

Ơi

VIETNAM

MARCH 2015

STOCKING COFFEE

A 50-Plus-Year-Old
Brewing Tradition

PAGE 22

ART LIVES HERE

A Village Created By and
Dedicated to Artists

PAGE 26

FOR SIZZLE

A Deliciously Smokey
Korean Barbecue

PAGE 34

IN DEEP WATERS

In Search of
Mantas in Myanmar

PAGE 38

the KOREAN WAVE



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**CANADA AAA
ALBERTA BEEF (IMPORT)**

Contents



WINE & DINE

RESTAURANT REVIEWS

From the decadent Liquid Sky Bar to the humble Pach Café, with a Korean barbecue in between, this month's culinary journey is as eclectic as it is delicious

56

IMAGE BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

FEATURES

P10 DATEBOOK

With these events, you'll never have to be bored again

P16 TROI OI

Find out why Vietnamese banks, speed limit and cows made it into our list

P18 YEAH BOI!

Vietnamese female rapper Suboi talks about her career and upbringing

P22 STOCKING COFFEE

A half-century-year-old tradition of brewing coffee through pantyhose

P24 DRAW OUT YOUR STRESS

Find inner peace through painting and drawing

P26 ART LIVES HERE

Enter a village designed to inspire creativity

P29 EAT, DRINK, GIVE

The New Zealand Wine & Food Festival returns at RMIT in District 7

P36 REBEL, REBEL

Meet Ngo Thanh Van: singer, actress, model and producer

P38 THE VANISHING

An Australian backpacker's life changes when his friends in Sapa go missing

P41 NOT FOR SALE

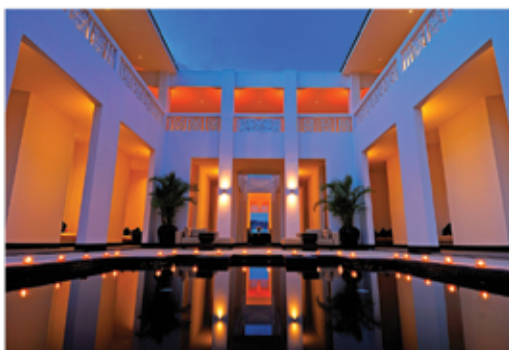
An NGO's mission to stop human trafficking



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IMAGE BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

43

COLUMNS

P76 IN DEEP WATERS

Capturing Myanmar's beautiful manta rays

P90 CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

A teenager's class project on the emotional stress of divorce on kids

P92 BRAVING A NEW WORLD

A Vietnamese man recalls the time when he first discovered the internet as a teenager

P21 LEGAL EASE

Seeking compensation for a cosmetic surgery gone wrong

P35 MONEY TALK

Become your own financial advisor

P60 CHUC AN NGON!

Make cod Basquaise at home, it's easy

P61 CHEERS!

The lesser-known wine areas of Spain

P84 LIFE'S A TRIP

Tips to getting the best airfare possible

P94 TELL TAIL SIGNS

Curtailling the overpopulation of cats in Vietnam

P95 HIGHER LEARNING

How playing is important in educating your kids

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Datebook

What's on this month...

MARCH 4-26

What: Tho Cam II Exhibition

Where: VinGallery (6 Le Van Mien, D2)

About: Doan Xuan Tang's paintings distill the romance and mystery of Vietnam's mountainous region and its people. The streaked lines look like veils through which eyes peer dispassionately, recalling his rain-lashed first visit. "I particularly love to paint the eyes because they reflect the soul inside – happy, sad or suffering," Tang explained. He refuses to romanticize a region whose beauty belies hardships; the lines remind us that cultures can't be consumed, and inevitably elude our true understanding. Physical appearance is just one facet of the complexity of the human condition. "Beauty fades, but its impression is permanent."

Contact: Visit www.vingallery.com for more info



**MAR4-
APR 15**



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What: The Second Culin' Art Exhibition

Where: InterContinental Nha Trang

About: For its return, the InterContinental Nha Trang commissioned Hoi An-based acclaimed photographer Rehahn to collaborate with their culinary team. Together, they will marry images and flavors to create an artistic dining innovation. Over 24 images personally selected and printed by Rehahn will be exhibited across a series of contrasting platforms throughout the hotel's public spaces and will illustrate the extraordinary range of subjects that he has captured throughout his eight-year trip around Vietnam. In conjunction with the photographs, Executive Chef Dennis Barton and his team created 13 signature dishes, including Atlantic smoked salmon with Gia Lai highland musk white pepper, Nha Trang calamari fried with doc let salt and Ha Giang wild pepper, roast duck with orange and Lang Son fresh star anise, among others. The culinary journey will be accompanied by a range of five distinctively different liquors from the makers of Son Tinh.

Contact: Email info@icnhatrang.com for more info



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www.bluecross.com.vn



**MAR
9**

What: A Night of German Music

Where: Ho Chi Minh City Opera House (7 Lam Son Square, D1); 8pm

About: Under conductor Tran Nhat Minh, the Ho Chi Minh City Symphony and Ballet Orchestra presents an evening of classical German music with favorites from Beethoven, Schubert, Strauss and more. Tickets start at VND80,000 for students and VND200,000 for the public.

Contact: Booking and delivery, phone 38237419 or 098 987 4517

MARCH 11-13

What: Vietnam Victory Challenge

Where: Ngoc Lan Hotel (42 Nguyen Chi Thanh, Dalat)

About: The Vietnam Victory Challenge is a three-day, four-leg mountain bike race in Dalat, Vietnam. The race is open to all levels of participants with excellent prizes for all categories, men and women alike. The race is fully supported with food and water throughout the race each day and a small lunch at the finish line.

Contact: Visit www.vietnamvictorychallenge.com for more info

MARCH 19

What: Saigon Cyclo Challenge

Where: Celadon City, Tan Phu District

About: The Saigon Cyclo Challenge is a charitable corporate teambuilding event in Ho Chi Minh City, with all funds raised going to help Saigon Children's Charity. Teams compete against each other in a variety of challenges associated with Vietnam's most famous means of transportation - the cyclo. With a combination of cyclo racing, team games, a cyclo parade and good honest fun, this unique event provides a wonderful afternoon of competition and entertainment for a really good cause: helping disadvantaged children have the chance to go to school. Since its inception in 2001, the cyclo challenge has raised over USD720,000 to support disadvantaged children and young adults in Vietnam gain access to education. Over 21,000 participants from a wide range of companies have taken part in the challenge to date.

Contact: Visit www.saigonchildren.com for more info

① ② ③

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MARCH 19

What: Roaring 1920s

Where: InterContinental Asiana Saigon; VND2.5 million per ticket

About: To mark BBGV's 20th anniversary, join their Roaring 1920s party which includes a dancing competition and a prize draw to win flights to Europe or accommodation vouchers for hotels and resorts. Dress code is 1920s style.

Contact: Email nga.nguyen@bbgv.org for more info



MAR
25

What: Azimute

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

About: Azimute is a new musical project combining the energies of rising techno and house DJ/producer Cesare Marchese and veteran DJ/producer Philippe Quenum. In its first few months, it has attracted the attention of

major players on the electronic music scene, kicking off with releases on Crosstown Rebels and Transmat Records. Cesare Marchese is new to the band, but no newcomer to electronic music. His productions have been released on top labels such as BPitch Control and Get Physical. He was named in "Beatport's Ones to Watch" in 2009. Quenum started his first label, Access58, in London in 1995 and co-founded Cadenza Records with Luciano a few years later, composing with him the techno anthem Orange Mistake. His discography stretches over decades and continents, and includes top labels such as Soma, Crosstown Rebels and NovaMute among others. Following Quenum's release of his first album, Face to Face, the two artists became close friends. They realized they share a common musical vision and way-of-life, one centered on friendship and bringing happiness to those around them through music. This is the vision that Azimute wants to share in their performances.

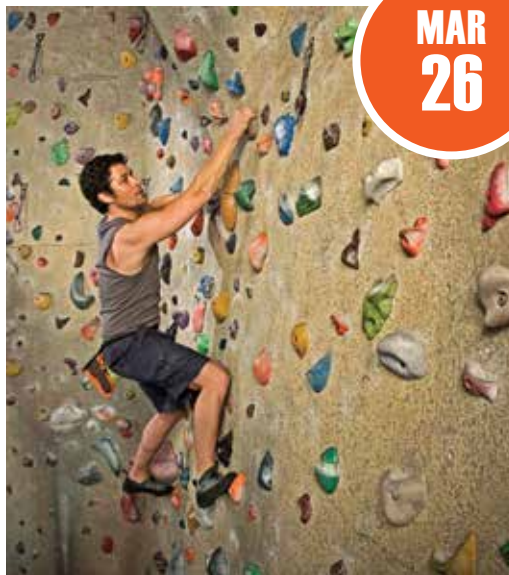
Contact: Visit www.theobservatory-hcmc.com for more info

What: Saigon Bouldering Cup

Where: Vertical Academy (18 Truc Duong, Thao Dien, D2); 9am to 10pm; Visitors: Free entrance. Participants: Individual registration: VND250,000, Team registration: VND750,000. All climbers receive a T-shirt of the event.

About: Vertical Academy follows the rules of the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC). The indoor climbing competition has 4 categories: "U17", for participants under the age of 17, "Novice", for participants with no or few previous experience in rock climbing, "Intermediate", for trained rock climbers, and "Open", for seasoned climbing athletes

Contact: Visit <http://www.facebook.com/events/769324746530708/> for more info



MAR
26



MARCH 31

What: Network Girls 10th Anniversary

Where: The Society Bar & Grill (99 Nguyen Hue, D1)

About: Network Girls turns 10 in 2016. To celebrate, the monthly evening event in March will include cocktails, canapés and a fashion show modeled by some of the Network Girls. The event is open to professional working women in Saigon. Spots are limited, so RSVP by email by March 29.

Contact: Email networkgirlshcmc@gmail.com for more info

UNTIL
MAR31

What: The Face Exhibition

Where: La Maison (201B Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, D3)

About: Antonius Kho is a painter and sculptor from central Java, Indonesia. Kho's work

is a mosaic of beliefs and visual symbols that capture the paradox of tradition and modernity. Torn between the various layers of his identity, Kho shares his time between Cologne, Germany and Ubud, Bali, and exhibits regularly both in Europe and Indonesia.

He loves to paint so much and, like his masks, his life has two facets, and his identity lies in this ambiguity. "His works challenge the viewer to find a sense of direction. Countless lines, points and areas of color dance on the ground and foreground until we connect the first elements into a shape. Quickly this shape disappears, giving rise to another as new eye or nose comes to the forefront and we recreate the perceived image anew," said Dr. Ursula J. Krohn, an art historian, of Kho's pieces.

Contact: Email himiko.nguyen@gmail.com for more info



APR
17



What: Clean Up Vietnam Day

Where: Vietnam

About: April 17th is the inaugural Clean Up Vietnam Day. Clean Up Vietnam is an organization with a mission to inspire people to take action in changing the way we dispose of waste and the way we look at community space. The concept is based on a similar event that takes place in Australia, which has proven a great success with over half a million participants annually. "As much as it is about cleaning up the environment, it is also about bringing communities together and raising awareness of the long-term benefits of keeping our urban and rural spaces free of litter," says Clean up Vietnam Director Scott Alderson. "Get some friends, colleagues or family together and register online so others can join you. It only takes a couple hours of your time and you can make a huge difference. We will send you bags and gloves and everything you need to take part." According to a recent study from environmental organization Ocean Conservancy, Vietnam, China, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia are responsible for as much as 60 percent of the plastic waste dumped into the ocean each year.

Contact: Visit cleanupvietnam.org for more info



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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

TOP 100 FOR THE BLUFFS

The The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip has just been ranked #74 in *Golf Digest's* "World 100 Greatest Golf Courses". Expert panelists from the world's best-known golfing magazine amass the rankings once every two years, drawing on their unmatched experience to rank the best courses against set criteria. The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip is the first-ever course from Vietnam to be included in the coveted "World's Greatest" club and is part of an illustrious group of new courses to be welcomed to the rankings for the first time. The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip, designed by golfing great Greg Norman has had a year beyond compare, bagging some of golf's most coveted titles and staging what many now regard as the most exciting new event on the professional golf circuit, The Ho Tram Open. For more info, visit www.thebluffshotram.com or www.thegrandhotram.com.



IMAGE BY PATRICK CARPENTER

VINGROUP DRIVES NEW AMBITIONS FOR GOLF IN VIETNAM

Vingroup is currently developing golf courses outside Hanoi and Haiphong and has plans to do the same in Quy Nhon and Can Tho. Vingroup's Vu Yen Golf Community, located near Haiphong, will offer two distinct championship courses, with one routed through marshland and the other featuring an abundance of lakes. Both courses are expected to debut in October. Vinpearl Golf currently has two golf developments in its portfolio: Vinpearl Golf Nha Trang, a hilly, resort-style layout overlooking a secluded bay on Hon Tre island just off the coast of Nha Trang; and Vinpearl Golf Phu Quoc, a 27-hole facility that opened last year and is situated within an old-growth forest on the north end of Phu Quoc, the country's top island destination.



FROM HANOI TO TAIPEI

Vietjet officially launch their Hanoi to Taipei route with three return flights a week. The flight between Hanoi and Taipei will take two hours and 40 minutes one way, and will fly every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. Vietjet also currently operate daily flights between Ho Chi Minh City and Taipei.



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Bamboo Chic: Indulge in a unique set menu created especially by you. Complimentary welcome cocktails will awake your appetite for the lavish dinner, while a separate selection of wine pairing will enhance your dining experience.

Above promotions run throughout March and April; for more info, visit www.starwoodhotels.com/lemeridien.



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Troi Oi

The country in numbers

12,456 businesses shutdown in January, according to The General Statistics Office.

Economist Pham Chi Lan said private businesses in Vietnam are operating under too much pressure and estimated the government takes 40.8 percent of their profits through taxes and various fees, leaving little to reinvest in development and training. "They can hardly survive that [burden]. So that's why they have been scaling back and dying," Chi was quoted by numerous local outlets as saying. She added that the government has further strained businesses by keeping fuel prices artificially high despite plummeting global crude prices. Nguyen Dinh Cung, director of the Central Institute for Economic Management, said macroeconomic management must change because state firms continue to monopolize opportunities that private firms could have made better use of. Vietnam is taking steps to privatize its many SOEs but Cung said the government needs to fully privatize these firms rather than auctioning off minority stakes.



~2,000

cattle have died in northern Vietnam during the recent cold weather spell. Northwestern provinces suffered the greatest damage, especially Son La and Lao Cai, which lost 367 and 354 cattle, respectively, followed by Dien Bien, Yen Bai and Lai Chau, where 311, 134, and 46 cattle have died due to freezing temperatures. The frosty conditions have also severely impacted farming communities in the northeastern region, leading to livestock deaths in Cao Bang, Quang Ninh, Ha Giang, Hoa Binh, Bac Giang, Bac Kan and Lang Son. All vegetation areas in Mu Cang Chai, a district in Yen Bai Province, were completely covered with snow. In Ha Giang, 150 hectares of vegetables, including lettuces, beans and potatoes, were severely damaged by the frigid weather. About 407 hectares of rice paddies in the Xiu Man district of Ha Giang are very likely to wither under freezing temperatures.

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illegal Vietnamese workers are in South Korea. More than 10,000 Vietnamese guest workers did not

return home last year after their South Korean work contracts expired, an official of Vietnam's Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs reported. The north-central province of Nghe An topped the list of having the most illegal workers in South Korea, with as many as 1,454 workers not returning to Vietnam. Hanoi came in second with 948 people.



10KPH

increase in the speed limit in residential areas will take effect in March. Besides the speed increase, speed limits will vary based on the types of road, rather than the type of vehicle (as they are currently based). The new 60kph limit will be applicable to roadways with median strips and one-way two-lane roads, whereas the restriction for two-way roads without median strips and one-way one-lane roads will be 50kph. As per current regulations, speed limits are different between trucks, cars, and motorbikes even though they travel on the same road.

152



People were killed while jaywalking in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City last year. Dao Vinh Thang, chief of the traffic police department in Hanoi, said his department has stepped up fines for jaywalking early this month to reduce fatalities. In the city, deaths linked to jaywalking increased from 80 in 2013, to 92 in 2014, and 102 last year. In Ho Chi Minh City, 50 pedestrians were killed last year. Many in Hanoi were actually surprised when fined VND70,000 for jaywalking the past few days. "I always crossed the street like this and no one fined me before," said Nguyen Ngoc Suu, a resident on Ham Long Street. In just two weeks Hanoi traffic police have issued fines against 423 pedestrians for traffic safety violations. "It is difficult to fine them because many often said they did not bring money. We then requested them to produce their ID but they did not have it either," he said. "Some also complained that they walk on the street on vehicle travel lanes because the sidewalks are occupied."



3 Vietnamese banks named among world's most valuable brands. The UK valuation consultancy firm Brand Finance has listed Vietnamese top lenders VietinBank, Vietcombank and BIDV among the world's 500 most valuable banking brands. VietinBank, the country's largest bank with VND799 trillion worth of assets at the end of 2015, made the top 400, climbing from 437 to 379 this year. The bank was also on the list in 2012, 2013 and 2015. The Bank for Investment and Development of Vietnam, or BIDV, made the list for the first time at number 413 while Vietcombank advanced 37 places from last year to 450. Brand Finance puts the brand value of the three banks at USD249 million, USD218 million and USD189 million, respectively. The three banks last year were also named Forbes' list of 2,000 largest companies in the world.



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Yeah Boi!

Vietnam's first successful female rapper

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

THE DJ LAYS down another track as Suboi sits, hands clasped and elbows on her knees, brow knitted in concentration – and then she takes a breath, sits back, shakes her head and says, “Sorry guys, I don’t like any of these beats.”

There’s a *literal* record scratch. Every head in the studio office turns and stares. Evidently, this isn’t how an artist is supposed to talk in Japan. What she is supposed to do is turn up at the studio in the morning, stand in front of a mic all day, and leave the record execs with a brand new piece of music to go off and market. Every day. What they don’t need is a rapper with an attitude – as if there were any other kind.

That’s when it hits her: *this Japan thing? Not gonna work out.*

Suboi may have given it a shot as the sweet petite Vietnamese girl for her Japanese fans – she went as far as making a thunderously cute pop video that she describes as all “hey putty putty putty” (she’s never posted it and will throttle anyone who manages to dig it up) and she gave a number of energetic performances to unresponsive, bewildered local audiences. But at the end of it all, one thing was clear – our angelic, rough-hewn, super-feminine tomboy rap artist remained an enigma to the Japanese, and it was time to come home.

You can probably put a pin on the



**“I’m taking care of my look,
and I’m putting out my music...
trying to make videos with a
crew who believes in me.”**

interested, the flavor of rapper-endorsed yogurt is peach.

Fame, in her words, also ruined her in many respects. Her first inkling that she was heading on an uncomfortable trajectory was when strangers with champagne glasses in hand would approach her for chit-chat in the kinds of parties she was desperate to escape from, while her old crew from the underground were suddenly blanking this breakout celebrity who’d obviously started to believe in the voices telling her they could ‘make her a superstah.’ Those voices happily took the rights to the new album she’d spent all her cash on putting together (that’s where the yogurt money went); they were also delighted to keep all the proceeds from sales, if there were any – Suboi says that she still has to figure that out, given that she hasn’t seen a single dong from it herself.

