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VIETNAM

APRIL 2016

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City on the Verge



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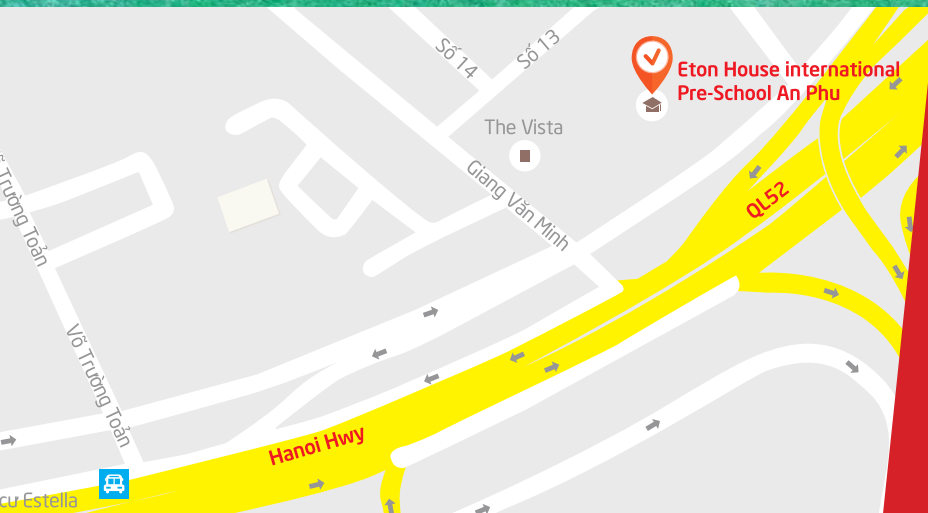
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What's on this month...

APRIL
8&9



What: Cinderella
Where: Ho Chi Minh City Opera
About: The classic ballet *Cinderella* is Norwegian choreographer Johanne Jakhelln Constant's success with the Ho Chi Minh City Ballet Symphony Orchestra and Opera (HBSO). The magical world of fairy tales coupled with Sergei Prokofiev's fantastic score has attracted audiences since its Ho Chi Minh City premiere in 2013 and has since become one of HBSO's most awaited annual performances.
Contact: Visit hbso.org.vn for more info

APRIL 9

What: Outsiders
Where: Saigon Rangers (5/7 Nguyen Sieu, D1); 1pm
About: Hardcore and metal music fans can rejoice as Outsiders is organizing a large line-up of 13 bands from Indonesia, Malaysia, Hanoi, Singapore, the Philippines and Saigon.
Contact: Visit www.saiгонrangerbar.com for more info

APRIL 9

What: Red Bull Champion Dash
Where: Phu My Hung, D7
About: The course is designed to encourage teamwork, requires limited training, but remains challenging enough to provide a real sense of accomplishment at the finish. Join thousands of others in leaping through flames, climbing walls and barricades, balancing, splashing and swinging their way through obstacle courses.
Contact: Visit www.123go.vn/en/champion-dash for more info

APRIL 16

What: Color Me Run
Where: 168 Truong Van Bang, D2
About: If you enjoy a colorful explosion of fun and fitness, then you can't beat this event for both. You and your friends can jog, walk or run your way through the course. Mexican-American DJ Deorro will perform as the star attraction.
Contact: Visit www.colormerun.vn for more info



APRIL 16 & 17

What: Ta Lai Trophy
Where: Ta Lai Longhouse
About: Ta Lai Trophy is back with its third edition in Cat Tien National Park. Come and test yourself in the jungles of one of Vietnam's biggest national parks, only three hours from Ho Chi Minh City. With two difficulty levels to choose from and a new race course for children, this year will be bigger and better than ever.
Contact: Visit www.talai-adventure.vn for more info



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Black Tie Charity Party

Renaissance International School Saigon

Continuing chain of charity activities, Renaissance International School Saigon collaborates with Habitat organisation to build homes and schools. Habitat is the organisation which helps the poorest and most vulnerable people lift themselves out of poverty by partnering with them to improve their homes or to build schools. On May 6th 2016, Renaissance will organise Black Tie charity party at the school to raise fund for helping them. In this party, attendees are encouraged to donate or simply to buy the ticket to attend and be a part of the auction. The revenue from the party and the auction will be drawn to Habitat charity with the follow up from Renaissance International School Saigon and also be published on Renaissance International school official website and Oi Magazine. We strongly believe this charity will develop the social empathy and responsibility implicit in the school's core value of dedicated service.

Join with us in this meaningful activity and build up the better community.

For donation or ticket requirement, please contact Ms. My at
mydvk@renaissance.edu.vn | Tel: (08) 3773 3171 - ext:219

**2016
May 6th**
from 6:30 PM
until late



APRIL 16

What: Get Wet: Songkran Water and Music Festival

Where: Nha Van Hoa Thanh Nien (4 Pham Ngoc Thach, D1)

About: Every year, scores of people across Southeast Asia celebrate the Thai water festival, Songkran. But if you cannot be in Bangkok in April, Saigon Outcast will be hosting one in Ho Chi Minh City. In addition to bringing together some of the best food and beverage vendors, Saigon Outcast will also have top local DJs and international DJs to keep the party going. If dancing is not your strong suit, put on your wetsuit and take a jump in the bouncy castle or slip'n'slide.

Contact: Visit www.saiگونoutcast.com for more info

APRIL 21-23

What: Cosmobeaute

Where: Saigon Exhibition and Convention Center (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7)

About: Cosmobeaute is a beauty trade exhibition in Vietnam that has attracted more than 10,000 visitors and international traders, alongside 130 exhibitors from countries such as China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, the US, and first time participants from Hungary, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. The three-day event allows visitors, exhibitors, speakers and delegates opportunities to network, discuss current trends and gain insightful knowledge through product launches, demonstrations and workshops.

Contact: Visit www.cosmobeauteasia.com for more info

APRIL 22

What: Pablo Valentino

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

About: Pablo is a talented DJ from France and has been DJing since 1997. A well-traveled and knowledgeable music collector, Pablo loves to play across the board, from jazz and funk to house and hip-hop. He is also the founder of FACES Records – featuring releases from Simbad and Danilo Plessow's Motor City Drum Ensemble/Inverse Cinematics aliases – and releasing 12"s under his Creative Swing Alliance, Kid Swing and Hipster Wonkaz pseudonyms. Pablo also co-runs the buy-on-sight MCDE imprint with Danilo and has been influential in the label gaining cult status with its *Raw Cuts* series.

Contact: Call 3925 9415 for more info



APRIL
23

What: Farmers' Got Power Exhibition

Where: Galerie Quynh (Level 2, 151/3 Dong Khoi, D1)

About: Nguyen Manh Hung is one of Vietnam's most accomplished young artists. For his second solo exhibition at the gallery, Nguyen has created a new body of sculptures, paintings and photos depicting an absurd world under constant threat where the past, present and future collapse into one perpetual cycle. Images of soldiers, weapons, planes and fire trucks suggest a sense of urgency, calamity and danger, yet the addition of domesticated creatures (turtles, chickens and even a snail) pose little menace. Ambiguous violence is suggested within a calm, subdued atmosphere. Through keen, satirical humor with elusive narratives, the artist looks at issues of power, control and protection. A reference to the reality TV show *America's Got Talent* (the *Got Talent* franchise is broadcast in Vietnam as *Vietnam's Got Talent*), *Farmers' Got Power* is also an awkward phrasing of what could be a public slogan or comedic film. Are Nguyen's farmers – in the guise of the domesticated animals – the heroes who save the world?

Contact: Visit www.galeriequynh.com for more info

APRIL 23

What: ND_Baumecker

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

About: ND brings together completely different tracks in a surprisingly inclusive way. After ND played at every club in Frankfurt regularly (Box, XS, Music Hall, Dorian Grey, etc), he moved to Heidelberg where he started promoting a club night at HD800 together with Dirk Mantei aka D-Man. After a short stop in Mannheim, ND finally came to Berlin in 2004 where he not only continued to run his label Freundinnen (releases by Isolée, Snax, Lopazz, Ruede Hagelstein or Motivi:Tuntematon), but also picked up a residency at Panorama Bar.

Contact: Call 3925 9415 for more info

APRIL
28-30



What: Reunification Celebration In The Sky

Where: Cay Bang, Thu Thiem (Across the Saigon River from Me Linh Square)

About: One of the world's most exclusive and spectacular dining experiences is coming to Vietnam. Events In The Sky are holding their first-ever public dining series in Saigon, taking diners up to 60 meters high in the air where they will enjoy amazing cuisine, fine wines, sensational cocktails and superb 360 degree views of the city.

Over the three nights there will be a choice of cocktail & canapés and dinner flights featuring award-winning local and international chefs and guest star mixologist. The highlight of the three-night event will be the special Reunification Fireworks Dinner where guests will experience the fireworks display in spectacular fashion, up in the sky. Tickets will be available from Ticketbox.

Contact: For more info, visit EventsInTheSky.vn

APRIL
29



What: A Night of American Music

Where: Ho Chi Minh City Opera House; VND200,000; 8pm

About: A Night of American Music concert will feature internationally-famed Vietnamese-French violinist Stephane Tran Ngoc. Stephane, a world-class violinist, has won prestigious awards such as the Lipizer and the Paganini at the Aspen Music Festival and the Grand Prix Award at the Long-Thibaud International Competition in 1990. The audience will enjoy Stephane playing in Erich Wolfgang Korngold's Conerto for Violin in D minor, with the accompaniment of the HBSO Symphony Orchestra, as well as works from American composers Benjamin Britten and Howard Hanson.

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

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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

GALLERY VILLAS AT THE HO TRAM STRIP

The Ho Tram Project Company announced the opening of sales on the latest feature of its Ho Tram Strip development, the Gallery Villas (www.galleryvillashotram.com). The 60 three-bedroom villas join The Grand Ho Tram Strip and The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip, as part of the nation's leading beachside destination. Designed by DWP, the Gallery Villas have been woven seamlessly into the course's rolling dunescape, with their curved sandy rooftops giving way to floor to ceiling glass which both bathes the homes in natural light and allows residents to drink in the views of the East Sea and the course itself.

The Gallery Villas range from 800 to 1700 square meters and are set over two floors, including terraces and private swimming pools. Interiors have been meticulously thought-out to convey a unique interpretation of a contemporary luxury seaside lifestyle for the most discerning of residents.



All owners have 43 year residential golf memberships included with the home, allowing them to tee-off from their doorsteps at one of the world's most acclaimed new courses. This same affiliation with The Grand and The Bluffs sees owners have five-star

service at their doorsteps, including privileged to access to the resort's facilities including swimming pools, kid's center, gym, The Spa, a broad range of luxurious restaurants as well as the Strip's 2.2 kilometer private beach.

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MAD HOUSE D7

With the success of its first location in District 2, MAD House has decided to open a second one in District 7 (Capri by Fraser, No.2 Street C, D7). Diners can expect modern Scandinavian dishes with Vietnamese twists.

DELICIOUS ESCAPE

The Delicious Escape package at Pullman Danang Beach Resort includes 23 percent off on stays of two nights or more, breakfast buffet, 20 percent off on food and beverage at any outlets and late check-out. Prices start at USD194nett/room/night; email info@pullman-danang.com for more info.

SUMMER LEARNERS

Renaissance International School Saigon (RISS) will open their Summer Learners Programme from July 4 to August 12. Now in its fourth year, the Summer Learners Programme excites, challenges and engages pupils. Learning in an international environment is an incredible experience for young people, and RISS have mixed an academically-strong program with the best activity providers in the city. The program also includes British Curriculum with English language learning, sports and arts. Scholarships are now available, early bird discounts apply and complimentary TOEFL Primary and TOEFL Junior test for six weeks study. For more info, email admission@renaissance.edu.vn or call 3773 3171 ext: 120/121/122



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TROI OI!

The country in numbers

5800

HOUSEHOLDS along canals in Ho Chi Minh City are expected to be relocated in advance of a major aquatic environment improvement project. The primary goal of this third phase is to dredge the Doi and Te canals and

upgrade 13.5 kilometers of roadway that run alongside them. The improvements hope to allow an unobstructed flow of water to eradicate flooding. The project is expected to affect an area of 1,600ha along the canals that run through Districts 4, 7, 8, and Binh Chanh, relocating 29 offices and 6,200 households, 400 of which have already been relocated as part of phases one and two. Compensation is estimated at around VND4,500 billion and discussions are underway to combine the relocation plan with the construction of new high-rises in cleared areas for displaced residents.



7 UNUSED WATER TOWERS will be demolished in Ho Chi Minh City. Saigon Water Corporation is devising plans to remove seven of the eight mushroom-shaped water reservoirs that have been left unused for 40 years. The seven reservoirs are located in Districts 4, 5, 6, 11, Go Vap, Phu Nhuan and Binh Thanh. After their removal, the areas will be converted into underground water reservoirs to supply water for extinguishing fire and chloride filling stations to enhance water quality. The reservoir near Ho Con Rua (Turtle Lake) in District 1 is the only one that will remain untouched.



800kg

GAUR died in Vietnam last month. A huge gaur was found dead in a nature sanctuary in Dong Nai, the second death of the largest extant bovine in the same area in less than a month.

The animal was seen roaming around normally in

the Dong Nai nature and culture conservation area one day before it was found dead. The gaur's body was almost intact, except for two cuts on the surface of its right shoulder and a wound in the abdomen, said Le Viet Dung, deputy head of the forest management agency. Forest management officers are still investigating the cause of the death and have not given any further details.

The gaur's internal organs have been taken away for an autopsy. On February 28, forest protection officers also discovered a dead female gaur when they were on a patrol at the nature sanctuary. The 200kg female was fatally shot, with two legs and part of its body butchered and the internal organs already decomposing. The species has been listed as vulnerable on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List since 1986, as the population decline in parts of the species' range is likely to be well over 70 percent during the last three generations.

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500

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED DOUCS were discovered in Vietnam. A population of 500 gray-shanked doucs, one of the world's 25 most endangered primates, has been found in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Doucs, or douc lagurs, are native to Southeast Asia and consist of three species: red-shanked, gray-shanked, and black-shanked doucs.

They generally have dappled gray bodies, black hands and feet and white cheeks.

The gray-shanked douc lagur is native to Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Kon Tum and Gia Lai. They feed primarily on leaves and live in tribes as large as 50 individuals, though tribe numbers have been greatly reduced to four to 15 individuals in recent years. Gray-shanked doucs, along with three other primates native to Vietnam, have consistently been listed among the world's 25 most endangered primates since 2000 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission Primate Specialist Group, the International Primatological Society, and Conservation International.

96%

OF VIETNAMESE perceive themselves as middle class. Most Vietnamese think they are among the middle class, while those whose income actually qualifies them for such a category only make up half of the population, a Japan-based think tank has said. A person with an annual income ranging from USD5,000 to USD35,000 is considered belonging to the middle class, and nearly 50 percent of Vietnam's population of 90 million people

meet such a criterion, according to the Hakuho Institute of Life and Living ASEAN (HILL ASEAN).

However, 96 percent of the Vietnamese surveyed in a HILL ASEAN research see themselves as part of the middle class, regardless of their actual income, according to the findings.

The discrepancy between the middle class by income and that by self-perception in Vietnam is broader than those in four other Southeast Asian countries, which were also mentioned in the research. The figures in Singapore are 45 percent vs. 85 percent, and the respective statistics for Malaysia and Indonesia are 46 percent vs. 79 percent, and 56 percent vs. 72 percent, according to the study. The last country in the research, Thailand, has less discrepancy, 72 percent by income compared to 80 percent by self-perception.

USD135,000

Was spent on one of Mobifone's prized super SIM phone number. "I purchased this SIM (0933 999 999) from a wealthy real estate developer in Hanoi in 2013 for over

VND1 billion," said Do Trong Hieu, former owner of the prized phone number and director of Me Linh Commercial Services. "A man from Thai Nguyen just purchased it for personal use. It's a rare kind of phone number, as the number nine means everlasting and the number three means fortune. Thirty-nine is a symbol of wealth, so the person who buys it will receive lots of luck."

The new owner of the phone number also confirmed its purchase, saying that he had previously used only Viettel numbers beginning with 097 and 098. "I rarely resell a SIM I purchase for personal use, unless a more attractive SIM number comes along," the new owner told *VnExpress*.

This was Mobifone's most expensive SIM sale in 2015, but you'll be pleased to learn that it's not the highest of all. In March, the chairman of Mai Linh Group transferred his own "super SIM" number - 09 89 999 999 - to a wealthy Saigon resident to the tune of nearly VND5 billion.




MOUNTAIN RETREAT
vietnamese restaurant

36 Le Loi St,
Ben Nghe Ward, D1
10:00AM—9:30PM



ORANGE



Director Courtney Marsh and Producer Jerry Franck
on their 2016 Academy Award-nominated documentary
Chau, Beyond the Lines

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD
IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

THERE'S A LOT of warmth out there for American documentary *Chau, Beyond the Lines*, which picked up an Academy Award nomination earlier this year as the latest in a string of accolades for a film that has effectively bent the rules of its genre. Dealing with the human impact of the chemical defoliant Agent Orange – used extensively by the American military in parts of Vietnam during the wartime era – first-time filmmaker Courtney Marsh tells a

moving story that avoids overdramatizing its own emotional material in focusing on the simple tale of one victim, born disabled after his mother was exposed to Agent Orange, and his undeterred objective to pursue a career in art.

For Courtney, this storytelling strategy was a very conscious one. Early on in the production of the film – which wasn't originally intended to touch on the issue of Agent Orange at all – she found herself

gravitating toward telling a positive, inspiring story about children living in a disabled shelter without whitewashing or sugar-coating their situation. Her intention, it seems, has been to stand in contrast to films that paint a somewhat maudlin picture of their subject matter – something she feels can serve to alienate audiences.

