class bar – you can take it on good authority that the bartender is very generous with the proportions of liquor.

Which steak you select is down to personal preference, of course, but what I will say is that you have a tough choice ahead of you. If you're a purist, select an unadulterated filet (150/200/250g at VND459,000/VND615,000/VND765,000) with one of Chef Vu's own gourmet sauces – the house specialties are quite unique, the most intriguing of which being the tamarind and the red pepper with saffron (both just VND50,000). Selecting a straight-up steak with sauce like this will bring out the youthfulness of the veal – these are not tough, heavy cuts as you'd expect from most Western-style steaks available in this city – and you'll be able to taste how the fine fatty layers have soaked into the meat to make it more tender and flavorful.

There are several other steak preparations to try, however – and my weakness was the coffee beef marinade (150/200/250g at VND 469,000/VND605,000/VND745,000). Soaked for two hours in an imported Italian espresso mixture with various other secret ingredients, the coffee

meat is seared to induce a rich charcoaling, which – when biting into the rarer steaks – yields a juice that will appeal to anyone's caffeine addiction. It's served on a bed of Mexican rice, and pairs particularly well with the mashed potato (intensified with crushed apple, VND75,000) or the stuffed eggplant (VND97,000) from the vegetarian menu – and yes, there's plenty here for herbivores, not to mention a well-planned kids' menu (the star attraction of which is a burger with a bright red bun at VND79,000). I'd also be doing the chef a disservice by not mentioning the sublime desserts available at this venue – I swear on The Maple Leaf that it's worth visiting Canada Steakhouse for the chocolate spring rolls (VND76,000) alone, and cheesecakes (VND87,000) this good are similarly rare in Vietnam.

If I've done my job, you may by this point be swayed towards the faith as far as Canuck beef goes. Canada Steakhouse may end up being the decider for your next holiday destination – Tien swears that even *pho* and *banh mi* tastes better there than it does here owing to the superior beef – but in any case, let's hope the Canadian marketing people come and take a look at what's going on at this venue, as those guys could probably do with a few ideas. ■

Mi Casa is Su Casa

A Melbourne laneway-style trattoria in the heart of the city

TEXT BY TAYNE EPHRAIM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



An unlikely visage of a Melbourne-styled Italian restaurant, complete with *Monty Python* and *Fawlty Towers* iconography and a line-up of Australian beer brands, greets diners as they enter **Casa Italia** (86 Le Loi, D1), located right in the beating heart of downtown Saigon. The impression is comparable to sticking an RSL (Returned and Services League, Australia) club into an upscale Italian restaurant on Melbourne's famous Lygon Street and then transplanting the whole affair right into the middle of Saigon.

I question Stephen, the restaurant's owner, on his choice of décor. "Why *Fawlty Towers*? Because that's exactly what it's like to set up a restaurant in a place like Saigon," he replies. Steve's mission is to recreate what he believes is fading from areas such as Lygon, a place which he regrets is becoming increasingly "aggressive" in terms of competition and driving up the bottom line.

Steve wants to operate Casa Italia like the family-run establishments he remembers from his Melbourne heydays. "I want to foster amongst the staff a loyalty to the restaurant, and a feeling of ownership," Steve tells me, unlike the revolving door culture of the contemporary Melbourne restaurant scene where he cut his teeth. Steve's oldest staff has been there right from the beginning, taking up leading positions in the new Casa Italia branches recently opened in Phu My Hung (82 Le Van Thiem, D7), Thao Dien (82 Xuan Thuy, D2) and another one in District 1 (98J Le Lai, D1).

That close-knit ethic kicks into overdrive during Tet, which is a bit of a boom time for the restaurant with most of its competition shuttering for the holiday. Steve fondly relates the chaos of one Tet, running the tables himself with a skeleton staff of four well into the wee hours, as some of his most happy and hectic memories with the restaurant.

Casa Italia bases its brand on the staple meals of pizza and pasta. "Keep it simple" is Steve's philosophy, in the true-blue Aussie manner. "There's no need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to making great food, no need to over-do it." Other than fresh herbs and vegetables, the ingredients are imported or hand-made in the kitchen.

And with Stephen, making great food is in the blood. He began at the sprightly young age of 14, running the tables at his father's establishment in the Dandenongs. A self-described country boy in the big city, he now divides his time between the Sunshine Coast and Saigon.



Capricciosa pizza



Beef carpaccio

“Keep it simple” is Steve’s philosophy, in the true-blue Aussie manner. “There’s no need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to making great food, no need to over-do it.”

From Lygon to Saigon

We start our meal with the Capricciosa Pizza (VND119,000), a mozzarella cheese-girdled rapsallion of olives, artichoke, oven-baked leg ham, mushrooms, and all-round mouthwatering good times. Shortly following upon this crusty creation comes the Beef Carpaccio (VND267,000). First timers (such as myself) may initially balk at this dish and its rather pulpy appearance, prepared with thinly-sliced raw beef topped off with rocket and finely chopped garlic, but will be pleasantly surprised by its delectable salty succulence once tucked into. It melts away in your mouth like soft taffy. The carpaccio washes down particularly well with a glass of house wine, a California shiraz (VND125,000).

Next up is the Atlantic Salmon Liguria (VND359,000), oven-baked salmon fillet in a tomato-fennel sauce, tender as a kiss on the lips. The stuff just falls apart on the tip of your tongue, cooked to perfection with a side of crackling, beans, mash and a sauce that takes it to the next level. Throw in a Fettuccine Carbonara (VND137,000) and Fettuccine Alfredo (VND110,000) for good measure, and we’re a couple of very happy campers, heartily stuffed. The carbonara is creamy and cheesy as John Cleese’s smile beaming down from the wall with a pantheon of other 1980s television icons, while the alfredo is of a more restrained and understated hue.

For dessert we treat ourselves to the Almond Semifreddo (VND129,000), essentially a slab of almond ice cream (“*semi freddo*” being Italian for “half frozen”) topped off with almond toffee snap – and what a treat it is. That nicely put away, we cap off the evening with a complimentary shot of limoncello and nightcap flat white espresso.

“Smack your lips around this one, boys,” offers Steve, putting down the goods onto the table, served in an espresso cup. “This is the original flat white, Italian style.”

“A taste of Melbourne’s finest, right there,” declares my dining companion. How right he is. A slice of Lygon, right here in Saigon.

86 Le Loi is opened every day during the Tet holiday, 98J Le Loi is closed on February 8, and 82 Le Van Thiem, PMH is closed on February 8 & 9. ■



Atlantic salmon liguria



Fettuccine alfredo



Almond semifreddo

Back in Time

Delicious innovations on
Vietnamese classics

TEXT BY JOHN GLENN DOYLE IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



Tempura prawn served inside dragonfruit



Cha gio

IN BETWEEN DUCK tacos, wasabi crab and the latest culinary fad it can be far too easy to overlook those classic dishes which sprang organically from Vietnam. Also were it not for a helpful *xe om* driver who recognized the signs of a foreigner completely lost, I would have walked right past **Time Bistro** (44 Nguyen Hue, D1) several more times before finding it. The understated and moonlit façade may have been easy to miss the first time but having tried their take on authentic Saigonese food it will be difficult to walk pass again.

Authentic Saigonese cooking in Saigon? Granted the premise may not be original but like all good remakes Time Bistro pays homage and takes liberties. While distracted by the intriguing fibrous lampshades that hang from the ceiling, I was seated with the proprietor, Phuong, who was telling me of recent renovations that coincided with construction work for the Nguyen Hue Pedestrian Walkway. As expected, business had been down during the work on the street, and therefore the time was right to make the change when cost would be minimal. The restaurant is unrecognizable from the photos online of its previous incarnation. The carved and turned timber tables and chairs, styled in the classic Indochinese ebony, account for the majority of the furniture. On the walls are murals of classic Saigon icons (The Notre Dame Cathedral, The Continental Hotel, etc) and a treat for cartography fans are 1960s maps of Saigon that belonged to First Lieutenant Ray W. Wilson, presumably an officer of a Topographical Battalion of the United States Engineering Corp. The ambient Vietnamese music played softly on the sound system is much like the waitstaff: instinctual and unobtrusive. Their smart uniforms are color coded to the murals and they are never without a smile.