All this is why Suboi has, for the past two years, largely been appearing in pajamas in her kitchen, practicing up on her pasta dishes rather than rapping on stage in front of adoring crowds, and how she found the time to appear in a local movie (Ham Tran’s *Hollow*) as opposed to recording any actual music.

So who, then, is this confident young woman who’s recently been making frequent public appearances in designer outfits? Fresh back in Saigon from appearing at South by Southwest and sell-out shows in Brooklyn and San Francisco, with a new single released last month, a challenging new film role, and being photographed with far more bottles of Budweiser in hand than can possibly be coincidental?

“I’m building everything again, right?” says the new Suboi in the rich, urban accent she picked up from the gangsta lyrics she studied as a teenager. “I’m taking care of my look, and I’m putting out my music... trying to make videos with a crew who believes in me.”

There’s an emotional flashback scene here where Suboi is found sitting on her sofa, tears burning ridges down her cheeks and splashing onto her popcorn, being admonished by a close friend who pulls her out of the hole, saying “no no no, not this attitude. You go out, put your music out, get your image on and everything. People will notice.” That’s pretty much what got

her back on her feet – but let’s not focus on that, and instead on the deliciously dark sounds that Suboi is promising to deliver in her new music.

“I always liked dark beat, but I never released it,” says Suboi. “It’s *too* dark, and everybody got a hard time anyway. Anybody got a hard life, they gotta work, they gotta da da da... but in the end they don’t wanna hear your shit. That’s what I thought before. But now I will share all these topics, all these different stories.”

Perhaps as a result of the two-year hiatus and the various career setbacks that have now been overcome, Suboi is finally ready to bring her skeletons out from the shadows – something that is giving her new music an edge she’s never felt confident enough to express before.

“I appreciate being a woman,” she says, “but when I got into showbiz, I found out all about sexual harassment... and before that, I got beaten by my [former] boyfriend. So I’m not going around saying hey... I’m a female rapper... I should be better than the guys... but I’m just saying that I’m not that hard gangster stuff. Yeah, that’s what my brothers is, but I’m not. But it’s cool. That’s why I like hip hop. I get so angry all the time.”

Some of that anger, understandably, is derived from the unraveling of her original career momentum. Her first album *Walk* (2010) was, for Suboi, an exercise in baiting the hook – intriguing her potential audiences with a mish-mash of rap and pop, spread out on top of a famous Vietnamese children’s song that everybody who grew up in this country knew by heart. With some verses in English sprinkled throughout, Suboi got everyone’s attention – even if it was largely “what the hell is this girl singing?” That was the first step; the second was to throw in a little old school for *Run* (2014), to get them closer, pulling them in.

“I think I failed at that step, because I didn’t plan very well,” admits Suboi. “But it’s OK. I learned, and I’ve been trying to get the copyrights and everything back. I signed some contracts, so I lost money and trust, I lost all my songs. I don’t own anything. But of course I actually *own* it. In the end it’s still me, right? OK, if you want to sell this stuff, who are you gonna sell it for, who’s gonna sing it? If you don’t promote it, how are you going to sell it?”

timeline right there and say that’s when things bottomed out for Suboi. Months earlier, everyone had been talking about her – international media exposure had made her not only the country’s first successful female rapper, but likely to be the first popular Vietnamese artist ever to make a dent on the global music scene. Fame had taken the awkwardly goofy schoolgirl with a penchant for wrestling and Eminem-style foul language and had landed her stage appearances, album contracts, and a lucrative sponsorship deal for Yomost – for which she’s extremely grateful as the check was good, although it must be said that this was for a *yogurt drink*, and she is a *rapper*. If you’re



“I could see they was like, oh yeah, the Vietnamese rapper, they didn’t know what to expect – until the beat comes up, my flow comes out, and it’s like, oh, okay... she sayin’ something.”

“Anyway, now, I’m very excited, coming back with new music,” she grins; “new stories, I actually share all the stories that I’ve been through. I never really said that before. I was afraid that my parents were going to read it.”

This is the point where Suboi’s swagger gives way and there’s a noticeable change in her accent as she transforms into her alter ego, the sincere and traditional young Trang Anh, still living a stone’s throw from the family home she grew up in in District 3.

“I like cooking, I like just being as a woman,” says Trang Anh, as if to prove that this whole rap artist thing doesn’t go right to the core. “My family is like, very old Saigon, traditional and everything. There’s a beauty about that. My dad is always like, you gotta do stuff proper, and now that I grew up I think that’s true. If you want people to treat you nice, then you got to be nice to them. That’s one thing he said. But

the one thing I don’t like about what my dad says is to care about what other people say about you. They live in a neighborhood where everybody gossips, like I dated a boyfriend when I was 15, and people said, ‘oh yeah, this girl da da da...’ I understand, yeah? But they don’t pay our bills and stuff. And you guys are my parents, I only care about what you guys feel. That’s what’s different about me and my family.”

What’s different about Suboi now is that that she’s simply grown up. Her parents are now well aware of the troubles she’s been through in both her personal and professional life, and part of her renaissance is that she’s now free. She may still have to keep her politics in check – she has always voiced her distrust of censorship through coded lyrics, and as long as she wants to keep recording in Vietnam she’ll have to keep that up – but her recent performances in Vladivostok and the USA during her two years of relative inactivity have brought on a new confidence and put her firmly back in control of her own destiny.

“In Brooklyn, it was really small, like people at the end of the room, I could see them,” she shares. “I could see they was like, oh yeah, the Vietnamese rapper, they didn’t know what to expect – until the beat comes up, my flow comes out, and it’s like, oh, okay... she sayin’ something.”

“In America, people make art, and they still can make money,” she observes, “because people know that’s art, people know that is expression, people know that’s the freedom in art. You know, they appreciate it. But in Asia, you’ve got to change how they see it.”

Suboi’s excitement about her overseas performances is starting to sound dangerously similar to what she said prior to leaving for Japan two years ago – but it seems that she has finally settled on a peace with the city she was itching to leave behind back in 2014.

“It’s good to look back at what I said,” she says of the frequent interviews she gave at that time. “It’s kind of still true, but not 100 percent. Before I really wanted to leave. After the showbiz people, the censors – as a rapper, I need to express. But I traveled to a lot of countries now, and I came back. You see Saigon, just in a month, they have a new building. I feel like a tourist sometimes. We’re developing very well, so it means that you have more chances here. So the new things that people haven’t done here, in other places like New York it’s already there. It’s a melting pot, it will never change. But Saigon is changing. So I changed my mind. I just want to have new experiences, and that’s it. I don’t mean to leave. I love this country. I have this kind of love and hate relationship with Saigon. I’m like *f**k you*, but I miss you... It’s like a marriage already. Don’t even ask me about marriage, I’m already married to this *f**king* Saigon. We have to argue, we have to leave...”

She points to the tattoo on her arm, which reads, in highly stylized letters, ‘Saigon.’

“Yes! this guy right here,” she says, “Yes, it’s my husband.” ■

Saving Face

Obtaining compensation
after a medical error



Marijn Sprokkereef is an associate of **Audier & Partners**, an international law firm with offices in Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi), Myanmar and Mongolia. Audier & Partners provides advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

Dear Marijn,

Even though my wife is the most beautiful woman on this planet, she insists on having cosmetic surgery. The operation, which should have been pretty straightforward, went horribly wrong and now my wife is facing serious consequences. Apart from the mental suffering, she also needs to go through several additional operations. In the meantime, we found out that the surgeon who was in charge of the operation at the clinic did not respect applicable standards on hygiene and safety. Are there any legal remedies available to us?

UNFORTUNATELY, STORIES SUCH as yours are not that uncommon in Vietnam. However, Vietnamese law does provide some solace. According to the Law on Medical Examination and Treatment of 2009, medical establishments are required to control bacterial contamination, sterilize their medical equipment, guarantee personal hygiene, and use protective clothing. If you believe the clinic did not respect these obligations, then your first step is to file an official complaint with the competent State authority. In your case, that would be the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Health.

Under the same law, medical practitioners are required to observe professional and technical regulations, and to take responsibility for their medical examination and treatment. If a practitioner breaches these obligations then, under the Penal Code of Vietnam, a practitioner may be sentenced to prison time (between one and five years) and may also be subject to a fine (between VND5 million and VND50 million).

Apart from potential criminal liability, both the surgeon and the clinic may have to pay administrative penalties. Vietnamese law states that a failure to effectively control bacterial contamination may lead to a penalty of between VND5 million and VND10 million.

Now let's look at civil liability and the possibility of claiming damages. The Law on Medical Examination and Treatment states that either the clinic itself or its insurance company must pay damages to a patient if the incident is the result of professional and/or technical mistakes. This is partially echoed by Vietnam's Civil Code, which entitles you to claim damages from the surgeon. If it is financial compensation you are after, I would recommend you seek the assistance of an experienced legal counsel.

In short, you and your lawyer will need to prove that the clinic and/or the surgeon failed to respect their obligations as prescribed by law. Please keep in mind that the requirement

to compensate for damages is often restricted to technical errors, which are caused by the negligence and/or carelessness of medical practitioners. You can claim financial losses for the expense of treatment, nursing and rehabilitation, as well as for loss of income. And depending on the circumstances, you may also claim for mental suffering, even though that will be much more difficult to prove in practice.

Before you end up in lengthy court proceedings, I suggest you have a careful look at your own medical insurance policy. Even though cosmetic surgery is often excluded from coverage, it may actually be worth reaching out to your insurance company first before taking any legal action. I wish your wife a speedy recovery!

*Every month, **Marijn Sprokkereef** answers legal questions from Oi readers. If you have any legal questions you want answered, send them to legal@oivietnam.com. ■*

Stocking Coffee

A most unusual way to brew coffee

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGES BY **NEIL FEATHERSTONE**



AN IMAGE OF coffee slowly dripping through a metal filter into a cup perfectly captures Saigon and its unhurried way of life. However, before the arrival of these iconic metal filters, coffee sold by street vendors was made an entirely different and unusual way. Finely milled coffee powder was brewed in earthen pots (same ones Chinese traditional herbalists used to brew medicine) on top of wooden cookers for five to ten minutes. When ready to serve, the thick liquid is filtered through nets made of cloth similar to thick stockings or boot socks – giving this style of coffee, aptly named, stocking coffee (*ca phe tat*, *ca phe vo*, or *ca phe vot* in Vietnamese). According to devoted drinkers, the texture is smoother, the flavour richer and the fragrant lasts longer.

No one can pinpoint where this method

originated from, just that it was first popularized by street cafes and restaurants in Saigon's old Chinese quarter sometime in the 1950s. These days, only a handful of places still serve stocking coffee in Saigon: the nameless cafe at 330/2 Phan Dinh Phung in Phu Nhuan District and a cafe in alley 313 Tan Phuoc in District 11. Each cafe is more than half a century old and has passed through several generations.

The tiny 330/2 cafe has never once closed its door in 60 years, not even for Tet. Interestingly the fire, which never goes out, is in a US bomb casing. Dang Tran Con and his wife Pham Ngoc Tuyet manage the shop from morning to late afternoon. Their children, fourth generation stocking coffee brewers, man the counter from late afternoon through the night and into the next morning. The cafe's customers vary,

ranging from teenagers to nostalgic retirees seeking a taste of 1950s Saigon.

"We actually have changed our way of serving a little to keep the young people from being too bewildered," says 64-year-old Mr. Con. "Back in my grandfather's generation, we serve coffee in porcelain soup plates so that the customers can dip pieces of Youtiao (fried Chinese breadstick) in the coffee and have them for breakfast. When you drink it, you sip the same way you would soup, just like how the French used to do it. Back in those days, that's a meal and for some people it was considered the vogue way to enjoy coffee in Saigon then. If you didn't drink coffee from soup plates and eat Youtiao dipped in coffee, people would call you a boorish country bumpkin. But nobody does it that way anymore." ■



Mr Con and his wife

Draw Out Your Stress

Using the creative process to find inner peace

TEXT BY **DANG MINH TUAN** IMAGES BY **NEIL FEATHERSTONE**

I STARED AT her face. She stared at mine. Our eyes were still but our hands were moving. Black-rimmed glasses, a little nose, eyes that sparkled, hair neatly tied back. Her gaze was strong but loose. Mine was direct and weak. She couldn't handle it. It was too much for her so she just laughed out loud. It was a laugh filled with pure joy, and so contagious that almost everyone in the room started to laugh along. It took her almost a minute to regain her composure. She said it had been a long time since she had had this much fun.

This was one of several activities we had at Ve Thu Gian ("Art for Relaxation";

VND350,000 for a 2.5-hour class), a workshop at Toa Tau ("The Train"; www.toatau.com). People came to the workshop with different purposes. Some seek to calm their mind while others come to have fun.

After playing games to warm up, we sat on the floor and tools were brought out: paper, crayons, pens and black ink. "First, draw some lines to divide the page into four," instructs Do Huu Chi, artist, Fulbright scholar and co-founder of Toa Tau. "Anyone know what's the most difficult when it comes to seeing and drawing?"

Someone said "portrait" and before I knew it, we were sitting in pairs, facing a

stranger, and trying to draw their face. It was stressful. I had always been terrible at drawing. I couldn't even draw a simple flower properly. I did my best not to insult her with my sketch. "Ok, now that you're done with the portraits," says Chi. "Let's do that again, but this time with your other hand."

I started to loosen up because, since it was with my left hand, of course the portrait would come out looking bad. He then told us to redraw our partner for the third time, but this time we were not allowed to look down at the paper, instead keeping our eyes focused on each other.



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My partner just moved her pen randomly on the paper, which she found was more enjoyable, and started to laugh. At that moment, I felt a connection with her even though we were strangers.

“Now close your eyes,” Chi continues. “And draw your partner’s portrait once again.”

As I closed my eyes, I envisioned her face. I could see it so clearly and started to draw with ease now. However, when I opened my eyes and looked down, on the paper were tangled lines and scribbles, nothing resembling her face... Well, it was fun.

Chi explains, “Doing these activities was to show you that by lessening your own expectations to draw something beautiful, you will truly be able to let go and enjoy the moment.”

We were then provided with paints and non-traditional painting tools such as straws and toothbrushes to use. I recalled what Chi had told us at the beginning of the class: “This workshop is not about how to draw, but about how you feel.” And staying true to that, he played songs from *La Vie En Rose* to *What Makes You Beautiful* and asked us to paint the emotions the songs evoked. There were no longer chains of expectation. I was completely sucked into the moment, my mind was blank, all I could see were colors and lines, and I was filled with the joy of being able to express myself without being judged.

Finally he tells us to lie down, close our eyes and imagine a place where we’re completely free to be who we are, to exist in that particular place, to truly feel peace. For our last activity, we had to draw that scene. I started to draw simple lines then added a bit of color. I could gradually see it. There it was. That place, my place, the place where I could truly be free. ■



Art Lives Here

A hidden village of artists on the banks
of the Saigon River

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGES BY **MAX NGUYEN**



BEFORE A 1997 government project to redevelop District 2, it was largely an unpopulated wasteland the size of District 1, 3 and 4 combined. After nearly two decades of construction, and foreign investment, it is now a real estate hotspot filled with modern infrastructure, luxurious serviced apartment buildings and exclusive gated neighborhoods. Hidden amongst this urban revolution, at the fringe of District 2, lies a little-known enclave that would not look out of place in rural Vietnam, except the denizens here, instead of being farmers, are all artists. Before San Art and creative co-working spaces, and before the arrival of Thao Dien Pearl and high-rises, there existed Ham Long Village (35 Thich Mat The, Thanh My Loi, D2; 3889 3871/091 803 1225).

"It started out half by accident and half by our intentions," says Ly Khac Nhu, one of the 30 artists who currently live in Ham Long. "We first heard of villages where everyone was an artist back in the 1980s. There's one such village in Singapore that was founded in the 1980s. The idea was to create a space where art is celebrated and like-minded individuals can share their visions and help each other grow. Around 1997, a few friends and I started looking for a place to create our own community."

After some time looking, they found a wide strip of land along the banks of the Saigon River, at the edge of District 2 and District 1. "We built a few shacks, made a place where we can visit on the weekends to daydream or fish. We didn't have lofty ambitions of creating our own village, the village part happened all on its own," say Nhu. Words spread about the creative sharing space and soon artists, drawn to its concept and quietness, joined the group. Eventually, the shacks became houses and





then sprawling private residences with gardens. The small group of artists became a community of over 30 painters, sculptors and carvers.

Ham Long comprises of private residences for these 30 plus artists and a pact, made when the village was founded, forbade non-Vietnamese architecture, which means that every living and working space of the complex was beautifully designed by its inhabitants. Each artist contributes a unique style to the village's overall aesthetic. Among these, the standouts are Ly Khac Nhu's Ky Long Vien, Nguyen Hai Huong's imperial Hue garden and house, Duong Dinh Hung's 100-year-old Hue house, and Bach Truong Son's Highland-style house on stilts. The Ky Long Vien is a garden and house modeled after ancient Vietnamese villages and is covered with his artwork along with pieces from his private collection. Huong and Hung's houses were uprooted whole from their original locations in Hue and transported all the way to Saigon. Son's house on stilt was uprooted from the Central Highlands and relocated to the village. The house is rumored to be over 200 years old and once belonged to a dear friend of Son's. Many of its members are award-winning artists and are well-known in the art scene throughout Asia. A few years ago, Nhu sold a painting for over USD20,000 and a statue by Hung's sold for a similar price.

Architectural wonders aren't the only offerings at Ham Long. Staying true to their original aim of creating an artistic environment, the artists regularly organize exhibitions, workshops and events. "We are all getting a little bit on in age and while quietness and tranquility is good, we also want to bring our art to a wider, younger and more varied audience," says Nhu. Several artists, including Nhu, have decided to open their private residences to tourists and some more have entered into collaboration with tourism companies to host river and art tours with Ham Long as a featured destination. ■



Eat, Drink, Give

This year's NZ Wine and Food Festival aims to raise funds to help the Ba Chieu Girls Shelter

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD



WITH THE INTRODUCTION of direct commercial flights between Auckland and Ho Chi Minh City starting June 4th this year, New Zealand will feel a lot closer to Vietnam than ever before. After decades of time-consuming stopover arrangements with other airlines instead of making the more intuitive direct hop over Australia, Air New Zealand has finally acknowledged the blossoming relationship between the two countries and seen the potential for growth in travel both ways. For tourism operators, this has been a long time coming – but with travel to New Zealand soon becoming easier, faster, and less expensive, there's a lot of optimism going around that the sector is finally about to take off.

It's a welcome development for NZ Consul General Tony Martin, who has seen the ties between Vietnam and New Zealand strengthen over the past year, following their 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2015. The consulate now plans to hold a number of activities to attract more Vietnamese people to consider New Zealand as a holiday and tourism destination, not the least of which will be the annual NZ Wine and Food Festival put on at the D7 RMIT campus on March 12.

"The key thing really is to increase the profile and awareness of New Zealand, which is still relatively low in Vietnam," explains Tony. "One of the key reasons that we have it is to make the broader public aware of the fact that we're here, that we have a presence in Vietnam – and related to that, we want to demonstrate some of the NZ food & beverage

products in particular that are already being imported into Vietnam and are available for Vietnamese and foreign consumers alike."

The festival has been held almost every year since 2000, when it was launched at its former District 2 location as a way to bring the Kiwi community together and raise funds for charity. It has grown with a swell in numbers of resident Kiwis, and also in response to increased interest in the country and confidence in the quality of its food & beverage imports. "It's an area that I think people are becoming a bit more aware of now," says Tony, "that New Zealand has very high safety standards, and in a country like Vietnam there are still a lot of concerns and suspicion around food safety. They're becoming aware of the fact that New Zealand provides a good level of comfort when they purchase our products, because of their good quality."