"I personally don't want to just present a hopeless scenario," she explains. "People often do not respond positively or actively

“We can’t relate because most of us don’t know what being a disabled kid (oftentimes, orphan) growing up in a care center in Vietnam feels like. There is a major degree of separation. But when I stayed in the camp, I felt instantly connected to the kids – because that is what they were: kids. They laughed and played and fought and loved soccer. **I could relate to all of those things.**”

—COURTNEY MARSH,
DIRECTOR OF *CHAU, BEYOND THE LINES*



to those situations. I think positivity and hope breed active involvement and genuine concern. That is what I am after. Had I had the opportunity to tell those stories of the other kids in the camp, I would still have kept Chau as the center thread to the piece. His story is incredible and needed to be told.”

What is incredible about Chau’s story is exactly that which is most unexceptional about him – he is an ordinary human being who simply wants to follow his ambitions. Never having known a life without disability, it never seems to occur to Chau that his dreams are in any way unreasonable – he has an obvious talent as an artist, and can paint perfectly well by using a brush in his mouth – so he simply sees no barrier where others see an impossible road ahead.

“Many films have been made about Agent Orange, which continue to show

these affected kids in a light of sadness, deep within the looming shadow of Agent Orange,” observes Courtney. “We can’t relate because most of us don’t know what being a disabled kid (oftentimes, orphan) growing up in a care center in Vietnam feels like. There is a major degree of separation. But when I stayed in the camp, I felt instantly connected to the kids – because that is what they were: kids. They laughed and played and fought and loved soccer. I could relate to all of those things.”

“In any film I make, I want to get to the core of someone,” she explains. “Despite our appearance, race, gender, religion, we are, at the end of the day, all people. By telling Chau’s personal journey, I think it strengthened the film because his story is universal and relatable. Chau follows the traditional arc of a literary hero: someone striving towards a worthy goal, overcoming seemingly insurmountable

odds, all in order to achieve it.”

The film’s producer, Jerry Franck, joined the eight-year-long journey to document Chau’s life at the midway point while production was on hold following the filmmaker and her subject being temporarily out of touch. “When I saw the footage for the first time, I couldn’t believe what I was seeing,” he says. “Some scenes were very emotionally affecting because of the extreme nature of these disabilities. Once I started digging deeper, and Courtney would tell me a lot of the backstories, I got immediately interested in helping to see this through. It was personal because I felt that I could bring a new point of view to the project and that I needed to share it with the general public. Like myself, I quickly realized that most people didn’t know what Agent Orange was.”

“We had secured a number of distribution deals before the Oscar



Nomination already,” he continues, “which was a great confirmation that people responded well to the film. Once we did get nominated, the attention on it grew substantially, and it got us more distribution opportunities, mainly theatrically and also for the educational market.”

The overwhelmingly positive audience reaction to the film, culminating in the Oscar nomination, has not only catapulted both Chau and Courtney into the limelight, it has also drawn new attention to the Agent Orange issue. “On a completely tangible scale, the documentary has opened up numerous, countless doors for me as a filmmaker,” says Courtney, “from representation to new projects. On an intangible level, telling Chau’s story has really taught me confidence, perseverance and positivity. I used to be a more pessimistic person, but now I find myself always battling through negativity to get to where I need to be.”

In terms of the cause, positivity is not inappropriate – the contamination in Vietnam is something that can be dealt with very efficiently by continuing cleanup efforts, something that Courtney hopes the film will

draw attention to and perhaps garner further support for. “The cleanup is effective and will take a long time,” she says, “but Vietnam and the US are working together to do it. The biggest project is the Bien Hoa Airbase, which is just starting. Until then, people in Bien Hoa shouldn’t eat any fish or ducks from the lakes around the airbase.”

Although Courtney is reluctant to take any credit for Chau’s successes in the art career he built out of his own determination, the film’s reception has been instrumental in elevating Chau’s achievements, expanding the market for his artworks abroad. Chau now produces art from his own apartment in District 10, while Courtney and Jerry continue to work to augment the impact of the documentary.

“We are seeing this film through and want it to reach the maximum amount of people,” says Jerry. “A film usually only has a few years of intense life and then it slows down significantly, so we’re exploiting it to the best of our abilities.” Courtney, in the meantime, is currently developing her first feature-length narrative screenplay – the duo are hoping to go into production on that film within the next couple of years. ■



WATERLOGGED

Protecting your deposit from an unreasonable landlord



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,

I currently rent a serviced apartment in District 2. About a month ago, I came back from work one evening to find pots and pans floating around in my kitchen. The service pipe had burst and the first thing I did was call my landlord to get it fixed. He sent someone to clean up the mess but they left the pipe untouched. After a few days with no access to water and no reply from the landlord, I finally decided to have it repaired by someone else. Now the landlord refuses to pay me back for the cost of the repair and, on top of that, he told me he will deduct the cleaning cost from my lease deposit. What are my rights under Vietnamese law?

I CAN ASSURE you that you're not the only one fighting with your landlord over rights and obligations under a lease agreement. If you want to know about your rights as a lessee then have a look at the Civil Code of Vietnam. One of the fundamental principles of the code, which is scheduled to be replaced in 2017, is the freedom of contract - this means that you and your landlord are free, at least to a large extent, to agree on whatever terms and conditions you like. Ideally, I would like to have a look at your lease first before giving you any definitive advice.

Having said that, I can tell you some of the basics your landlord must provide: 1) he will deliver your serviced apartment to you strictly in accordance with the lease agreement, and 2) he will ensure you an un-interfered use of the apartment during the term of your lease. And relevant to your flooding situation, he must make reparations to your apartment when there is any damage. You have the right to request the landlord to do so, you may do it

yourself, or you may assign the job to another person and demand the landlord to repay the expenses and to compensate you for any damages suffered. This means as long as you can show that the damage to your apartment was not caused by you, and that the landlord didn't make the required reparations even after several reminders from your side, you are fully entitled to ask someone else to repair the service pipe and to reclaim the expenses. Furthermore, in certain cases where the landlord fails to repair damages in the apartment this can be a valid ground for you to unilaterally terminate your lease and claim for damages.

Now let's turn to the deposit that you paid upon entering into the lease agreement. As mentioned before, it is the landlord's obligation to repair the apartment and - unless the damage is caused by you - the landlord cannot charge you for the costs involved: neither directly, nor indirectly, via the deposit.

In accordance with Vietnamese law, if you've performed all your obligations under the lease agreement (paid your rent every month, returned all the inventory the landlord provided you, etc) then the landlord should either repay you the deposit or set it off against the rent. As we have seen that the obligation to repair the service pipe was not on your side, so there is no valid ground whatsoever for your landlord to deduct any cleaning and/or reparations costs from your deposit.

Perhaps it doesn't come as a surprise that in Vietnam knowing your rights is one thing and having your rights enforced in practice is something else. So how to get your money back? Of course, filing a lawsuit is - technically speaking - a possibility. But when you consider the time and costs involved, as well as the lack of transparency in the legal system, starting court proceedings is not what I would recommend. Instead, your best option is to sit down with your landlord, enjoy some *tra sen* and discuss the situation. Keep your rights in mind, consider which concessions (if any) you are willing to make and try to find an amicable solution.

The next time you sign a lease, make sure that the rights and obligations of both parties are clearly written down. Furthermore, prepare and sign an inventory list when moving in, and write down the state of the apartment and the inventory as you find it that first day. By doing so, you take away one potential reason for your landlord to keep some of your deposit when it's time to check out. Best of luck!

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. ■

Crowd-Pleaser

The ups and downs of crowdfunding in Vietnam

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH**

DESPITE POPULAR BELIEF, crowdfunding is not a modern financial model. In 1850 Auguste Comte created a scheme to issue notes for the public support of his further work as a philosopher. The *Première Circulaire Annuelle adressée par l'auteur du Systeme de Philosophie Positive* was published on March 14, 1850 and several of these notes, blank and with sums have survived. However, there is no doubt that the rise of sites such as Kickstarter, Indiegogo and Gofundme has brought this alternative financing option to the 21st century and a far wider audience. Since 2009, hundreds of thousands of projects have found investors through crowdfunding and the number will only continue to increase.

But what is crowdfunding? It's a way to raise money, awareness and support for a project from the people around you and in return they receive benefits. However, despite its popularity internationally, crowdfunding is underused in Vietnam and the reason for this is the failure of the first Vietnamese crowdfunding platform. Founded in 2013, IG9 (a shortened form of 'ignite'), was hailed as the vanguard of the modern crowdfunding model and a robust startup in Vietnam. It had a strong team

at its core as well as the backing of an entire community of young, tech-savvy Vietnamese entrepreneurs. It was featured in many local media outlets and even received international attention. Despite signs of success, the company was hit with accusations of mishandling of funds and a general lack of responsibility to its followers and supporters. Its business and credibility started to dwindle and in less than a year after launching IG9 quietly faded into obscurity.

Since IG9, a handful of crowdfunding platforms, including Fund Start and Charity Map, have launched but none has achieved commercial successes until this year.

A Case of Cultivated Success

Before 2016, Comicola (www.comicola.com) was a name known only amongst comic book fans but earlier this year, it pivoted into the limelight when Long Than Tuong, its signature comic book series, achieved international acclaim as the runner-up in the 9th International Manga Award. Long Than Tuong, an ongoing series with three volumes published so far, is Comicola's biggest commercial crowdfunding success. Its third volume raised USD5,000

within just three days of the project's debut on the company's crowdfunding website. It is not the only success the company has achieved, Comicola has published more than ten comic series through crowdfunding and it is the only company in Saigon where comic book artists can publish their work through crowdfunding.

Hoang Anh Tuan, co-founder of Comicola, believes his team has figured out the keys - community, commercial viability and a harmonious startup ecosystem - to crowdfunding success in Vietnam. "The community is extra important in the crowdfunding model. They are the investors and the customers. They are the ones who decide which contents get published and consumed. They are the ones who decide which projects succeed and which projects fail. Because of those reasons, community management is of vital importance. The community manager needs to maintain a great deal of interaction with the community. He or she needs to listen to the community and ensures its growth. A weak community means less funding and consequently fewer projects. The thing that heralded IG9's end was its failing of its Facebook community. They had thousands of





IMAGE BY ANEESA KARA

people following them but they didn't really do anything for these people aside from posting a few links to press coverage. For weeks before their closure, there were no updates on their page and people's questions on Facebook were left unanswered for months."

Commercial viability, according to Tuan, means high value and responsibility towards a project's supporters and investors. "We study the concept of perks on Indiegogo and Kickstarters. Everybody wants value. Everybody wants bang for their buck. So we vet each project carefully for viability and value. We make sure that we give back to our crowds a bigger value than what they give us."

The last component - a harmonious startup ecosystem - is important to survive and develop. "So far, every project we ran was a success. But between success and long-term survival and growth, there is still a gap. We study the cases of our American friends and behind every success of theirs is a vibrant ecology of startup businesses and entrepreneurs. They work together to survive, grow and thrive. This is no longer the business world of our fathers where it's every man for himself. We need to work together. Vietnam right now lacks that kind of harmonious ecology. Crowdfunding may ensure an initial investment, but each project must find other sources of income to build upon their prior success. This is the last component and the one we are slowly working towards. We aim to connect with more young and new businesses like us and create more opportunities and values."

A Case of Sheer Luck

Unlike Comicola and its cultivated successes,

the story of the Green Bamboo Shelter (www.maiamtrexanh.org) charity fund project is one of luck. One of the oldest charity groups operating out of Saigon, Green Bamboo runs various programs aimed at assisting homeless children. Earlier this year, one of those programs, the Social Progressional Integration project (SPI), was at risk of cancellation because of financial reasons.

"Our biggest donor, the Danish government, recently dropped funding for the SPI due to paperwork complications," explains Aneesa Kara, an officer of the Green Bamboo Shelter and the person behind its first charity crowdfund attempt. "The SPI is a program created to help homeless teenagers in Saigon. These kids aren't your spoilt runaways. They are kids from rural areas who move to Saigon in search of jobs. Because of their age and usually their lack of paperwork, they are open to exploitation and abuse. The SPI is a yearlong program that shelters them, helps them with legal paperwork as well as equips them with the vocational skills that higher paying jobs require. We have maintained this program for years, but this year, because of a complication of paperwork, we lost the majority of our funding and were forced to look for operation money elsewhere."

After months of painfully slow and low-yield fundraising campaigning, Aneesa, on a whim and with low expectations, decided to create a crowdfunding project for the SPI program on Generosity.org, a charity-only branch of Indiegogo. Much to Aneesa's surprise, her project managed to raise USD5,000 in 23 days, half the funding of a year of SPI operation and an amount that normally would require at least four months of traditional campaigning with

donors and partners. "I couldn't believe it at first," says Aneesa. "I spent maybe two hours creating and uploading that project and in return we got donations from everywhere around the world. A man in India, none of us at the Green Bamboo Shelter knows him, donated thousands of dollars to us with no expectations of returns or rewards."

Reflecting on her unexpected success where many other Vietnamese crowdfunding projects have failed, Aneesa says it may be a matter of time and trust. "The crowdfunding platform is a new concept for a lot of people. Up until half a year ago, I had never even heard of Indiegogo. You can't support what you don't know, and naturally you can't trust your credit card details to people or organizations you don't know either. But nowadays in Vietnam, people are getting more used to online transactions. It can be that three years ago was just too soon for crowdfunding to take off in Vietnam."

She also believes scope may be a factor in deciding a project's success or failure. "We didn't expect it but we got our money from many people outside of Vietnam. That's when we realized that even when our shelter is based in Vietnam and helps only Vietnamese children we don't have to limit ourselves to Vietnamese or Vietnam-based donors. People naturally want to help or to be a part of something. Distance or a difference in nationality is not an issue. You just have to make it easy for them to reach out. And isn't that what technology does best? Connect people?"

In the near future, Aneesa and Green Bamboo shelter plan to expand their online presences and crowdfunding to create a stable source of funds for their many charity projects. ■

Moveable Feast

With relish, Saigon embraces the food truck trend

TEXT BY NPD KHANH
IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE



THE FOOD TRUCK concept has been around since 1866 when Charles Goodnight wheeled out his Texas Panhandle Food Wagon, but it has taken over a century and a half for this mobile catering model to transcend its roach-coach classification to become the rich and vibrant gourmet food truck trend that has been taking over the US by storm since 2008. According to *Foodbeast*, there are about three million food trucks operating in America in 2012 alone and, supported by a similarly eye-brow raising number of food truck rallies and parks, this number has only grown since then. Suffice it to say, the food truck business is a fever that doesn't look like it will cool down any time soon.

This month, the fever comes to Saigon in the first-ever gourmet food cart rally in a single space. While the idea of mobile

food has been around for decades in Vietnam, the organizers behind Street Food at Weekends wants to give it a fresh makeover along with the aim of assisting young startups in the food and beverage business. It's a weekly two-day event that will debut April 2nd and 3rd at the Youth Cultural House (4 Pham Ngoc Thach, D1).

"We have three main goals," says Nho Hoang, a manager at the city Youth Cultural House. "One, create a startup environment that encourages young and small businesses. Two, create a new hotspot for urban culture, a place where young people can go to enjoy some good, clean fun. Three, create a new attraction for visiting tourists."

To this end, the event is organized with policies and rules that are fairly inviting and open to most people. Just about anyone, expats included, can apply

for a truck space in the event so long as they have a good food truck concept and design. A VND1.5 million fee is required to take care of overhead costs such as space, water, electricity, security, sanitation and entertainment programs attached with the event.

According to Hoang, there will be 19 food carts serving 60 different dishes and drinks at the event. "We have a variety of things, from milk tea to soda cocktails, from shaken fries to sushi and Korean barbecue," he says. "Food truck... or in the case of Vietnam, food carts, because truck movements in the city are limited due to traffic laws. Most of the dishes we have seen are fairly simple in style and concept. We look forward to nurturing the food cart culture until we can sample some truly gourmet dishes like our friends in America."



Meet the Carters

The Ne'Mer Drinks, the beverage brand and beverage cart, was founded by Nguyen Chi Hoang Nam three years ago. This year, with financial backing, they were able to start traversing the streets selling drinks such as their signature Thai tea and peach tea with homemade all-natural toppings. Nam says his business concept revolves around clean, high quality ingredients and is aware that food hygiene and safety is a big concern right now in Vietnam.

"The beauty of a food cart is in its mobility and low cost setup," he says while pointing at all the brick and mortar restaurants on Huynh Thuc Khang. "This is a gold level location. A tiny shop here costs at least USD2,000 to USD3,000 of rent per month but since we don't actually have a fixed location, we don't

have to pay a dime in rent... and yet we still get to enjoy the benefits of a first-class location."

Instead of opening up a second café Nam opted to set up a drink cart, citing cost as his key motivator. "A café, even on a shoestring budget costs at least VND300 to VND400 million in investment, and about VND20 to VND40 million for monthly upkeep. With that kind of number, I don't know if I'm able to recoup that in less than five years. But a cart costs a tenth of that amount and I can see some money back in a matter of months."

Specializing in flavored fries (cheese, beef, spicy prawns and roasted chicken), **Lapi Shakin' Flavor Fries** started out with one cart two years ago and now owns a small fleet of 23 that roams various Saigon districts and adjacent towns such as Hoc Mon. Founded by

Le Minh Tuan, his first cart cost VND7 million to make and credits his success to the wheel. "Mobility leads to visibility. I realize that very early on. If chain stores have great brand visibility because of their number, then food cart has even greater visibility because they move around from street to street, district to district. That's why I thought this model was perfect for franchising," he explains. "I recouped my initial investment in under two months. From that point on, it's just profit and uncontested growth."