What is sure to become Time Bistro's signature dish is the tempura prawn served inside a dragonfruit with dragonfruit mayonnaise (VND220,000). Just to see this dish is worth a trip here. The presentation allows all the natural beauty of the fruit to stand out and accentuates the golden tempura. The sauce is a unique experience — the creamy mayonnaise tempered well by the mild and delicate flesh of the dragonfruit. The tempura is thick and is complemented by the sauce, and is delicious. This is an impressive and uniquely original dish, although prawn purists may wish to order it without the tempura.

A step up from the usual *cha gio*, the traditional pork and taro shallow-fried (VND60,000) is a must-have — the chef has a light touch with the oil and this is where their skills really shine, allowing the flavors of the pork to stand out. The spring rolls, as well as the fried squid *banh cuon* (VND60,000), when coated liberally in the serving sauce, make for an excellent start.

Though a full menu of cocktails is available at a reasonable VND100,000, the traditional Saigon experience would



Thien ly flower



Duck wrapped in deep fried taro

demand a fresh and flavorful array of traditional drinks starting from VND50,000 from the seasonal juice blends (*khong duong* naturally) and camomile ice tea to the coconut smoothies and *vu sua* with fresh milk.

Though the vegetarian options are few, it's the quality that counts and Time Bistro revives an interesting vegetable with a variety of English names with the most memorable being "The Tonkin Creeper" and "The Flower of a Thousand Skies." The vegetable, known as the *thien ly* flower (VND80,000) to you and me, has the taste and consistency of something somewhere

between broccoli and asparagus and is lightly stir fried in butter and garlic. Carnivores should consider this as well, as it makes a good side dish to a hotpot. I was served the salmon claypot (VND110,000) with pepper, lemongrass and fish sauce. Though using salmon may be an ambitious choice, the fresh and ample seasoning makes any albumin imperceptible. Be sure to order rice with this dish as you'll want to savor the sauce. An unexpected highlight was the duck wrapped in deep fried taro (VND140,000); though splendid by themselves, they were accompanied by a *sori sinh* to sauce –

sori is Vietnamese cherry (which is remarkably similar to an Australian lili pili fruit) made into a smoothie, which is then used as a sauce.

When I finally ask Phuong what the strange and pretty weavings are that cover the numerous small incandescent bulbs lighting the restaurant, she explains that they are wrapped in dried out loofah. The soft shadowed effect of the dappled low light makes for a warm and romantic venue, with Phuong divulging that "some people come here to kiss." I came for the food, and that was more than enough to satisfy me. ■

Some Like it Hot

Bollywood turns up the heat at its second location in District 1

TEXT BY JULIAN AJELLO IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

IT'S SAID THAT variety is the spice of life. The spices do just fine on their own. India's southwest coast, Kerala in particular, established itself as a major center for the spice trade as far back as 3000BC and came to be known as the Spice Garden of India. Lucky for modern civilization, obtaining exotic spices no longer requires the risk of life and limb that it once did. As a result, we

are able to feast on the spectacular cuisine from Kerala's home country most anytime we wish.

While Saigon has no shortage of Indian restaurants, can one really complain about having a bevy of choices for such wonderful cuisine? Pravin D'Souza's **Bollywood** (41 Bui Thi Xuan, D1 and 26-A Sky Garden 2, PMH, D7) does well to

distinguish itself and is no run of the mill Indian eatery. Pravin, who hails from Goa, arrived in Saigon as a cigarette salesman, transitioned into owning the Bubbly Bubble Tea chain before electing to open an Indian restaurant — with no prior restaurant experience whatsoever.

Fortune favors the bold, and Pravin certainly seems to have found some with

The chicken korma, in a fragrant creamy sauce made with onions, ginger and cashews, is an excellent complement to the spicier dishes.



Chicken korma



Lamb vindaloo



Vegetable samosas



Paneer chili

his latest endeavor. Technically, Bollywood has been operating for three years now, but its first location was tucked away in the Sky Gardens Apartments complex in D7. They now have a brand new one on Bui Thi Xuan in District 1. Adorned with the glitz one might expect from the name, each location offers a festive environment for those looking to celebrate as well as eat.

Chef Sanjay, whose professional career spans 13 years – the last four of which have been here in Vietnam, and one year with Bollywood – helms the kitchen. His comprehensive menu includes all one would expect, yet they've tailored it slightly to accommodate Vietnamese tastes.

We started with the vegetable samosas (VND30,000 for two pieces) and the *paneer* chili (VND70,000). The samosas were spot on and are sure to please fans. For those who enjoy *paneer pakora* I urge them to try the *paneer* chili, which has a distinctive

Chinese influence, is served with sautéed onions and peppers in a spicy red sauce. This dish could, and should, be a main. It's a fun take on a wonderful starter.

We moved onto our mains, chicken *korma* (VND85,000), lamb *vindaloo* (VND100,000), and chicken *chettinad* (VND75,000) served with steamed rice and garlic *naan*. The lamb *vindaloo* is exactly as one would expect, tasty and packing a chili kick. Bollywood does tap the brakes on the chili so that you sweat, but only a little. They're interested in bringing people back for more, not burning them out on the first go. Chicken *chettinad* recently became one of my favorite dishes. It's also quite spicy, but that spice comes from black pepper rather than chilis, so it will light up your mouth, but without the heat. It's excellent and a great example of why the spice trade ran through India. The chicken *korma*, in a fragrant creamy sauce made

with onions, ginger and cashews, is an excellent complement to the spicier dishes. It's well-balanced and a welcome respite from the heat and spice of other dishes. It's a perfect pit stop from spices during a meal. While many people usually opt for chicken *tikka masala*, I favor the *korma* and suggest heading in that direction at least once.

Something of note was that the sauces—or gravies—were noticeably lighter than in other Indian restaurants. While they were still ample enough with which to douse your rice, or dip your *naan* into, they didn't fill you to gut-busting extremes, which often accompany the end of an Indian meal.

With set lunches on offer as well as a delivery service and curries to go, Pravin's Bollywood has the bases covered and looks to remain firmly entrenched in the Saigon cuisine scene. If you're in need of a new fix for Indian food, or just want to add one to your rotation, get yourself to Bollywood. ■



Chicken *chettinad*



Naan



Supertuscans

Plenty to discover with Italian wines



Alfredo de la Casa has been organizing wine tastings for over 20 years and published three wine books, including the Gourmand award winner for best wine education book. You can reach him at www.wineinvietnam.com.

ITALY IS PARADISE for wine lovers. Like France or Spain, virtually every single Italian region and province, including the islands, produces wine. The country also has over 400 autochtone grapes (rising to over 2,000 if you include sub-varieties). A few decades ago, Italy was famous for producing large amounts of subpar wines, but over the last 30 years or so, this has changed. Most Italian wineries produce amazing wines, some of them topping the best international lists.

Veneto, in northern Italy, is one of the foremost wine-producing regions in the country in terms of both quantity and quality. Some of the most famous wines produced in Veneto include the popular sparkling Prosecco, the white Soave and reds Recioto and Amarone de la Valpolicella. Tommasi is one of the top wineries in this area, producing a refreshing Prosecco, as well as top-end Amarone, one of the best wines Italy has to offer.

Piedmont, also in northern Italy, is well-known as the home of great reds such as Barolo and Barbaresco. This region is the second-largest producer of quality wines after Veneto. Barolo is known as the “king of wines” — high in acidity and tannin, it can be cellared for decades, and is considered among the best in the world.

Without a doubt, Tuscany is the most famous Italian wine region, mostly because of the popularity of one of its wines: Chianti. Chianti is probably Italy’s largest-volume quality wine, without forgetting the iconic Brunello di Montalcino. Situated on the west coast, north of Rome, Tuscany’s wines are famous for using Sangiovese grapes, delivering fresh delicious wines.

However, a few decades ago, visionary winery Antinori played a key role in producing top-end wines, breaking the Chianti’s strict grape rules (that required a large amount of Sangiovese grapes), and making possible what today are known as supertuscans: wines produced in Tuscany, but not following any rule, while delivering astonishing top-quality wines. Examples of these are Tignanello

(made with Cabernet Sauvignon) and Solaia (made with a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc) — the top two most amazing wines awarded with 95-97 points by Robert Parker.