This year, the festival will convene in the enclosed grassy area on the right of the main RMIT building (when coming from the main street). It's an intimate setting for exhibitors and festival-goers alike, and very close in atmosphere to similar events held in New Zealand itself.

On the day, 14 wine companies will be serving a total of 42 different New Zealand wine varieties, with a good representation of the Marlborough sauvignon blanc for which the country is best known, along with pinot noir, chardonnay, merlot, and other gems from celebrated wine-growing regions such as Hawkes Bay and Central Otago. Seven leading Saigon hotels will be providing menu

items based on fine imported New Zealand cuisine – including green-shelled mussels and gourmet lamb.

Hottest Event in Town

Originally set up by former New Zealand Trade Commissioner & Consul General Celia Caughey, the festival has proved popular since its inception. "It went down like a house on fire," says Celia of the festival's early days, "and everyone just loved it, partly because it was such a great concept – that you go and have a small plate of each different food with little wine glasses. We matched the right wine with the right food, so you could just sit down with it and listen to the jazz. It's in a fixed location, so you have a beautiful lawn with the band, and the marquees all round the edge, and we set up another area for the kids to have their activities under a great big parachute – that worked pretty well, the kids were out of the way. It just snowballed from there, and it became the hottest event in town, it would sell out within 20 minutes."

"The NZ community will attend," she adds, "but people also use it as an opportunity to meet up with business associates. Anybody who has heard about it and been wants to go back again. It's really such a pleasant experience. A lot of people will bring business associates along."

The principal charity recipient is the Ba Chieu Girl's Home, which Celia set up with then New Zealand Ambassador, David Kersey. It was established when Celia was approached by the vice president of the Women's Union and informed that a large number of girls had been found sleeping in the Ba Chieu Market, without any home or prospects. The home is the New Zealand High Commission's most consistently supported charity, dedicated to educating the young women at schools (and tertiary institutions if possible) to allow them to lead independent lives.

"There are a number of other charities that we have supported over the years," Tony says of the funding recipients assisted by profits from the festival, "but this has been the one consistent charity that we've supported the whole way through. In 2016 we're also supporting KOTO, and we see a really good alignment with the work that KOTO does and the opportunities that Ba Chieu provides for disadvantaged girls; they're two really good causes. And of course, with KOTO having a focus on food & beverage with their restaurants and training chefs, it matches particularly well with the story that we're trying to tell about what NZ provides in terms of food & beverage offerings."

As befits the representative of one of the least populous expat communities in Ho Chi Minh City, Tony remains modest about the charitable work that the New Zealand office is able to perform. "For a small country we can't do everything," he says. "We're pretty focused on these kinds of causes. It lines up really nicely with what NZ has to offer."

*New Zealand Wine & Food Festival,
March 12, 4-10pm.*

*RMIT University Lawn,
702 Nguyen Van Linh, D7
Tickets (VND2 million) available at the NZ
High Commission, Suite 804 Metropolitan
Building, 235 Dong Khoi, D1 ■*

Joy Ride

Vietnamese designer Adrian Anh Tuan has named his 2016 resort collection Joy Ride - Love-filled Days. Inspired by women in love, the collection features pastels and bold romantic reds on lace that come together to create elegant, sophisticated and sensual designs. ■











VALENCIANI RESORT 2016 COLLECTION

Model: Truc Diem

Photographer: Chanh Nguyen

Makeup: Vinh Dang

Stylist: Tran Dat

Location: Saigon Garden

Shoes: Christian Louboutin

Clutches: Christian Louboutin, Chanel

Earrings: #Nii

Vested Interest

Is a financial advisor needed when deciding to invest?



Sven Roering is a Managing Partner at Tenzing Pacific Investment Management. He holds an Economics Degree from Rhodes University in South Africa, and is a candidate in the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) program, having successfully completed level 1 and is currently working towards the level 2 exam.

Dear Sven,

I moved to Vietnam six months ago, and am on a temporary assignment here until the end of the year. I am paid into my US bank account and, since living in Vietnam is extremely cost effective, I have managed to save up quite a bit of money. The interest rates offered by banks back in the US are basically zero so I am looking for a different avenue to invest my money that would offer a decent return. I have been courted by a few investment advisers and feel all they want is to sell me a product instead of designing a portfolio suited to my specific needs. Are there ways I can open my own account to invest how I want?

THE FEASIBILITY OF managing your own money is based on two factors: your level of interest in investing and your time constraints. You are obviously interested in the subject, and assuming that you would like to invest as a hobby and do not have any significant time constraints (family, travel, etc), then the good news is that you can open and manage an investment portfolio fairly easily.

Since the invention of broadband and the gradual replacement of human beings with computers at stock exchanges around the world, financial markets have become ever more accessible to individuals regardless of where they live. You can open your own online trading account from your sofa at home. There

are some fantastic online brokerages that are easy to use for an amateur investor: Sharebuilder, Charles Schwab, TD Ameritrade, Fidelity, E*Trade and the best option for international investors – Saxobank (make sure these trading platforms accept Vietnam-based account holders). You can open an account with the above companies on the web and trade on many different exchanges around the globe. You will have the option to purchase stocks, etfs, bonds, mutual funds, options, futures and various derivatives at your fingertips. The account providers are very good with providing tools to assist amateurs with making investment decisions and giving easy-to-understand portfolio management tools.

If you would like to improve your

portfolio management skills or learn more about certain products or companies, there are many sources that you could subscribe to for free online. The best source of information, by far, is Investopedia, which is basically the Wikipedia of finance. Here you can learn about every single concept in finance, along with videos to make things easier. *The Street* is a great online source if you would like to receive daily stock picks (you would most likely have to pay for this), as is Morningstar.com, where you will find treasure troves of information on exchange-traded funds and mutual funds. If you would like to learn more about the concept of money and its origins, as well as the history of stocks, bonds and their functions in society, read *The Ascent of Money* by Niall Ferguson, a renowned economic historian, which will put everything in perspective.

Now you have the tools to manage your own savings portfolio. Investing in this day and age is not that hard at all. With all the efficiency and information that modern technology provides us, everyone should be able to know a thing or two about investing and saving for the future. However, if you are not interested in doing so or cannot find the time, by all means have a professional do it for you. Just make sure the individual discloses all their conflicts of interest and is set on acting in your best interest, and is not simply focused on lining their own pocket. ■



Rebel, Rebel

In conversation with the talented
Ngo Thanh Van – actress, model,
singer and producer

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD**

IMAGE BY **KIM BTN**

WHEN THE SEQUEL to Hollywood blockbuster *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was released last month, international audiences received a long-overdue introduction to Vietnam's own action heroine, Ngo Thanh Van. It's a modest role but a significant step for Van, who has been a prolific force in the Vietnamese industry in numerous capacities. Originally a beauty pageant contestant and model, she went on to reveal a strength of character and physical presence that would make her synonymous with martial arts flicks in her acting career, while releasing several popular albums as a singer along the way. Now with her own talent agency and opportunities to direct film projects already in the works, Van's Hollywood debut marks a new crest in an already impressive career in entertainment.



Van, who first came to the attention of mainstream cinemagoers in the 2007 local hit *The Rebel*, shows no signs of slowing down. The opportunity to audition for the new *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny* film came while she was already waist-deep in a local movie that she was producing, *Ngay Nay Ngay Nay*. “My agency in the US notified me that *Crouching Tiger 2* was going through the casting process,” she says, “but I could only send in a clip instead of attending the audition myself. After many callbacks, I finally got the role of Mantis and flew to New Zealand to film. Mantis is a small antagonist role, with just a few scenes and lines. It was mostly amazing action sequences with a Chinese spear, which I’d never tried before in Vietnam.”

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny – which hits US cinemas and Netflix simultaneously on Van’s 37th birthday – is not the only major screening we’ll be seeing her in this year. Local audiences are hotly anticipating the release of *Tam Cam: The Untold Story*, a modern reboot of a traditional Vietnamese Cinderella fairy tale (a retelling of which featured in *Ôi Vietnam*’s September 2015 issue), which Van directs and performs in. Expected to represent a significant evolution of Vietnamese cinema techniques, the film will be an opportunity for her to showcase the maturity of both the local cinematic arts as well as her own progression in the industry.

“The special effects of *Tam Cam: The Untold* were performed by talented Vietnamese engineers, who are just as incredible as their Hollywood counterparts,” enthuses Van. “The cast is a highlight of the movie, boasting veteran actors like Huu Chau, Thanh Loc and members of the idol band 365, who appeared together in a movie for the first time.”

The movie will recast a classic of Vietnamese culture into a new context. “Revisiting folk stories has been a global trend,” explains Van, “but it’s still lacking in Vietnam. This prompted me to retell a well-known Vietnamese story in a more modern way while still retaining its essence, via the wonderful language of film and drama. Viewers will think ‘Wow, this is the Tam Cam tale that I know, but 60 percent of its content is only revealed now.’ The movie is filmed wholly in Vietnam, with breathtaking scenery that will charm our viewers. I’ve chosen the most remote and unknown landscape in the movie to promote tourism there as well.”

Women’s World

Much of Ngo Thanh Van’s conspicuous inner strength is something that’s been with her since childhood. Van is from the Mekong, hailing from rural Tra Vinh, where

she stood out even then for her courage. “In the vast countryside, there wasn’t much to do for us kids except rowing, showering in the river and dueling with swords made from bamboo,” she remembers. “I’ve loved martial arts since then, which may be the reason for me becoming a martial arts actress, as I’m known in the Vietnamese movie industry. My fondest childhood memory is going to the local markets and paddy fields with my mom and my brothers. Life was difficult back then, but also tranquil, and Tra Vinh remains the most beautiful land in my heart.”

The intention to pursue a career in the entertainment industry was never a conscious thought for the young Van. She emigrated to Norway at the age of ten, where she was oblivious to her

“I came back to Vietnam only to visit my family and my hometown,” she continues. “There were no intentions to join any beauty pageant or enter the entertainment business at all... I was truly astonished that many brands started approaching me after I won the second runner-up award in this contest. From then, I began to take my career in show business more seriously.”

Fortunately, Van quickly connected with a number of talented mentors, including the composer Quoc Bao – who mapped out her career as a singer – and *The Rebel* director Charlie Nguyen (who is also co-producing the new *Crouching Tiger* film), who helped to establish her reputation as a martial arts actress.

“Before *The Rebel*,” says Van, “I’d already studied martial arts for the TV show

Rouge. But in *The Rebel* I had to spend three months learning much more difficult and unique positions with cascadeurs and teachers. Afterwards I acted in other action movies, so I often had great opportunities to practice for both my roles and my health.”

Following on from her own successes in the entertainment field, Ngo Thanh Van went on to establish her own talent firm, Vietnam Artist Agency, or VAA. It was the realization of a long-term dream for Van, who admits that she has always desired to train and manage other Vietnamese talents in a comprehensive way. “Through VAA,” says Van, “both I and other teachers can share our knowledge and experience with young artists and shape their direction in entertainment. This is different from being an artist, but it’s also quite an advantage as I can collaborate with my talents in various ways. My biggest success to date is 365 – the only idol band in Vietnam that has been active for five years running, with many devoted fans and achieving great milestones.”

Van’s agency and interests

as a director and movie producer are likely to represent her future direction as an artist. While her music career has trailed off (her album *NTV Virus* remains her representative work, the title of which has since become her handle as a celebrity figure), we can expect to see more of Van’s work in the cinematic arts from this point going forward. “Film is still a great passion of mine that has tremendous potential for growth and creativity,” says Van. “I can’t wait to contribute more to the film industry in Vietnam – and if I have more opportunities abroad in the future, I’ll grab them and advance my career path there too.” ■



Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny poster

transformation from a scrawny Mekong waif into a tall, fair-skinned beauty until her return to Vietnam at the age of 19, when her stunned brother insisted she enter the *Women’s World* beauty pageant, in which she placed as a runner-up.

“I’ve enjoyed singing since I was little,” says Van, “and joined some performances at school. Back then, I didn’t even intend to become a singer – it was purely a hobby. In Norway, there are many extra-curricular activities for students to showcase their talents. I chose to sing, and didn’t feel any stage fright as I was so excited. Instead, I sang my heart out as if the stage was my own.”

The Vanishing

A man's journey to find his missing friends

TEXT BY **OI VIETNAM** IMAGES PROVIDED BY **BEN RANDALL**



A young H'mong girl

STOP ME IF you think that you have heard this one before:

Young man decides to take some time off and travel. He chooses Southeast Asia. It's affordable and vibrant, and has that *feel* to it. Maybe he'll find himself, maybe find something more. He packs a bag and a camera and just like that, he's there and loving it. The colors, the people, the food: it's all such a rush.

A million and one great photos.

The last leg of his journey takes place in Sapa. Not that he'd planned it that way, but money was running out and so were the destinations. Planned just to stay a short while up there in the mountains. But plans change.

The young man ends up spending a

few months, making friends with many of the ethnic minorities who spend their days selling their goods on Sapa's streets. Teaches some of them – those who work as hotel staff – how to speak better English. Gets to know a group of H'mong girls well enough to consider them friends. Well enough to see each one as a person and not just a curiosity or a photo opportunity.

When at last it's time to leave, he swaps email addresses. Takes the train out of Lao Cai and the plane out of Vietnam. Sits on his sofa back home and thinks about all he has seen and wonders, "Well, now what?"

Not exactly a new story so far, yes?

Time goes by. Months.

And still Ben Randall wonders.

Up to this point, the young man was part of a more or less common experience - but what happens next separates Ben from the generic backpacker tale.

While he's wondering, Ben gets an email from one of the H'mong girls. She tells him half of the girls in the group have disappeared. Gone – from one day to the next. Not all at once, but one one time, two another time... Five in total. All of them teenagers. She doesn't really say much more.

So now Ben has something else to wonder about. Something larger than himself. Yet he lets it gestate inside his head for almost a year before he realizes that this question - "What happened to my friends?" - is what he is going to do next.

Back in Sapa, Ben moves carefully. Well, as carefully as he can, given that he is recognizable and has decided to make this quest to find the missing girls into a documentary film, and now there is a video camera recording his moves, his contacts.

Ben learns.

He learns that the region suffers from kidnapping/trafficking on account of its proximity to the border and the demand for marriageable women on the other side.

He learns that the H'mong, for a number of reasons, are frequent targets of kidnappers/traffickers. One key reason being that a traditional H'mong engagement behavior is for a young H'mong man to spot the girl he wants to marry and abduct her back to his village, where after a few days he and his representatives will go to the girl's village and negotiate her dowry with her parents. So when a H'mong girl goes missing, the parents, the authorities, do not immediately suspect they have been trafficked across the border. It goes almost without saying that in all trafficking cases, the first 24 hours are the most critical for finding the victim,

and the trail gets progressively colder with every hour. When you consider that a H'mong girl could be well into China within one day, then the chances of picking up her trail after four days are extremely remote.

He learns that, as with many trafficking cases in different parts of the vulnerable populations in the world, the trafficking have people working for them on the inside: people in the community, perhaps even relatives. Trafficking works easiest when there is implicit trust, and the best way to establish trust is through a familiar face or common identity. So then that also means that when a group of girls from a single area have disappeared, then the rescue efforts should begin with finding the insider.

He also learns that the missing girls can be viewed as complicit in their kidnapping – even by their own families. They are blamed for getting on the motorbike of the friend of the insider, or for accepting an invitation to a meal or a drink with someone slightly out of their circle, usually a young and charming H'mong man from

another village, who might drug the girl's drink so that they wake up on the back of the bike and far away from familiar territory. In such cases, the families do not want to help participate in a rescue attempt out of shame.

Or, equally possible, the families could believe, once they accept that their daughter is not in a neighboring village, that she is in a better situation than if she had stayed, given the low living standards in some of the villages and the expectations for what her life would likely have been, and the positive imaginations that some families build around the man who has procured their daughter. In such instances, the families do not want to help participate in a rescue attempt out of wishful thinking.

The reality is, of course, far different. The men who are going through these channels to buy their brides are not wealthy, nor do they have any real social standing; if they were attractive enough, or at least able to afford to marry a local woman, they would. These men are buying these women for children and for the fact that a wife is more affordable than a maid. These men may also



A still from the documentary

be gullible enough to believe what they are doing is perfectly legal, that the girl is a willing participant in the arrangement, and even that the girl is legally in-country – despite her obvious inability to speak the language, her lack of a legal identity card, total lack of familiarity of customs, or even knowledge of where her new home is. They just accept that she is from a tribe in-country. Of course, the inability to communicate, the total lack of geographical knowledge or any personal contact all work against a girl with limited means and education ever finding her way back home.

At the same time Ben's learning all these layers of complexity, he also learns that one of the girls escaped from her kidnappers and has made it back safely. So he turns his focus and energy on two of the remaining missing, knowing the odds of finding either would be extremely unlikely.

Cut to the Chase

Miracle of miracles: Ben eventually makes contact with both. As it turns out, the two girls were in contact with each other. And one was able to contact her family in Sapa. This points to both girls being victims of the same trafficking network – a network that somehow did not completely sever the means of communication with Sapa. But like two rolls of the dice, these two girls have gone on to lead two very different lives. Both have a daughter, but one is in a small village with little freedom, the other in a large city with a “not uncomfortable” life.

By the time he makes actual contact with the girls, three years has passed since their kidnappings. He arranges to meet them, and the meetings pan out like a droll spy novel: on a street corner, at a café. There they are, this ethnic minority girl and this white Australian guy – each unlike everyone around them – chatting awkwardly about life. Later Ben learns that one's husband had trailed the girl and observed the meetings.

To hear Ben tell it, the biggest moment of his whole story is when they see him, because they are all at once reconnected to their previous life. Like a shockwave, he is proof of all their memories; the first person who knows them from before where they are now.

It's a moment of joy. But only a moment. Because Ben is there to help them return to that life they are now reliving in their mind's eyes. And it comes to this: each girl has to choose to stay or go. To go means leaving their child behind. To disappear again in order to get back to a place where maybe it won't be the same, where maybe they won't be able to find a husband, or to put these three years behind them. And that's if everything about the rescue effort goes smoothly.

Here are other things to consider:

It is not unheard of that suspicious husbands and members of the kidnapping rings will threaten the girl with trafficking her child if she ever tries to leave. There

It's a moment of joy. But only a moment. Because Ben is there to help them return to that life they are now reliving in their mind's eyes. And it comes to this: each girl has to choose to stay or go.

are also cases where girls have returned in agreement to work for the kidnapping rings, arranging to send girls into the same experience they have endured. So for these girls to show up at their villages again, they may also face strong suspicion that their return comes with a sinister bargain.

Also, the girl who was in contact with her family did not want her family to worry about her, and so she inflated the details of her new life. She told her parents her husband was rich, that they had a big house, that she had a better life. Why would she suddenly show up again at the family's door without her child?

Against all these considerations were mundane factors that added pressure. Ben's money was running out. He was spending his post-production budget on staying in China and helping the girls come to a decision. To be honest, he did not budget for actually meeting both of them, seeing as the chances were so slim. The miracle of contacting both (and at this point the Blue Dragon NGO must be acknowledged for its critical support and experience in helping to make contact possible) did have financial implications. The hard fact was that he could not afford to stay indefinitely. He was also looking at

the possibility that both girls would prefer to stay in their new lives, which would be a more complicated story to sell against raising awareness about the evils of human trafficking.