Tuan says his next step, aside from continuing to increase his fleet, is to add more flavors to the menu. "I'm thinking German sausages and something else a little more on the gourmet side. Some people may think it's just fries, but I think, with time and effort, fries can be gourmet too." ■



A woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing dark sunglasses and a black dress with intricate floral and bird embroidery, is sitting on stone steps. The dress features various colorful flowers and birds, including a large white peony and a small bird. She is looking down and adjusting her sunglasses with her right hand.

Black Bird

Usually known for her intricate embroidery technique and bold, bright colors, Thuy Nguyen has decided to move to a darker period with her latest Black Bird collection.







Model **Hoang Oanh**

Photographer **Thong Hoang**

Designer **Thuy Nguyen/
Thuy Design House**

Hair & Makeup **Bao Bao**



MORNING *in the* MOUNTAINS

A solo exhibition of mixed media paintings by Hanoi-based artist
Nguyen The Hung

TEXT BY CRAIG THOMAS

IMAGES PROVIDED BY NGUYEN THE HUNG



BORN AND RAISED in Tuyen Quang Province in Northeastern Vietnam, much of Nguyen The Hung's work is influenced by the cultures and traditions of the many ethnic minority groups that populate the mountains of his native region. "The idea for this collection was born from a volunteer project to teach drawing to children in the Ha Giang Highlands that I participated in two years ago. While teaching the kids some basic skills, we teachers in turn learned from them a pure way of seeing things that we had possibly forgotten," explains Hung. "In this series I have concentrated on observing and depicting the Dao and H'mong ethnic groups. Their individual portraits, marked by a mixture of cheerfulness and shyness, made a strong impression on me. I observed with fascination and delight the way they live in deep communication with

the natural world that surrounds them."

Perhaps best known for his use of *do* paper in many of his earlier collections, the 12 works of *Morning in the Mountains* are an experimental combination of various styles including action painting, *do* paper, traditional lacquer painting and vibrant coloration from contemporary art. The artist used a mix of materials including acrylics, Chinese ink, gold leaf, "cockroach" lacquer paint and photographs for the series. Hung took special care in reproducing each pattern and accessory on the traditional clothing of the ethnic groups depicted.

"I was confused by the intense emotions the people of the mountains engendered in me. They live their lives immersed in nature. The way they eat and drink is etched in my mind. Their charming way of speaking and unique colloquialisms

echo through my thoughts like happy musical notes. I felt that only an action painting style could fully express the joy, excitement and vitality of these special people," says Hung.

With his latest work, Hung once again displays the unique and appealing aesthetic first demonstrated in his well-received 2011 collection *And Flowers Showered*. Most impressively, he evidences his determination to explore new materials, subjects and modes of expression as part of his continuing evolution as a visual artist. In addition to his work as a visual artist, Hung has also participated in various projects in music, dance, theatre and fashion. The artist lives and works in Hanoi.

Morning in the Mountains is Hung's fourth solo exhibition with Craig Thomas Gallery (165 Calmette, D1; until April 21). ■



TRAIPSING THROUGH THE city's must-see destinations, I stumbled across FITO's Museum of Traditional Vietnamese Medicine (41D Hoang Du Khuong) in District 10. Everything from hand-carved wooden photographs to manuscripts in ancient Chu-nom language – a rather confusing Vietnamese language using Chinese characters – are on display. While the bulk of the museum's contents explore the medicinal value of Vietnam's plentiful flora, it was the archaic acupuncture charts that stood out among the displays. As I gazed at the display, a curator approached. "Vietnamese schools of medicine were heavily involved in trading knowledge with those of China throughout the second century B.C. to the ninth A.D. During this trade of expertise, both schools ascertained the preventative, healing and curative powers of natural remedies," she explained.

I wondered why traditional Vietnamese medicine wasn't given its credit with that of big-brother China. Especially since, she continued to tell me, "they also began charting the body's many systems, including those beyond the understanding of Western medicine; the flow of life force energy, you may have heard of it as ch'i, along an invisible system of 12 main meridians. When these channels were mapped, so were over 365 points and the genesis of acupuncture."

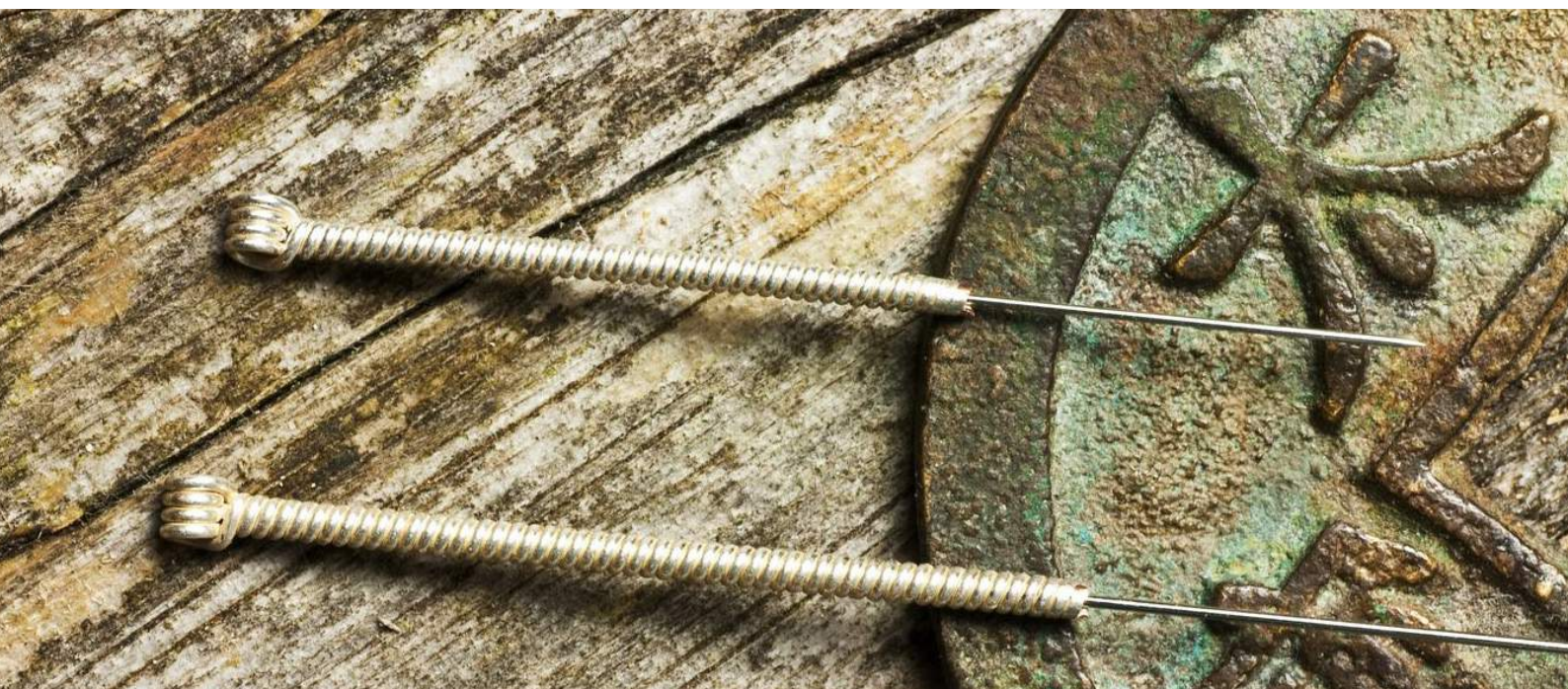
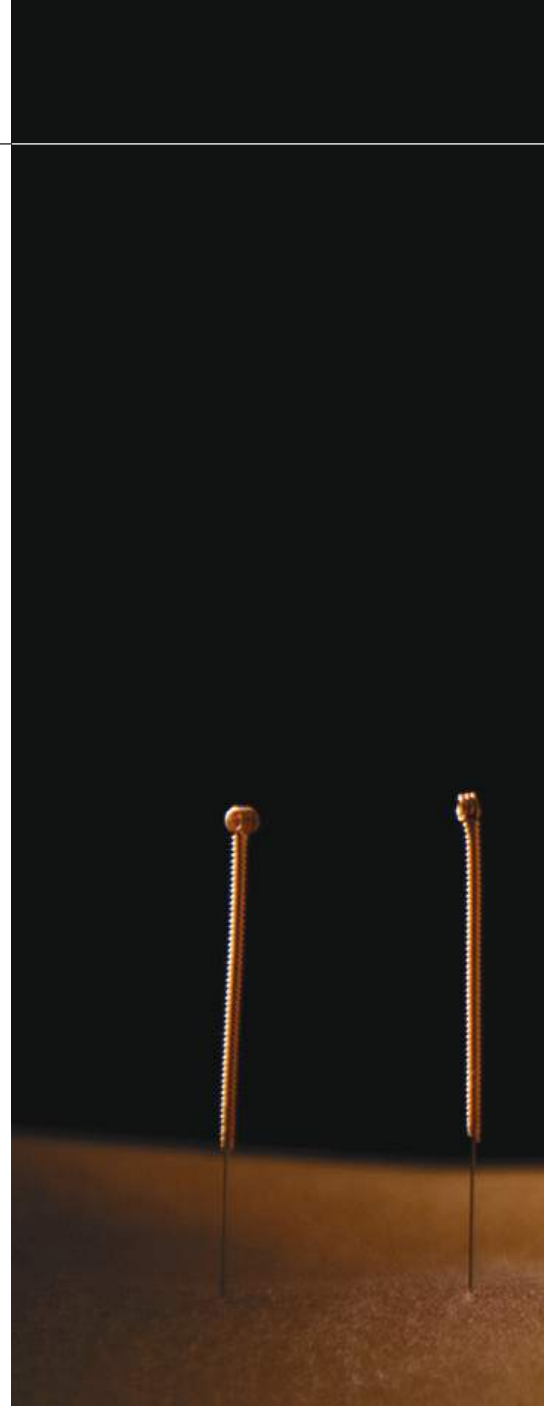
We toured the rest of the displays, and as we did, my curiosity for Vietnam's history and use of acupuncture grew. Where she referred me to next was the last place I would have expected – a beach resort in Nha Trang. The Six Senses Spa within the Evason Ana Mandara is the only resort spa within the country to have a full-time licensed acupuncturist. Ms. Giao is also the assistant spa manager, spa trainer, yoga therapist, reiki master and

massage therapist. When I first arrived for the interview I was suffering from standard Saigon stomach syndrome, and before discussing her trade, Giao ushered me into a calming treatment room.

I lay face-down on a comfortable massage bed, peeping through to a decorative bowl with fresh, floating frangipani. The treatment began with singing bowl therapy so as to harmonize the environment. "Ch'i is harmonized with the polarizing forces of yin and yang. If, at any time, there is a disruption or an accumulation of one over the other, then a body's ch'i must be realigned," she explained. "Otherwise it leads to illness or can manifest disease, as believed in traditional medicine." Unlike modern medicine that tends to treat the symptoms, traditional methods will treat the whole system through a holistic approach. In the case of acupuncture, it's with delicately-placed needles.

The insertion of the needle can be at various depths within the dermis and muscular system. I felt a light throbbing sensation under the needles. "There should never be any pain involved in treatment," said Giao. She sterilized each needle prior to insertion. How many and the location of the needles depends on what blockages in your ch'i your practitioner needs to clear. The needles may not be kept local to the troubled area, as the meridians run the full gamut of the body. In my case I also had a few needles in the back of my knees. While Giao coupled the treatment with reiki I slipped into a trance-like state.

As I woke at the end of the treatment my body had already expelled many of the needles. Following a period of relaxation and ginger tea, Giao addressed the flow of ch'i through our bodies with a calm efficacy, as if continuing the comfort of the treatment. "Each of our



SO, WHAT'S YOUR POINT?



THE HEALING EFFECTS OF PINS AND NEEDLES
TEXT BY MONICA MAJORS



meridians serves to relegate the flow of energy throughout the body, and a practitioner must be as knowledgeable about this flow and its access points as a modern doctor is about anatomy or physiology.”

Treating Impotency

Acupuncture is not only part of the fundamental teachings of traditional medicine, but also of Vietnamese folklore. Born during the 14th century, Tue Tinh is heralded as the founder and saint of traditional Vietnamese medicine, followed by the great accounts of Tran Canh who rescued the King of the Tran Dynasty from drowning, later successfully treating his impotency with acupuncture. More recently lauded, Vietnamese professor Nguyen Tai Thu made waves setting up his own acupuncture centers in 50 countries around the world. He found his passion for medicine and saving lives as a young soldier during the French occupation, studied in China, and in 1958 brought his trade back to Vietnam. By 2009 he was honored as the “People’s Physician” and “Labor Hero” based on his success in providing some 500,000

disabled children access to free treatment and the recovery of more than 1,200 drug addicts through acupuncture.

According to the World Health Organization, acupuncture treats more than just pain. It also treats stomach illness and the common cold, neurological disorders, infections, stress, mental exhaustion and cancer, to name a few of the recognized 28 symptoms. The American Academy of Acupuncture lists several other conditions appropriate for seeking acupuncture, including ulcers, premenstrual syndrome, infertility, endometriosis, anorexia, insomnia, drug detoxification, depression and anxiety. Some practitioners may refuse to treat during pregnancy, but historically Vietnamese medicine has used acupuncture to alleviate nausea, depression or cramps while carrying a child to term. A series of treatments may be necessary, but you will feel relief after only one. To this, I can attest.

Curious to give it a go? You don’t need to travel all the way to Nha Trang, try the Traditional Medicine Hospital (179 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, D3) in Saigon. ■



WOMEN IN POWER

RETHINKING THE STATUS OF
VIETNAMESE WOMEN
IN BUSINESS AND SOCIETY

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD
IMAGE PROVIDED BY THU HUONG

EARLY LAST MONTH, Saigon's WLIN (Women Leaders International Network) forum brought together a considerable vanguard of high-profile female business luminaries under a slogan celebrating the ideals of beauty, success and happiness, in that order. That may not be the most feminist of mantras out there, but WLIN isn't a group setting out to challenge traditional stereotypes – it's a support network that seems to operate very much within the framework of Vietnamese gender bias in an attempt to take advantage of a simple strength in numbers. The thought is that classical leadership roles associated with family women are amplified when applied to business given the support of a solid network – and if the attendance numbers are anything to go by, that's a notion that resonates particularly well with successful Vietnamese businesswomen.

The concept – which has its roots in the challenges faced by Vietnam's wartime women in balancing caregiving and motherhood roles while still actively supporting the war effort – is perhaps best understood as working to bring broader opportunities to women who are fighting to succeed in the business world while still enjoying their traditional feminine identities. While membership involves its fair share of networking-event attendance and sitting through inspirational lectures, the group also features a beauty pageant for its A-list membership of successful lady industry magnates – and, in return for a USD500 membership fee, around USD4,000 worth of benefits including fashionable clothing, facials, beauty treatments and a medical check-up.

WLIN is both founded and spearheaded by someone who has to be one of the luckiest women alive – Thu Huong. Her multiple pageant titles and numerous appearances on screen as an actress and MC would have guaranteed her a comfortable, effortless existence on their own, but Huong opted for the more difficult path, insisting on a challenging career as a media entrepreneur. She conceived of the network while she was representing Vietnam in the 2012 Mrs. World pageant – in which she placed as a runner-up – having reasoned that Vietnamese women leaders could benefit from the kind of confidence exuded by the successful international contestants.

"Because of the history of Vietnam, the women here are very strong," observes Huong, who is absolutely unapologetic

for the capacities of the organization that are not strictly business. "In Asia, men are always expected to become successful, to become a leader. But women in Vietnam are most respected when they have three things; a happy family, a good job, and staying beautiful – and by that, I just mean that you look happy, that you can show that you take care of yourself."

It was while Huong was again representing the country in speaking at a global women's summit in Malaysia that she realized that the key to Vietnamese women achieving a balance between health, wealth and happiness lies in their capacity to share. "I think that women, when they connect together, can form a very powerful network," she says. "So when I came back to Vietnam, I connected with the Women's International Network, and then I opened this group focusing on women leaders. Then, when they join our network, we always tell them 'you need to

“So it's my dream from now to the end of my life that women leaders worldwide can connect together under the slogan of beauty, success, and happiness.”

—THU HUONG,
FOUNDER OF WOMEN LEADERS INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

take care of *you*. You need to take care of your health; you need to take care of your image. Spend time on yourself. Then, when you're happy, that means you're beautiful, and you can make people around you happier as well.' A lot of businesswomen can be successful but cannot stay beautiful, cannot stay healthy – but when a woman is beautiful, she will have more chances to become successful."

Vietnam is not short of businesswomen – in fact, according to WLIN's literature, it's among the top ten countries worldwide in terms of the highest rate of women CEOs, and the second highest in Southeast Asia. A 2014 Bloomberg News report entitled *How the Vietnam War Made Female CEOs Better Than Men* notes that while businesswomen tend to be marginalized in other Asian countries, the opposite is true in Vietnam, where women leaders are considered hard-working, bright, and committed. It's this advantage that Huong has drawn on to build her dream support network throughout the country here – but it's also a strength that Huong plans to tap in further developing the concept abroad, including among Vietnam's community of foreign residents.

"We really have an international network now," says Huong. "I'm a supporter of that network, I'm the international founder. Now in Vietnam, we have four clubs – HCMC, Hanoi, Nha Trang and Hai Phong. This year I want to open another six clubs in different cities, and have one or two clubs in Hanoi and HCMC for foreigners. So now I'm trying to find someone who can become the chairwoman – it can't be me, my role is as the founder and president of the whole of Vietnam. So I need to find someone who can be the chairwoman for foreign women leaders here. After that, I will support them to find a team leader. Then, members will come. When they come, they'll only speak English, so it will be easier for them to share their experiences and support."