Sicily, an island south of Italy, produces very different wines. Some of the best are made from the Nedo d’Avola red grape, producing rich full-of-fruit wines. Sicily is also famous for Marsala, a fortified wine produced in both dry and sweet styles.

Those looking for really different grapes should try wines made from the

Negroamaro grape in Salento (Puglia) — full bodied, dark wines with hints of spice, very different while delicious. And for whites, try an Orvieto from Umbria — fresh and inexpensive, and great paired with fish and seafood.

Find Italian wines at these locations:
RubyRed Italian Wine Store
 (206 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2);
Wine Embassy (41 Quoc Huong, Thao Dien, D2) and **Finewines Showroom**
 (50 Hai Ba Trung, D1) ■

RubyRed
 Italian Wine Store
 206 Nguyen Van Huong, D2, HCMC

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 Pellegrino&Co, Bellavista Franciacorta, Castello di Buttrio,
 Sambuca Molinari, Leone De Castis, Aldegheri, Castello di Querceto...

Food for a Cause

Be part of the solution for children who suffer from heart disease



Vietnamese chef **Jack Lee** (www.chefjacklee.com) has served a host of Hollywood A-listers from Angelina Jolie to Barbra Streisand, and recently returned to chef for Acacia Veranda Dining (149-151 Nguyen Du, DI). His biography by *Oi* writer NPD Khanh will be released next year.

I WAS BORN in Vietnam during a very violent and difficult era, and I still have many painful memories of what it was like for the children who suffered at that time from the effects of conflict and poverty. One of the painful things about returning to my own country has been to see that even years after the war, there are still many thousands of children here living on the breadline, who simply do not have the financial means to benefit from modern medicine. Recently I had the chance to be part of the solution for a number of these children who suffer from heart disease, working as the executive chef for a charity gala held by the Heart Institute of Saigon under CMI. Tickets to the gala, as well as proceeds from the silent auctions we held on the night, went towards providing high-quality care for such children.

I was grateful to accept the opportunity to work with CMI's Suzanne Veyron Magar and Tu-Tho Thai of Lys Events, with the help of Damian Spencer White and Mischelle Thuy of Damian By Mischelle Jewelry. The preparation was not easy, because we had to bring in all the ingredients the day before and start prepping with many cooks, most of whom I hadn't worked with before. So to assemble the team and execute the meal to perfection was asking a lot for most of the cooks at the Gem Center.

Most charitable events usually go with a three-course meal consisting of a salad, main course and dessert. My charity event was a bit different. I wanted the high-profile guests who were supporting the event to experience the catering style of Hollywood with dishes reinvented using Vietnamese elements, marking the contrast between

the glamour of the tinseltown set and the inspiring hopes of those less fortunate children among us in Vietnam.

Attendees at the event enjoyed a range of dishes, from foie gras ravioli with duck breast and perigord sauce, lobster salpicon wrapped with salmon, to seared jumbo prawn and caviar sponsored by Mr. Phil Nguyen. I prepared a *filet de beouf* for mains, while Charity Food & Bakery under Ms. Thuy Nhu Nguyen provided servings of Vietnamese coffee gelee with passionfruit sauce for dessert.

I was honored to be able to contribute to this noble cause helping kids in Vietnam suffering from heart problems. I encourage all readers to consider adding their support to this great charity, and I'd like to share the recipe with you for one of the appetizers we served on the night – firecracker shrimp. ■



FIRECRACKER SHRIMP APPETIZER

4 poached u-15 shrimp
2 cooked egg yolks (grated)
1 tbsp of red onion (finely diced)
Baby dill (finely chopped)
2 tbsp Japanese tobiko

Remoulade

2 tbsp of Japanese mayonnaise

1 tbsp of Japanese tobiko
1 tsp of Sriracha hot sauce

Directions:

Mix egg yolks, red onion, baby dill and tobiko evenly to serve as coating condiments for your shrimp. Set aside. To make the remoulade, mix the

mayonnaise, tobiko and hot sauce evenly.

Using a pastry brush, spread the remoulade evenly onto and around the shrimp completely and then dip into the egg yolk, red onion, dill and tobiko mixture, then refrigerate for 20 minutes. Serve cold.

>>The List

Wine & Dine

BARS



Elixir

A fashionable lounge situated just next to Starbucks in Rex, Elixir is a high-class location for drinks, tapas, and dining focusing on specialty cocktails and grills. DJ nights are Wednesday to Saturday, and the venue features a smooth cigar lounge.

148 Pasteur, Ben Nghe, D1

Hotline: 2239 3399

Facebook: Elixirgastro



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 Deck Bar

The Deck Group is proud to announce the opening of The Deck Bar, right next to its famous pan-Asian sister restaurant The Deck Saigon in Thao Dien, District 2.

38 Nguyen U Di, Thao Dien, An Phu, D2

info@thedecksaigon.com

3744 6632



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...

Broma Saigon Bar

Famously known for 'not being a bar' Broma is one of Ho Chi Minh City's most popular hangouts with prices ranging from VND30,000 - VND500,000. Broma is a more upscale option for those wishing to escape the cheap drinks in The Pham.

41 Nguyen Hue, D1

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.

119 Bui Vien, D1

Game On

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

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

dine@icasianasasaigon.com

6pm until late

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

www.caravellehotel.com

11am till late

Xu Bar

A cocktail hot spot with Coconut Martinis, Cranelo Sparkles and Passion Fruit Caprioska on offer along with a variety of tapas with DJs and drink specials throughout the week.

71-75 Hai Ba Trung, D1

www.xusaigon.com



For full review, please visit: www.oivietnam.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, D1



MOF Japanese Dessert Cafe

Tet Yokoso New Menu (12/28 - 3/13). Ring in the Japanese & Lunar New Year with vibrant & wonderful flavors at MOF. Using traditional and all-natural New Year ingredients like rice, yuzu, and matcha. MOF is proud to present Tet Yokoso. Rush into MOF to try these auspicious & authentic desserts to help you start 2016 with a lucky charm!
Somerset Chancellor Court, GF,
Nguyen Thi Minh Khai & Mac Dinh Chi Corner, D1
3823 9812 / www.mof.com.vn



Catina Cafe

Catina Cafe mirrors the past and present of former rue Catinat (now called Dong Khoi). "Welcome in, make yourself at home" is the vibe. Catina has something for everyone — Western and Vietnamese options as well as healthy and sweet indulgences.
151/6 Dong Khoi, D1 / 3827 5555
Facebook: Cafecatina



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,
Corner Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, D1
3520 9099
dine@icasianasaiagon.com



En Tea House & Restaurant

En replicates the feeling of the old Saigon by modern Saigonese, complimented by authentic Vietnamese cuisine and deluxe teas, for anyone who wants to look for Saigon's sense of nostalgia and friendliness.
308 - 308C Dien Bien Phu, Ward 4, D3
3832 9797
Facebook: Enteahouse



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, D1



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ROBOT TOWER, 308-308C Dien Bien Phu St, Ward 4, District 3, HCMC

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



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



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



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

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.

1st Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon, Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, D1
3520 9099
www.intercontinental.com/saigon



For full review, please visit: www.oivietnam.com

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



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



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, D7



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
info@lacreperie.com.vn
11am - 11pm



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
094 841 5646



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, 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...

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 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

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.lebouchondesaignon.com

Trois Gourmands

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

18 Tong Huu Dinh, D2
3744 4585



INDIAN



Ashoka

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

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



Bollywood

Known for its complete North & South Indian cuisine, Bollywood's speciality is its special chaat & tandoori dishes. Parties, events & catering services are available, with Daily Lunch Thali and set menus. Free delivery in D1, 2, 3, 4, and 7. Complete menu on Facebook.