In the end, just as both girls had come to have very different lives, so too did they come to very different decisions. One made it back, one chose to stay. But the story of the one who made it back is worth a documentary of its own. It could be called, *The Second Miracle*. And the factors that led to the one staying have not all been addressed here. It is only fair to let the documentary fill you in on this, the story that began like so many other stories you hear about a young man with a camera and a backpack and a few months time roaming around Southeast Asia looking for adventure.

You can learn more about this story and the upcoming documentary, Sisters for Sale, by going to Ben Randall's website: www.humaneearth.net. It should also be noted that the governments of Vietnam, Lao PDR and Cambodia have recently signed an agreement in January to intensify their cooperative efforts in the fight against human trafficking. ■



Not For Sale

Tackling human trafficking in Vietnam

TEXT BY ALEX GREEN IMAGES PROVIDED BY PACIFIC LINKS



VIETNAM'S RAPID ECONOMIC growth has masked long-standing problems of human trafficking, child labor and the illegal sex trade. Organizations such as Pacific Links Foundation (www.pacificlinks.org) are addressing these issues through education, training and the creation of a positive socio-economic narrative.

Pacific Links was formed in 2001 by a group of Vietnamese-Americans from California. Anh Kim Tran, one of its founders, grew up in Vietnam but moved to the US at the age of 20 and worked her way through college. One of five children, Anh's emigration was a success story that motivated her to help others less fortunate. "All of us that founded Pacific Links knew how lucky we were, and we all knew how important education was for us. Our organization began quite humbly, providing educational training and courses in Unicode, which my husband taught, but after we all returned to Vietnam, we knew that we needed to expand the project. Human trafficking and the poverty it creates is so closely tied to educational opportunities, and we knew we had to make sure Vietnam developed along the right path. So many things have changed in the last few decades, some for the better, some for the worse – you can see it on the

streets of Saigon, and we wanted to make sure that further changes are positive ones."

In many ways, Vietnam has become a victim of its own development. As cities have grown and rural-urban migration increased, cases of human trafficking have proliferated. Director of Advocacy and Strategic Partnerships, Mimi Vu explains that Vietnam's uneven economic growth has helped foster the conditions in which human trafficking thrives: "Vietnam is a young and populous country, and the people are thirsty for opportunity; they know that wealth is out there. Unfortunately, education has often not been able to keep up." For many people, the image of human trafficking is of children sold into modern slavery by friends and relatives, but this is not the full story. "People think that they can best provide for their family by going to work abroad, but they don't understand the legal ramifications of doing so. Traffickers pose as 'labor brokers' promising that a payment of several thousand dollars will open the doors to an easy life in the West." These brokers provide neither work permits nor documentation, and funnel economic migrants into a global network of illegal activities.

Mimi has just returned from a number of meetings with British companies and

government institutions in an attempt to combat this network. "The UK is a common destination. Many Vietnamese people immigrated to Hong Kong in the 1970s, and the refugee camps there were infiltrated by organized crime syndicates. After the handover of Hong Kong a lot of Vietnamese people migrated to Britain and Ireland, and they set up human trafficking networks to supply labor for the drugs trade."

Up to 3,000 Vietnamese children are thought to be held in servitude by drugs gangs in Britain, working in marijuana farms or nail salons, and the problem cannot be tackled with penal legislation alone.

In destination countries like Britain, Pacific Links plays a vital role in anti-trafficking strategy. "Trust building is vital when dealing with victims of trafficking, but emergency and social services in destination countries often don't have the linguistic and cultural sensitivities required to build a relationship," says Mimi. "Traffickers tell people that if they speak to the authorities their families will be in danger. Victims therefore often run away from the social services that have rescued them. If they are arrested for drug-related offences they are often isolated when they get out of jail, and find the only way to make money is to become traffickers



themselves. Sixty percent of traffickers arrested are former victims themselves, and it's essential that we break this cycle."

Pacific Links works closely with social services and police forces across the world, offering face to face and emergency Skype interviews with victims of human trafficking, to put them at ease, assure them that their families have been contacted and are safe, and aid their reintegration into normal life.

Women as Commodity

In this region, 70 percent of Vietnamese victims of human trafficking are female, in most cases sold into the sex industry or as wives abroad. Trafficking is particularly common across the Vietnam-China border because traffickers take advantage of the less populated streets. Anh speaks of one girl who was kidnapped at 14 and held in China for three years before she escaped: "She was walking home from school and was snatched by two men on a motorbike. It's so hard to guard against something like that."

Mimi also highlights the more established familial and community relationships that are abused by traffickers, who utilize the ethnic connections that span national borders. "While girls are rarely at risk from a direct family member, we often see cases where an uncle or a family friend has sold a young girl, or group of girls, getting them away from their family under the pretext of taking them to a show or a festival." This first contact will only make about USD100, but they are the first step in a vast network of traffickers. "Women have a very high commodity value for human traffickers, as they can be sold as wives or to brothels a number of times, and when they get older are forced to work. Vietnamese victims have been found all over the world, in Ghana, Angola, Europe and China. It is a massive operation."

Some do manage to escape, and once they make it back to their communities, Pacific Links oversees and conducts an extensive range of interviews with victims and their families to determine the best course of action. Some prefer to dive back into community life, while others need more time to adjust. For the latter group, Pacific Links runs two long-term shelters that help reintegrate victims back into society. The shelters (located in Lao Cai and An Giang) each house around 30 women who remain in the shelter for two to three years. During this time, Pacific Links encourages vocational training or education, funds health insurance and the development of life skills, and provides legal and vocational assistance to ensure that the women have a stable future once they leave the shelter.

For Anh, it is vital to help the girls regain their confidence. "They need to get back to their lives, to their own selves. They have to sort out their hardships and figure out what they want to do with their lives. This process is different for everybody, and we try and facilitate it with whatever works best for the individual. Recently we started to offer dance and art therapy, an art therapist visits the shelters four times a year." Art therapy has proved successful and the girls are taking part in the upcoming Sapa Art Festival, which takes place from April 5 to May 5.

"We originally worked with Adrienne de Geer and Maria Graven, who run the Mark Your Wall project in Saigon," says Mimi, "and we found that not only is art a therapeutic practice, but that some of the girls have a real passion and talent for art. Adrienne put us in touch with Bridget March, who runs the Sapa festival, and the girls from the Lao Cai shelter are going to produce a large installation telling their story set to the backdrop of Sapa's rolling mountains where many grew up." So

what began as therapy could well become a career.

Education and training is important to allow women to find their place after becoming victims of human trafficking, but it is also key to prevention. "It is really important to pre-empt the economic motivations behind human trafficking, and to ensure that communities are able to spot and prevent people falling victim to traffickers," says Anh. In this endeavor, Pacific Links has trained more than 1,500 factory managers and workers to spot and assist at-risk women, and has engaged in community outreach programs that have engaged more than 10,000 people. "Prevention through education and training is really at the heart of what we do. We run several programs – ECCE, ADAPT and MWCD - which focus on education in early childhood, awarding scholarships and the support of vocational development, and the promotion of women as community and economic leaders." Over the past fifteen years, Pacific Links has awarded more than 6,200 scholarships to at-risk girls, providing funding, textbooks and transport from 6th to 12th grade.

Mimi is proud of what the women, aided by Pacific Links, have achieved. "One girl has gone on to a four-year university course in Hanoi, which is a huge accomplishment, and others are studying or training at all levels. Since we first started, we have offered training in IT skills, operated programs in conjunction with Chefs Without Borders, and brought various companies to give talks to women and inspire them." Scholarship recipients also attend an annual summer camp, which includes health workshops, educational workshops (especially in coding and STEM fields), talks from successful female businesswomen, and a variety of mandatory and elective courses that help to stimulate a desire for learning and foster links between local and international communities.

While the global problem of human trafficking has no easy solution, Anh and Mimi are confident for Vietnam's future. "We have strong partnerships with the Vietnamese government and government institutions all over the world," says Mimi. "Business communities are also aware of the problem and countless institutions are involved as partners, supporters or funders. Even if their motivation is economic, we can ensure that it makes a human difference."

Perhaps most importantly, young people in Vietnam are aware of the problem and are self-reflective. Anh, now 64 and happy that her work has provided a foundation for future development, sees Vietnam's ambitious and educated younger generation as the key to further improvement. "They want Vietnam to prosper, they want to see change and they want to participate in change. They are thirsty for knowledge, and I think that they will make the difference. They will have to fight corruption, fight for better policy, for better education, for better training and for a better future. I do think that the younger generation will find success." ■

A person wearing a traditional Korean hanbok with a yellow top and blue patterned sleeves is holding a white bowl filled with kimchi. The background is a solid red color.

the **KOREAN WAVE**

The “Korean Wave,” or hallyu, was coined in the early 2000s to define the increasing popularity of Korean pop culture, especially among other East Asian countries like Vietnam. Many Vietnamese are attracted to Korean dramas because they have a strict hierarchical order, an attractive culinary culture and beautiful Korean stars. In a survey conducted by the East Asia Forum of 1,114 students in Ho Chi Minh City, 59 percent liked Korean dramas, and nearly 50 percent liked K-pop. Based on the cultural success of K-pop and Korea dramas, particularly among young Vietnamese, Korea has created a popular national brand here.



Seoul Music

Vietnamese-Korean singer Hari Won opens up about the industry of making Korean pop idols

Text by Michael Arnold | Image by Patrick Carpenter

IT'S BEEN ALMOST two decades now since the delicious beauty and artifice of the Korean entertainment world began to prevail over popular Asian culture. The power of appearances has held enormous sway in this region since the time of Confucius, so the appeal of Korean celebrityhood here – its obsession with surgical, skin-deep perfection, its idols and

its big hits manufactured rather than made – is not at all difficult to understand. It's an industry of illusion and sleight of hand, and one that both thrives and frowns upon its own superstars' lapses into humanity. Being able to hold the attention of the public in any way possible is key – to paraphrase Wilde, the only worse thing for a Korean pop star than being in the tabloids is *not*

being in the tabloids.

If nothing else, then, the treatment that emerging Vietnamese-Korean starlet Hari Won has been handed by the local press lately – based on barely scandalous material – confirms that she has finally become a true microcosm of the Korean idol industry here in Vietnam. Since rising to national attention after her successful



Le Méridien Saigon Pool (3C Ton Duc Thang, D1;
www.starwoodhotels.com/lemeridien)

2013 appearance on the reality TV show *The Amazing Race* (with her then long-term boyfriend, Vietnamese rapper Tien Dat) Hari has been the focus of increasing fascination for the Vietnamese public. Although born in Seoul, she's half Vietnamese by her father, and speaks the local language fluently with an excruciatingly cute accent that has scored her plenty of fans all on its own. Having been prepped for the industry back in Korea in one of Seoul's infamous celebrity factories, she has managed to make the transition to the Vietnamese music and acting scene as a direct import from the holy land of Asian entertainment.

The irony of all this is that part of the reason why Hari Won is in Vietnam at all is that she refused the sinister Kpop path to notoriety back in Seoul not just once, but three times, precisely for being unwilling to give up the kind of clean living that *doesn't* make for clickable headlines.

"When I was 18 or 19 years old, I joined an entertainment company," says Hari of her first foray into Korean showbiz. Despite an ever-so-slightly broad Vietnamese nose, she had that classic Korean doe-eyed look, was tall and slender, and was a superb candidate for a performing career – so she went straight on the company's 'ready-for-

debut' list, receiving training in singing, acting, and the Japanese language, waiting for the enlistment of compatible members to put together a marketable girl-group.

"There was a company which had trained many famous singers at that time," she recalls. "At the interview, they asked me what I would do if I had the chance to be a singer, how determined I was. So I thought for a while, and I said, 'Except for prostitution, I can do anything. If you ask me to cut my finger and sign in blood, I'll do it. Just don't ask me to sleep with anyone, I can't accept it.'"

It's well-known that Korean celebrities are expected to be of exemplary moral character in the public eye. It's also well-known that the realities of the industry are far less squeaky-clean.

"So they explained that this industry is like a dirty pond," Hari sighs. "Even if I was clean, I'd get dirty when I got into it. So I had to refuse – they offered me everything, a house, car, everything, but I just disappeared after that day."

A second door opened for Hari after one of her self-published videos drew an unusual amount of public attention, but the opportunity disappeared when her father fell ill and she was asked to join him in Vietnam. It was then a number of years before a chance encounter with a third agency back in Korea revived the dream of making it as a performer.

"I was around 26, so I thought I was already too old to become a singer," she says. "But they said I looked young enough, so it was just a matter of faking my age. I was a little confused and afraid of the dark side of the industry, but they assured me that they wouldn't force me to 'do that.' So, I considered it my last chance."

"I worked as a singer for a year," she continues, "but then the company had financial problems, so they decided to ask me to 'do that' after all. There were some rich Japanese guys who wanted to invest in me, it was about VND20 billion. The manager advised me to carefully consider it. Then, all of a sudden, I was diagnosed with the early stages of cancer. It was nothing serious, but it was the perfect excuse to refuse them. Sure, I was sad to have cancer, but it was better than working in the Korean pop industry – so I felt very happy."

Mixed Heritage

Wedge between the Chinese empire and imperial Japan for centuries, the Korean people only survived as a nation by strict observance of racial purity and determined xenophobia. Cosmopolitanism only dawned in Korea after the Seoul Olympics in 1988, three years after Hari Won was born to a lovestruck Vietnamese father and a mother whose resolve in marrying him was largely brought about by her parents having absolutely forbidden her to do so.

"I had no idea what mixed meant," says Hari of the difficulties posed by her heritage as a child. "I often had trouble making friends, because the other kids' parents were afraid that I would be an influence on them. They were worried that a kid growing up in such a different

cultural background like me would affect the other children, that their kids would follow me."

Visiting Vietnam as a child gave Hari some positive experiences of the country – despite the unbearable heat, the crowded, indecipherable hospitality of her father's huge extended family helped her to adjust to a country she'd presumed was all jungle and khaki. While she became rather more fond of Vietnam than Korea, she never considered a permanent move here until, during the visit to help her father recover from his illness, her mother stole and hid her passport, preventing her from returning to her corporate job and boyfriend in Seoul. By that stage, her whole family had made the move to Saigon, and her mother – rightly, as it turned out – believed Hari's life here would be better.

"Actually, I think I'm a very lucky person," she says. "If I hadn't joined *The Amazing Race*, people here wouldn't have known anything about me. I didn't think of entering showbiz at that time. I didn't even know the rules of the show until I took part in it."

"*The Amazing Race* is not popular in Korea," she explains. "They only like to watch their own TV shows. In Korean showbiz, I always had to be pretending, I had to be polite, watch my mouth, because of the strict social behavior there. During filming in Vietnam, I was just myself, 100 percent. Because nobody knew me, and there were many famous competitors there, so I thought I wouldn't be on camera very often. So I was comfortable just being myself. And what was really amazing was that people seemed to like me."

Shortly after the show, Hari was approached by Vietnamese talent management to appear in local performances. Well-treated by fellow entertainers and quickly accepted by the Vietnamese public, her fourth brush with fame turned out to be the big one, and Hari fit right in here as a Kpop star straight out of Saigon.

"In fact, the entertainment industries are not very different between the two countries," she observes. "Korean showbiz is more specialized and professional, like a real business. Many Vietnamese singers still have to do everything on their own. In Korea, every singer has a company behind them, controlling every aspect of their lives – their fashion sense, diet, skin care, even where to go out – it's from head to toe. In Vietnam, not every singer has the same working style. They even do their own makeup. But I think that's probably comfortable for them – if they don't feel like doing something, they can refuse. It's not the same in Korea, if they don't want to do something, they have to have a reasonable excuse."

"Besides, it's more stressful for Korean singers," she adds. "It's very competitive. So in Korea, you must be a winner to survive, otherwise you're a total loser. But here in Vietnam, it's not so clear-cut. It's competitive, but not intensely so. It's easier to do it here. Being half Vietnamese and half Korean here is actually an advantage." 🌈

A *WON-WON* SITUATION

Korea and Vietnam are win-win economic growth partners

Text by NPD Khanh | Image Provided by KoCham



Chairman Han Dong Hee

THE NUMBER ONE resource for Korean companies looking to venture into business in Vietnam is the Korean Chamber of Commerce (KoCham). Started in 2004, KoCham is one of the most influential and active commerce chambers in Saigon because of the increasing business and political relations between the two nations. “This year, Vietnam has become the third largest importer of Korean products and services, after China and America. Korean companies such as LG and Samsung are household names to the average Vietnamese families. In Vietnam, Korea is the number one investor, surpassing Japan and America. I think that more than proves the importance of business relation between our two nations,” says Mr. Han Dong Hee, the current Chairman of KoCham.

The Republic of Korea and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have had diplomatic relations since 1992, just four years after the economic revolutionary campaign *Doi Moi* started opening the country’s doors to outsiders. In those early years, trade between the two countries did not surpass VND500 million and there were no official charters to facilitate business deals. Fast forward 23 years and business affairs have become radically different. Vietnam and Korea have signed several bilateral and free trade agreements and in 2015, trade between Vietnam and Korea reached a USD30 billion milestone. In the same year, the Korean government and Korean businesses invested a total of USD38 billion in Vietnam, making it Vietnam’s number one investor. Korean exports to Vietnam include electronics, computers, automobiles and textiles, while Vietnam exports textile, wooded furniture and agricultural products to Korea. The fact that neither country is a direct competitor of each other in export also plays a big part in improving their business relation.

“There are roughly 100,000 Koreans living and working in central and southern Vietnam and 700 Korean companies, large and small, operating in the same territory. And they all look towards the Saigon-based Korean Chamber of Commerce for assistance and guidance,” says Hee. These 700 member companies include world famous brands such as Samsung, LG, Lotte and CJ. Hee is President of Pearl Dent, a biotech company specializing in medical dental supplies. KoCham’s mission is to guide and assist Korean companies within its jurisdiction. It does this by providing vital information to its members, by liaising between Korean businesses and the Vietnamese government, by actively sourcing the opinions of its members through various forums and meetings, and by resolving difficulties or obstacles in trade and bureaucratic relations between Vietnam and Korea.

Vietnam and Korea’s relationship isn’t only on a commercial level. According to history, the two nations share a bloodline. In the 12th century, the Vietnamese royal prince Ly Long Tuong became a war refugee in Korea. Once there, he became a famous general in the Korean royal

court and later became known as Hwasan Sanggun in Korean. Ly Long Tuong sired a long and influential line of Vietnamese-Koreans that include Syngman Rhee, the first President of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea. Genealogists have confirmed that Syngman Rhee is a 26th generation descendant of the famous Vietnamese emperor Ly Thai To (a familial relation to Ly Long Tuong).

Furthermore, under an agreement recently signed by the Vietnamese education ministry and the South Korean embassy, students at four select secondary schools in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City can start choosing Korean as part of their foreign language requirement. And in 2020, several high schools in the cities

will join the trial program. After 2023, the language will be taught across all schools in Vietnam.

“2016 is a very exciting year for Korean-Vietnamese relationships. We have signed not only bilateral agreements but have also entered into multilateral agreements such as ASEAN and ASEAN+. Every year, more and more Vietnamese are finding homes in South Korea either as immigrant workers or students. Every year, more and more Koreans have come to Vietnam to establish their own businesses. We are starting to see modern children of combined Vietnamese-Korean blood. Some of them have even attained celebrity status such as the dancing boy in Psy’s *Gangnam Style* music video. And it will only improve the further we go,” says Chairman Hee. 🌈

Vietnam and Korea's relationship isn't only on a commercial level. According to history, the two nations share a bloodline. In the 12th century, the Vietnamese royal prince Ly Long Tuong became a war refugee in Korea.