That support, supposes Huong, could be invaluable in advancing the achievements of women in business for both foreign and local members in a country where even the

most basic stepping stones into entrepreneurship face tough social barriers. Thu Huong herself has had difficulties convincing her parents and her husband that achieving her dreams is something she wants to pursue on her own strength rather than to accept their enthusiastic support – and she hopes her experiences in media, business, and even as a mother may be of some value when shared with

other women here and overseas.

"This year I need to spend time for Malaysia, Hong Kong, and at least one other country," she says, "to help them to build up this concept. So it's my dream from now to the end of my life that women leaders worldwide can connect together under the slogan of beauty, success, and happiness – because I know that when a woman is successful by herself, she can know success, but when women are successful and they network together, they're very strong. It's because they handle family, they handle the kids, and they can appreciate the value of a good network with other successful moms who know how to treat their children. Unlike men, women focus on building up the next generation; if we have a very good network of moms, they're not jealous, because they're business-minded, they know how to network, so they know how to work together and build themselves up – better than men."

English-speaking businesswomen interested in chairing the foreign community chapter of WLIN are directed to the website at womenleadersforum.vn. ■



SALUTE!

Become fluent in Italian wine at RubyRed

TEXT BY NPD KHANH
IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

ITALY IS ONE of the world's largest wine producers and is home to some of the oldest winemaking regions in the world. However, it remains relatively unknown to the Vietnamese market. **RubyRed Italian Wine Store** (206 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2), wine boutique specializing in imported Italian wines, is attempting to change this one customer at a time.

Managed by Italian duo Christian Boarin and Mirko Traini, with accountant Nguyen Phuong Hang, RubyRed (Facebook: *Rubyred Italian Wine Store*) is the public face of Viet-It Wine, a wine importing company based in Hanoi. Viet-It Wine supplies 90 percent of the Italian restaurants and cafés in Vietnam and in recent years has been making significant headway with many French and Japanese restaurants belonging to five-star hotels in Saigon. While Viet-It Wine has been around for ten years, the Saigon boutique has only been open for two. "The market in Saigon is ten times bigger than the one in Hanoi," he claims. "The weather here is also more conducive to enjoying fine wines. People here go out more, so consequently they drink more. Opening a wine boutique here is simply the logical choice for us as a business," says Christian.

The wine boutique houses hundreds

of bottles, all imported straight directly Italy, and through Viet-It, has exclusive partnership with 14 different winemakers from nine winemaking regions in Italy. "There are thousands of winemakers and brands in Italy," says Christian. "We have bottles coming in from all the best winemaking regions in Italy. We have bottles from Piedmont, from Lombardy, from Tuscany, and more. What we have in this boutique is the best that Italy has to offer. Of course, our number one goal is to do business, but second to that, we also want to introduce Italian wines and rich culture to wine lovers in Vietnam."

According to Traini and Christian, RubyRed is designed not only as a wine store but also as a place where people can discover and enjoy Italian wine and culture. For this reason, every bottle in the boutique has a story behind them. For example, their main star is La Scala's Bellavista Vittorio Moretti, a pricy Franciacorta Champagne with a price tag at over VND5 million per bottle. Behind this sublime blend are veteran winemaker and sponsors Armani, Gucci and the Theatre of Milan. The same bottle of Bellavista Vittorio Moretti Extra Brut 2008 that RubyRed offers is also served during Milan fashion weeks.

On the lower side of the price range, at under VND1 million, Leone de Castris Five Roses Rosato Salento is the only rosé wine on offer. This charming pink bottle has a history dating back to the turmoil of World War II. Created during a time when Italian people and business were so poor they couldn't afford to put their wine in glass bottles, the Five Roses was instead poured in used Coca-Cola or beer bottles. When American troops came to liberate the whole territory from the Nazis troops, they became so enamoured with the unique flavor of the Five Roses that their demand eventually catapulted the then household brand into the first Italian wine to be bottled and exported to other countries.

La Scala's Bellavista and Leone de Castris Five Roses aren't the only bottles with a story or history behind them. As Christian and Traini proudly claim, RubyRed's number one priority is quality of service. Its second priority is to promote the names and culture of Italian wines in Vietnam. "Business is booming," says Christian. "We have had many happy customers and likely many more to come. Our next step is to open a second store in a location closer to the city center." ■





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.

VROOM VROOM

Hit the brakes, sir. Is that cash or credit for the car?

Dear Sven,
I'm American and my wife is Vietnamese. We've decided to buy a car. I've never purchased a new one in Asia. We definitely want to buy new. We're considering getting a loan from a bank. Which banks would be able to offer me an auto loan, and would I be issued the loan in my own name or would it have to be in my wife's name? Are there any other issues that I would encounter?

FIRSTLY, KUDOS TO you for actually making the frightening leap to drive a car around Ho Chi Minh City. I would be too scared of hitting a crazy motorist or a jaywalking pedestrian while on a dreary drive to work one morning.

You can take comfort that multiple free-trade agreements, which Vietnam will be a party to, will reduce the cost of vehicles quite substantially through the reduction of import duties in the next few years. According to *Tuoi Tre News*, the prices on small imported cars (engine capacity smaller than one liter) may drop by 42 percent. It seems this will only come into effect after June 2016, so if you can be patient you might land yourself a good deal.

Commonwealth Bank will issue you a car loan for 80 percent of the purchase value, over a four-year term. To obtain a loan you will have to present a work permit or residence card as well as documented proof of your income.

They are not able to issue you a loan in your own name, so you would have to make a joint application with your wife, or simplify the process completely and have the application done in your wife's name. You will have to purchase insurance on the vehicle, which the bank might facilitate, or it could be done through our insurance division which works with multiple providers. You can choose from the following interest rate structures: 1) 6.99 percent per annum, fixed for six months which would return to 8.49 percent per annum after six months, 2) 7.49 percent per annum fixed for one year which would return to 8.99 percent after the initial fixed period. They would charge a one percent fee for early repayment in the first year and 0.5 percent for early payment in the second and third year.

Standard Chartered would be able to issue you a loan in your own name, but instead of a specific auto loan structure as provided by Commonwealth, they

would issue the loan to you as a personal loan, which is basically a loan issued to you for general purchases and consumption. From the bank's perspective this would obviously be more of a risky type of loan and they would require evidence of who your employer is, concrete earnings proof (three months of bank statements). Additionally you would be subject to higher interest rates (17 percent – 22 percent per year). There is no fixed period or early penalty structure as offered by Commonwealth, thus you would be foregoing a lower interest rate for a more flexible loan structure.

The first issue would be obtaining insurance on your vehicle as a financial institution would most likely not issue a loan on a vehicle which is not insured. If it is a new vehicle this would not be too difficult. The second and most important issue is that you are buying a depreciable consumer good on credit at relatively high interest rates. You should perhaps only consider obtaining loans against assets which are intended to produce future profits, for example, investment property. A vehicle depreciates in value the second you drive it out of the showroom, and will only continue to depreciate in value until the day you scrap it. Generally, getting involved with consumer credit is not a good idea considering the high interest rates you are subject to, and the fact that over time you will be paying considerably more for something that you realize you didn't really need. ■



MEET MR. BIG

Thai artist Pariwat Anantachina's
digital collage of Saigon and its people

TEXT BY AND IMAGES **PATRICK CARPENTER**

MEET THE OTHER Mr. Big. He's not very tall. He's not even large. And he has nothing to do with Carrie Bradshaw. But he's been Mr. Big since birth. You see, his parents owned a heavy machinery shop in Bangkok – buying, selling, repairing. Of all the brands they sold, the BIG brand sold best. BIG sold so well that the mother thought it a lucky name. So when her son was born, she blessed him with the good fortune of a popular, respected, well-made machine. And the moniker has served him ever since.

Nowadays, Mr. Big makes his living as an artist. But it's not surprising to learn that it was his father's gift of another machine, a Kodak instamatic camera, which pushed him at five years of age to begin to explore the visual world surrounding him. As a child grown up around bolts and gears, gadgets and levers, Mr. Big had an instant comfort with his Kodak. It was simply a small machine that captured light and shadow on colored film. The biggest difference between the machines in his parents shop and the one he wrapped around his neck was the portability of his light box as compared to the heavy duty contraptions back home. As with many other photographers, Mr. Big's camera taught him how to look at life, and this training of the eye helped him to widen his artist portfolio to painting and design.

All of this leads up to Mr. Big's current exhibition at L'usine Le Loi. Mr. Big's exploration of the world around him began with his own neighborhood, then



his own city, and now the cities that surround the region. He takes photos of their character (and their characters), their everyday personality (and personalities), and their eccentricities (and, when he can spot one, their eccentrics). He fashions all this into a collage that serves as a statement of a city in a way that no map or guidebook could as easily reproduce. His canvases come out like well-ordered chaos, like labyrinths or mazes, or like visual symphonies somewhere between Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and Stravinsky's *Rights of Spring*. If the gift of the foreigner to the local community is the ability to see critically what they no longer notice, then Mr. Big's cityscape collages are both playful and prescient.

I sat down to talk with him about his work on Saigon before the opening of his exhibition. The first impression is one of good nature and happiness, and the way he sits and smiles and comports himself with graciousness puts you back on your best memories of Thailand. He says he first came to Saigon to explore it as a subject back in 2012. He loved it then, and loves it now, but says when he came back this year so much of the city had changed. Fortunately for him, the chaos of Saigon's traffic had kept up its frenzy, and so he spent much of his time reveling in the

craziness. I told him it's quite a statement for someone from Bangkok to find another city's traffic patterns to be extreme, but he just smiled and said, "Bangkok traffic is crazy but with a system. Here in Saigon, it seems there is more crazy and less system." I pointed out that this is both true and a common remark from most tourists from almost any other city (except perhaps some cities in India), and that it takes just a bit of time to see the system within the chaos here. But I agreed that for both the tourist and local alike, one should never get so confident as to think he's mastered its great unpredictability. I asked him what he looked for to shoot in Saigon, and he told me he only had five days, so he had to rely on the advice of his friends and those willing to share what they had enjoyed in their travels here. Beyond that, he looked for what he tends to look for everywhere: the honest life of the street. "These people are the heroes of the city to me." The shopkeepers, the people who bring their produce to the markets, the goods that spill out onto the sidewalks from the stores, and the goods that are set up in any shady spot by someone with anything to sell. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Big has a great affinity for the sections of the markets that sell and repair machinery, seeing in them a reminder of his childhood and his loving

parents. Also unsurprisingly, Mr. Big prefers to focus on what can't be replicated anywhere else, so the big buildings, the international brands and stores fail to catch his eye unless it is out of a sense of commentary or irony. But then he gets a sparkle in his eye and says, "I love the small houses, the hand-painted signs – the human level touches that make the city so unique. And what I really love is to see people sleeping on their motorbikes – the children in between their parents on the way home, the men on the corners after lunch. There are many more cars here than in 2012, so the nature of the traffic is changing a bit, but I still love to see that people are so at home already on their motorbikes."

If you missed Mr. Big in person, you can still find him in L'usine. He is in each one of his city collages, and searching for him is a bit 'Where's Waldo?' but with the added benefit of being forced to look hard at what he has chosen to represent Saigon. Some of his choices are iconic, some expected, some surprising. All still serve as great reminders of the individuality of that this city still enjoys despite its rapid redevelopment. And that is Mr. Big's gift to you: a reminder that you are lucky to have it all – the past, the present, the heroes of the street – swirling around you. ■

The Old Man and The Sea

Coincidence is sometimes very beautiful



A professional artist and author of *A Week in Hoi An*, Bridget March specializes in urban landscapes and aims to reveal the hidden treasures of city life and small town cultures through her illustrations. Bridget offers art classes and sketching tours in Ho Chi Minh City. For more of Bridget's work, visit bridgetmarch.co.uk



NEARLY THREE YEARS ago, I found myself browsing the online pages of Thomas L Le - a scholar and translator of Vietnamese and French poetry. I was so moved by one of the poems that it inspired a small painting of a Hoi An fisherman skilfully riding the surf in his coracle as he brought his small catch back to the girl waiting on the beach to take it to market. I wrote some lines from the poem directly onto the painting and it quickly sold at my Hoi An Exhibition in May 2014. The poem was by Xuan Dieu but being new to Vietnam, I found it difficult to commit the name to memory.

Some months later, I found myself living on Xuan Dieu in Hanoi. More recently, I found myself in a specialist printing shop on Xuan Dieu in Ho Chi Minh City, D5 and I thought 'there's that name again.' I realized that this is no ordinary poet. I discovered that Xuan Dieu was born and died in exactly the same years as my father (1916-1985). Had my father lived, he would be 100 years old in May this year. So I could immediately identify

with this poet and compare his life with that of my own father. Xuan Dieu was coming to life in my imagination.

The poet had started writing while at university in Hanoi and over a lifetime contributed around 450 poems, short stories, diaries and essays as part of the Modern Poetry Movement that took off in the 1930s. Under the influence of Western education introduced by the French, Vietnam was emerging from a highly structured Confucian, family-centered culture to become more individualistic and expressive. The Modern Poetry Movement gave voice to the discomforts of this transition. I imagined these poets were viewed with equal disdain as rock 'n roll, punk and hip hop artists were by their parents' generation. Now, of course, many of the early movers and shakers of modern music have been honored by their governments and they will be revered by generations to come. Xuan Dieu's poetry will live on and his words are just as poignant and relevant now as they were in his day.

The Sea

*I don't deserve to be the ocean blue
But I want thee to be the white beach sand
The sandy beach stretching calmly its hue
Under the crystal sun*

*The comely beach of yellow sand
Extending to the rows of pine
So dreamily and quietly
For eons by the roaring brine*

*Let me be the clear turquoise swells
That kiss ceaseless thy yellow sand
The gentle kiss that often dwells
The quiet kiss that has no end*

*I will kiss thee again, again
From here clear to eternity
Till none of this wide world remains
Before my heart can beat calmly*

*There's times when I would fain surge in
As if to crush thy edges dear
It's when my billows roar passion
To drown thee is ceaseless love sheer*

*I don't deserve to be the ocean blue
But want to be the turquoise sea
To sing eternal songs by thee
In endless love for thee dear true*

*So when the foam comes boiling white
And wind gusts in from everywhere
Insatiably I will kiss with might
Cause I love so thy sand edge bare. ■*



CITY N T H V E R G

STEP OUTSIDE





LOOK AROUND.

What you see is who you are.

Where you live defines you.

Your street, your neighborhood, your market, your museum, your art, your café, your crime: They all seep into your identity. Your city and its surroundings are the history around your life – they should speak to you about you, and you should listen.

In different places we are different people. When someone says they can be happy anywhere as long as they are with the right person, what they are really saying is they have little idea what a place can do to a life. They are ignoring the single constant of the history of humanity: we move to find a better life. So tell that someone to flip the formula: find the place that makes you happy, and you will be the right person.

In this issue, *Oi* takes a look at three cities: Saigon, Los Angeles and Hue (*page 80*). In many ways, Saigon has more in common with Los Angeles than with Hue. Both are economic capitals with major ports, both are renovating their downtowns, both are dealing with urban sprawl and vertical commercial and residential growth. Most importantly, both are planning now the ideal of they want to become, and their versions of urban living are not just for their citizens but for the international stage.

At the other end of such discussions sits Hue, with its placid Perfume River, its Imperial City, and a pace of life that is an escape from all the hustle. Once upon a time, it was the epicenter of Vietnam. Now it appears to sit contentedly close to Danang, a living relic more authentic with its small houses and gardens and trades than most frozen world heritage sites.

So where are *you*
in any of this?



IMMINENT SAIGON

TEXT AND IMAGES BY PATRICK CARPENTER

In less than a decade Ho Chi Minh City has transformed itself into Asia's most dynamic boomtown. But in its dash to the future, will the city still called Saigon make room for its past?

SAIGON.

SOME MIGHT look around and say: 'Saigon? More like *Saigoing*.'

This city, first named for a forest kingdom as part of the Khmer Empire, is today a concrete jungle. The newest buildings are eclipsing or uprooting the tallest remaining trees, and the forest now resides in gated areas. But what should one expect when the population grows faster than the trees?

My Saigon still has this forest. If only just barely. My windows look onto the zoo. It is the densest green patch of shade in the city proper. Between my window and the zoo skirts a canal that sucks in and spits out everything the Saigon River pulls along its current. I wake to the sounds of elephants and peacocks over banana boat engines and motorbikes loaded down with produce for the neighborhood market. Oh, and the disco-throbbing beats of grandmas morning exercise class. I pass the market on my way to work. It is my countryside

village, with frogs being skinned, chickens being plucked, eels slithering out of shallow tin trays. Fetid smells of ripening clams and fruit mingle with garlic, lime, and fermented cabbage. Never is there less than a tangle of human voices, horns, and animal cries. It takes two minutes to cut through, but it lingers long in the mind's eye.

I can cut through the zoo to get to my office building, so I do. It is my jungle, with shafts of sunlight, wild plants, and somewhere a tiger lurking and a rhino hiding. Lurking tiger, hiding rhino. It is also my air filter, and the lungs of the area, and its overloaded state every weekend is a testimony to its precious value as a place of escape and rejuvenation.

I'm through the zoo and into the city proper in eight minutes. I've got a view down the broad street to the bamboo inspired motifs of the Reunification Palace. Except I never see the Palace for the frantic traffic flow. So I keep my eyes on the best buildings of Le Duan and

wonder how long they'll remain there, art deco signposts of the old guard.

So this is my Saigon: in 20 minutes, I've walked through the jungle, the village, and the modern metropolis. I've got fish scales and traces of pineapple on my shoes, coffee from at least four different vendors in my nose and carbon monoxide in my lungs by the time I duck into the office elevator. Where else can you cut across a century of development in such short a time? Where else can you confront the raveling spool of PROGRESS on a daily basis?