* 41 Bui Thi Xuan, D1
6679 5267 - 6686 3168
* 5A 26-2 Sky Garden 2, Phu My Hung, D7
2245 0096 - 2213 1481
www.bollywoodvietnam.com
Facebook: Bollywoodvietnamindiancuisine



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



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




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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Wildlife At Risk (WAR) is a non-profit organisation based in Ho Chi Minh City
Tel: +84 3899 7314 Fax: +84 3899 7316 Email: info@wildlifeatrisk.org
www.wildlifeatrisk.org

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.ciaobellavietnam.com

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 1299
info@internos.vn
www.internos.vn
Facebook: 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
6260 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 spawned 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 Cafe has two floors providing a nice atmosphere for meetings, relaxation or parties. The menu is extensive with drinks and Western, Japanese, and Vietnamese food – from sandwiches, 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



Lavastone BBQ

Modern Japanese Yakiniiku restaurant combined with a classic cocktail bar located right in the heart of buzzing Ho Chi Minh City. Juicy BBQ in the restaurant's home-made sauce to mind-blowing signature cocktails, you can find them all at Lavastone.

96B Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, D1
6271 3786
Facebook: Lavastone BBQ



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
3930 0039
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
3824 5355
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.

R1-25 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
3820 4085



THAI



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

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 1412

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



For full review, please visit: www.oivietnam.com

STEAKHOUSE



Canada Steakhouse

We are proud to be the first restaurant to serve imported Alberta beef in Vietnam. Alberta beef is world renowned for its tenderness, flavor, and texture. Come try our steakhouse. You will be amazed!

219C Pham Viet Khanh, D1
6294 8787
www.canadasteakhouse.com
 Facebook: Canadasteakhouse219c
 10am - 11pm



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



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



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



Wild Horse Steakhouse


The restaurant offers grilled pork, barbecued chicken and steak dishes along with a wide selection of cocktails as well as a number of smaller dishes.

8a/1d1 Thai Van Lung, D1
www.wildhorsesteakhouse.com




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VIETNAMESE



Bun Cha

Bun Cha, named after the iconic Vietnamese pork dish, offers a focused and elegant menu served up in comfortable rustic surroundings. Ordering a selection of dishes is a must; so enjoy tapas-style dining with all the freshest of Vietnamese flavors.

145 Bui Vien, D1
3837 3474



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



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



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



Time Bistro

Timebistro – a tiny little restaurant will bring you back to Saigon 1960s. Visitors will be impressed by romantic atmosphere with elegant and simple style which is close to your heart.

44 Nguyen Hue, Ben Nghe, D1
09 8910 4633
www.en.timebistro.vn

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

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

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

INTERNATIONAL



Bamboo Chic

Bamboo Chic serves an inventive menu of Japanese and Chinese dishes and creative cocktails. Open for dinner, the contemporary space features modern velvet chairs with purple and plum pillows and dramatic beaded chandeliers inspired by the Saigon River along with live music from the house DJ.

Level 9, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1

6263 6688

www.lemeridien.com/saigon



Brotzeit German Bier Bar & Restaurant

Brotzeit serves authentic Bavarian cuisine such as Schweinshaxe or Pork Knuckles, Nürnberger sausages, Weisswurt - 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

3822 4206

www.brotzeit.co



Cuba la Casa del Mojito

Bienvenido a Cuba, The first Cuban Bar, Restaurant & Lounge! Come enjoy some fine Cuban Cuisine, Authentic Mojitos and flavorful Cigars! Music and Ambience will transport you to the Old Havana where Salsa never ends.

91 Pasteur, D1

3822 7099



Eleven Café

Eleven Café is located in the center of town, a 5-minute walk from Ben Thanh Market. The restaurant has a stylish vintage design with a friendly and cozy atmosphere. The Asian fusion menu combines Asian & European vegetables and spices, providing a unique and unforgettable experience.

29 Le Anh Xuan, D1

08 3822 2605

info@elevencafe.com.vn

Facebook: ElevenCafeVN



Latest Recipe

Latest Recipe invites diners to an international culinary experience set against views of the Saigon River. An open kitchen is the focal point of this contemporary space, with chefs preparing an array of dishes to order. Every Sunday Latest Recipe serves an elaborate brunch buffet filled with tantalizing dishes from around the world.

Level M, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1

6263 6688

www.lemeridien.com/saigon



Noir. Dining in the Dark

Diners choose from a selection of set menus served up by visually impaired waiters completely in the dark. Choose from one of three set menus (East, West and Vegetarian) with four or five tasting portions per course (starter, main, dessert). Purposely, not much more information is provided.

178/180D Hai Ba Trung, 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



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: Tntbbqvietnam



Villa Royale Treasures

Villa Royale specializes in antiques from Europe and Asia. Enjoy lunch or high tea while surrounded by treasures from around the world. Specializing in over 40 flavors of luxurious TWG tea.

3 Tran Ngoc Dien, Thao Dien, D2

www.villaroyletreasures.com

Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY JAMES PHAM





Hutong at night, Beijing

Walking Beijing

Exploring one of the world's greatest cities on foot

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JAMES PHAM

IT'S BEEN CALLED by many names: Jicheng when it was first known to be settled more than 3,000 years ago; Zhuojun, the northern terminus of the 1,776 km-long Grand Canal; Dadu, the Mongol capital under Kublai Khan; and Peking, a transliteration of the pinyin form of "Beijing" (meaning "Northern Capital"), to name just a few. But by whatever name you choose to call it, Beijing is one of the world's most vibrant cities, boasting no less than six UNESCO-designated World Heritage Sites (seven if you count the Grand Canal), equal to the number found in the entire country of Egypt.

First time visitors to China envisioning cramped streets and massive crowds will be in for a surprise in Beijing. Although housing upwards of 20 million people, sprawling Beijing Municipality covers an area of almost 17,000 sq km of mostly flat land including large parks and wide open spaces just begging to be walked and explored.

Hutong History

I start my exploration of Beijing by walking some of its oldest neighborhoods. Meaning "water well" in Mongolian, these 700-year-old *hutong* networks of grey-stoned alleyways were originally communities centered around sources of water and consisted of mostly one-story houses built around a central courtyard. Reaching a peak of more than 3,000 neighborhoods before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, these ancient alleyways have since given way to roads and high rises, with only 1,000 or so remaining.

Each *hutong* house typically had three courtyards: one for guests, the second for the master where the main activities took place, and a third for the daughters where they practiced traditional music, embroidery and other feminine arts designed to attract suitable husbands. High thresholds were customary to keep wayward daughters in and ghosts (who apparently could only walk in straight lines) out. Subtle clues outside the homes speak to the original owners: the number of colorful beams indicating social rank, markers showing how many generations have lived there, and round drum-like stones outside the door for military families and rectangular bookish ones for scholars.

While some *hutong* houses have been lavishly restored into trendy restaurants and offices, the majority have simply been divided into small State-subsidized multi-family dwellings, evidenced by a dozen or so electric meters just inside the gate. Most

are tiny rooms with a shed-like kitchen and no bathroom, hence the communal squat-style toilets every 5 meters or so. In some *hutong* houses, a small courtyard may remain, harkening back to ancient times. "*Hutongs* are different from apartment living," says Lilei, a 32-year-old Beijinger. "You can live in an apartment for 20 years and never know your neighbors. In the *hutongs*, my neighbors would always ask me if I had eaten, and if not, bring me a bowl of congee, just like my family. The *hutong* rooms are small, so people like spending time in the courtyard with each other." We cycle around the *hutongs* behind the Bell and Drum Towers and come across many scenes of community: an elderly foursome bundled up against the cold

playing a noisy game of mahjong, ladies gossiping while waiting for fresh hand-pulled noodles and songbird aficionados watching over their winged charges, a disappearing slice of Old Beijing.

All the Tea in China

The largest producer of tea worldwide, all the tea in China amounts to a veritable mountain, about 1.7m tons a year. On a brisk autumn morning, I set out for the upscale *hutong* area behind the Ping'anli subway station, once home to the emperor's relatives, for a lesson in tea. Despite the inroads coffee has made in the last decade or so, being able to appreciate and properly serve tea is still a hallmark of sophistication, so it is that I find myself at



A relaxing half day can be spent leisurely walking the 798 Art District northeast of the city center. Disused factories built in the 1950s by the East Germans were converted in the early 2000's to house contemporary art galleries, hip cafes and quirky boutiques. Exhibition spaces feature everything from 3D art, political paintings, multimedia installations and sculptures to more commercial art forms. Wander around and take in all the mind-bending street art — old rusty shells of buildings provide the perfect backdrop to gigantic blue-green rabbits and bright red velociraptors stacked in cages.