An illustration of General Ly Long Tuong during the Mongol invasions of Korea

R-FOOD

Why Korea's national cuisine has yet to make it on the world stage

Text by Michael Arnold | Images by Neil Featherstone

WHEN SOUTH KOREA'S former first lady Kim Yoon-ok made it her personal mission to bring *Hansik* – the cuisine of Korea – to global prominence, it seemed like a great idea. Following on from her relatively successful efforts to introduce the delicacies of the Korean people to delegates at international summits and encouraging the country's five-star hotels to reopen their shuttered Korean restaurants, it soon became a government priority to have the whole world eating it. If everyone was ooh-ing over its dramas and ah-ing over its music, it seemed only natural that *kim chi* would be the next Korean Wave.

The plan was a dismal failure. Perhaps it was the headshakingly bad promotional KPop videos or the bizarre pseudoscientific studies to demonstrate that men who ate *bibimbap* instead of burgers had higher sperm counts – but after millions of taxpayer dollars had been squandered on ineffective campaigns, the world hadn't noticeably changed its eating habits, and

even Koreans themselves were eating more pizza than ever before.

If you ask Alexis Won, the proprietor of Won's Cuisine (49 Mac Thi Bui, D1), the problem was much more deep-rooted than just poor marketing – as far as she's concerned, it was mostly the *tteokbokki* to blame. A spicy, soupy sticky rice cake with the consistency of tree rubber, this much-loved Korean street snack simply failed to gain any traction overseas, especially on the Western palate. According to Alexis, the heart of the problem was that outside of its own cultural context, *tteokbokki* (and some of the other dishes prepped for world domination) does not strike first-timers as being particularly yummy. The guys in government simply made the wrong choices when they put their personal faves in the limelight.

Alexis, who is about to launch her own major *kim chi* brand for national distribution here in Vietnam, means no disrespect to the national cuisine she loves.

She does, however, feel that the promoters of Korean food have obviously completely failed to consider the tastes of the outside world.

This is perhaps something that she has a unique perspective on, having always been a culinary oddball. As a girl, she was the only child in school to regularly enjoy a lunch box of *kim chi* sprinkled in cheese at a time when Korea was still undergoing a painful, impoverished post-war recovery period. Most of the other children had only rice and leaky Maxwell coffee jars full of *kim chi* for their school lunches in those days – she still remembers the uniformly acrid stink of textbooks stained by the pickling juice.

Today's Korea has very little in common with the conditions of rural poverty it underwent barely a generation ago, and yet somehow the bitter taste of its most difficult days lingers on in its cuisine – which perhaps is part of its problem in exporting *Hansik* to international diners.



The resultant kimchi unearthed months afterwards was exceptionally crunchy and flavorful.

If you wander about its fashionable, well-kept streets today, you probably wouldn't believe that the average dish enjoyed by Seoul's wealthier-than-average young citizens costs less than the frappuccinos they routinely enjoy afterwards (Seoul has no less than three expensive café franchises on virtually every street and the highest concentration of Starbucks you have ever seen).

Koreans are still entranced by menu items that were once staples of the desperate peasantry, even if they can afford to splash out on international haute cuisine. A conservative country in every sense, most older Koreans can barely tolerate even the most moderate of culinary experimentation on their time-honored recipes. *Tteokbokki* is a prime example – many Koreans still fondly remember winding down after a long day at school with friends at a local *tteokbokki* stand, and they're still so fond of the stuff that they'll actively hunt down venues that have good *tteokbokki* on offer whenever they go traveling.

Driven by Necessity

As with many national cuisines worldwide, Korean innovations in cooking developed during times of necessity. The Korean Peninsula famously experiences four entirely distinct seasons per year, with long hot summers and equally punishing winters. It was never particularly blessed with culinary resources, either – and with a dearth of fresh vegetables in the months of snow following November and the festering heat of the Korean summers, the impetus on local cooking techniques has always been to find ways to preserve the harvest. In the centuries before fridges and freezers, Koreans learned to dry out their vegetables – fat cabbage leaves and chunky radishes – and then ferment them in large ceramic jars filled with a sea salt solution, which they would bury in the freezing cold soil. Water would seep through the porous pottery, leaving the vegetable inside tinged with sweetness in the brine – and thus, *kim chi* was born.

As the representative dish of all Korean cuisine, there's actually a lot more going for *kim chi* than there might seem at first. "People think that all *kimchi* tastes very similar," says Alexis, "but there are lots of subtle differences based on how you choose the ingredients; what kind of salt and garlic you choose. The *kim chi* that people used to make in the buried jars, you can't find that taste anymore, because now we use



Alexis Won

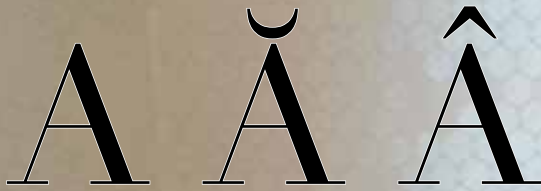
a special *kim chi* fridge that keeps it at a constant 18 degrees. It's more consistent in taste, but it's not like what we had before. Those old techniques, you can't really learn them from a book. They get passed down in families."

Alexis' own *kim chi* techniques were passed down to her by her mother, who was well-known in their part of Seoul for producing an exceptional variety based on a secret recipe. "It was very special," says Alexis, "she would use a lot of fresh fruit to give it a different flavor. She put lots of radishes in it, and would then fill it up with pears." Not many people, however, guessed the key ingredient – a live octopus, placed in the center of the mixture. The resultant *kim chi* unearthed months afterwards was exceptionally crunchy and flavorful.

At Won's Cuisine, Alexis follows in her mother's tradition of using unexpected ingredients and preparations to create

variations on Korean cuisine that are more forgiving to foreign tastes. Many Western diners are quite particular to *galbi* – beef ribs – but noticing how troublesome they often are to eat with smoky barbecue racks and greasy scissors, Alexis serves it in Vietnamese-style rice paper rolls. The classic Korean method of wrapping meats and radish together in wet folds of lettuce (which can burst over the table at first bite) is resolved at Won's by serving the ingredients as a salad.

"I use dipping sauce with my Korean sushi and serve big, plain pancakes with cheese," says Alexis of her cuisine. "People here seem to like it. I never thought I'd be a restaurant owner – I'm very picky. But every time we develop a menu, I remember my mother's taste, and I have to imitate it. It's not popular at all with traditional Koreans, especially with men over 50. But I just follow her way, and it seems to work." 🍱



A Korean YouTube channel overcomes language barrier and finds popularity in Vietnam

Interview by Dang Minh Tuan



From left to right: Linh Nguyen, Shinhye Oh & Dongki Koh

EARLY LAST YEAR two university students in Korea, Dongki Koh and Shinhye Oh, uploaded Youtube videos as a way to improve their Vietnamese. Little did they know their clips, called *Khoa Tieng Viet* (*The Faculty of Vietnamese Language*; www.youtube.com/user/KhoaTiengViet), would become popular in Vietnam with more than 70,000 subscribers and 12 million total views and rising. *Khoa Tieng Viet* was also profiled on Vietnamese media sites YanTV News and television channel VTV6. Now with the recent addition of Linh Nguyen, a Vietnamese studying in Korea, to help improve the show, *Ôi* speaks to the trio on their journey to internet stardom in Vietnam.

Why did you choose to learn Vietnamese?

SHINHYE: I chose to learn Vietnamese

because Vietnam is developing at such a rapid pace, not to mention that the Korea-Vietnam relationship is stronger than ever before. Also, when I first heard the Vietnamese language, it sounded like music to my ears.

DONGKI: When I finished high school, I had to decide what university to attend and what major to choose. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do in the future but I thought it would be beneficial if I could speak a foreign language. At that time, I happened to watch a documentary about the impact of the Korean Wave in Asia. I was surprised to see how much love the Vietnamese had for our actors and singers. Seeing this, I believed learning Vietnamese would equip me with better opportunities later on. Besides, there are also several similarities between Korean and Vietnamese culture.

What similarities and differences do you see between the cultures?

LINH: The biggest similarity would be how both the Korean and Vietnamese culture heavily place emphasis on the importance of etiquette, respecting elders and societal orders by abiding to their values of harmony. The difference is that the Koreans follow this societal guidance so strictly that it could appear so extreme at times, whereas the Vietnamese would often neglect the aforementioned, leading to several inevitable consequences.

How did *Khoa Tieng Viet* begin?

DONGKI: I had known Shinhye since we went to the same university. We uploaded our first video in February 2015 but we



“Being a part of Khoa Tieng Viet, I find myself responsible for promoting both the good and bad of my beloved Vietnam, to not only the Koreans, but the world.”

LINH: I remember when we three first met at a Vietnamese restaurant. Shinhye wowed the staff with her Vietnamese and it was fun to watch. Also, once we were filming a video where Dongki had to guess the animals based on their cries in Vietnamese. One was a rooster but he didn't know how to say “rooster” so he ended up saying “male chicken” in Vietnamese.

How did your friends and families react when you told them you were starting Khoa Tieng Viet?

SHINHYE: I didn't tell my family I was doing these videos but somehow my dad went on the internet and found out about it. I thought he would scold me but he was proud of me. Now that we have Korean subtitles in our videos, my dad enjoys watching them even more.

What future plans do you have for the show?

DONGKI: Starting this year, we will cooperate with TreasureHunter – a Korean MCN (multi-channel network) company. They offer free usage of their studio and will even provide guidance on making videos. We will also have the chance to work with other famous Korean Youtubers. We are looking forward to producing videos with better content and quality this year.

How had Khoa Tieng Viet changed your life?

DONGKI: I've made more Vietnamese friends. And thanks to the channel, I've also had the motivation to pursue a different career that I'm truly interested in.

SHINHYE: Once I uploaded a photo of me wearing the Korean traditional *hanbok* and it sparked interest from many of my Vietnamese friends to visit Korea. My Korean friends saw photos from when I was in Vietnam, making them want to visit the country. It makes me feel like I'm an ambassador for both countries.

LINH: Being a part of *Khoa Tieng Viet*, I find myself responsible for promoting both the good and bad of my beloved Vietnam, to not only the Koreans, but the world. I also hope to become a bridge between the two countries so that mutual understandings can be achieved. 🌈

decided to drop the project after five videos because we were too busy and they didn't attract many viewers so we thought our content wasn't good. Later on, to our surprise, we gradually gained viewers and comments on our channel and at the same time Linh sent us a message on Facebook in October 2015 saying that he could help with filming and editing so that was how it all started.

What has been your biggest challenge running the channel?

LINH: It must be that we all live in different cities. (Linh lives in Seoul, Dongki is in Chuncheon and Shinhye is in Paju). Dongki and Shinhye also work full-time so it's difficult for us to arrange a meet-up for filming, but when we do we have a great time together.

SHINHYE: Reading hateful comments often saddens me. However, when I found out we started to have a lot of new subscribers sending us positive messages and comments on our videos, I become much more motivated.

What has been your most memorable moment making the videos so far?

DONGKI: When we were featured on YanTV News. I have always been a fan of YanTV so I was very happy to see our channel featured on it. This is definitely what I would brag about to my grandchildren.

SHINHYE: For me, I found it magical the moment we reach 20,000 subscribers, and from then the number kept rising.

Wine & Dine

IMAGE BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE





Head in the Clouds

For exceptional views and stylish settings, the rooftop Liquid Sky Bar is unsurpassed

TEXT AND IMAGES BY **PATRICK CARPENTER**

SAIGON SEEMS TO have caught on to the idea that a lot of good things happen when you reach the rooftop. The air's a little cleaner, the breeze a little better, the view just goes on and on and gives you the feeling of being above everything heavy. The traffic is just two streams of lights, its horns not meant for you. And everyone that has made it up to the top is ready to celebrate the journey. Ok, it's not Everest, it's not Heaven, but it's closer to both without the discipline required for either.

This renaissance of high-altitude relaxation may be a reaction to the city's unquenchable thirst to see and be seen. If looking is Saigon's favorite pastime - looking out, looking at, looking forward, and looking good - it mixes perfectly with the city's accelerated reconstruction. Is there any other city reinventing itself as quickly? Is there any other cityscape that has changed so dramatically? And is there any better way to take it all in then with a table full of friends and signature cocktails?



But let's also not deny that in the rooftop world of superlatives, there are views and then there are VIEWS! The same goes for drinks and entertainment. So let's cut to the chase: The **Liquid Sky Bar**, 21 stories atop the Renaissance Riverside Hotel (8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1), hits the spot for unbeatable views of downtown's newest skyscrapers jostling with each other for pride of place along the river. You can watch the boats float by from their three terraces or from your own floating mattress in the Sky Bar pool. It's also a perfect spot for toasting the evening with the office or breaking the ice with new business contacts – whatever your tastes, the good people of Liquid Gold Drinks have you and your taste buds covered. And unlike most sky bars, the one at the Renaissance is open for morning coffee – a strong drip after a quick dip – so hotel guests can celebrate the sunrise that follows after all those sundowners.

The Sky Bar is open nightly, but its boldest colors come out on Friday and Saturday evenings, with world class DJs and an Asian barbeque. Best bring your appetite and clear your calendar for the morning after. It's your choice to ditch your business suit for your bathing suit and stare up at the stars, or come casual chic and lounge on the upper deck that overlooks the pool and the rest of the city. There's also the VIP lounge for some serious star gazing. ■



Pach Mentality

Grab a glass of one of their brewed wines and toast to 100 years of good eating

TEXT BY JOHN GLENN DOYLE IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE



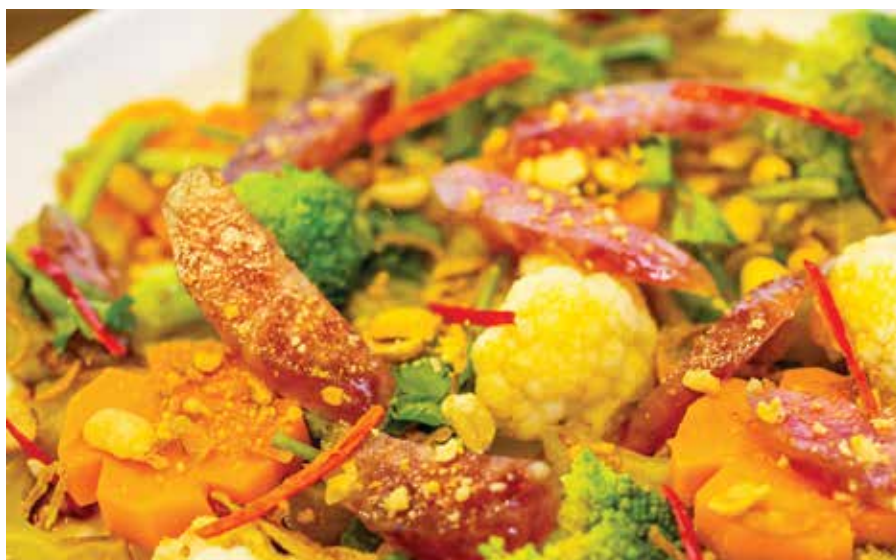
The refreshing After Lunch

THE NAME OF health food café and wine bar, **Pach Café and Brewers** (14 Huynh Thuc Khang, D1), comes from the Vietnamese word “*bách*,” meaning to live for one hundred years in good health and strength. Hien, graphic designer and brainchild of Pach, determined that, for aesthetic purposes, the “B” should become a “P.” From the modern polished concrete floors and geometric motifs, and the contemporary artwork adorning the tables and walls, to the layout and lighting that provides a feeling of cleanliness without sterility, and warmth without kitsch - every detail was carefully thought out.

Firstly, to quench our thirst, we chose from their selection of “teatox,” sugar free ice teas that come in eight different flavours using natural, unprocessed honey - this feature was particularly stressed by Hien, who was tired of being served overly-sweet honey-flavored syrups at most cafés in the city. My Fly To The Moon (VND45,000) was a refreshing mix of apple, orange, ginger and honey, a nice pick me up after a long day at work. My dining companion had the After Lunch (VND35,000) a delicious

and revitalizing blend of watermelon, mint leaves and honey that served as an excellent palate cleanser between dishes.

Living to triple a digit age is hard work but Pach have made it worth trying thanks to their salads, teas and desserts. Do not go gentle into that good night until you’ve tried their homemade salad (VND65,000), a unique and delicious blend of perfectly cooked cold steamed vegetables garnished with starfruit and cilantro then drizzled sparingly with their homemade soy sauce and served with smoked Russian cheese. This dish is worth the trip to Pach and, while you’re there, try the beef *kho quet* in a claypot (VND79,000). It features tender strips of Australian beef sizzled in a pot of fish sauce, garlic and black peppercorns, complemented with a hefty serving of hot steamed vegetables. Next were the experimental Pach Spring Rolls (VND55,000) - not your ordinary *cha gio* - they’re stuffed with banana and pork, coated in bread crumbs and served with a sauce that’s a reinvention of the Thousand Island dressing - so delicious it should be bottled and sold.



Homemade salad



Pach Spring Rolls



Beef *kho quet* in a claypot with vegetables



Brewed wines and mixed snacks combo

I was interested in the “brewers” part of their name. Examining the menu, I flicked to the drinks section expecting to find a long list that would establish a new competitor in the Saigon craft beer scene. Instead I found something special, something which local friends have told me has been, until now, completely missing from Saigon - brewed wine. Brewed wine is essentially rice wine infused with fruit and a little sugar to make a sweet liqueur. Offered in both hot and cold varieties (VND75,000 for 100ml or VND155,000 for 250ml), the wine is available in seven infusions at Pach including mulberry, which is a reasonably priced treat for anyone who has abandoned the search for the taste of Port wine in Saigon. Our favorite was the apricot wine, with a more even sweetness and a flavor truer to the fruit, it was a well-received digestif.

If you’re new to rice wine as I was, I’d highly recommend trying the wine combo (VND115,000). It includes four shots of your choice served in a carved out baseball bat along with a selection of nuts, dried seaweed and the delicious Russian smoked cheese that complements the fruity wines perfectly.

With our desserts I ordered an Americano (VND35,000) that came with a pleasingly thick crema that’s similar to the Australian “long black” coffees I prefer. Light in texture but full of flavor, the peach tart (VND35,000) and vanilla yogurt (VND20,000) were a perfect combination to share after a filling meal. The tart was fresh and fruity, with a deliciously crumbly base while the yogurt was faultless, not too sweet and not too creamy, ending our dining experience perfectly.

With its vast and healthy menu Pach could certainly last 100 years, but I won’t be waiting that long to go back. ■

For Sizzle

The sweet smells of grilled meats, pickled cabbage and soju

TEXT BY JOHN GLENN DOYLE IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE



Khotsal



FOR THOSE OF us living in Phu My Hung, traveling outside of “Korea Town” (as this area is informally known) in search of Korean food may seem foolish however, **Arirang BBQ** (11-13 Lam Son Square) was well worth the cab fare, and the perseverance to find it. The only indication of the restaurant’s existence was a sign near the beer house adjacent to the Caravelle on Lam Son Square which will lead you to another sign by an elevator, the elevator mercifully contains another sign indicating the floor to select. In spite of its devil may care location it was near capacity on a Monday night with families, couples and large groups of friends and

salarymen. Ordering was made simpler thanks to the staff who were happy to make recommendations, answer enquiries, and were never without a smile.