Ah, PROGRESS. Like DEVELOPMENT, it's a loaded word. Saigon is staring point blank at them both, with an increased realization that it is easier to get them wrong than to get them right. This realization is coupled with an increased sense of urgency to move on the transformation of the city's visual identity and infrastructure. It's not quite frantic, not quite frenzy, but it's not far off from either.



In order to learn more about what might happen, what will happen, and what should happen, *Oi* spoke with a number of informed, invested, and expert sources. What follows is a conglomeration of quotes from a series of interviews about the varied topics that all fit under the dual umbrellas of PROGRESS and DEVELOPMENT. We can add a third umbrella to the discussions: IDENTITY, because it seems to be the key arbiter in all discussions, and the point of departure from which a loose consensus begins to fray.

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SAIGON'S VISUAL IDENTITY YESTERDAY TO TODAY



Hoanh: The identity of Saigon is made up of an accumulation of many different layers, many different versions of one city. The Saigon we know is actually not very old; it begins with the French colonial architecture largely because what was built before was built from wood and did not last or was razed by French urban planners. So we have layers of early and late French colonial, and generally speaking, these buildings have a beautiful, human scale, and well adapted to the climate.

Mel: The French colonial architecture comes out of an agricultural age, when economies and their buildings were designed around agricultural production. The modernist era that followed comes out of the industrial age. From Art Deco to Modernism, it still has links to French architecture, namely Le Corbusier, but it's on a mass production scale and a complete departure from the agricultural identity. Local architects took the new concepts and made them their own; the buildings from this period are truly Vietnamese modernism – from the public facilities down to the shophouses.

Also, unlike Thailand and Cambodia, where many buildings took their architectural instruction from religion, with the exception of Hue and the Cham areas, most of Vietnamese architecture was and remains very eclectic, and very present and future oriented.

Matthew: The French colonial architecture gets the most attention today. Why is it more important than what came before or after this period? It was a period of 70 years or so, but it seems to represent or relate to a notion of affluence, or succeeding to the international stage. Conversely, some of the Soviet architecture that came later is very interesting from an architectural point of view, but it rarely gets attention because it is tied to a

different and less well-regarded time.

Andrew: There is such nostalgia for the French style that even up to ten years ago, when clients would say they wanted a contemporary Vietnamese building, what they really meant was they wanted French colonial. It is changing now, with the younger local architects coming onto the scene wanting something more youthful and exuberant, and having seen what others are building around the world.

Archie: Many colonial buildings were replaced by modernist buildings during the building boom of the 1960s and 1970s. At the time, Saigon was a small city, low to the ground, and visually, it welcomed individual interpretation. Modernist architecture actually facilitated this. The new modernist buildings of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s made great use of space and shade and ventilation - this was all pre-air-conditioning - and Saigon's visual identity began to separate from some other parts of Vietnam.

Matthew: As it should have. Vietnam has different topography, weather, ethnicities and each influences the types of structures in a particular area. Hanoi has four seasons, Saigon barely has two; they should differ.

Archie: After 1975 there was still a period of informal growth. In spite of economic constraints, buildings grew room by room, with modest, individual spaces added onto the French and American buildings. It was a very organic architectural period, very ad-hoc, very personal. For the larger projects, there was the importation of Soviet style architecture.

Mel: As Saigon settled into peace, aspirations rose. From temporary shelters to single story homes and then as families grew, so did the height of the home. The point being, people did not move, they simply added on and added up. The basic

structure, which still dominates today, was four meters by ten or twenty. It is an efficient structure, with no need for hallways, and reflects the innate sense of design the Vietnamese have. The personality was in the façade and the interior design.

Matthew: The pre- *Doi Moi* architecture you see in Saigon is almost hard to call modernist. The ideals behind modernist architecture – mass production, age of machinery – don't represent what was being built. Saigon's modernism is so bespoke, so personal, and there is so much exploration of form, that it almost reminds me more of the Arts & Crafts style that blended being modern with being distinct.

Andrew: These tube houses, four meters by 20 or 30, didn't allow for light on the sides. Unlike similar typologies in the region, modern Vietnamese tube houses gave little thought to the incorporation of courtyards and other open spaces, everything was covered so as to show it was completely used space and therefore more valuable if ever the property was reclaimed. The light came down the center around the staircase, which works for up to five stories. You could make the argument that the tube house is the most representative Saigonese building, because local architects have been redesigning this same type of rectangle over and over and therefore have become experts in its design and potential. They're still interpreting it, improving it, keeping it relevant and it will continue to be a key part of the visual landscape of Saigon.

Hoanh: So you had around 200 years of layering, basically up until the present, post *Doi Moi* period. This is the identity of Saigon: a fabric of two centuries worth of cultures, styles, improvisations and local interpretations, all woven into a completely unique visual narrative.





SAIGON'S VISUAL IDENTITY TODAY TO TOMORROW

Tim: There needs to be a comprehensive inventory of heritage buildings, and measures to protect those that are of particular importance from an architectural or historical point of view. The French agency PADDI (Ho Chi Minh City Urban Development Management Support Centre) is working with the HCMC Institute of Development Studies to draw up an inventory of architecturally and historically significant villas in Districts 1 and 3 and to formulate zoning and planning regulations for the city in conjunction with all stakeholders. In the longer term, this project needs to be widened to include other districts and other types of built heritage throughout the city.

Lam: The model was to have been Shanghai's Pu Dong. Saigon's historical core was to remain intact, and the new city was to be built across the river in Saigon South. But obviously development has evolved in a completely different way. When the first towers went up downtown, it was a shock – even if it was understood as a skyline statement. The redesign of Nguyen Hue repurposed the surrounding buildings and now we are seeing a complete change of use for central Saigon. It has become a question of vision and of participation. Also one of sustainability. Because when a population doubles in little more than a decade, the pressures that result are huge. Where do you grow: out or up? Already the countryside from Cu Chi to My Tho is one long road of construction.

Matthew: Sustainability is inevitable in that it is in people's best interests. It is not just an altruistic response to caring for the planet but also a common sense solution to balancing needs and wants over the long term. Air conditioning is inevitably going to be taken up in Southeast Asia, however power generation is getting more and more expensive, so people and governments are turning to renewables. Also, people care for

their health: they are more aware so they look after their waterways better, protect them from filth and disease, and protect their water supply and their irrigation for crops. This is simply the future and here it is so visible – so close to the people I believe great strides will be made.

Andrew: One solution is to incentivize at the commercial level, for example where if you can prove your building is sustainable, then you are awarded with more gross floor area, or where commercial spaces are encouraged to generate their own power to sell to the grid. The long-term goal there would be to generate enough of their own power to store in batteries. Also, solar will work; the main thing preventing it now is cost and storage capabilities. Maybe it will start in the rural areas where it is easier to go off grid, but eventually it's a no-brainer. Generally speaking, where you see the initiative being taken on sustainability is either in industrial buildings, or in resorts here. They are always looking for self-sufficiency as a way to reduce costs, or reduce risk. But what is really needed is an over-arching plan for all stakeholders.

Mel: When air conditioning became cheap, homes and buildings became like caves. Architects stopped designing ventilation openings at the tops of walls. Also, home security usually required the bars on the inside of windows, which meant you could not keep your windows open at night, and were forced to use air conditioning. One way for the individual home to improve its energy use is to move the bars to the outside and use louvered windows, which can be opened at all times. Then you can live very comfortably and sustainably with open ventilation and ceiling fans, like it was before air conditioning. Also, the individual home, the tube house, should consider courtyards and gardens as a means of ventilation and light – and physical well being – rather than build to the extremities and cover everything



with a roof as has been done for decades.

Archie: Urban design should recognize what worked well in the earlier system and design to accommodate the close knit social fabric that assists the population in their daily life. The existing fabric of Saigon has a beautiful mixed-use scale that supports Saigon's still largely a self-employed, small enterprise economy. It's boutiques and small cafes, small markets as well as soup stands and *banh mi* sellers. Look at the organic development in buildings like the Catinat and along Le Loi: they are great examples of Saigon scale, with easy transitions from street to living quarters. Massive shopping centers seem to belong to a different city, or fit better in Phu My Hung.

Matthew: We're hoping for adaptive re-use as a recognition of current and evolving identity. And it's intriguing to see that Vingroup has a project in Sydney's central business district that will be exactly that. So maybe that bodes well for future adaptive re-use here in Saigon. Maybe we will see something similar to what was done with New York's meatpacking district or Sydney's carriageworks. Architecture is constantly evolving as technologies and building techniques and priorities in the built environment change. Adaptive re-use preserves what is important about the character and soul of a place and reinvigorates its use and importance in a contemporary setting.

Andrew: I grew up in Singapore during its redevelopment, so I am a bit more pragmatic. Things must change. When you factor in population growth estimates with a comparison of Saigon's commercial space against other cities in Asia, it is clear that you cannot escape a skyscraper city. Saigon needs a strong central business district, which from purely a mathematical point of view means it needs more business space. The outskirts of the city will be vertical, which will actually be easier in terms of utilities and infrastructure than if a population of ten million continued to sprawl horizontally.

Matthew: Phu My Hung was an experiment. In a way it is a capsule of a different style of living. I expect to see towers in other districts, like the ninth, as new development will take place along the periphery because they will be more open for opportunity than the center. And if they can clean up the canals, as they did on the



way to the airport, then you'll see a real shift in vitality. If the face of the river changes, and every riverside project goes through, then that will further impact the viability of renovating and maintaining some of the characteristics so loved of the city center. And as an aside, when or if the airport moves, then the entire city will flip 180 degrees.

Lam: Renovation of the canals is very forward thinking. In Cholon, for example, this would be a key part of its revitalization plans. But just in general, embracing them for traffic and transport would change Saigon by alleviating the strain on the streets from traffic and the heavy infrastructure projects that are tying up the city. At the same time, we see how the already renovated parts can become destinations for quality social living and recreation. But there needs to be behavioral change so that the canals are not seen as places to dump trash.

Hoanh: The canal renovation projects are a recent positive regarding green space and infrastructure. At some point, cities grow beyond their capacities, and Saigon should develop the infrastructure and layout of its inner core and consider developing satellite cities linked to Saigon by metro.

Matthew: The issue then becomes how long does it take to build a full-scale metro system capable of serving the HCMC populace?

Hoanh: The metro is a long-term exercise, but if you look at Bangkok, you see that when its metro went in, there was rapid behavioral change across generations. But the line has to serve the most populated districts and outer areas or else who is it for?

Archie: Regarding the high-rise projects, they have an effect on the urban fabric and, by extension, the social fabric as well. Speculation can shift the focus away from the existing communities, so care should be taken to make sure new developments also consider the populations of the communities where they are located.

Mel: It is important to recognize that historically, there was always a shop or ground floor with high commercial value. Prime pieces of city land should retain this commercial space and value; they should not be purely residential.

Lam: On new ways of living, people used to not want to live 'up'. They remembered power outages, fires, and mistrusted elevators. Rents were cheaper on the top floor than the ground floors. The younger generations do not have such concerns.

Andrew: 'New' is now associated with 'safe' and is a selling point. Lessons like back up power generators have been learned and fire regulations improved. Older buildings that had illegal additions have had to take them down.

Hoanh: As for the future, in this transitional period, Saigon will still be charming. In every city, there are two threads: the big development projects, and the small development that occurs when people and small enterprises take over buildings and introduce new commercial opportunities and imbue these areas with character. They become hot spots for communities, trendy areas for young people, and for those in artistic or creative fields. We are seeing this in many places in Saigon now, and it should continue at least for the short term. But if rents escalate in such places, and globally that has been the experience, then these neighborhoods get locked up and begin to expel the character that made them attractive: the local eclecticism gets taken over by global chains and the experience loses its genuineness.





SAIGON'S VISUAL IDENTITY WHO AND HOW

Matthew: Generally speaking, the private sector moves quickly, but is much more focused 'on the city block' than 'on the city.' The public sector tends to take longer, but also tends to do the right thing for the city. When the two come together in public-private partnerships, it usually works quite well, with arrangements that favor both, like giving land for development at favorable cost and then the development raises value of the area. These models balance private interests with civic requirements, and are necessary sources of funding.

Lam: I believe these public-private partnerships could work well in District 5's renovation plans. The business community seems to be particularly geared for such arrangements.

Andrew: In terms of opportunity, one great thing about Saigon is that, particularly with the outer districts, you can just get on and build your project. That is why I expect the outer districts to develop more dynamically and quickly than the center. But my point was more that there is none of the delay that you experience from planning commissions and related agencies in other cities outside Vietnam. This is a

great advantage for young architects, as they can actually get work built. It accelerates their career development, and it accelerates the development of a new architectural identity for Saigon – created by local architects. The new generation of Saigon architects are well traveled and educated. They are patriotic, they have great ideas, and they also have access to a world of solutions and interpretations. What they don't have is hard experience, and as long as they can be properly mentored, then a decade out they will have valuable experience and perspective – which is well-timed, as a lot of the big development projects will come up around the time they are reaching their full potential. And their buildings will be at least a decade old, so the best built will have separated from those that were just well-publicized.

So I am generally positive about the future. The one real concern is there needs to be a clear path to contribution from all stakeholders – small as well as large. Right now there is little public communication going on, even among architects, and we would love to be more engaged in a grand urban vision. ■



DEAR SAIGON

A LOVE LETTER
FOR THIS SPECIAL CITY
IN MY LIFE

TEXT BY CRISTIAN CARENINI



IMAGE BY PATRICK CARPENTER

I'M IN LOVE with this city. Saigon is a city full of vitality and, despite the hardworking and hectic life of its inhabitants, is characterized by a contagious lighthearted optimism. I think what excites and conquers us foreigners, especially Westerners, is the how easy the possibility is to connecting with others. In Saigon, we are constantly connecting with our neighbors with whom we talk and smile often and willingly.

It's a fact that to understand the identity of a city, we should pay particular attention to its public space. We should look at it not only for its quantity and distribution, but how the public space is experienced: what behaviors it favors or prevents, what kind of social contract it enacts. A good city is really about motion and action. It is about a peaceful social mix between classes, a porous and accessible public space (possibly green), and the possibility for everyone to move easily, cheaply and quickly throughout the city, from its center to its outer limits.

In Saigon we live (still largely) in active 'contact' with others. This anthropological characteristic has surely shaped the city much more than its zoning and its architectural styles. In more specialized terms, I could say that the beauty and the good of Saigon

is how its public and private space mingle, promoting encounters and social interaction between its varied inhabitants, while also demonstrating and facilitating the brilliant art of surviving that is typical of this city's wonderful people. I think it should be this characteristic of Saigon, namely that of being a cluster of big and widespread social interaction spaces, that is its true heritage. To me, this space is worth defending against the globalized creep of other city personalities. But as it always is with urban development, such decisions are matters of vision, and always come before the actual urban planning and architecture.

When we speak of 'heritage,' we speak of the idea of something precious to pass down, something to be safeguarded. I consider heritage everything that makes a city unique and memorable, typical to itself and special to others. It is important to enforce and foster what is typical to a particular city in order to create an intrinsic and beloved 'home.' At the same time, we should consider nature our first heritage and practice respect for nature, both a collective population and as individuals. Harmony with nature must not be thought as salve for a disease, or as decoration on a cake; it must be understood to be the main purpose of development. Until recently, we have put

the idea of the landscape at the end of the design process. But we actually should consider it at the front, with equal value to all the other elements in the project, before we begin to design.

We should therefore acknowledge once more Saigon's natural heritage: She is a city grown out of a river delta. Her river should once again become her main landscape. It should return to its place as the progenitor of social and commercial life. Saigon's city planners should revive the river's dormant value and design new transportation systems, parks, and recreational spaces that spread out from its currents. That all of these are either under-developed or non-existent is a sign of a lack of harmony with nature.

Of course, I say all this with the issue of climate change now unignorable in our future. We must recognize that water will dominate Saigon's future design agendas, which ultimately means that water will dominate the city's landscape. Far better to design in harmony with this fact than try to resist or sequester the inevitable.

Augustus Caesar said of Rome: "I found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble." I think we will do well to say that we found Saigon a city of bricks and left it a city of canals.

Cristian Carenini holds a Ph.D. and is an Urban Planner and Landscape Architect. ■



The larger than life past and exciting future of the City of Angels

TEXT AND IMAGES BY PATRICK CARPENTER

“The final story, the final chapter of western man, I believe, lies in Los Angeles.”