Within walking distance of the Art District is another homage to art in the form of the 5-star NUO Hotel Beijing. Recently opened in mid-2015, the hotel's stunning design was inspired by the literature, art and culture of the Ming Dynasty. The massive lobby is adorned with ten 2.5 meter-tall blue and white painted porcelain vases and anchored by a striking 3-ton silver and bronze sculpture by renowned Chinese

artist Zeng Fanzhi. The artist and scholar theme is carried into the 438 guestrooms which offer floor-to-ceiling views of the city and are decorated in tones of brick grey and blue sky, colors popularized by Chinese literature from the era. Tea lovers will want to pay a visit to the Yuan Tea House, a contemporary interpretation of a Ming Dynasty-era tea house complete with teas created exclusively for the hotel served up in exquisite tea sets. Guests will also find custom NUO Pu'er infused bath amenities in the spacious all-marble bathrooms and guestrooms are equipped with marble-topped writing desks, Bluetooth-enabled Bose stereo speakers, Nespresso coffee machines, walk-in wardrobes and more. The hotel is ideally located just 20 minutes away from the Beijing airport and a 10-minute walk to Jiangtailu metro station. Doubles start at USD257 with easily one of the best buffet breakfasts I've ever seen anywhere in the world, both in size and quality, making me wish immediately that I had skipped dinner the night before. For more, visit www.nuohotel.com



Temple of Heaven



Hutong door and courtyard



Dancing at Temple of Heaven



Mahjong in the park



Tea paraphernalia



Art District 798

a tea school, brushing past racks of flowing tea robes and displays of plain but very expensive Yixing tea pots made from a special clay that absorbs the flavor of every tea brewed in it.

In a small room with beautifully carved wooden furniture and spa-like music playing in the background, I sit facing tea master Li Long whose unenviable task is to teach me the difference between an Oolong and a Pu'er. "Many people come to us to learn about tea," she says of the standard 50-hour course. "It might be parents sending their daughters, businesses sending receptionists or those looking to open up their own tea house. The class teaches you the process of preparing each type of tea, how to enjoy it, how to sit, which posture looks beautiful." I immediately sit up straight and sheepishly admit that my tea experience is limited to

the occasional Lipton tea bag only to see a flicker of disappointment flash across her face as she brings out a tray loaded with accoutrements for the lesson: scale, strainer, wooden tongs, tasting cups, teapots (one for each type of tea), and a small glass pitcher called a *gong dao bei*, literally "fair pour cup," ensuring that everyone receives hot tea that hasn't been oversteeped.

As Li Long begins to weigh out little balls of Iron Buddha oolong tea, she speaks of the five steps to enjoying tea, using words like "terroir" and "fermentation," very much like a sommelier. "First, look at the dry tea and smell it. Next, steep, then taste before examining the tea leaves after they have steeped." We review the essential elements of preparing the tea which differ for each kind: the amount of tea, the ratio of tea and water, the temperature of the water and how long to steep. I'm shocked

when Li Long has me count out only 20 seconds to steep the oolong before pouring out the amber liquid into the *gong dao bei*. It tastes tart, light and floral, and unfurled, the leaves are long, slender and beautiful. I tell her that I normally let my tea steep for minutes at a time and that the tea I've seen is usually small bits ("chopped" is the official term). Her mouth tightens ever so slightly. "There's mindfulness involved. It's meditative in a way, just you and the tea."

We try two more varieties: a full-bodied white tea from Fujian and a Shou Pu'er tea from way down in Yunnan, bordering Myanmar. The Pu'er is unusual in that it comes in a big round cake carefully wrapped in paper. Originally transported over long distances, the tea was steamed into cakes for easy handling. Along the way, it naturally fermented, giving rise to

an earthy, musty, almost woody flavor. As each cup is served, we examine the color and brightness and rap our knuckles twice to thank the tea server. We then pass the steeped leaves around and unravel them to look for fullness. “Originally, tea was first used as medicine, then food, and now only for the tea liquor,” says Li Long. “More recently, people have experimented with the taste using milk instead of water, and adding honey or butter.” But somehow, I can’t imagine her desecrating the purity of *cha*, not even for all the tea in China.

Forbidden No More

Like planets revolving around the sun, the *hutongs* radiated outwards from the center of Beijing, the Forbidden City, with the highest social classes allowed to settle closest to the imperial palace. Built from 1406 to 1420 by an estimated one million workers, the largest palace complex in the world was the seat of power for 24 emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties. For nearly 500 years, entrance meant death to anyone who didn’t have the emperor’s permission. Now, so many people visit that last June the museum had to cap visitors to 80,000 per day.

With 980 surviving buildings and almost 9,000 rooms spread over a massive 72

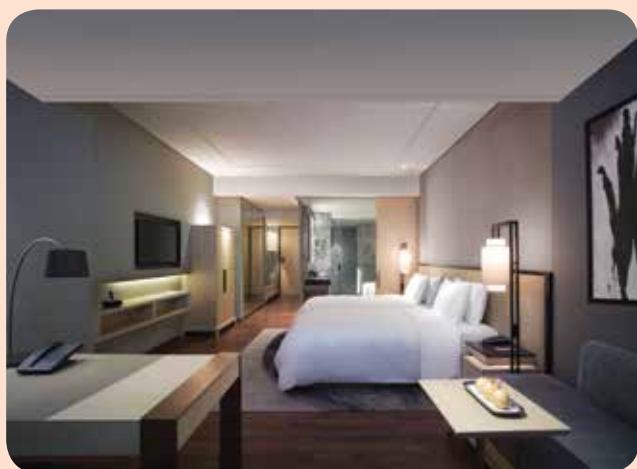
hectares, walking is a given. The public now has even more to see because last October, on the 90th anniversary of its establishment, the Forbidden City (also known as the Palace Museum) opened up four new sections of the Imperial Palace compound for the very first time, meaning 65 percent of the palace grounds is now open to the public.

My first visit to the Forbidden City a few years ago was a blur of beautiful symmetry and gleaming yellow-tiled roofs tinged with an air of sameness. Unlike European palaces, most of the buildings in the Forbidden City are sparsely furnished at best, with names like “Belvedere of Spreading Righteousness” and “Bower of Well-Nourished Harmony.”

Determined not to make the same mistake again, this time I brought along Forest, a specialist on the palace. Instead of trying to see all the buildings, some which house galleries that display a portion of the over 1,800,000 sets of artifacts in the museum’s collection, we focus on areas that had stories behind them, like the library at the Pavilion of Literary Profundity, the only building with a black roof — black being associated with water to ward off fire. Despite the long line, Forest encourages me to wait to see the newly opened exhibition

hall over the Meridian Gate. The wait is worth it, as we stand high above the walls, on the axis believed to traverse the center of the universe, befitting a Son of Heaven. The exhibition hall is beautiful, with a colorful papered ceiling, and display cases full of priceless treasures. What I find most mesmerizing, however, is a historical document, an almost 40-meter long scroll completely unfurled to reveal the streets and *hutongs* of Beijing during the 60th birthday celebrations of the Kangxi Emperor in the early 18th century. The painting is ravishing in detail and brilliant in vivid coloration. Forest points out how to distinguish the officials from the common man, a feat in itself in that the scroll depicts over 18,000 figures.

We make our way to the rear of the city, to the Palace of Gathered Elegance, where the emperor’s wives and concubines lived. As I peer through the windows into stark rooms, Forest tells the story of China’s most famous Dragon Lady, Empress Dowager Cixi, who rose from concubine to de facto ruler of the Qing Dynasty. The story is salacious and involves sexual exploits, intrigue and murder. In fact, it’s the stories that breathe life into these beautiful but Spartan buildings, the grandest museum of them all. ■



Along Beijing’s north-south axis lies a cluster of must-see sites including the Bell & Drum towers, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square and the beautiful Temple of Heaven. Built in 1420, it was the sacred altar for emperors to offer sacrifices to Heaven and pray for a bumper harvest. The most striking building is the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, near the North Gate, a three-tiered, conically roofed structure set on a marble base and supported entirely by massive wooden pillars without using nails, beams or crossbeams. The main buildings only occupy one percent of the temple’s 273 hectares, the rest being beautifully landscaped trees, flowers and parkland. Come on a weekend and watch dozens of couples elegantly ballroom dancing under the pine trees. Spot the regulars who bring their own hooks to hang bags and things on the railings.