They informed me the name “Arirang” comes from a tradition Korean folk song considered an unofficial national anthem in both North and South Korea; some may remember both Koreas marched together at the Sydney Olympic Games to this song. The traditional aspect of Arirang certainly shines through the restaurant’s concept with the waitresses dressed in *hanboks*, textured bamboo painted walls and booths separated by tall walls of translucent stencilled paper. There was also a room

available for the fully traditional style of floor seated dining.

When the complimentary *banchan* (side dishes) arrived, it included, among my favorite mixed cabbage salad with mayonnaise, a variety of *kim chi*, *kkakdugi* (which was made with daikon as opposed to the traditional *napa* cabbage), *dopoki* (hot and spicy rice cakes), *dubu jjiagae* (tofu stew), *bindaetteok* (mung bean pancake) and *namul* (seasoned, parboiled green spinach). These were set alongside a saucer of mild and flavorful *gochujang* (a Korean chili paste) and small pile of salt mixed with matcha tea powder which is actually a lot nicer than it sounds.



Something that was definitely unexpected was the *japchae*, a remarkable dish made of translucent sweet potato noodles stir fried in sesame oil with carrots, onion, spinach and mushrooms.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Banchan* (side dishes); *Galbimal*; *Bibimbap*; *Japchae*; and *Dudul jjiaga* (tofu stew)

If you're a first time Korean BBQ diner, a useful tip to know is to not begin eating the *banchan* when they arrive, wait until the meat is cooked so you can pair them together. Luckily, the restaurant provided a waitress to tend to barbeque to ensure the meat were grilled to correctly – a real comfort for a Korean food novice such as myself. She also explained how to eat certain meats and what meats best complemented the *banchan*. For our meats we were recommended *kkotsal* (VND510,000) and *galbimal* (VND380,000). The *kkotsal* were boneless beef short ribs that were melt-in-your-mouth tender. A

little chewier, the *galbimal* was still great to eat folded in lettuce, dipped in *gochujang* and sprinkled with matcha tea salt, but I found the meat was better eaten by itself.

We also ordered a dish I was already familiar with – the mixed rice *bibimbap* (VND150,000) – which was served in a traditional *dolsot* hot stone. The flavors blended perfectly and it was even too big for two people to finish. Something that was definitely unexpected was the *japchae* (VND320,000), a remarkable dish made of translucent sweet potato noodles stir fried in sesame oil with carrots, onion, spinach and mushrooms. If there's any room left

on your table, or in your stomach for that matter, this is definitely worth ordering. To drink we had *soju* (rice wine), which had been kept at a near freezing temperature for a smoother taste and was served with limes.

Arirang doesn't have a fancy storefront located on a main street, nor does it have a website, however, these facts do not worry the owner. The restaurant thrives on its reputation, something that was made plain to me when I told Korean friends I was going to dine there - the reaction was the same, a short intake of breath, a brightening of the eyes and exclamations that included, amongst others, "Take me with you!" ■

For the Love of Cod

Basquaise in the deliciousness of this fish course



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

EVERYONE KNOWS THE feeling – when you're away from home for a long time, all you can think about is what you're going to eat when you get back. My job gives me the chance to prepare and sample culinary creations from around the world, but it's still the same for me – nothing beats the taste of home. Much as I love the local cuisine here, after ten months of living, filming and managing a restaurant in Vietnam, after the endless servings of pho, banh mi and rice, when I finally had the chance to return to Los Angeles to be with my family at the end of the year, I was really looking forward to eating something I missed: Bouillabaisse, gumbo, or even a good cod Basquaise – all perfect for this cold winter weather in California.

But on the first night upon returning to the US, my wife and kids had just one request – excited to try something good from Vietnam, they wanted me to cook pho for them. That wasn't quite what I had in mind, but I had to oblige nonetheless. They may have had their cravings, but I had my own too, and so I was really looking forward to making some seafood dishes. As I stared out at the endless Los Angeles rainfall, I felt as if I'd do anything for a spicy seafood dish to satisfy my palate, something like a good cioppino.

The next night – at last – everyone agreed to have a fish course, so (having eagerly prepared the sauce in advance) I decided on the cod Basquaise, a dish I'd originally picked up from the *Éric Ripert* Cookbook.

Basquaise is a Basque sauce or, in this case, a mélange of vegetables, including tomatoes and bell peppers. Cod is quite simply the perfect fish to accompany it – a delicious, sturdy, white-fleshed fish. So many people only know salted cod, but codfish is very versatile and can stand up to hearty sauces and vigorous cooking techniques.

So from me to you, here's my welcome home dream dish – enjoy it in sunny Saigon, and be sure to pair it with a dry red wine, such as Bordeaux or Pinot Noir. ■



COD BASQUAISE

Basquaise:

3 tbsp EVOO
 ½ cup finely diced yellow onion
 1 teaspoon minced garlic
 ½ cup of small diced ham
 ½ cup of small diced red bell pepper
 ½ cup of small diced yellow bell pepper
 1 cup diced seeded peeled tomato
 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme leaves
 ½ cup dry red wine
 1 tbsp chopped fresh Italian parsley, S&P, Piment d'Espelette

Cod:

2 tbsp Canola Oil
 4 cod fillets
 S&P
 2 thyme sprigs
 2 Garlic Cloves, Peeled and Halved

Heat the oil in a heavy sauté pan over a medium heat, add the onion and sauté until tender (about 5 minutes). Add garlic for 2 minutes, and then add the ham and bell peppers for about 5 minutes. Add the diced tomato and thyme, and simmer on a low heat for 20 minutes. Stir in the chopped parsley, and season with S&P and Piment d'Espelette.

Leave overnight.

When you're ready to cook, heat a griddle pan over a medium high until hot. Add oil, and season the cod on both sides with S&P. Place the cod in the pan along with thyme and garlic.

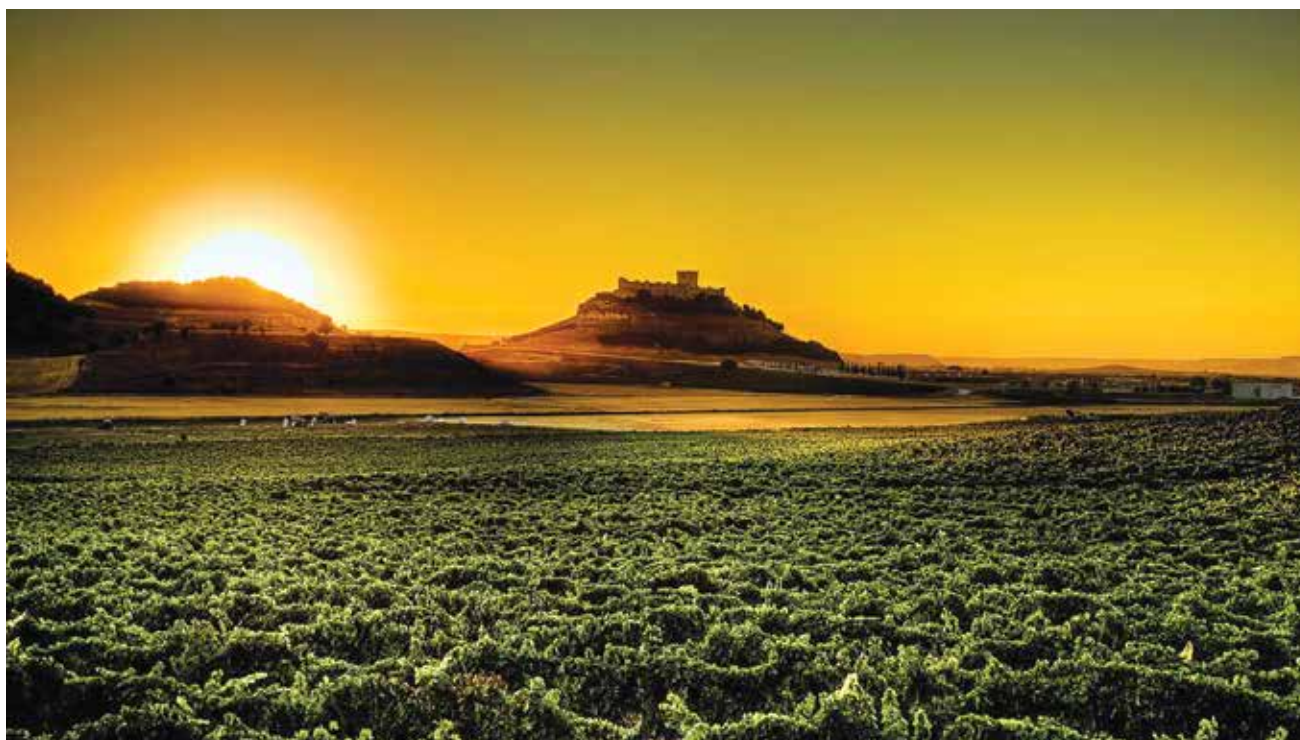
Warm the Basquaise to a nice heat, and spoon the sauce onto the plates. Place the cod in the center and serve immediately.

Move Over Rioja

From a bleak landscape in central Spain comes a fabulous wine, Ribera del Duero



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.



FOR VARIOUS REASONS, one particular area in a country, over others, becomes famous for its wine. For example, in France it's Bordeaux, in Italy we have Piedmont, Marlborough in New Zealand, Napa in the US and in Spain the favored area is Rioja. Wines in those areas are of exceptional quality, and the quality is consistent, so year after year their reputation grows on these two factors.

However, exceptional wines can be found in less popular areas of the same country. Let's take Spain again as an example; the lesser known region of Ribera de Duero produces wonderful wines. Situated in the Spanish plain, it benefits from the cooling effect of the Duero River, with vines planted in the provinces of Valladolid, Soria, Segovia and Burgos.

Dry summers, little rain and long winters are the climate characteristics

of this area, which, with its particular poor soil and huge temperature contrasts between day and night, make it ideal for growing vines.

Ribera de Duero produces great red wines, which by law must have a minimum of 75 percent Tempranillo grape (locally known as Tinto fino and Tinta del Pais grapes) and, if blended, the other grapes are usually Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec and Albillo; although only up to 5 percent Garnacha is allowed.

Ribera de Duero's high-quality young wines, the Crianza and Reserva, are helping to boost the region's reputation. The Crianza must spend a minimum of one year in oak barrels before being bottled and released, while the Reserva require a minimum of three years aging between the barrel and the bottle, giving it time for the wine to evolve

and gain complexity.

One of the Ribera de Duero's most famous wines is Vega Sicilia, sought after but many wine lovers and collectors. But for those of us who don't usually spend a couple of thousand of dollars for a bottle, many other, much cheaper, alternatives exist. For example, Ars Mitica from De Bardos is an amazing Reserva that retails at a fraction of Vega Sicilia. Wines from Arzuaga are also fantastic, and deliver value for money. Both Arzuaga and Ars Mitica can be found in Vietnam. While the wines are great on their own, they become exceptional when paired with food: roasts, beef, lamb and grilled pork, hard cheeses, oven roasted piglet and meat rice dishes like paella are recommended. Enjoy!

Find Spanish wines at Wine Embassy (41 Quoc Huong, D2) ■

>>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

CAFÉS



Bach Dang

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

26-28 Le Loi, DI



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, DI / 3827 5555

Facebook: Cafecatina



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



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, DI
3823 9812 / www.mof.com.vn



The Library

The Library recaptures the romance of a bygone era while offering an all-day snack menu as well as the finest tea, coffee, wine and spirits in an elegant setting.

Ground Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon,
Corner Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, DI
3520 9099

dine@icasianasaisgon.com



The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, DI

Also Try...

Cafe Terrace

A local interpretation of a European cafe concept, Cafe Terrace has become a popular destination for the local middle class taking a respite from shopping in the chic Saigon Centre. The main cafe street-side facing onto Pasteur is always busy with a mix of locals and expats sipping coffee or enjoying a light lunch or early dinner. Upstairs is a smaller cafe amidst fashion stores, dimly lit and cool. The menu includes savoury and sweet crepes, cakes, juices, shakes and some Vietnamese favourites.

Saigon Centre, 65 Le Loi, DI
3914 4958

Caffe Bene

A brand new cafe in the heart of District 1, marking the debut of a Korean coffee and dessert concept in Vietnam. When it opened queues stretched out the door with locals and expats alike eager to try the unique offer of European style coffee, blended drinks and sweet, creamy dessert and cakes. Modern, industrial designed interior spanning two floors, and with a corner site street frontage which cannot be missed!

58 Dong Khoi, DI
3822 4012
caffebenevietnam.com

Ciao Cafe

There's rarely a tourist who's been through inner-city Saigon and hasn't stopped in on the super-friendly-looking Ciao Cafe. It stands up well as an expat mainstay too, with its fashionable decor that varies from floor to floor and its classic selection of Western cafe and bistro favorites.

74-76 Nguyen Hue, DI
3823 1130

Du Mien Garden Coffee

A 30 minute taxi ride from downtown, but worth the effort, this unique cafe is renowned for its 'treehouse' feel. Set in lush gardens, it's a world away from the chaos of Ho Chi Minh City. A destination in itself, it offers much more than coffee; open from 7am until 11pm, it attracts workers, travellers and romancers alike. The locals love it (20,000 likes on Facebook!) for the coffee, the meals and most of all the gardens.

7 Phan Van Tri Phuong 10, Go Vap.
3894 5555

LightBox Cafe

This stunningly designed cafe also doubles as an event and photography studio, so make sure you dress to impress at this location because you never know who might snap your picture. They also serve vegetarian cuisine with prices ranging between VND300,000 - VND500,000

179 Hoa Lan, Phu Nhuan
3517 6668
www.lightbox.vn

Masstige

Another newcomer to the Vietnam cafe scene, Korean-based chain Masstige offers European style coffee at competitive prices (40,000 VND for a mug of hot Cafe Latte) and accompanying light snacks. For something truly original, try the Avocado coffee or their alcohol-free chilled mojito cocktails. The name Masstige is a blend of mass and prestige, meaning 'premium but obtainable'.

125 Ho Tung Mau, DI (behind Sunwah Tower).
www.facebook.com/masstigecoffee

Mojo Cafe

This modern, chic cafe, restaurant and bar offers freshly baked homemade cakes, pastries, wood fired pizzas, light fare and superb coffee and smoothies for dine in or take away.

88 Dong Khoi, DI
08 3827 2828
www.mojosaigon.com

Vecchio Cafe

A self-styled Little Italy that does a good job of looking the part, this venue's interior features ornate Italian decor, dim lighting, and antique furniture enhanced by Italian music. Offerings include fine meals, delicious gelato and beverages.

39/3 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3
6683 8618

The Workshop

A great find, this New York loft-style venue is hidden away up a couple of flights of stairs and well worth seeking out. Spacious and airy with lots of natural light, the central coffee bar offers an exquisite gourmet selection. Superb for setting up your laptop and getting some work done over great coffee.

27 Ngo Duc Ke, DI
3824 6801 / 3824 6802
7am-8pm

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



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



WINE



RubyRed Italian Wine Store

The only one Italian wine store in Ho Chi Minh City, with over 200 labels of wine from all regions in Italy, Nardini grappas, Sambuca Molinari and Marsala, Passiti and Bellavista Franciacorta (official sponsor of Armani, Zegna, Gucci and La Scala Theatre of Milan). Cozy design with friendly staff and professional expert of Italian wines managers (Mr. Mirko and Mr. Christian Boarin).
206 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2

Also Try...

An Phu Supermarket

Large supermarket stocking a wide range well-known international brands of dry goods along with fresh groceries, frozen meat and fish, fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese, wine, toiletries and more.
43 Thao Dien, D2

Annam Gourmet

An upscale deli and grocery chain offering gourmet groceries, cheese, organic products, gluten-free products, fruit and vegetables, gourmet deli, wine and other beverages. All locations have a coffee lounge that serves breakfast, lunch, drinks and early dinner.
41A Thao Dien, D2.
16-18 Hai Ba Trung, D1

The Warehouse

A premium wine importer, distributor, and retailer supplying wines from all over the world, the Warehouse also offers spirits, wine accessories, glassware and refrigeration to complement their customers' choices.
15/5 Le Thanh Ton, D1

Veggy's

A specialized grocery store carrying imported products, Veggy's offers wine, a wide range of international food imported from abroad and fresh produce grown in Vietnam.
554-1 Sky Garden 2, D7

Vinifera

Established in 2002, Vinifera is one of the most reliable wine distribution companies in Vietnam. Offering prestigious wines from around the world at a great value.
7 Thai Van Lung, D1

Wine Embassy

Wine Embassy opened in 2012 by the passionate sommelier Francois Carteau. The informed staff can help you choose a bottle of wine from their wide selection or purchase a Wine Card and grab a glass at the automated Enomatic wine dispenser.
41 Quoc Huong Street, Thao Dien, D2
Facebook: Wineembassyvn



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.cn
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 duo, Pan seared salmon along with pastas, risotto and decadent desserts. The wine list here is an oenophile's dream with over 200 labels in stock from Australia, California and Chile to Italy. The restaurant is on two levels with a small terrace in the ground floor.

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1
www.tycozsaigon.com

Also Try...