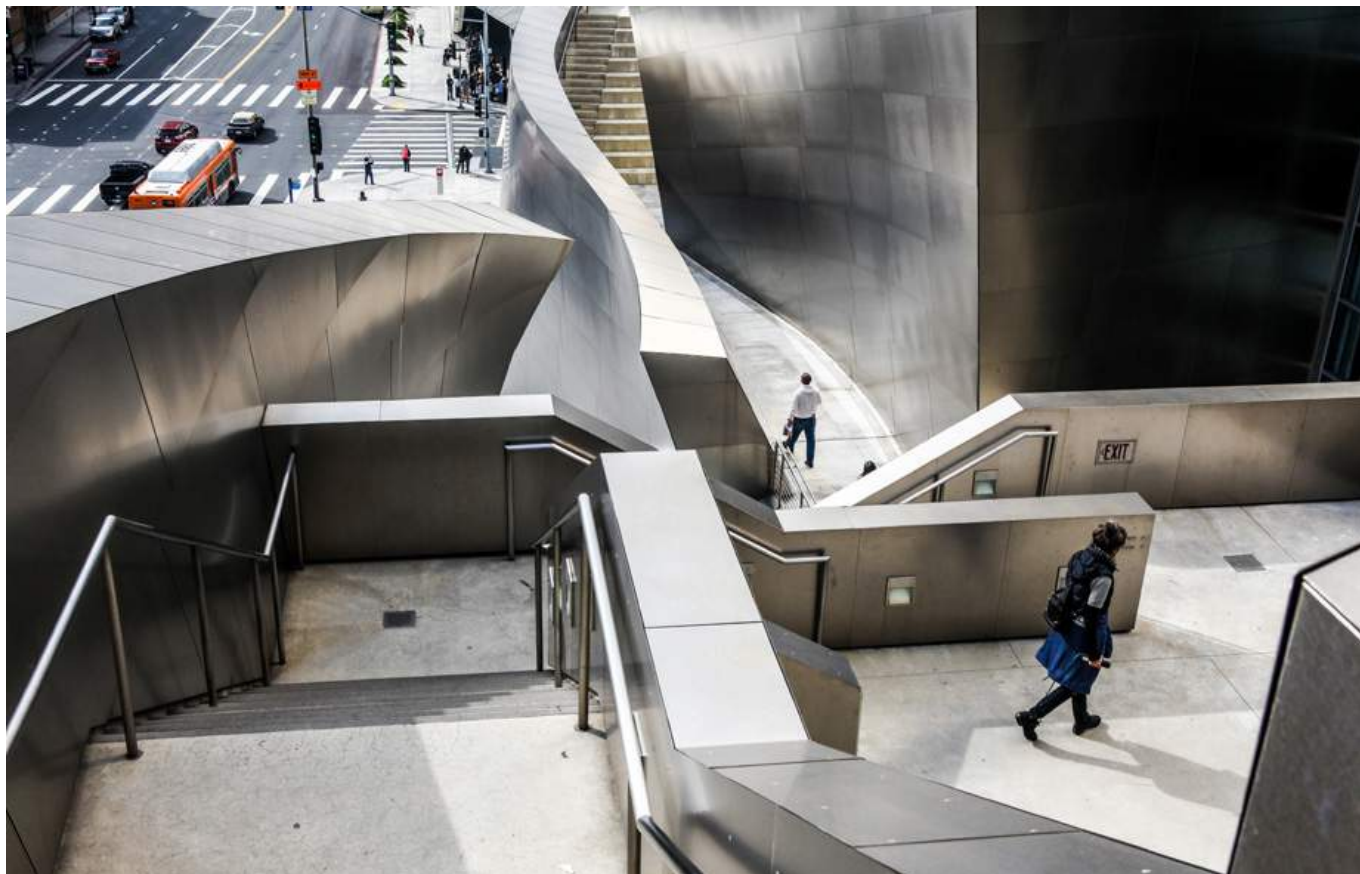
—Phil Ochs

SOME PLACES ARE beacons for the human race. They have a reputation for greater possibilities. They attract ambition and make talent, from pure potential to fully formed. They also attract their fair share of misfits, savants, poseurs and false prophets (all are necessary). The *where* and the *why* of a city is geographical; the *who* and the *how* of a city is sociological; the *when* and the *what* of a city is political, if political is to be understood as the art of the humanly possible. So where is the epicenter of the humanly possible? Easy. It's Los Angeles.

The city that grew up on dreams. Without dream factories, you do not stretch possibilities. It's a city as old as film, the world's favorite new art form and means of communication. The greatest communicator of the 20th century, Charlie Chaplin, was made possible by

leaving London and living in Los Angeles. It's a city young enough to not be saddled with old world entrapments. It's a city by the ocean, by the mountains, by the desert – because a great city also has great escapes. It's a city built of new spatial forms from new and renewed materials – pushing the global discussion of how we should live and how we could live even when we are living off the grid or off the planet. And yet it is a city founded along a fault line – a crack in the earth that teases total destruction. This tease, paradoxically, reinforces the batty optimism of Los Angeles residents and their coda of physical, personal and spiritual regeneration: Nothing lasts, so nothing gets old. Nothing old in a city named not for a god but to glorify those who do the will of god, for those who are seen to be the best versions of humanity: The city of the angels.





“There is something in movement and chaos that fits our life, the present, and that I tapped into because of Los Angeles. It’s an American city that’s ugly to us all, but it’s the highest product of democracy.”

— Frank Gehry

“Turn the world over on its side and everything loose will end up in Los Angeles.”

— Frank Lloyd Wright

Why Los Angeles? Well, beyond the pure joy of being able to surf and ski on the same day, beyond being the headquarters of a USD504 billion strong arts and culture industry (Hollywood’s top five film companies comprise 80 percent of the international box office), beyond the universities, the biotech and aerospace sectors (GPS, the Space Shuttle and the Mars Rover all were invented in LA), beyond Google, beyond Tesla, beyond the international cuisine that results from a population whose children spoke 85 different languages in primary school, beyond the 284 sunny days a year and weather that stays between 13 and 22 degrees Celsius, beyond the regular onshore breezes, beyond the 120 acre botanical gardens, beyond a music capital that boasts everything from Frank Sinatra to Joni Mitchell to Los Lobos to NWA to the world class symphony and a symphony

hall made possible by an animated mouse, beyond the art scene (Andy Warhol had his first show in LA), beyond the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Rudolph Schindler, Richard Neutra, John Lautner, Frank Gehry, beyond Beverly Hills, beyond Compton, beyond the waterways of Venice... there’s always the fact that in Los Angeles, despite it being the third largest metropolitan economy in the world with a population of 13 million, you still might wake up on the dusty edge of this metropolis and find a coyote or a mountain lion in your back yard, with your chihuahua in its mouth. Or on the salty marina side with a sea lion barking at your sliding glass door. Because no matter how civilized this city seems, there’s always the hint of the wild out there. Which is to say, no matter how well protected and behaved we get, we should never forget the wild that exists inside and alongside us all.



“Los Angeles seems endlessly held between these extremes: of light and dark – of surface and depth. Of the promise, in brief, of a meaning always hovering on the edge of significance.”

—Graham Clarke

Paris and London are marvelous depositories of glorious eras and cultures looted and colonized. Moscow can't hold a candle to St. Petersburg, which has a grandeur like Rome, but what has either produced recently? Same question for Barcelona (tourism and football are not enough). Athens is broke. Bangkok is broken. Vienna is a balancing act between worshipping its famous dead and admitting it never liked them while they were alive. Ask Kafka about Prague and the other charming Central European relics. Tokyo is the greatest blend of old and new, and like LA, a leader in entertainment and earthquake resistant structures, but can you ever sit in a café and watch all the people walk by and think: “I could be anywhere, because everyone

from everywhere is here and owning it?” You can in New York, the home of billionaire global economy destroyers. Beijing, like Moscow, is all about the strength of ancient conquerors, but it's also about buying international starchitects to build statement buildings that you can't see for all the air pollution. Same goes for Shanghai and Hong Kong: can you breathe freely when you're there? DC was built on a swamp, produces lobbyists, and shuts down when there is more than an inch of snow. Mexico City is just too large; Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen just too small. Rio might crumble from self-inflicting the World Cup and the Olympics. San Francisco has a superiority complex bigger than its beauty – which is immense. Berlin?



“I love Los Angeles. I love Hollywood. They're beautiful. Everybody's plastic. But I love plastic. I want to be plastic.”

—Andy Warhol

Other great cities have immediately identifiable profiles, monuments, towers, statues. LA's only truly iconic landmark, the Hollywood sign, was first just a real estate advertisement that overstayed its purpose. It became so neglected, so pathetic, that it began to symbolize the cruel side of stardom: this is what happens when you outlast your fame. Garbo, Dietrich, Hedy Lamarr – they

all hid when they could no longer look like themselves. Marilyn committed suicide. So enter Hugh Hefner, creator of *Playboy*, the magazine launched by Marilyn Monroe's nude centerfold. Who else but the man who brought celebrity skin to middle America should come out of his LA mansion to be the savior of the symbol of celluloid by funding its facelift?

“In Los Angeles, by the time you are 35 you are older than most of the buildings.” —Nora Ephron

LA panders to our great common weaknesses of vanity and self-absorption. The city is where every selfie should go to be validated. But in a way, there is no more honest city than LA, in that whatever was beautiful, or popular, or promising will be exposed as nothing but a facade. It all peels faster than a sunburn. It fades faster than you can say: Your new face looks great!

This false front isn't just for film sets and plastic surgeons. It's in the highest pantheons of culture. If you step inside Frank Gehry's signature Walt Disney Concert Hall (designed before his Bilbao museum), you will see woods and concretes arranged in such a way to look something between the luxurious order of an ocean liner and the chaos of anti-gravity. The Douglas fir wood paneling that frames the halls was intentionally selected to match the warm color tones of the musician's instruments. According to Gehry, “Douglas fir and a cello look like brothers.” And for the audience, the color

has a psycho-acoustic sensory experience, in that they are both comforted by the color tones and believe that the warm wood is part of the outstanding acoustic experience. Together, this psychologically elevates their concert experience. But in truth, the outstanding acoustics are due to the 20.3 centimeter-thick concrete walls. The wood is largely decoration – a special effect in the city of special effects.

Gehry, an Angeleno since 1947, is perhaps the brightest star of starchitects. He revived Bilbao and is now making waves with his Foundation Louis Vuitton outside Paris. More interesting, and more American, are his earlier projects around LA. Gehry's use of unpretentious materials like chain link fence, concrete, pressboard (condensed wood/paper scrap), and corrugated metal was an exercise in democratic living. He mixed low and high, ghetto with privilege. In much the same way LA's privileged classes dress up to the nines or down to resemble those who've had to make their living on the street.





**“Los Angeles is 72 suburbs in search of a city.”
—Dorothy Parker**

Other great cities are centered – historically, financially, there is a dot on the map proclaiming “from here, you can gather your bearings.” Los Angeles evolved differently: it sprawled because it could. Because cars were new and affordable and land was cheap. This evolved into a city that today is not immediately accessible to the tourist. It takes time and Google maps to begin to understand, and once you figure out that everything is so spread out, well...why bother when San Diego and San Francisco are so close? This relentless expansion strained resources and divided sections based on ethnicity. The most famous of these is East LA, which became a hotbed for gang- and drug-related violence and a rap style that laid it all out for listeners to get their kicks from the gunshots and sirens at a safe distance. Those who made it big, like Dr. Dre and Ice Cube

and Snoop Dogg, are now seen in movies playing themselves or (wink) tough cops. Catch *Straight Outta Compton* now in theatres if you’re curious. It makes *Entourage*, that other LA success from the wrong side of the tracks thing, look ridiculous. Or better yet, catch *Dope*, a film that shows the duplicity in our own rushes to judgment.

When you look closer at this sprawl, you see patterns and opportunities not available in more traditionally laid out metropolitan centers. You see space for satellites and disbursement of industries, cultures, micro-cultures and wealth. There are spaces enough for young talent to practice their trades on the small stage before hitting it big. Saigon appears to be evolving in a similar way, both out and up, with opportunities in outer districts that may catalyze old neighborhoods into new hot spots.

“Los Angeles is a microcosm of the United States. If LA falls, the country falls.”

—Ice T

Los Angeles’ progress and influence is tangible in other realms, other cities. Hollywood money helped elect the first black man to the White House. Not that Hollywood hadn’t been there before: Ronald Reagan served two terms sticking largely to an image and a script of how to look presidential. If that means nothing to you, then maybe this will: Hollywood made Reagan plausible and then made Obama possible. Obama looks to his influential friends in LA when he needs to bolster party platforms and support. New York made Trump, and the global financial Armageddon Obama was forced to face at the start of his presidency.



Here’s the thing about LA: it has all the great faults of all the other great cities: traffic, pollution, dead zones, organized crime, gang warfare, police brutality, a fractured school system. It has twice been the setting of race riots *after* civil rights acts had been championed by presidents and pundits. But there is progress on a scale that can help other major metropolitan centers.

Emissions standards, local regulations, improved public transport and share bike programs have brought smog levels down dramatically, to the point where studies can now measure the cause and effect of improvements in air quality to better public health (Beijing, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Saigon, etc. take note). Revitalization efforts to historical downtown have resulted in an influx of

“The setting sun burned the sky pink and orange in the same bright hues as surfers’ bathing suits. It was beautiful deception, driving north on the Hollywood Freeway to home. Sunsets did that here. Made you forget it was the smog that made their colors so brilliant, that behind every pretty picture there could be an ugly story.”

—Michael Connelly, *The Black Echo*

startups, conversion of derelict buildings to galleries, restaurants, and civic buildings, and the influx of 60,000 more residents. And the program to ethnically diversify LA’s police has transformed the identity and perceptions force (now 55 percent non-white, 20 percent female) and improved credibility among citizens, and reduced both excessive force and false arrest cases.

“Sometimes I feel like my only friend is the city I live in, the city of angels...”

—Red Hot Chili Peppers

In 1982, Sir Ridley Scott, an English director, made *Blade Runner*, a movie about a not-too-distant future Los Angeles (November 2019) filled with eclectic architecture, robots that are almost but not quite human and ethnic neighborhoods that do not interact beyond their racial boundaries. *Blade Runner* also makes a strong statement about the impact of technology on society and the environment. It's anything but cozy and green. In fact, it's

tragic dystopia. Interestingly, already in the late 1980s, not long after LA had hosted the US-dominated, Soviet-boycotted summer Olympics, the Mayor of Los Angeles commissioned a plan for LA: 2000 – the city of the future. The report warned of creating a *Blade Runner* scenario where great ethnic and cultural diversity will be the weakness, not the strength.

Well, it's 2016 and we're not far off from Ridley's imagination. We've got the

architecture, the AI is just over the horizon, and our neighborhoods teeter when racist flames are fanned. So should we believe Ridley or not? Will the most human of cities lose its humanity, design its own demise? What do we see when we look at all those millions of Angelenos? Do we see a great weakness or a great strength? Do we see a collective personality, or 72 fractured, independent identities? Step outside.

Look around. You tell me. ■



“California knows how to party.
In the city of L.A.
In the city of good ol’ Watts.
In the city of Compton.
We keep it rockin!”

—2Pac

The
END

Wine & Dine

IMAGE BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE





SOMTUM DER HCMC

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

MULTIPLE ASIAN CUISINES ON SEVERAL FLOORS

TEXT BY JOEL ZORILLA
FOOD IMAGES PROVIDED BY NGON ASIA HOUSE
RESTAURANT IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

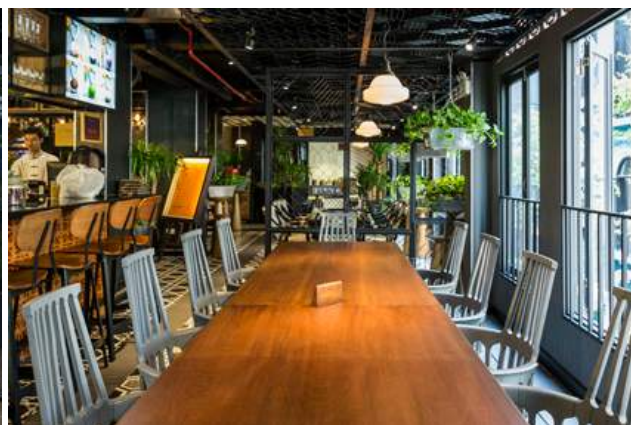
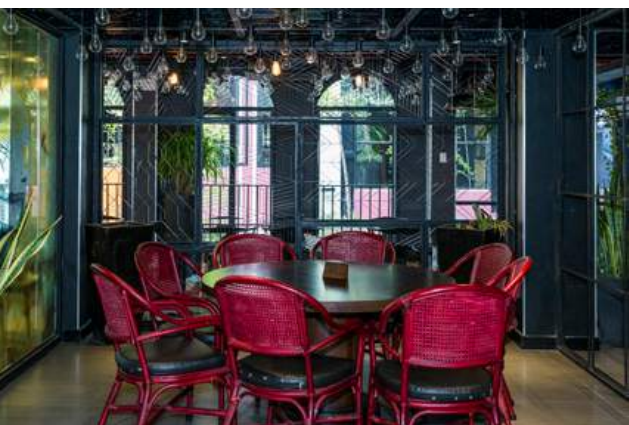
IT'S DIFFICULT TO put into words the incredible amount of detail that went into designing and creating **Ngon Asia House** (99 Nguyen Hue, D1). From dark wood furniture and red curtains separating various dining spaces to exposed light bulbs hanging from the ceiling, the restaurant is like an interior design showroom. And with greenery and vines crawling up walls as if they had naturally come to inhabit the space, the air even breathes cleaner than outside. The checkerboard floor tiles take you into an art nouveau world of geometrical wonder with tastefully placed surprises in every nook and corner of the three-storey restaurant. Entry to this place is by a glass

lift and when the elevator creeps back down the shaft it revealed a hummingbird mural intricately placed behind the cables. The restaurant is separated into five culinary "houses": Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese

Ngon Asia House's ordering process is unconventional where diners are presented with a card that can be topped up with any cash amount. Once that's done then it's time to wander around the museum-like restaurant, choosing from the many styles of seating options available, from the contemporary Philippe Starck-like tables to the more loungy sofas bathed in warm, autumn hues. If you can, grab a table by the tall glass windows overlooking the

Nguyen Hue Pedestrian Walkway – a great spot for people watching.

While the idea of choosing from five different menus can be overwhelming, the restaurant made ordering fairly easy by simply using photos and numbers. We ordered a colorful array of Japanese sushi including the mixed plate of California, eel and salmon rolls (VND85,000) which were all stunningly delicious. That was followed by the Soft shell crab and rice (VND98,000) which was a home run - it's hard to mess up soft shell crab in my opinion. But the star of the sushi platters was the exotic Salmon and caviar (VND75,000) - seaweed wrapped around a bed of salmon with a crown of caviar bursting out the top. It was





Mixed sushi platter, Salmon and caviar sushi, Korean boiled pork and kimchi wrapped in cabbage, and Thai fried shrimp cakes

an explosion of gourmet flavors that left me instantly wanting more. And last but not least the Mixed sushi platter (VND105,000) which served seven different types of sashimi and sushi, including salmon, octopus, tuna and omelet. Rubbing our bellies we proceeded to the Korean section and tried Rice served with boiled pork and *kim chi* wrapped in cabbage (VND80,000), having very little experience with Korean food, I was immediately blown away by the combination of tastes and textures. I wrapped the rice, pork, and *kim chi* in the lettuce then dip it a sublime soybean dipping sauce producing a crunchy juicy explosion in my mouth. I walked out of

Ngon Asia a Korean food fan.