The closest deluxe hotel to the Temple of Heaven (and the nearby Pearl Market for

those who need retail therapy) is the beautiful 309-room New World Beijing Hotel. A pleasing blend of contemporary style and subtle Oriental influences, the hotel has business class elegance but the feel of home. I found the guest rooms to be very spacious (47-84 sqm) and the mix of hardwood flooring and area rugs along with the sliding walls between the marble bathroom and the bedroom made it feel almost like a chic apartment. A large work desk was most welcome and the understated Chinese ink-brush artwork was soothing. You’ll want to leave a few hours in your itinerary to make use of the spectacular Health Club & Spa which includes an indoor swimming pool, sauna and steam rooms and state-of-the-art gym occupying the entire third floor. Head up to the spacious outdoor rooftop terrace at YIN on 12 for gorgeous views of the nearby low-lying hutongs juxtaposed against Beijing’s modern buildings. Doubles with buffet breakfast start at USD215. See www.beijing.newworldhotels.com for more.

IF YOU GO

It’s easy enough to wander the *hutongs* on your own. However, a guide will help bring the history alive and provide innumerable little insights on *hutong* living. I did a three-hour evening walk with Leo (free on select days at www.beijingwalking.com) visiting the *hutongs* around Nanluguxiang shopping street, scenic Houhai Lake and more. A highlight was visiting the home of an older gentlemen who used to train fighting crickets. To see Beijing like a true Pekinese, I engaged the help of the irrepressible Sunflower Li and spent the morning bicycling through some of the city’s hutongs. Tours can also be combined with cooking classes (www.sunflowertourschina.com).

The *tea class* was part of an excellent half-day food tour organized by Hias Gourmet (www.hiasgourmet.com). Accompanied by Shannon Aitken, one of the company’s founders, we explored Beijing’s history and culture through its food — stinky tofu, Muslim snacks, steamed buns, egg griddle pancakes — you name it, we ate it.

If you plan on visiting the **Forbidden City**, you’ll need to bring your passport to have your ticket issued. Better yet, skip the long lines and have your ticket pre-purchased online. Along with an expert guide, pre-arranging tickets was part of the In-depth Forbidden City Heritage Discovery Tour (www.chinahighlights.com) which follows a “no shopping” policy. Forest, my expert guide, was excellent and the tour flew by as it was more akin to storytelling than a conventional tour.

A Trip Back to Nature

Escape the busy city and treat yourself to the serenity and tranquility of Madagui Forest City

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY MADAGUI FOREST CITY



THIS WINTER, THE season of the southern winds, instead of staying in the hectic and crowded city, make a change and enjoy a nature trip along pathways of colorful flowers within the forest, and taking selfies with wild deer and ostriches.

The beauty and fascination of Madagui Forest City is best experienced during the last days of the year. The air is neither cold, as in the winter of the northern regions, nor frosty, as in the mountain highlands. It's perfect, and the gentle

winds at Madagui will inspire you to play in the sunlight and mingle with nature. Now is the time to discover all the adventure games this unique forest city has to offer in a cozy atmosphere, drinking fermented rice wine (a specialty of the area), sampling seasonal grilled meat and exchanging ideas.

You'll find Madagui Forest City brings you back to nature.

Helpful Information:

- Madagui Forest City is about 152km

from Ho Chi Minh City and takes 3 hours by road

- Advance hotel reservations for your trip are recommended
- Madagui hotel has four restaurants
- Most of the games at Madagui are adventurous, some are played in groups

Contact (063) 3709 444 or email sales@madagui.com.vn. See more at www.madagui.com.vn & www.facebook.com/madaguiforestcity ■

>>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



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). **093 344 6542** www.bhayacruises.com



Cham Villas - Boutique Luxury Resort

Located right by the beach in one hectare of lush tropical gardens, this 18 villa property is ideal to get away from the hustle and bustle, to chill out and be pampered. Each villa has a bath overlooking a private garden and a large private patio with comfortable club chairs and a day bed. Two restaurants provide culinary pleasures to round up a perfect holiday. **32 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Phan Thiet** **+84 62 3741 234** www.chamvillas.com



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



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



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 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



Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa

With 280 ocean view rooms and suites and six signature restaurants and bars, including Altitude – the highest bar in Nha Trang. Amenities include outdoor swimming pool with infinity edge and reflection pool area, Shine Spa with 9 luxurioxus treatment rooms, Sheraton Fitness with 24-hour access, Sheraton Club Lounge, Link@Sheraton, Sheraton Adventure Club, and a purpose-built Cooking School. **26 - 28 Tran Phu, Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa** **058 2220 000** www.sheratonnhatrang.com



The Island Lodge

Newly-opened, The Island Lodge is a 12-room Indochine-themed lodge set on Unicorn Island (Thoi Son). Mekong River view rooms and bungalows are scattered around the grounds, but the jewel is the open air restaurant/lounge fronting 50 meters of riverfront along with a French restaurant. There's also an infinity swimming pool and Jacuzzi. **390 Ap Thoi Binh, Thoi Son, My Tho** **073 651 9000** www.theislandlodge.com.vn

>>The List

Health & Beauty

DENTAL



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
08 3925 7526
08 3925 7527
nhakhoadrhung@gmail.com
www.nhakhoadrhung.com



Also try ...

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

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.

2Bis 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 6999

SPA



Maison Mikiu 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



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



Also try ...

Orient Skincare & Laser Center

The center offers non-surgery aesthetic treatments by 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

Saigon Dep Clinic and Spa

Saigon Dep offers cosmetic, acne and pigmentation treatments, as well as scar and rejuvenation services, alongside a full reflexology suite.

90 Le Lai, D1
www.saigondep.net

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

Temple Leaf Spa

Temple Leaf is located in the heart of District 1, and is staffed by a multinational team of skilled masseurs. In addition to foot and full body massages, Temple Leaf also offers cleansing green tea facial care and moisturizing masks.

74 Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.templeleafspa.com

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

YCK Beauty Spa and Hair Studio

The spa offers full relaxation massages, as well as cosmetic care such as firming and collagen treatments. YCK Beauty also offers hair coloring and styling in a relaxing ambience.

178B Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.ykcsa.com

>>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.
4th Floor, Continental Tower, 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.
3rd Floor, IBC Building
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.
15th Floor, Kumho Asiana Plaza,
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.
Unit 25F, Saigon Trade Centre
37 Ton Duc Thang, D1

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 Ngan, D1
(+84) 8 3910 1220
www.alliedpickfords.com.vn



SEAL Logistics

Saigon Express Agency Limited (SEAL) is an experienced and versatile relocations and logistics company. SEAL staff are experts in relocations and pet transportation and can deliver all your logistics requirements to your satisfaction at a competitive price!
3826 8850
sgnexpress@seal.com.vn
www.seal.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 Khac Khoan, D1
3521 0071
ags-vietnam@agsfourwinds.com
www.agsfourwinds.com

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.
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

Crown Line

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

VISA & TRAVEL SERVICES



Vietnam Visa-on-Arrival / Private Visa Approval Letter

Planning to visit Vietnam? Tourists and travelers are now able to get a visa on arrival through our online service. Avoid long queues and high expenses, no need to send-off your passport. Receive an approval letter prior to your departure, issued by the Vietnam Immigration Department, pick-up your visa upon arrival.
0169 9161 166
www.vietnamsvisa.com
support@vietnamsvisa.com



Also try ...

eVisa

A convenient online visa application service with money back guarantee. eVisa is approved by Lonely Planet.
64 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, D1
www.evisa.com.vn

SinhBalo Adventure Travel

SinhBalo Adventure Travel has operated for more than 20 years, specializing in Mekong Delta tours designed by a delta resident. They offer cycling tours and river cruises, in addition to destinations further afield such as Angkor Wat.
283/20 Pham Ngu Lao, D1
www.sinhbalo.com

The Sinh Tourist

The Sinh Tourist was the first travel agency in Saigon, founded

with an aim to introduce travelers to a friendly and welcoming manner. Sinh Tourist also has local offices in Da Lat, Mui Ne, Nha Trang, Hoi An, Da Nang, Hue, Hanoi and international offices in Phnom Penh and Siem Riep.
246 - 248 De Tham, D1
www.thesinhtravel.vn

TNK Travel

Established in 2001, TNK has grown exponentially and has served more than 1.3 million travelers. They offer tours to all major tourist destinations in tailor-made packages.
220 De Tham, D1
www.tnktravel.com

Trails of Indochina

Trails of Indochina is one of the leaders in destination management and bespoke luxury travel throughout Southeast Asia.