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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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 Yakiniku 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
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
S36-1 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

what

live music . wine pavillion . food tents
2,000,000 VND

includes: food & wine coupons, wine glass, gift bag, entertainment book

where

on the lawn
RMIT University
 702 Nguyen Van Linh, District 7, HCMC

when

Saturday **12th March**
 2016
 4pm-10pm

how

tickets on sale from 17th Feb at:
D1 - NZ Consulate Suite 804 Metropolitan Building, 235 Dong Khoi St.
D2 - AIS Cherry Blossom Reception, An Phu Superior Compound, 36 Thao Dien St
D7 - Pitchers Sports & Grill Riverside Apts, Nguyen Luong Bang St

why

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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**

Time Bistro

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 Hanoi 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

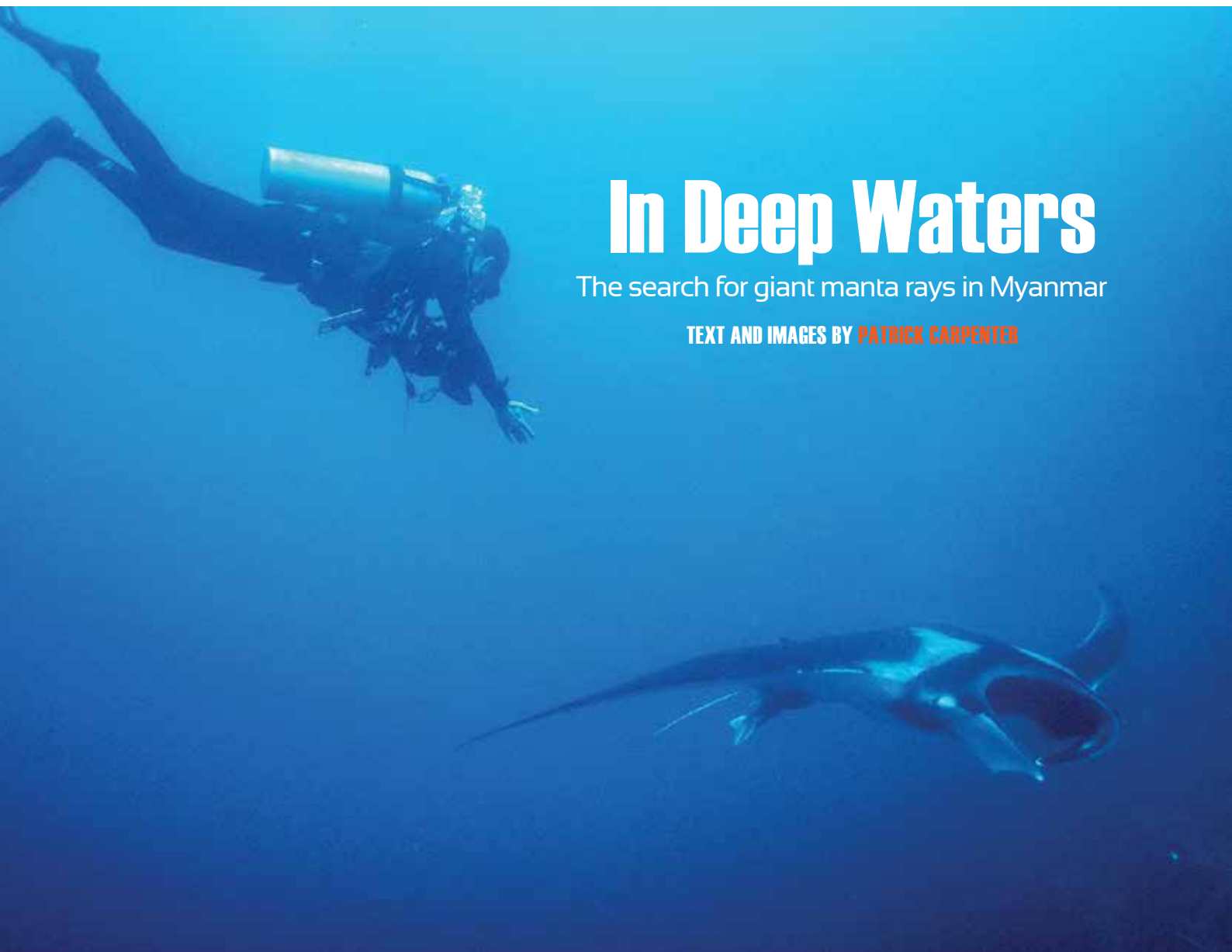
www.villaroyaltreasures.com

Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY **PATRICK CARPENTER**







In Deep Waters

The search for giant manta rays in Myanmar

TEXT AND IMAGES BY **PATRICK CARPENTER**

I STEP OFF the back of the boat into a realm of blue. There is little shock, little worry about getting too cold too quickly. The water's warm at the surface. Back on land, most are rising and rolling out of bed. I am dropping deeper, losing air, losing buoyancy, sinking out of the white light, through the layer of tropic blue, and down, down, down. Beyond 20 meters, then 30, to where blue meets violet meets midnight. At this depth, there is no red; colors dull, greens and browns just above, and the smaller skittish, wildly painted fish are all well above my head, darting around in the sunlight.

I am in the Mergui archipelago, in Myanmar waters, at a site no more than a speck on the local nautical map. A blackish, chiseled clod of rock sits six hours from the nearest community – that of the Moken, Myanmar's sea gypsies – and 15 hours by speeding boat to the closest decompression chamber. Tomorrow I will see my first bird in three days, a bird the size of a child's fist, suddenly clinging to the scruff on the top of the black rock. Otherwise, society is confined to the boat. Deep in the distance,

Black on top, white on bottom, mouth forever open, the giant manta doesn't swim. It soars, it glides, it flies – all the verbs of the air and for good reason.

solitary, lonesome fisherman in their rail thin longtail boats speckle these waters – some with nets, some with explosives, all with only the most meager protection from the elements. Hard lives here in relentless salt and sun.

I am one of 19 divers, including one manta expert, and six boat staff, including one captain, one cook and one steward that have traveled three days together in good faith as part of the Ray of Hope Expedition to track the *Manta birostris* – the giant manta ray. Individually, the group has traveled from as far away as Europe, America, Australia and Phuket. The distances combined to get to this moment are impressive, and add to the enormity of expectation.

The reef is on my right, the open ocean to my left and forever after. The reef tapers out and the ledge drops off into a canyon. On this dive I have two choices: I can comb the reef, with its moray and white-eyed eels, its octopus, soft corals, fan corals, zigzag oysters, the beautiful but horribly named varicose wart slug, the beautiful and perfectly named oriental

sweetlips, the bluelined and honeycombed groupers, glassfish, angelfish, emperor fish, parrotfish, surgeonfish, an infestation of scorpionfish, fusiliers, snapper... or I can move out and away, into the current and towards the edge of midnight, and gamble my air on the chance of a giant manta.

I drop down to 32 meters and stare out. I listen to my Vader-like breathing, try to slow it down. Always with diving it is about doing less, conserving air and energy. The rest of my group is posted like sentries in a similar fashion, looking hard into the void, plumes of air bubbles from each escaping upwards. Time burns. I check my dive computer. How much longer at this depth? Burning air, burning time. Both are measured, finite.

How far can one actually see, when there is nothing to gauge the distance? The water is heavy with plankton, but it actually flattens perspective, like stargazing. Beyond what you can see is simply more that you can't. There is nothing like a landmark, just the liquid density of a color. Look up to the surface: it's pure light, morning sun beams piercing, silver surface dancing. But look straight out and it's permanent midnight. And in between, it's the full spectrum of blue.

This is it, then: off away from the rock, at this depth, there is only liquid midnight and the iron-lung respiratory sound of me pulling air out of my tank into my mouth. Each breath one less in the tank, each breath louder in my head. So it slowly goes, and goes, and goes. The minutes fall, I check my air, I check my depth, my watch, the numbers trickle up and down as I inhale and exhale in the current. I stare down past my fins. I stare at the surrounding nothing. I check the body language of the others.

From inside the midnight, a flicker of white. The uplifted, unfading tip of a wing. Our dive leader taps on his tank with his metal baton – sound travels faster through water than air – and all masks align like searchlights, first to his outstretched arm, then straight on from his finger to that tip. Confirmed.

First Sighting

The first manta appears at approximately 7:40 on Tuesday morning, at a depth of around 35 meters, cruising in silence and in and out of focus. Black on top, white on bottom, mouth forever open, the giant manta doesn't swim. It soars, it glides, it flies – all the verbs of the air and for good reason. In its manner it is more like the wandering albatross than a shark or fish. It is, in its essence, a kite without a string, or wings without the need to land. A giant manta's wingspan can exceed six meters – imagine three tall humans head to toe. The largest reach a seven meter span. There is a slight bump on its otherwise thin whip of a tail that links it distantly to the stingray, but there is no barb and therefore no defense other than flight.

Unlike most fish, mantas have no air bladder to regulate their buoyancy at different depths and to resonate sound.



They are therefore like the shark: ships without ballast, without voices. The lack of this bladder enables the manta to dive down beyond 500 meters – useful in flight and feeding in rich ocean depths. Further like the shark, the manta draws its oxygen from the water pouring into its open canyon of a mouth and into and through the gills. To draw the water in this way means that the manta (and shark) must keep moving to keep living. This basically limits any extended interaction and observation with us, and increases the mystery that surrounds them: these silent ships passing – where have they been, where do they go, and why?

I sense that the manta is aware of me, individually and collectively. It seems both wary and unconcerned – the manta can outswim a shark, so really, what danger

could a human, weighed down with all that gear: those nitrox and oxygen tanks, the weight belts, the fogged, leaky masks, the neoprene, lycra, silicone, rubber – what threat could a human really present?

And yet their numbers are being decimated. From human consequences: entanglements, coastal development, climate change, fisheries. But mostly from agents that pay poor fishermen in Mozambique, in Ecuador, in Asia, in villages near seas where the manta is known to frequent, to catch and kill mantas. Both the giant manta and the smaller reef manta are listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. In the same way that a shark is prized for its fins, the Chinese prize the manta for its gill rakers. Mantas feed by filtering the plankton from water they ingest. The





plankton is separated and processed by these gill rakers, with the water continuing on and through the gills. Because the Chinese believe that these gill rakers, like so many other animal parts from so many other animals, contain miracle cures and health benefits, they add them to their traditional herbal medicines. They choose to believe this despite no proven evidence – it's the tragedy of the rhino horn, the tiger penis, the bear gall bladder all over again. But with the manta, it's all the more tragically absurd, as tests done on these gill plates have shown them to be toxic in their mercury and lead content. Consumption is slow death.

I kick as best I can to try and keep the manta in my view, kicking past and through the rising air bubbles of the other divers. Its giant wing just glides on, seemingly not a muscle moved, traveling in a way that appears slow and fast simultaneously. Sharks, dolphins, whales, fish all give you some sense of the scale of effort it takes to be in motion in the

way their tail fins push them through the water. The hammerhead, in particular, is exhausting just to look at. But the manta, without so much as a downward push, easily increases the space and depth between us, and I am forced to give up, level off, and hope it doubles back.

And it does. It banks away and then circles back in pure hydrodynamic grace, rising for another pass at the plankton massing around the vicinity of this lonely black rock and its reef. Dr. Fabrice Jaïne, the manta expert, and senior scientist at the Marine Megafauna Foundation (www.marinemegafauna.org), tells me that mantas follow the plankton and can predict where the oceans are at their most productive, and at this moment this must be the place. Wings now pushing, rising, falling, mouth agape, perpetually harvesting. I have time to take this all in now, to savor the moment, and I see the manta in its entirety, striking a balance between massive and fragile.

I move in closer this time, moving into

its trajectory. I turn on my back, looking up as it passes over. It's harder to suck the air from my tank, but closer, I can see the distinct gray to black patterns that identify it individually. Like snowflakes and fingerprints, no manta has the same pattern. This enables manta researchers to identify and attempt to trace the extent of their migrations. So on a dive such as this, my photograph of the manta doubles as an entry in the research archive. Through this Ray of Hope expedition and the Marine Megafauna Foundation there is pattern recognition software to either link my photos to a previously identified manta, thereby adding another bit of data to its profile, or establish it as a newly identified manta. In both cases, my contribution is rewarded with a link that will enable me to be updated to this manta whenever it is sighted in the future.

While we still know surprisingly little about the shark, despite all the documentaries and related entertainments, we know much less about the manta ray. We know the manta used to be known, and in some places is still referred to as “the devil ray” on account of the two cephalic fins at the top of the head that can give the appearance of horns. We know the name “manta” comes from the Spanish word for cloak or blanket. And I can see why, when viewing a manta from above, looks like watching the devil's cloak moving across the waters.

We know the manta has the largest brain of all fish by absolute weight, likely providing higher sensory capacities. We know its wings are made of thin cartilage, and that the giant manta likely can regulate its core temperature, enabling it to function in deep water. We can spot the gender differences, and know something of their courtship rituals and mating. We know a pregnancy lasts about a year and almost always produces a single pup (twins are extremely rare). We believe the giant manta could live for more than 50 years, and we generally know the extent of their habitat, and they seem to travel both singly and in small groups. But there are also times and places where they will appear en masse to form the most well structured underwater feeding frenzy. We know more than this, of course, but it is fair to say that the book on mantas is just starting to be written. To study the *Manta birostris* professionally across the equator's oceans like Dr. Fabrice Jaïne, is to be at the forefront of understanding and conserving this species.

The manta turns back into the void, tantalizing, fading, practically dissolving into midnight. Just like that it has left me and our group, left the reef, left the black rock. Its timing is perfect - just long enough: come late, leave early, like all the most desired guests.

I ascend now, slowly. On the boat, all divers are all jacked up. The two in charge of this expedition, Ric Parker and Clive White (www.thailanddiveandsail.com), know that whatever happens on the rest of the trip, they, by the good graces of this giant manta, have delivered. The mood on the boat is contagious and inclusive and stays elevated throughout the entire trip. ■





Panavision

IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

Hoi An Panorama is a 150-page photo book extolling the virtues of central Vietnam's charming Hoi An, one of the country's best known and most visited tourist destinations. The book covers the Ancient Town as well as the river, rice fields and beaches nearby, while also highlighting local specialty dishes such as *mi quang*.

This is the first book for Saigon-based Australian photographer Neil Featherstone. The book is available at Tribook (158 Dong Khoi, D1) and Artbook (43 Dong Khoi, D1) outlets throughout Vietnam. ■







Fly Cheaply

Tips to getting the best airfare possible



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



WHO DOESN'T LOVE getting a great deal on airfare? With increased competition, lower energy costs and more discerning travelers, cheap fares are there to be had. That said, there are tools and tips that guarantee you'll be the person on the flight who paid the least for their airfare.

Be flexible. Obviously, if you have a window of time to travel, you'll be able to take advantage of certain flight days and times which are typically cheaper.

Google Flights is my go-to resource for checking on the cheapest flights. There's a user-friendly calendar function that lists prices by departure and return date, locating the ideal combination of price and speed (number of stops). By the time you'll be reading this, I'll be ensconced on a Hawaiian beach for just USD780, including taxes, for a return flight from Saigon. Google Flights told me that it'd be cheapest to leave on a Tuesday and come back on a Wednesday. There are a few other bells and whistles with Google Flights, like being able to see a map of an entire continent, say Europe, with prices to various locations. Slightly more fanciful but less useful is the "Interests" button which will give you suggestions and prices based on your likes.

However, before you click the Buy button, remember to **factor in hidden costs**. These can be real costs like long

layovers requiring a pricey overnight hotel, extra fees for baggage or even "convenience fees" for simply booking, whether it's online or in person, credit card or cash. (I'm looking at you, AirAsia!) I once scored a ridiculously priced roundtrip flight of USD150 to Beijing from Phnom Penh. While I loved the savings, but the tiny box of a hotel on the layover in Kuala Lumpur for USD60? Not so much. On the way back, I spent another long night in the dreadful low-cost terminal, killing time in a Starbucks. The friends I was traveling with had a similar budget mentality, so we made the most of it, but you'll have to weigh in whether it's worth it to pay USD100 more and get better connections. My Hawaii trip involves a 10 hour layover in Shanghai, but the fact that I get there in the morning and leave late afternoon and Shanghai offers a free transit visa, means I can spend the day exploring a brand new city for free.

Once you think you've found a flight at a price you're happy with, **be prepared to act fast**. Typically, only a few seats are available at promotional fares, and once they're gone, very rarely do they appear again. So if it seems too good to be true, jump on it. That said, if you think you can do better, give yourself a window to **do some research**. But first, put on a **fare alert**

(available on many travel search sites like airfarewatchdog.com and expedia.com which will track any price change, or notify you when the flight comes down to a specific price). Gone are the days when I would obsessively call a frazzled travel agent for the latest prices. Now that you have a bit of time to dig around, Google what airlines fly into your destination. Sometimes the airfare search engines don't include all the budget or small local carriers (either because it's a remote area or because the airline won't pay a commission), so you'll want to cover your bases.

Then there are the more ethically ambiguous methods. **Hidden city ticketing** is an option when a flight that connects in a city you want to go to turns out to be cheaper than flying directly to it. Airlines sometimes discount a new destination or an unpopular route, but have to fly through one of their hubs. Savvy travelers who want to save on airfare can simply hop off at the stopover city. Skiplagged.com is good for finding these types of fares. Obviously, this means you can have carry-on luggage only and can only do it on the return leg (or else the rest of your itinerary gets automatically cancelled if you miss a leg.) Airlines tend to frown on this as it technically makes you a no-show and they can't re-sell the leg you've abandoned. While not technically illegal, heavy abusers of the hidden city ploy may find their frequent flyer accounts suspended or even be banned from flying certain airlines. Another play is the **point of sale** loophole. An airline might offer discounted rates to citizens of a certain country, and by making it appear as if you're buying from that location (either by selecting a different country as your "home" country, paying in a different currency or changing your IP address), you'll benefit from these rates. Something similar is the **fat finger fare**, a glitch or input error that leaves off a digit, or mistakes made in **currency conversions**, often found by following social media accounts like The Flight Deal or Flyer Talk. It's buyer beware, though, as some airlines have refused to honor these loopholes which will leave you without a ticket. Put in a bit of legwork and you'll be jetting off to some exotic destination in no time! ■

Diary of a Backache

A slightly overweight 40-something chronicles his journey to wellness

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGE PROVIDED BY ACC

Day 1

It started as a niggle in my lower back two days ago, something I chalked up to sitting for too long, the occupational hazard of being a writer, I suppose. A night of agonizing back spasms through permanently clenched teeth had me Googling “Saigon + chiropractor” and led me to an expat forum where I discovered the American Chiropractic Clinic, an ad for which I remembered seeing in this magazine. However, it was the soothing, professional tone of Dr. Wade Brackenbury, the clinic’s founder, that caught my eye. Add a central D3 location, and I immediately booked an appointment for that morning.

Pulling up to the clinic, two surprisingly proactive security guards helped me park my bike and opened the door for me, a small gesture, but most welcome as I shuffled into the clinic with the deliberate gait of an 80-year-old. First impressions remained good at the sight of the bright, spacious reception area that would be welcome in any Western city, staffed by friendly personnel who helped me fill out the paperwork. Formalities completed, I was ushered in to meet Dr. Sandy Dargere, one of the clinic’s 12 doctors. After a thorough assessment, he uttered one of the most beautiful sentences I’d ever heard: “You’re going to be fine in 7-10 days.” No spinal problems, he confirmed. The pain was due to a misalignment in the lumbar area, muscles tightening up like a rusted bicycle chain in response to some stress or injury.

Dr. Sandy then asked me to stand up and bend over and I immediately groaned at the thought. My hands could barely reach my knees, but after some deft manipulation, his nimble fingers seeking out all the tension spots in my back, I could now reach my shins. A small but welcome improvement.

Day 2

I arrive for my second treatment and I’ve never looked forward to seeing the doctor so much, knowing that relief was just minutes away. It was another difficult night, an electrical storm of pulsating spasms ensuring I only got snatches of sleep. Standing up with my back pressed against the wall or sitting ramrod straight seemed to be the only positions that didn’t induce the next wave of pain. The walking stick I used while trekking Sapa just a few weeks earlier now served the ignoble purpose of simply helping me sit up. Deep breaths are impossible because it feels like my chest is enclosed in a vice.

Dr. Sandy has me lay down on a motorized chiropractic table. “So much tension,” he says as he feels my muscles twitching. “Relax,” he coos, before beginning his manipulation of the muscles that have seized up. I exhale deeply, preparing myself for the inevitable *pop* that follows. I learn later that the

extremely unnerving sound has nothing to do with bones or joints being put back into place. Rather, it’s gas bubbles being released into the joint fluid, restoring range of motion. To me, every *pop* sounds like angels singing.

After the manipulation comes my favorite part, the physiotherapy. The clinic has 20 stations staffed by 23 physiotherapists. I lie face down while the therapist takes me through the cycle of therapeutic ultrasound, electrotherapy and massage. Just like the therapist the day before, she tells me exactly what she’s about to do before she does it — applying the cool gel, finding my comfort level for the electrotherapy, confirming where to focus the ultrasound — all which I find very assuring. It’s 30 minutes of bliss as I feel warm electric pulses stimulating my back muscles. I make a note to Google how much this amazing machine costs and dream about having one at home. Unfortunately, it’s somewhere around USD3,000, so it looks like I’ll have to get my physiotherapy fix at the clinic.



Dr. Wade Brackenbury

Day 4

The spasms have lessened significantly. But like in the scary movies I’ve downloaded to help me pass the time, it’s more the anticipation of what’s about to happen that’s torturous. Every sneeze, every trip down the stairs, every reach to flick on a light switch could be the innocuous movement that triggers the next spasm. I’ve experienced full body cramps before, usually after a particularly physical tennis match, a pain I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemy. This isn’t as paralyzingly painful, but the constant tensing and releasing is equally exhausting. You don’t realize how much you use your back muscles throughout the day, say to

throw your leg over a motorbike or to put on a shirt, and I’m starting to question all my life decisions, like why I had to put the coffee on the top shelf, or why I threw clothes on the ground and now have to spend 5 minutes slowly picking them up.