To complement our first round of dishes we ordered a glass of chardonnay (VND95,000) a Mojito (VND75,000) and a Cocoloco (VND60,000). The chardonnay was the perfect partner to pair with the sushi, the mojito was strong, sweet and minty, as any good mojito should be, while the Cocoloco (a mix of coconut water and other tropical fruits) brought back memories of the beach.

We continued our food adventure across Asia stopping at China and Thailand - two culinary giants. From the Chinese menu we ordered the Pan fried chive and pork dumplings (VND75,000).

They were phenomenal dipped in soy sauce with that amazing commingling of classic Asian flavors, reminding me again why dumplings are and will always be one of my favorite Asian dishes. If you know Thai food, you know that it's all about combining sweet, savory and spicy into one perfect mouthful. So, naturally, our order of fried Shrimp cakes (VND95,000) served with a fruit dipping sauce was an explosion of flavors.

It's hard to find Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai cuisine under one roof, and have it all done well, but Ngon Asia House has pulled it off. ■



THE SCENT OF GREEN PAPAYA SALAD

A FIRST LOOK AT ISAN THAI NEWCOMER
SOMTUM DER



TEXT BY YOORI KOO
IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

FOR INEXPLICABLE REASONS, even though they are close neighbors, there seems to be only a handful of Thai restaurants in Saigon, and rarer still to find one dedicated specifically to Isan cuisine. This is where **Somtum Der** (136 Pasteur, D1) enters the dining scene to fill that gap. Isan borders on Laos, and regardless of modern political boundaries, the people

of the region have traditionally shared a language, a climate (hot, steamy) and a love for two foods: larb and green papaya salad.

The new restaurant occupies the second, third and fourth floor of a narrow building above one of the many clothing boutiques that line Pasteur. The entrance is hidden with no sign except for an open hallway painted in deep red with straw lamp shades

VIBRANT, FRESH and DELICIOUS

From left: Thai prawn sashimi, grilled coconut milk marinated pork skewers, and fried rice with prawns





leading you in and up the stairs. The rest of the décor at Somtum Der is colorful, warm and inviting. The interior is a modern interpretation and nod to Isan culture with colorful patterned fabric on one wall while another is painted in bright reds and yellows with images of Thailand's countryside.

Somtum Der Ho Chi Minh City is their third outlet after the original restaurant opened in Bangkok in 2012 and Somtum Der New York City in 2013. So this is a Saigon replica of a Bangkok restaurant that interprets that city's street-food renditions of traditional Isan cooking. Amazingly, the food survived the journey, and if it has lost some herbs and other ingredients, it is still vibrant, fresh and delicious. An open kitchen on the second floor is filled with glass jars of spices and herbs used for their signature dish – the papaya salad, or *somtum*, the restaurant's namesake.

The staff were attentive and service was prompt with a smile. They offered recommendations on how much and what kind of food to order, which were two main dishes, one *somtum* and a side of rice, and I found the quantity to be spot on for hungry eaters. Between two of us we ordered four dishes, one

somtum, a soup and sticky rice as well as fried rice with prawns and it was plenty.

At the heart of their menu is *somtum* and there is a large variety on offer to choose from so you'll be sure to find a version that suits your palette. We tried the Spicy papaya salad with *nam*, pork roll and Isan herbs (Isan style, VND105,000) - the crunch and freshness of the herbs and spices were morish. Isan cuisine in general is fresh and spicy. Instead of the green curry that's often synonymous with Thai cuisine the dishes are light, full of flavor and with a great crunchy texture. The best way to sample everything on the menu is by ordering family style, so select two or three dishes per person and share them with everyone at the table. And that way the decision of what to order won't be too hard, either.

The Thai prawn sashimi (VND150,000) got me intrigued and didn't disappoint with a thick layer of lime, lemongrass and chili. This is definitely one of the spiciest dishes on the menu and after a few bites of this I was really glad to have the Grilled coconut milk marinated pork skewers (VND105,000) to put out the fire with its soft and subtle flavors. We also shared the Spicy minced duck meat salad

(VND85,000) - which somehow they managed to create light and fresh. The *tom yum* soup with shrimp (VND115,000) was different to what you'll expect, the broth was clear, without coconut, but without compromising any of the flavors expected of this traditional Thai soup.

For dessert the Taro in condensed coconut milk (VND35,000) was my favorite and definitely worth saving space for. The drinks menu is small and pairs the food well with a small selection of sweet juices and iced teas, six cocktails and a short beer and wine list. Since most of the dishes are spicy, I suggest going for the Crysantimum juice or Rosella juice (VND30,000 each) as their sweetness will help offset the heat. The latter is a bit more fruity and tangy while the Crysantimum is mellow and sweet.

We went during lunchtime mid-week and it was busy but not crowded. We enjoyed the relaxing upbeat background music that was distinctly audible but also allowed for easy conversation. If you're coming on your own you can also soak up the atmosphere sitting at the bar by the open kitchen or watch motorbikes pass by on Pasteur from their big floor to ceiling window. ■

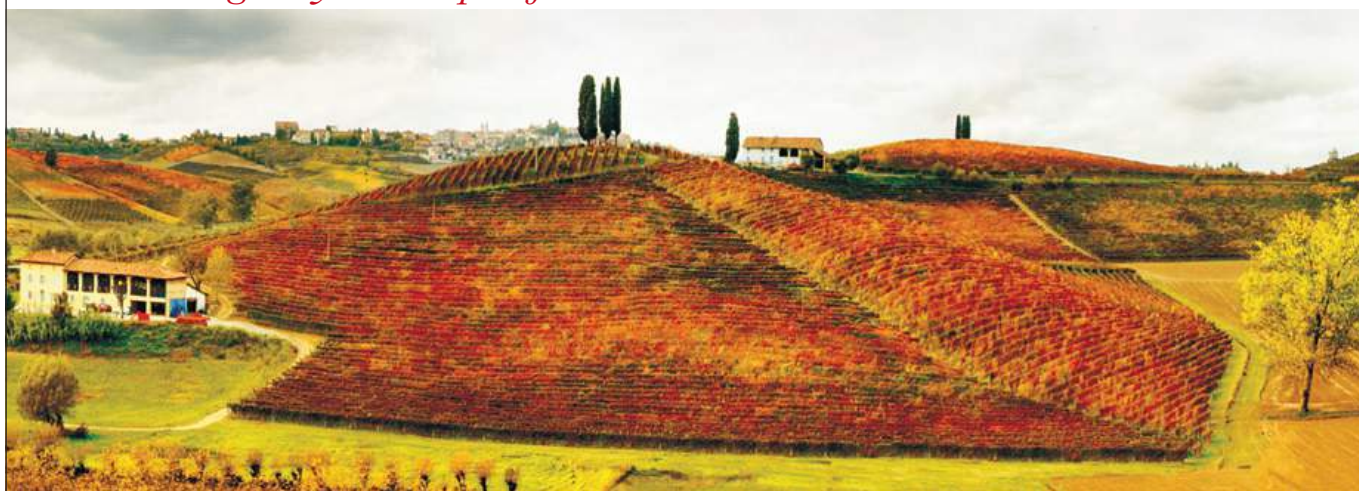


Wine It Up

From Asti Spumante to Barolo, the wines of Piedmont are among Italy's most prolific and best rated



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.



IN THE FAR north-west of Italy lies Piedmont, one of the most famous wine producing areas not just in Italy but all over the world. Surrounded by Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Bologna, Liguria, Switzerland and France, Piedmont is home to great wines like Barolo and Barbaresco, and is also well-known for its sparkling wines and, in fact, is the second largest producer of certified quality wines in Italy.

Piedmont is a wine lovers' mecca. Here wine is not a business but part of the culture and lifestyle. Most of the residents in the area live from wine and winemaking – there are over 800 small producers in Barolo and Barbaresco who bottle the stuff from their modest five acre vineyards.

Within Piedmont the DOCG of Asti has gained an

international reputation for the sparkling wines it produces, using Muscat grapes (or Moscato as it's locally known).

Although sparkling and red is what most people know when referring to Piedmont, the region also produces some fabulous white wines, and my definite favorite is Roero Arneis. The Roero grape is autochthonous to Italy, floral and fruity.

For red wine, Nebbiolo grape is the protagonist, delivering high acidic, high tannic, very complex wines, made to rest for a long time before they can be enjoyed at their best. One of the drawback/beauties of Barolo is the length of wait time needed to fully taste its plenitude. I say drawback because we want to drink it now, and now would be nice, but not as nice as if we wait a few more years so the magic and beauty of the grape, terroir and winemaking helps it develop all the flavors and scents over time while it waits in the cellar to be opened.

Barbera and Dolcetto are two other popular grapes in Piedmont. Barbera is the most widely planted grape in the region, also high acidic, but low in tannins producing silky wines with a cherry flavor. Dolcetto is low in acidity and delivers sweet tannins, making it ideal to blend with Barbera and Nebbiolo.

It is easy to find Piedmont wines in Vietnam (RubyRed, 206 Nguyen Van Huong, D2). And some of my favorites are Barolo Prunotto, of which a 2005 magnum is waiting in my cellar for the right time. Pio Cesare, Michele Chiarlo are equally fantastic.

But if you want to discover Piedmont, start with the entry level wines, enjoy what they have to offer, and slowly move upward, but remember, in this paradise for wine and truffles called Piedmont, making wine is an art, so not even the entry level wines are bad. ■

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

Focus in whole and retail sales,
specializing in Italian wines with over 200
labels, 14 wine makers from 9 different
Italian regions. Bellavista
Franciacorta, Pellegrino & Co., Castello di
Buttrio, Castello di Querceto, Leone
DeCastris, Contini, Casale del
Giglio, Casari, Aldegheri, Piovene Porto
Godi, Endrizzi, Zaccagnini, Cascine Chicco.



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

You'll Flip Over These



Apple pancakes with a side of family bonding for breakfast

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT breakfast is the most important meal of the day – and every traveler knows that it's the hardest part of your daily routine to change. No matter which part of the world you're from, if you're living overseas, the last thing you want to face when you wake up every morning is local food. We love to explore all the cuisines the world has to offer for lunch and dinner – but for most people, the only thing they want for breakfast is a taste of home.

With our busy schedule, the weekend is the only time our family can sit down and have a real breakfast together. For us, our favorite first meal of the day has to be pancakes – so easy to make that we always feel at home no matter where we are in the world.

This pancake recipe is one of our favorites; it's fluffy, moist, and simple to

prepare. What makes this breakfast even better is that when we have it together with our children, it's the perfect time for family bonding.

A stack of hot pancakes topped with caramelized apples is a great way to start your weekend... Who's in?

INSTRUCTIONS:

Pancakes

- 2 cups dry pancake mix
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup apple sauce
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- ½ cup milk

Directions

1. In a large bowl, stir the pancake mix and cinnamon together. Make a well

in the center and add the eggs, apple sauce, lemon juice, and milk.

2. Heat a lightly oiled griddle or frying pan over a medium heat. Pour the batter onto the griddle. Brown both sides and serve hot.

Caramelized Apples

- ½ cup brown sugar, packed
- ¼ cup butter
- ¾ tsp ground cinnamon
- 2 apples, cored cut into thin slices

Directions

1. Melt the butter in large skillet. Add brown sugar and cinnamon. Add apples, stirring to coat with the sugar mixture.
2. Cook over a medium heat for 5-7 minutes or until apples are tender, stirring frequently. Keep warm over a low heat. ■

>>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@icasianasaigon.com

6pm until late

Saigon Saigon Bar

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

Rooftop, 9th floor,

19-23 Lam Son Square, D1

3823 4999

www.caravellehotel.com

11am till late

Xu Bar

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

71-75 Hai Ba Trung, D1

www.xusaigon.com



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

CAFÉS



Bach Dang

An institute that's been around for over 30 years, Kem Bach Dang is a short walking distance from The Opera House and is a favorite dessert and cafe spot among locals and tourists. They have two locations directly across from each other serving juices, smoothies, shakes, beer and ice cream, with air conditioning on the upper levels.
26-28 Le Loi, D1



MOF Japanese Dessert Cafe

Tet Yokoso New Menu (12/28 - 3/13). Ring in the Japanese & Lunar New Year with vibrant & wonderful flavors at MOF. Using traditional and all-natural New Year ingredients like rice, yuzu, and matcha. MOF is proud to present Tet Yokoso. Rush into MOF to try these auspicious & authentic desserts to help you start 2016 with a lucky charm!
Somerset Chancellor Court, GF, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai & Mac Dinh Chi Corner, District 1, HCMC
(08)38239812
www.mof.com.vn



Catina Cafe

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



The Library

The Library recaptures the romance of a bygone era while offering an all-day snack menu as well as the finest tea, coffee, wine and spirits in an elegant setting.
Ground Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon, Corner Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, D1
3520 9099
dine@icasianasaiagon.com



En Tea House & Restaurant

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



The Workshop

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

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, D1
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, D1
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, D1
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, D1 (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, D1
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, D1
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. Mirto 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.lebouchondesaisgon.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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issuu.com/oivietnam

ITALIAN



Ciao Bella

Hearty homestyle Italian food served with flair and excellent service. An extensive menu is complemented with daily specials. Arriving guests are greeted with a free glass of Prosecco. Diners sit in a cozy setting upstairs or on the ground floor for people-watching. Big groups should book in advance.

11 Dong Du, D1
3822 3329
tonyfox56@hotmail.com
www.ciaobellavietnam.com

Ciao Bella



Inter Nos

Inter Nos means "between us" in Latin. Food amongst friends is exciting yet sincere. At Inter Nos, their dishes represent the appreciation they have towards guests, who they consider as family. Many of the ingredients are handmade, from the cheese to the pasta, even the milk is taken directly from the farm. The emphasis is on handcrafting special ingredients so that guests can taste the honesty in the food.

26 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2
090 630 1299
info@internos.vn
www.internos.vn
Facebook: Internossaigon



La Bettola

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

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



La Cucina

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

Block 07-08 CRI-07, 103 Ton Dat Tien, D7
5413 7932



La Hostaria

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

17B Le Thanh Ton, D1
3823 1080
www.lahostaria.com



LovEat

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

29 Hai Trieu, D1
6260 2727
www.loveat.vn

Also Try...

Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1
3824 4286

Opera

The luxury Park Hyatt Saigon is home to Opera, an authentic Italian dining experience open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Try their famous lasagna and tiramisu. Head chef Marco Torre learned his craft in a number of Michelin-star restaurants throughout different regions of Italy during a 14 year career. Dine on the deck alfresco or inside in air conditioned comfort.

2 Lam Son Square, D1

Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1
3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

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

8/15 Le Thanh Ton, D1
012 0789 4444
www.pizza4ps.com

Pomodoro

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

79 Hai Ba Trung
3823 8998



JAPANESE



Achaya Café

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

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



Ebisu

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

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



Gyumaru

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

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



Lavastone BBQ

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

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



Monde

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

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



Robata Dining An

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

15C Le Thanh Ton, D1
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 Chinh, 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



Noss Steakhouse

A stylish restaurant featuring Italian cuisine and Western steaks with a wide selection of imported steaks from Australian and the US. Noss 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.noss.vn



Pho 99

Not a traditional steakhouse per se, but Pho 99 is known for its excellent filet mignon steaks made out of Cu Chi beef. Also serves great pho.
139 Nguyen Trai, D1
536-1 Bui Bang Doan, D7



Wild Horse Steakhouse

The restaurant offers grilled pork, barbecued chicken and steak dishes along with a wide selection of cocktails as well as a number of smaller dishes.
8a/1d1 Thai Van Lung, D1
www.wildhorsesteakhouse.com



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VIETNAMESE



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 Saigoners.



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



Mountain Retreat

Home style cooking from the Vietnamese north in a quiet alley off Le Loi, Mountain Retreat brings a rural vibe to busy central D1. The breezy and unassuming décor nicely contrasts the intense northern flavors ideally suited for the international palate.



Top floor of 36 Le Loi, D1
+84 90 719 45 57



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 Hanoian Cha Ca salads stir-fried with fish and spring onion. Delicious.

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Com Nieu

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

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

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

Cuc Gach Quan

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

10 Dang Tat, D1
3848 0144

Highway 4

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

101 Vo Van Tan, D3
www.highway4.com

Hum

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

2 Thi Sach, D1
3823 8920
www.hum-vegetarian.vn

May

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

3/5 Hoang Sa
3910 1277

Nha Hang Ngon

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

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

Propaganda Bistro

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

21 Han Thuyen, D1
3822 9048

Temple Club

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

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

Thanh Nien

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

11 Nguyen Van Chiem, D1
3822 5909

INTERNATIONAL



Bamboo Chic

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

Level 9, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1

6263 6688

www.lemeridien.com/saigon

BAMBOO



Brotzeit German Bier Bar & Restaurant

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

Kumho Links, 1st Floor, 39 Le Duan St.,

Ben Nghe Ward, D1

3822 4206

www.brotzeit.co

brotzeit
German Bier Bar & Restaurant



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

CUBA



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

Latest Recipe



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 is a traditional American BBQ restaurant that specializes in authentic BBQ classics like smoked ribs, chicken, beef brisket, pulled pork and more. Dine in and experience a taste of home or call in for delivery.