They offer a number of themed tours ranging from gastronomic to architectural.

33 Le Trung Nghia, Tan Binh
www.trailsofindochina.com

Tuan Linh

Tuan Linh travel agency is a fully-licensed tour operator that supports sustainable, responsible tourism as well as offering full visa services for travelers.
Thai An 2, Nguyen Van Qua, D12
www.tuanlinhtravel.com

Phu Ngoc Viet

They offer assistance for visa application, extension and renewal.
217/2A1 Xo Viet Nghe, Binh Thanh
www.giahanvisa.net.vn

Visa4Vietnam

Visa4Vietnam offers a quick and easy online visa application service, facilitating visa application, extension and renewal, as well as offering an urgent service for those that require their visa within a few hours.
Suite 602A, 57-59 Ho Tung Mau, D1
www.visa4vietnam.com



Dr. Do Dinh Hung DDS.PhD

and His "Five-Star Treatment" Dental Center

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY **DR HUNG DENTAL CENTER & ASSOCIATES DENTAL CENTER**



TWENTY-ONE YEARS ago Dr. Do Dinh Hung, the founder of **Dr Hung Dental Center & Associates Dental Center** (www.dentalcentervietnam.com; 244A Cong Quynh, D1), was introduced to the American dentistry standard. At the beginning of his studies at the University of Texas, he knew his mission would be "to provide perfection" in oral care services by offering international-standard dental care to Vietnamese people. In early 1994 he set up the first American-standard dental clinic in Ho Chi Minh City.

As one of the pioneer dental centers in Vietnam, Dr Hung & Associates Dental Center has been consistently implementing new technology, investing in modern equipment and maintaining international standards to become the best dental center in Vietnam. Our customers have rated us as "5-Star Treatment" on WhatClinic.com - a reliable global source for hospital, dentistry and aesthetics.

Our modern building is located at the center of Ho Chi Minh City in a 1,400sqm

area including 22 dental chairs with sophisticated equipment set up to serve our international customers. Our dental center has an executive structure similar to a dental hospital with a full range of dental specialists and departments that allows us to complete every single step of the treatment process in-house:

- Imaging diagnosis department with CT Cone-Beam 3D ICAT, ORTHOPHOS XG 2-D images, Nobel Clinician Software, providing complete 3D views and allowing us to perform virtual surgery on the computer in 3D spaces
- Implantology and oral surgery department with a central oxygen system, heart rate monitor, breathing control and blood pressure monitor following the standards of a dental hospital to support anesthetists during the treatment
- Cosmetic department with SMILE DESIGN SOFTWARE, 3D INTRA ORAL SCANNER that helps develop an aesthetic and functional analysis of the face and analyze the dental components
- Orthodontics department with both traditional methods and Invisalign
- TMJ & snoring treatment department
- General Dentistry and Pediatrics dentistry department
- Infection control department under

FDA standard

- Dental lab with CAD/CAM (Computer Aid Design and Computer Aid Manufacture) technology allowing us to design and manufacture dental restorations in 3D.

All technology and equipment at our center are the latest and most advanced, and are imported directly from the US, Germany or Japan. We have a team of highly-specialized dental experts who speak fluent English and professionally-trained dental assistants. Utilizing our team of highly-skilled specialists, well-trained staff, high-quality materials and state-of-the-art facility, we are able to provide comprehensive care to our customers, resulting in the best treatment in a timely manner.

We are proud to be recognized as "5 star-treatment" by our customers, and we stand by our specialists and our products by offering you a 10-year warranty for cosmetic porcelain crowns and a lifetime warranty for implant placement by Nobel Biocare and Straumann implant systems. Building rewarding and lasting relationships with our customers is important to us. We strive for excellence in all we do and look forward to providing you with perfection. ■

Kids & Education



Book Smart

Room to Read sets out to make sure every child has an opportunity to learn

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH** ILLUSTRATION BY **PHUNG NGUYEN QUANG AND HUYNH KIM LIEN**

ALTHOUGH LITTLE-KNOWN, Room to Read Vietnam (RTRV) is one of the oldest NGOs in Vietnam and has been making a positive impact on thousands of Vietnamese children since 2001. However, this year RTRV (www.roomtoread.org/Vietnam) was catapulted into the spotlight when two of its alumni participated in and won the 2015 Scholastic Picture Book Award in Singapore.

Founded in 2001 by a group of social activists including then Microsoft's Asia Pacific Director of Marketing John Wood and Unilever Vietnam's Erin Ganju, the Room to Read non-profit organization operates in ten countries around Asia and Africa, with Vietnam being its second base country. It aims to promote childhood literacy and gender equality in education.

"Why do we choose to focus on fostering reading habits in Vietnamese children? Simple, because reading is a foundational skill. Countless research by various organizations have proven time and again that a child's reading skill is vital to their success in school, and in life. In terms of long-term potential for positive and enduring changes to our society as a whole, there is no better investment for an NGO like us," says Le Tien Phong, the Country Director of Room To Read Vietnam.

"We started out with book donations and scholarships given exclusively to female students in rural areas in Vietnam," shares Phong. "From there, we gradually built extensive programs over the years to create enduring long-term effects." For gender equality, aside from scholarships and financial aid, RTRV also organizes training

for teachers and in-school counseling services for female students. The non-profit has donated several hundred thousand books, successfully set up operation in 992 libraries and built another 130 in over ten provinces in Vietnam. Not stopping at only building libraries and teaching, they have also produced and published a significant number of children's picture books. To date, they have funded, produced and published 89 titles with each averaging a production run of 2,000 to 3,000 copies.

"Our end goal is to create independent readers," he continues. "When you think about it, ignorance and illiteracy are the root cause of many problems in third world countries like Vietnam, extreme poverty being one of them. To combat ignorance, we must give people not only the ability to read but also a love for reading as well."



Countless researches by various organizations have proven time and again that a child's reading skill is vital to their success in school, and in life.

This is easier said than done given the fact that, according to the Vietnamese Ministry of Publication, Vietnamese people read an average of 2.8 books per year per person, a quarter of the average Singaporean readers, and this is considered a fairly optimistic estimate. If that figure is not adequately convincing, then in their 2013 report, the Vietnamese Office of Statistics claims that the average Vietnamese spends 32 times the amount they spends on books on alcoholic beverages.

"It's difficult to change the habits of adults, and that is why we are concentrating our efforts on the children, on the future generation," says Phong. According to him, publishing children's picture books is the core of their childhood literacy operation.

Phong claims there is a lack of suitable books for children aged two to six years old in Vietnam. "The books available in commercial bookstores are typically of poor quality, age inappropriate, overly preachy or full of political agenda." This gap led them to organize workshops to train artists and writers interested in this specific field. And, fortuitously, it was in one of these workshops that Phung Nguyen Quang and Huynh Kim Lien found out about the 2015 Scholastic Picture Book Award.

Quang, 26, and Lien, 23, started their professional careers in 2012 by collaborating with RTRV to create various book titles. The book that won them the award follows the story of An, a Vietnamese boy, through the at-times tumultuous Mekong Delta on his first

journey to school. Aptly named *First Journey*, the book follows the creative principles taught by Room to Read: simple, concise and exquisitely illustrated. It has only six pages to tell its story but each page is filled with vivid imagery and a boundless sense of childish wonder. The text, no more than a single sentence per page, is poetic but simple enough that even younger children can read. The award came as a surprise to the duo who entered the competition just two weeks before deadline. "We never dreamt we would actually win the award. We participated because we thought the experience would be good and because we wanted to represent Vietnam," says Quang.