I’m at the clinic for my third visit. Dr. Sandy has started me on some back exercises and very gentle stretches which I dutifully perform while binge watching entire seasons of television programs. My bedside table looks like a nurse’s station complete with liniments, pain killers and a hot water bottle.

Day 7

I’m thankful I scheduled no travel during Tet, as it’s the perfect time to stay home and recover. Friends come by bearing flowers, chocolate macadamia cookies and a bottle of wine, the perfect Get Well Soon ingredients. They ask me what medication I’m taking, and are surprised to hear that the doctor only prescribed magnesium and vitamin B6. The clinic’s mission is to address chronic pain without the use of drugs or surgery, instead relying on an alternative triad of manipulation, physiotherapy and acupuncture to treat the cause rather than the symptoms. One of the shows I watch features a catchy tune and I suddenly find myself dancing in my chair. It’s in that moment that I know I’m going to be fine. That is, until I get ahead of myself and feel a sudden twinge. Dr. Sandy says that’s normal; it’s my body’s way of telling me to watch my limitations.

Day 9

I come for one more visit before the clinic is closed for Tet. The spasms have completely gone. It’s just a lingering tightness and a sense of back fatigue that remains, something the doctor says will probably last for another week or two. He clears me to try playing tennis again in a few days.

Day 16

Dr. Sandy recommends I continue with my back exercises and finish my course of magnesium supplements and come back for a final check up in a few weeks.

From debilitating pain to complete health in just six visits is nothing short of miraculous. I look up my records and note that a similar back problem five years ago in Phnom Penh required 13 visits to the chiropractor. I feel grateful to have my life back.

When Dr. Wade Brackenbury opened the American Chiropractic Clinic (ACC) in 2006, it was the first legal chiropractic clinic to operate in Vietnam. After suffering a broken back in his teens and undergoing a year of rehabilitation, Dr. Wade went on to study Emergency Medicine in Idaho (USA), Chiropractic in California, and Acupuncture in Korea and China, and founded a number of clinics in Malaysia before moving to Vietnam. Since opening, ACC has treated more than 26,000 patients in Vietnam. ACC in Saigon currently has 12 doctors from a number of different countries, all with doctorate-level, American equivalency qualifications.

The American Chiropractic Clinic (www.acc.vn/en) is located at 161 Hai Ba Trung, D3. There is also a clinic in Hanoi. ■

>>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 Garden Restaurant

Cham Garden Restaurant is located inside Cham Villas Boutique Luxury Resort. Set in the midst of a lush tropical garden, this cozy and quiet restaurant serves Asian Fusion, Vietnamese and Western Cuisine. The ideal place for a romantic and exquisite dinner. **32 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Phan Thiet** **+84 62 3741 234** www.chamvillas.com www.facebook.com/chamgardemuine



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

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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 luxurious 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



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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.

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08 3925 7526
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www.nhakhoadrhung.com



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European Dental Clinic

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

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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

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173 Ton Dat Tien, D7

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2Bis Cong Truong Quoc Te, D3

Westcoast International Dental Clinic

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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



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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



Pacific Cross Vietnam (formerly Blue Cross Vietnam)

Pacific 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.

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3821 9908



Also try ...

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21st Floor, 115 Nguyen Hue, DI

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23-25 Thai Van Lung, DI

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, DI
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, DI
3812 5125

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McLarens Young International is a global claims service provider that helps our clients achieve timely and equitable claims resolution.

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41 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, DI
3821 3316

Prudential Vietnam

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RELOCATION



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www.alliedpickfords.com.vn



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sgnexpress@seal.com.vn
www.seal.com.vn



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5th Floor, Lafayette De Saigon,
8A Phung Khac Khoan, DI
3521 0071
ags-vietnam@agsfourwinds.com
www.agsfourwinds.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, DI

Logical Moves

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www.santaferelo.com

VETERINARY CLINICS



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6260 3980
www.animaldoctors.vn

Also try ...

K9

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192 Hoang Dieu, D4
www.phongkhamthuyk9.com
091 382 0812

Modern Pet

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A12-A13 Nguyen Huu Tho,
Kim Son Project, D7
www.modernpethospital.net.vn
6298 9203

New Pet Hospital & Spa

The clinic has two locations and offers boarding, 24-hour

emergency care and grooming services such as washing and nail trimming.

53 Dang Dung, DI
www.newpethospital.com.vn
6269 3939

Saigon Pet Clinic

Founded in 2008, Saigon Pet Clinic's goal is to open the best animal welfare veterinary clinic in Vietnam. They combine skill and technology to ensure your pet gets the best possible care.

33, 41 street, Thao Dien, D2
www.saigonpethospital.com
3519 4182

Sasaki Animal Hospital

The hospital is managed by a team of skilled doctors from Japan and Vietnam. Services include grooming and general care.

38-40-42 Nguyen Thi Thap,
Him Lam, D7
www.sasakihospital.com
2253 1179



Kids & Education



Children of Divorce

A 15-year-old girl uses her personal experience in a class project to open a discussion on a still-taboo topic

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY **NGUYET DUC**

Nguyet Duc is currently studying at EISHCMC. At the end of the 10th grade, she will finish her International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IBMYP), in which all students must complete a year-long assignment called the Personal Project. Each student has the opportunity to choose any topic that evokes their interest, as long as it fulfils certain requirements and provides a service to the community. A supervisor is also assigned to each student to support them through this learning experience. Nguyet Duc chose to work on the impacts of divorce on children.

BECAUSE OF A GENERAL lack of awareness and as a child suffering from divorced parents myself, I chose 'divorce' as the topic for my year-long Personal Project assignment for EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City.

Our society is continuously opening up to concepts and actions previously regarded as taboos, and one of them is divorce. In 2000, there were a reported 51,361 divorce cases in Vietnam, five years later the number increased to 65,929, and in 2010 it nearly doubled to 126,325.

Divorce does not only affect the couple, it also has a big impact on their children. Everyone, regardless of their age, is still a 'child' to their parents. Whether they're adults, teenagers or infants, they will be affected, one way or another, by their parents' divorce. But young children are even more vulnerable to the abrupt change and some may never recover from these the emotional scars.

Children are very dependent on familial love and care. Therefore, when their parents drift apart, they will start to become anxious about all the unknowns ahead of them. They may feel abandoned by their parents, and eventually they will wonder whether their parents will leave them too. All of a sudden, their perfect idea of "happily ever after" shatters, and worse, it's shattered by those they treasure the most. Soon they realize that life is far different from their favorite fairytales and stories, and they may burden themselves in the lingering thought that relationships can end and people will leave.



Dress #1

The emotions a child affected by divorce go through are unveiled through the two dresses I created. I feel that this issue is prevalent in Vietnam and is occurring even more frequently now. I strongly wish it would be more regularly spoken about and understood in a more profound way.

The blow of reality at such a young age is known to develop psychological issues. It is often found that children of divorced parents will face attachment problems as they grow older. They are more likely to feel insecure in relationships, in comparison to those that are not from divorced families. Many also endure hopelessness, crying spells and insomnia. Even when they step into adulthood, they may still feel agitated or uncomfortable when left alone due to separation anxieties. Despite millions of children whose heartstrings are being tugged at, the consequences of divorce are evaded, or simply shrugged off, by Vietnamese society.

Emotional Dressing

The emotions a child affected by divorce go through are unveiled through the two dresses I created. I feel that this issue is prevalent in Vietnam and is occurring even more frequently now. I strongly wish it would be more regularly spoken about and understood in a more profound way.

Dress #1 has many brightly-colored flowers and a large blank space in the middle. The vivid flower prints on the dress symbolizes the boundless, vibrant and carefree life of a child who is filled with buoyancy and hopefulness, while the white canvas implies their purity and innocence. This dress is used to picture the soul of a young child in the pre-divorce stage.

In contrast to the flowers in the Dress#1, Dress #2's flowers are black and their shapes are created by formless lines. Furthermore, purple and black were chosen to evoke confusion and melancholy. I added a black ruffle drooping down on the shoulder as an imagery of anxiety and sadness weaving into their lives as they lock away their little, fragile hearts. However, despite its gloominess, the presence of flowers represents a spark of hope that will never be out of sight.

Divorces are best avoided, but if it is inevitable, there is still an opportunity for the child to flourish, and the solution is love and communication. By making the child feel the love they deserve, and continuing their permanent relationship with both parents, they most likely won't have to go through the aforementioned emotional disruptions. Supporting the child through these tough times together will make a huge difference in their lives.

Divorce can be seen as a solution for parents during conflict, but they may not have realized that by taking this quick route, it could damage their child's future. Couples that are headed for divorce can recover, and some can find better marriages than before. Parents should closely consider whether a divorce is worth it before signing the papers, as they could also be signing away the joyousness of their child's life. ■



Dress #2

Braving a New World

Former junior high school students open up about their first experience with the internet in Vietnam

TEXT BY **DANG MINH TUAN**

I RUSHED HOME after class, said hi to mom, grabbed a quick bite, ran to my room, threw my schoolbag on the floor and sat down in front of the computer. The CPU started, the screen lit, and I would sit there at that exact position for at least five hours, drowning myself in that whole new world across the screen. It was 2005. I was 12, free and more alive than I've ever felt before.

That was a typical day in my life 10 years ago. I was an online game addict, and a proud one, too. In that virtual world I was a hero – someone who was stronger, braver and much more powerful than the



real me could ever be. I battled against other warriors, defeated monsters and demons of all kinds, gathered rewards whenever a mission was accomplished, hunted rare equipment that only the best of the best could lay his hand on. In my own mind, I was omnipotent. In fact, once I stepped foot inside that virtual world, I could become whoever I wanted to be. Why be an ordinary junior high student living in Saigon, suffering all the pressures of studying more than eight hours a day, when I can live another life in the land of heroes and dragons? For my 12-year-

In that virtual world I was a hero – someone who was stronger, braver and much more powerful than the real me could ever be.

old self, this miraculous thing called ‘The Internet’ that daddy hooked up one evening had been the best present ever.

As a hero on my virtual journey, I wasn’t alone. There was a huge community of online gamers and we gathered on platforms called forums. “You could ask for all kinds of information on those forums and people would answer in less than an hour or so,” remarks Son Le, a fellow gamer of mine who is currently a student at RMIT Vietnam. “There were forums for anything, from music, movies, fan clubs and sports to technology, and even my junior high school had its own forum.”

The forums were our hub of information before we discovered Google. Son himself was an active member of six different forums. “Sometimes people would start a random post on their daily life and others would come flooding in to reply whatever, pretty much the same mechanism as that of Facebook I guess,” he adds. “I didn’t have many friends back then so I considered the forum members my friends. I would feel sad if my post didn’t have many views or replies so I would constantly refresh the page hoping for some.”

Call me Yahoo

For others, the internet had much more to offer. “Yahoo was the craze back then,” says Tram Nguyen, now a student at Stony Brook University in the US. “I loved it so much I wanted to change my name to ‘Yahoo’ and I would ask my parents and friends to call me so.”

Tram was a close friend of mine back then, and yes, I did call her “Yahoo.” She was my class’ queen of blogging on Yahoo 360° – the super popular, and also the first-ever, blogging platform of the time. “I spent most of my time after class updating my blog, improving its design and stalking other people’s blogs,” she recalls. “I couldn’t help it, you know. I was normally a shy kid so the whole blogging thing really allowed me to express myself and have others acknowledge my existence.”

It was also Tram who introduced me to Yahoo! Messenger. I found it fun to chat with my friends now and then but, for her, she was aiming to earn another title – the class’ queen of Yahoo! Messenger. “I would chat with several of my friends at the same time and somehow the

conversation would never die unless I was too sleepy to keep it going,” giggles Tram. “It was much easier talking via a screen than directly in person, and I just loved the emoticons and online teen code so much that I would use them in my daily life.” That had also become one of her trademark; hearing someone say “*hem bí*” instead of “*không biết*” and you could be sure that was our queen.

We were only three out of a countless number of others whose lives had been impacted by the mighty internet during its rapid growth in Vietnam in the mid-2000s. It lured kids, teenagers and even adults in front of the computers, sitting there for hours, and sometimes, for days. There were boys who would kill and steal just to sustain the life of their virtual characters in game, while their bodies started to shiver, craving for a rest from the screen. There were girls who ran away from home, searching for strangers on random chatrooms to come and pay VND50,000 for her fee at an internet café, all that in exchange for her body. Employees started to neglect their jobs, kids stopped going to schools and families began to break. The local news was flooded with calamities. People were warning each other about ‘the internet,’ about how it could take away anything it touched.

And no, it wasn’t the internet’s fault. Now that I am 22 and a bit wiser, thinking back, I realized that we had taken advantage of the internet to hide away from reality because it was easier living in the cyber world, because it was too difficult to get up every single day to face ourselves. With the internet, we had found joy. But it didn’t last long.

Son almost got expelled from school for beating up a classmate who had trash talked him on a forum.

Tram was bullied because people didn’t like what she wrote on her blog.

And I was hospitalized after spending 12 straight hours hunting a rare item. I was so close to getting it, I swear! Having it would make me stronger, allowing me to explore undiscovered lands, to smash monsters with ease, to be admired by fellow players, to stand on top of the world.

Stepping inside this world, I could become anyone who I wanted to be, right? Anyone but me. ■



The Cat's Meo

Curtailing the overpopulation of cats in Vietnam



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

WHY ARE A large number of cats (*meo*) being abandoned in Vietnam? Why do these 'little tigers' suffer the fate of being consumed in the beginning of a lunar month thinking this ritual will eliminate last month's bad luck and raise one's luck in the new? Another black mark against cats in Vietnam is the sound of the word "*meo*"; it's similar to the word "*ngheo*" ("poor"). Conversely, "*cho*" (dog) sounds like "*giàu*" (rich) - an unfortunate disadvantage for cats.

I like cats. A lot. I admire their feline capabilities, physical prowess and beauty. They also drive me crazy with their stubbornness, aloofness and

uncanny nature to disrupt every aspect of my life. Little do we know they do this on purpose. They say we are a dog's master, but we are only amusement for cats. In my previous article I wrote about the importance of sterilizing dogs, however, in regards to cats, there is an even greater need to do so because Vietnam is facing a cat overpopulation crisis. If this article can prevent one more person from finding a bag of abandoned kittens, which occurs almost on a daily basis, I would be grateful.

A cat, whether male or female, in pursuit of sex is extremely annoying. The guttural sounds of being in heat are

similar to wailing: loud and persistent. Male cats mark territory by spraying urine, female cats, to a lesser extent, usually target you and your belongings.

Female felines reach sexual maturity between five and eight months. An unspayed female goes into a heat cycle every few weeks and can give birth to appropriately 12 to 15 kittens a year. These same kittens, if left unspayed, will repeat the same birthing numbers as their mother - multiply this by several hundred unspayed females and the numbers would be in the thousands in a very short period of time - truly staggering!

Sterilizing a cat is a basic procedure that prevents the production of hormones controlling the cat's sex drive and prevents unwanted pregnancies. Cats must be healthy and female cats should not be operated on during their heat cycle. The surgery can also control aggressive behavior associated with sexual maturity and can reduce the risk of certain life threatening diseases in older life. Most people acquire cats without knowing their history and whether they have similar bloodlines. Inbreeding produces cats that are physically deformed with genetic diseases. For example, an abnormally curled tail is not cute; it's a result of inbreeding that will develop into medical problems in the future.

Many local animal rescue organizations offer affordable sterilization programs and there are many vet clinics available in Saigon that perform this operation. I strongly believe sterilizing kittens before they reach sexually maturity should be mandatory. ■



All Work and No Play...

"Play is the highest form of research."
– Albert Einstein



Rebecca Lambton is the new Head of Early Years at Saigon Star International School.

DURING THE FIRST five years of a child's life, they learn more than at any other time in their life. That's why it's so important to 'get it right' in the early years.

So, 'Where do we begin?' I hear you ask. 'All they do is play!' I hear you say. Well actually, you are correct, and that is exactly how it should be. Play is how young children explore and learn about the world around them. It is through play that children engage in problem solving, test out ideas, ask questions and build new understanding.

Remember the days when you were trying to figure out how to build a den using only a bed sheet? Or cast your mind back to the time you needed to invite all of your teddies to a party but didn't have enough plates for your guests? For children, no doubt, these felt like very serious matters, and indeed they were, but unknowingly, they were also filled with many learning opportunities, rich in math and literacy.

In fact, play is recognized as so important to children's well-being and development that it is set down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). You won't be surprised to learn then that play is also a fundamental commitment within the English Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum.

Play-based learning, then, should be recognized as a positive approach to teaching and learning, particularly in the Early Years. Therefore, teachers and parents need to facilitate appropriate learning experiences and guide children towards activities that will support them in growing into confident learners.

As many parents and teachers would agree, attempting to sit a five-year-old at a desk for hours at a time just isn't going to work! The key, therefore, to capturing a young child's interest and participation in learning is, indeed, through play.

Finding the balance between adult direction and child initiation is key. Play without adults can be rich and purposeful, however, after a period of time it can begin to lack purpose or become a repetitive activity which



is 'hands-on, brains-off.' At the other end of the scale, too much tightly-directed activity deprives children of the opportunity to engage actively with their learning.

As an example, Early Years Teachers at Saigon Star are encouraged to develop Role Play Areas that will encourage pupils to engage with learning experiences linked to their current interests and learning needs. Last term, for example, a cinema area (complete with popcorn stand) was built to promote opportunities for the children to practice their communication, language and literacy skills. Just imagine all the magical moments that were showcased: re-telling stories that we had learnt, using puppets that we had made, deciding on 'prices' and calculating entry 'fees' to see the shows. The children were even able to script their own films and explore using ICT by filming them on an iPad.

This kind of learning creates core memories which excite and enthuse children into wanting to explore more. It also allows adults to delicately balance the see-saw of finding the 'right moment'

to join in, to ask questions and to model new ideas.

While we were all experts at playing once upon a time. Here are a few tips to help you get involved next time a five-year-old hands you a toy train and invites you to join in.

- Be enthusiastic. If you're not having fun, you're out of the game. You'll also be modeling confidence and conviction of an idea.

- Comment on what is happening. Like a narrator, try to describe what the child is doing. For example, "I can see your train is on the track." This will also give your child the opportunity to either confirm or correct your statement. You will most likely be told very quickly what you should be doing next! Modeling good speaking and listening skills can take place here.

- Let your imagination go wild. Don't be afraid to pretend. Any object can be anything in play. Take that cardboard box and make it an airplane. Creativity is born through this kind of 'out of the box' thinking. ■

>>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.

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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



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



International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

Vietnam's only international school offering a U.S. curriculum for children 18 months to 11 years old within a 100% English language environment. With a library containing over 13,500 English books and more than 60% of students achieving above grade level English, ISSP graduates are well prepared for secondary school at ISHCMC or ISHCMC – American Academy.

92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh

+84 (8) 2222 7788/99

admissions@issp.edu.vn

www.issp.edu.vn



Saigon Star International School

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

Residential Area No.5,

Thanh My Loi Ward, D2

3742 STAR / 3742 7827

www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



The American School

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



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28 Vo Trung Toan, D2

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The International School Ho Chi Minh City – American Academy

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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.aivietnam.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

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www.montessori.edu.vn



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