Quang, Lien and the Room to Read Vietnam team are now waiting to publish *First Journey* in Vietnam. ■

Unwanted Pregnancies

Benefits of spaying and neutering your dog

THIS MONTH WE explore ways to prevent unwanted pregnancies in female dogs and raise awareness of their mating 'heat cycle.' In the next issue we will discuss cats. Sterilizing dogs and cats, is the process of neutering the male and spaying the female through surgery.

Female dogs become sexually mature when they have their first mating 'heat cycle,' and smaller dogs can sexually mature faster than larger dogs. It is important to understand a female dog's mating period, which consists of four stages: proestrus, estrus, diestrus and anestrus.

One of the first signs of her coming into 'heat' is vaginal bleeding, which generally lasts between four to nine days; in addition, her vulva will swell. This is the first stage of the heat cycle, called proestrus. Male dogs will become attracted to female dogs early in the second estrus stage, lasting from four to 13 days, a period during which a female dog can become pregnant. The whole heat cycle can last up to 30 days. Her first estrus stage is generally between the ages of six months to one year.

Neutering a male (removal of the testes) and spaying a female (removal of the ovaries and uterus) is required to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Traditional surgical techniques include scalpels; however, laser surgery is now becoming a popular option among veterinarians in Vietnam. Surgery is completed in a couple of hours and if you arrange to bring your dog in the morning to the clinic, barring complications during surgery, your dog should be home the same day. A return visit to the vet will be needed to remove the stitches for both male and female. Become vigilant of your dog during the recovery period to make sure there is proper healing.

When is the Right Time and Age?

It is recommended to spay female dogs

before their first heat cycle. Male dogs can be neutered at any time after eight weeks of age, generally before reaching puberty. Most dogs are sexually mature by the age of five or six months.

Changes in Personality

Both female and male dogs experience changes in personality during a female's heat cycle. Hormones are raging in both sexes and the female, especially, will become overly sensitive. Males that are usually gentle may become aggressive towards anyone or anything that is in their way of getting to that female dog in heat in the vicinity. Generally, for both sexes, sterilization reduces aggressive behavior.

The males will become calmer with lower levels of testosterone and 'mark' less, and eliminate roaming, humping and other male dominance related behaviors. Many owners in Vietnam should have their dogs neutered so they can become more social in public with people and other dogs.

Health Issues

Spaying helps prevent mammary tumors called pyometra resulting from hormonal and structural changes to the lining of the uterus, and it also prevents uterine and ovarian cancers.

Neutering can reduce testicular and prostate cancer, and prevent against Canine Transmissible Venereal Tumor, which is widespread in Vietnam.

According to Catherine Besch, co-founder of Vietnam Animal Welfare Organization, sterilization is recommended to prevent needless suffering of domestic pets in Vietnam. "When done correctly, spaying and neutering causes minimal pain and suffering to the animal and will help prolong its life. This is the first step in limiting the population of unwanted animals and making the comfort and health of pets in Vietnam a top priority."



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).

The average dog owner in Vietnam simply misunderstands the critical need for sterilization, usually voicing concerns over the financial cost or that it's not 'natural' or not allowing a dog to experience the 'miracle of life.' ■



WHERE TO GO

RECOMMENDED ENGLISH-SPEAKING VET CLINICS

Saigon Pet Clinic & Pet Care Hospital
(District 2)
Modern Pet Hospital or Sasaki Animal
Clinic (District 7)

LOCAL ANIMAL RESCUE ORGANIZATIONS WITH LOW-COST STERILIZATION PROGRAMS

Animal Rescue & Care (ARC) and Saigon
Pet Clinic (www.arcpets.com)
— English and Vietnamese speaking staff
Yeu Dong Vat (www.yeudongvat.org)
— Vietnamese-language only website

Universal Design

An educational blueprint for today's diverse classrooms



Stacey Conner is a specialist in Special Educational Needs. She joined Saigon Star International School as Class Teacher in August 2015.

THE WORLD IS already a much smaller place and our classrooms are increasingly diverse. Schools are charged with educating students who speak various languages and who have a wide range of pre-existing knowledge from vastly different cultural contexts. This lends itself to a myriad of benefits for students: spontaneous cultural exchange, increased global awareness and unique learning communities are just a few. These invaluable elements of an international classroom cannot be manufactured, not even with the most diligent planning by a careful teacher.

However, to an educator, they also mean that there are just as many unique learning needs in that same classroom. The questions that then arise for these teachers are: How can I ensure my teaching matches every student's needs? What does a globally-conscious lesson plan really consist of? The truth is, there is no "one size fits all" answer, but there are strategies that can be put in place.

"Universal Design," a term originally used in the field of architecture, has since been adopted by the education sector. Originally penned by English architect Selwyn Goldsmith in 1963, the principle states that architectural design must consider all manner of people that may access the given structure. While some people might use the stairs, others may enter using a ramp and so forth. However, the people using these avenues aren't always the usual suspects you would assume them to be. Stairs are not

just for those who walk well, nor are ramps simply for those in wheelchairs. Stairs are the most straightforward path yes, but they may also benefit people who are in physical therapy after a hip surgery in need of the challenge, toddlers mastering the skill of the step, or someone looking to burn a few extra calories whenever they have the chance.

Inversely, while it's true ramps can be used by individuals in wheelchairs, they can also be used by someone wearing rollerblades, one who has a heavy suitcase in tow, or perhaps one with a temporary sprain of the ankle, trying to maneuver their recently-acquired crutches.

Architects realized they could not foresee who would use their buildings and who would not, so they came up with the ultimate "just in case." The idea behind Universal Design is to construct a building that can be accessed multiple ways, by multiple people, for multiple reasons. The design behind a lesson in a global classroom mirrors this same ethos.

As teachers charged with diverse classrooms, our learners each have a unique blend of strengths, needs and interests. As a result, we need to ensure there are multiple ways for our students to access the curriculum in a meaningful way. It sounds easy, right?

An architect will design several buildings, perhaps different types of structures with different functions in his or her lifetime; an impressive feat. However, consider now that teachers

must design several lessons, across multiple subjects, sometimes across multiple student populations *every single day*. It does not sound all that difficult at first, but when you really consider what quality teaching and lesson planning consists of, you realize that teachers really do make up all those summer hours through planning and preparation during the academic year.

Like the architect using data to demonstrate the needs of the population that the building will serve, I use assessment to identify an individual's learning needs, learning styles, and social/emotional needs to carefully plan support, whether it be customized goals, assessment procedures, teaching methods or resources.

That does not mean, however, that a student who is reading at their expected level will not benefit from the visual supports I have designed for a student with autism in my class. Perhaps the student performing at grade level used the picture support to help them derive the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Perhaps they attempted to read for context and still found themselves at a loss, but with incidental access to picture support, they were able to move forward with the momentum of the lesson as opposed to getting stuck on this one word they simply could not figure out, causing them to disconnect with the lesson objective. Perhaps that one word was crucial to comprehension. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps.

No matter how much I use assessment, I still cannot always predict what learning support may or may not benefit a pupil in my class; therefore, it makes sense to build as many learning supports into my lessons "just in case" it may reach a child when I least expect it. One word in one lesson may not seem like a lot, but it may allow learning to take place that may not otherwise happen.

While it may sound like a lot of extra work for not a huge amount of difference, teachers are dedicated professionals. It would be easier, yes, not to go the extra mile — but teachers want their students to flourish. Teachers are architects, the lesson plans the blueprints, and every child a growing structure. ■



>>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



EtonHouse International Pre-School @ An Phu

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, D2

www.eishcmc.com



EUROPEAN
International School
HO CHI MINH CITY



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



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



SAIGON STAR
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL



The American School

The American School (TAS) is an international school that has been accredited 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

3519 2223 / 0903 952 223

admissions@tas.edu.vn

www.tas.edu.vn



THE AMERICAN SCHOOL



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
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.
www.ais.edu.vn

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)
www.aisvietnam.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.
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.
www.igs-hcmc.de

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.
www.renaissance.edu.vn

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.
www.ssis.edu.vn

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.
www.sa-saigon.com

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.
www.montessori.edu.vn



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