0166 666 7858

3 Dang Tran Con

Facebook.com/tnbbqvietnam



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.villaroyaletreasures.com

Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY PATRICK CARPENTER





Hue Away

THE GLORY OF THE FORMER IMPERIAL CAPITAL
STILL RESONATES LONG AFTER YOU'VE LEFT THE CITY

TEXT AND IMAGES BY PATRICK CARPENTER

I REMEMBER EVERYTHING

I remember it took six steps to cross the balcony to lean on the white ledge to look across the river and through the palm trees to the citadel where the flag was undulating carelessly. The sky was the gray blue that comes after the rain and before the humidity. The wind came and went, came and went, and on it was the muffled chugging of the engines of the long boats sauntering against the current. Songbirds flitted through the palms and three boys came through the vegetable garden with covered bamboo cages and sat silently, staring up in a futile attempt to figure how to trap them. Time passed.





There were no horns, just an occasional human voice:
 "I thought he said he was in 104..."
 "...downstairs in thirty minutes..."
 "Wir sehen uns spaeter?"

And the infrequent opening and closing of solid doors. The pool to the left on the grounds was the cleanest Caribbean blue, salted and undisturbed. Over the thick white low wall that separated the pool, the garden and the grounds from the river, one of the hotel's chefs was cutting off banana leaves to be used to accent the plates that went out of the kitchen at noon. Women were walking single file and talking down the narrow path to the tourist and fishing boats. It was still morning, but the guests booked on the early flight had already departed and the residence was peaceful, contented.

I walked back inside the room and scanned the handwritten welcome note. Who takes the time to write by hand? I cut into one of the mangos in the basket on the bureau, slicing it sideways along its spine and dicing it into cubes. The room and the open balcony were quiet enough to hear the knife cutting through the sinews. It may have been the best mango I had ever tasted. Great meals make great memories, but can you make a memory of just one slice? Stop now all that is spinning inside your head and just realize how good this is. The city can wait. The itinerary can wait. The day is still ahead. There is enough time for everything. But now give into all the subtle variations of flavor in this singular fruit. I ate the first half on the bed and the second half over the sink as the juice ran down my arm. I raked the skin and the seed with my teeth. I thought, 'Who buries the best possible version of a fruit in a fully loaded basket in the far corner room on the first floor of a hotel on an unexceptional guest reservation?' Is it generosity?

The residence I am remembering is La Residence Hue Hotel & Spa, the city of Hue's grand hotel. It is part of Accor's MGallery universe and your reward for reaching the middle of Vietnam. The M is for Memorable, and MGallery hotels are the pride of Accor, distinguished by their settings, their history, their design, their character. La Residence is named obviously: it was the official residence of the French

colonial governor. Its grandest rooms are named for noteworthy personalities that graced the building in its first life, and these persons are noted in biographies along the long halls. If anything, they seem to confirm the elegance of the building in their portraits. Who knows if they lived grander or loved deeper than we do now, but they certainly saw to their days with enough savoir-faire to live up to the building's dramatic Art Deco styling. Rounded rooms, high ceilings and wraparound foyers – it all brings to mind the best days of the ocean liner and the grandest theatres. The hotel sits with pride of place on Le Loi, resplendent in white and set back deep in its berth. The entrance flows from a circular graveled driveway and into a lounge, because a good host knows what his guests want before they admit it. Straight ahead is the broad, well-stocked bar backlit by the sun. The ceiling is a structured sunburst, with support beams radiating outwards towards the pool. I sit and sip and stare and understand why the hotel has made the *Conde Nast* hot list and Reader's Awards, the *Travel and Leisure* top hotels lists, and won *Hideaway Report's* Grand Award. All this to say it's really the only place from which to base your excursions into Vietnam's last city of kings.



I remember stopping early that first full day on a street along a canal that fed into the Perfume River. Each house a different style from a different era, and seemingly every other house an outdoor café. Vietnam's history and her habits are here in plain sight. Trees along the banks of the canal that must have seen emperors, foreign emissaries, a student who would grow up to lead the country, soldiers local and foreign, and finally peace. Sitting for coffee just after sunrise, my guide asks about a particular antiqued gate down the alleyway. A conversation ensues, pulling in the surrounding tables. Being out of the loop, I sip the black bitterness and think of the advice of Walker Evans: "Stare. It is the way to educate your eye, and more. Stare, pry, listen, eavesdrop...You are not here long." We get up to get going, to cross over the bridge and go through the walls of the Citadel and she tells me the modest man modestly dressed that she was talking to was distant royalty and the gate was once an entrance to royal grounds. This little note settles in while I pedal past a steady line of men all fishing in the moat surrounding the Imperial City. So it goes here, with the blending of the opulent and the modest, the past and the present sharing the same wall.

Unlike Vietnam's big three, Hue is not in a rush to reinvent its visual identity. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are demolishing their physical past at breakneck speed, and Da Nang's rapid development means it can no longer be overlooked in favor of the political capital to the north and the economic capital to the south. But Hue has the good fortune of being fewer than 100 kilometers from Da Nang and yet in a world all its own, a world where there is still time, there are still sidewalks for walking, there is still a river you can actually swim in, there are still houses with gardens and lotus ponds that bring the good fortune in and walls to keep the bad fortune out. There are vestiges of the past everywhere, and not all its history is cast in cement or clay.





I remember everything, but some things more than others. In the Forbidden City, the painted phoenixes of the queen's gate, the bas relief of the dragons for the king, yes, but strikingly, the small relief of a multi-colored toad at the bottom of one gate. Who could guess that lowly toad would be there to greet the royal family? Leaving the palace grounds, I remember overhearing a tour guide tell two Indian men that his parents used to make him kneel on the skin of jackfruit when he was naughty. Who could ever find such a use for one skin against another? I remember much more: The somberness of the tombs of Tu Duc and Minh Mang, coming at the end of otherwise splendid grounds. The students in white *ao dai* hurrying into blood red French colonial buildings where Ho Chi Minh went to school and were now the pride of Hue. The metal swans bobbing beside the riveted bridge shaped like a comb that stretched over the river that flowed underneath like hair. The cup of mixed fruit and the sifter of apple juice placed on my table after my afternoon swim in the hotel pool, and the locals who still swim out every morning from the riverbanks, swimming around the nets of the fishermen in their skinny wooden boats. I remember the hint of orange in the marinated pan-fried prawns and the young rice ice cream from the six-course alfresco dinner beside the hotel pool. The 'honeymoon' bedroom of the mandarin who bought a garden house from a princess. It was no larger than two square meters, no higher than three meters. Even given the fact that people were smaller a century ago, this was no more than a closet and a challenge to even the least claustrophobic of lovers. I remember packing slowly but being driven away by the taxi rather quickly – a sign that my time in such a city, such a residence, was now turning into memory.

I remember it all. Because everything about it was memorable. ■





ON FEBRUARY 17, for the first time in its 20-year history, the world famous Clipper Round the World Race (www.clipperroundtheworld.com) arrived in Danang. Sailing and racing around the world for 11 months, the 12 identical 70-foot yachts completed a four-week journey from Australia to Vietnam. Next stop is Qingdao, China before heading eastward to Seattle and beyond.

Founder and sailing legend Sir Robin Knox-Johnston compares this marathon event to climbing Mount Everest. It's the pinnacle of sailing adventures and the longest yacht race in the world. The crews are mostly novices and the skippers are the only professional sailors onboard.

From Halong Bay to Danang, Nha Trang, Vung Tau, Phu Quoc and more, the doors are now slowly opening to this multi-million dollar commercial and recreational industry. Danang has been the first in Vietnam to embrace this iconic international sporting and media event. The sport of sailing and the

related industries of boat building, luxury boat charters and marinas are well established in the region. Nearby in Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, this lucrative and competitive commercial sector is booming. Now it's Vietnam's turn.

As the middle-class becomes more affluent, so does the interest in importing luxury motorboats and brand name sailing vessels. Currently on the Saigon River small berthing facilities are being developed with international brands starting to appear. The locally-based Focus Investment Group have built a 300m break-water along Pham Van Dong, Vinh Hoa Ward, Nha Trang. The Ana Marina development has been approved for 300 berths.

The significance of the Clipper Race 2016 stop-over means that Vietnam is now on the global sailing map of destinations to visit. Organizers are hopeful that a repeat performance will take place when the next race starts again from London in 2017-2018. ■



JOIN THE RACE

TEXT AND IMAGES BY **BARRY J ATKINSON**



The Armchair Traveler



How reading can inspire a love for travel

I WAS A completely unabashed bookworm as a kid. Nothing brought me greater happiness than a trip to the library where I could load up with a stack of books to devour. Long before my first international trip, my curiosity about the world around me was piqued by the books I read over and over. Today's young adult fare of *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* are completely lightweight compared to classics like *The Jungle Book* and *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* which transported me to the jungles of far away India or *My Side of the Mountain*, a mesmerizing how-to guide to solo travel in the form of 12-year-old Sam who runs away to live in the wilderness of the Catskill Mountains.

When we started learning about ancient cultures at school, I couldn't get enough of the Aztecs, Greeks, American Indians and Mayans, cultures so entirely removed from my own. Without photographs, my imagination was free to fill in the details. My parents happily indulged me on a budget trip to Cancun, my first

international trip, where they dutifully rented a jalopy of a Volkswagon Beetle (complete with manual windows and no air conditioning) and drove me more than two hours to the ancient site of Chichen Itza. Standing in front of the ball courts and the Sacred Cenote where human sacrifices were made turned all that history into reality. It was powerful to know that places I read about truly existed in real life and that I could spend the rest of my life searching them out.

Now, while I can afford to travel much more, travel reading still satisfies my wanderlust in between trips and helps me make the most out of my next one. While guidebooks are great for getting an overall idea of a place, they often don't get updated for years between editions. If I'm researching a destination, I gravitate towards blogs and forums which are more current. Sites like www.travelpod.com and www.travelblog.org allow you to search for blog posts based on destinations. Of course, you'll need to weed through many

pedestrian entries (painfully chronicling every bit of minutiae of someone's day) to get to the rare well-written gem, but overall blogs offer the most up-to-date info and often present an unglossed, authentic reaction to a specific place.

BOOK YOUR TRIP

For travel whimsy, I turn to glossy travel magazines, my travel crack. I've subscribed to Conde Nast's *Traveler* since I was a teen. Great photography and insightful prose never go out of style and while I fully realize I'll probably never travel to 90 percent of the places I read about, glossy magazines provide a cheap and wholesome escape with lots of travel tips. Then there are specific travel writers who I follow. When I'm in the mood for Old School, I'll pick up something by American travel writer Paul Theroux (probably best known to the masses for his book-turned-movie, *The Mosquito Coast*) who describes the people and places he comes across in unbelievably rich detail.



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

*‘The world is a book,
and those who don't travel
only read one page.’*

—AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

I remember reading *Dark Star Safari* as I was traveling through Africa, comparing my experiences with his, and doing my best to notice individual people around me in the same way as he does. And I dare anyone traveling by train to read *The Great Railway Bazaar* about a four month train trip through Europe and Asia and not feel like you're taking the most mysterious, romantic form of transportation ever. When I'm in the mood for a dose of travel reality, I reach for Sebastian Junger or Jon Krakauer, best known for their non-fiction accounts set in places like eastern Afghanistan or the summit of Mount Everest, equally fascinating and terrifying places I'd never dare go myself. One of my recent discoveries is author Chris Colin, a young'ish American writer, a little like Paul Theroux in his vibrant descriptions, but more contemporary. His articles appear in publications like *Afar* and *The New York Times* (www.chriscolin.com/articles) and range from renting a friend

in Tokyo to spending a raucous weekend in San Francisco's Mission District.

Whatever I pick up, though, needs to entertain me, transport me, and stoke my wanderlust to get out and see the world with new eyes, whether that be simply a trip to the corner *com tam* place or some far-flung corner of Earth.

While I'm a Vietnamese living in Vietnam, books on Vietnam still inspire me. Tim Doling's historical guidebook *Exploring Ho Chi Minh City* has inspired me to walk the city and see beyond its façade. And Geoffrey Murray's *Vietnam Culture Smart!* has encouraged me to try to understand the reason behind cultural differences I see on a daily basis. Just a few weeks ago, Saigon-based writer Barbara Adam released *Vietnam: 100 Unusual Travel Tips and a Guide to Living and Working There* (available on Amazon). The 208-page book isn't a guidebook per se, but bridges the gap by including tips only someone who has lived in Vietnam for years would know,

all with a good dose of humor thrown in. "Wave one arm above your head to make sure people have noticed you," she writes on crossing the street. "The waving will probably make you feel like a twit but it's effective." She also explains that weird extra long fingernail some Vietnamese men inexplicably sport: "For some, a grow-your-own-Q-Tip is a way to save money on ear-cleaning fees. For other men, the super-long fingernail is a sign that the bearer is not a manual labourer." Having a Vietnamese husband means that Adam has insights into both sides of the cultural divide. "It's also not rude to pick your nose or squeeze pimples in public in Vietnam. If it offends you, look away," she advises with all practicality.

So whether it's a guidebook or a magazine or a blog post you read, let it inspire you to see the world. After all, as Augustine of Hippo noted almost 2,000 years ago: "The world is a book, and those who don't travel only read one page." ■



Read All About It

THE TREND FOR OFFERING BESPOKE LIBRARIES IN LUXURY RESORTS AND HOTELS HAS BEEN QUIETLY CATCHING ON

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH**

"CICERO'S DICTUM IS that a room without a book is like a body without a soul. That said, books to me are like paintings. I've seen many hotels with great works of art in them, but not many with a really great library," claims Philip Blackwell, founder of Ultimate Library (www.ultimatelibrary.co.uk), a London-based company specializing in designing, curating and maintaining elaborate bespoke libraries for five-star hotels and resorts. To Philip, a great hotel library is not only relevant but essential to guest's experience. He calls this an intelligent kind of luxury. His concept maybe strange to some but evidently it has its market and audience because Philip's clientele includes The Savoy, Aman and Sheraton, and for the last eight years he has had no problems selling his library visions to hotels all over the world.



According to Philip, the idea of Ultimate Library came from his travel to Egypt with a friend in 2007. "Egypt was a magical place, filled with history and a sense of wonder, of adventure. We stayed in some amazing places that did absolutely everything very well except for one thing - they paid lip service to the world library. Their attention to the spaces in and around their shelves was woefully inadequate and that was where our conversation with the owners of these places started. Such libraries, instead of enhancing traveler's experience, actually mar the greatness of Egypt. As a lover of books and an avid traveler myself, I could not let this stand without speaking up, so I told those owners that I believed I could do better than what they had right then."

This conversation eventually led to Philip and friend taking up an impromptu job of creating a library that evoked the wonder of Egypt while complementing the hotel's style. Having been born to a family of bookstore owners, books are in Philip's blood, but for this one challenge he went above and beyond the duty of a normal book supplier. Composing a list of texts to acquire, Philip traveled up and down the Nile in search of local literary gems and dug his way through the recommended lists of bibliophiles deeply familiar with the area. When the job ended with a resounding success, Ultimate Library was born.

"I cannot be the only traveler in search of an experience beyond pools and bars and the usual hotel frivolities. I wanted that experience, that adventure that is captured only in real or imaginary tales. But such experience is not so easily available even in the most seemingly





luxurious of hotels because the libraries are often the most neglected place in hotels. I cannot be the only one in search of adventure and the true traveling experience,” he shares. “So I thought to myself, ‘Why not make this a business and a calling?’”

Ultimate Library designs, compiles and curates the libraries of its clients. “Our aim is to educate, entertain and inspire,” says Philip. Texts chosen for each hotel must provide a sense of place, adventure, purpose and perspective. “The library should not look like you walked into a bookshop in 2013. It needs depth.” Ultimate Library sources its books from both new and secondhand markets. The exact locations, length of stay as well as hotel amenities also affect the choice of books. In particular regions such as Languedoc or East Africa, it will refer to lists compiled by

authors familiar with the area.

“We also listen to hotel designers when it comes to choosing books,” Philip adds. For example in London’s Ham Yard hotel, all the books have their dust jackets removed so their multicolored spines perfectly compliment Kit Kemp’s richly colored and textured interior design. “It may not sound like much but once you go past a certain level in luxury lodging, there’s a plateau where every hotel and resort feels the same: the same hall, the same concept, the same cutting edge accommodation. The game then is to differentiate oneself from the flock, and an excellently curated library may just be that extra edge that draws sophisticated travelers to that particular hotel.”

It took Ultimate Library only a few years to go beyond its own national border and advance to Africa and America. It is in

Southeast Asia that the company seems to have stalled. In Vietnam, Ultimate Library has supplied their services to only three resorts - Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, Six Senses Con Dao and Amanoi resort in Vinh Hy bay. This is a modest number when compared to its extensive client network in Europe and East Africa where English is the majority language. Philip believes different income levels as well as traveler spending patterns are also key factors that inhibit the service’s growth in the region, but ultimately he believes this to only be a temporary setback.

“The Asian market is a unique challenge,” he admits. “But it’s an accepted fact that Asia in general are waking up to the world of luxury and refinement. It is only a matter of time before Asian travelers hankers for an experience beyond the usual five-star standards.” ■



“The game then is to differentiate oneself from the flock, and an excellently curated library may just be that extra edge that draws sophisticated travelers to that particular hotel.”

—PHILIP BLACKWELL,
FOUNDER OF ULTIMATE LIBRARY

>>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

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Cham Villas - Boutique Luxury Resort

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



Fusion Maia | Danang

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InterContinental Nha Trang

InterContinental Nha Trang is a luxurious modern beachfront hotel where an enriching urban retreat harmonized beautifully with its surroundings. Right in the heart of Nha Trang, a 40-minute scenic drive from Cam Ranh International Airport, experience the perfect blend of local charm and nature. **32 - 34 Tran Phu, Nha Trang** **(058) 388 7777** www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com



Mia

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Pullman Danang Beach Resort

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Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa

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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

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

Saigon Dep Clinic and Spa

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90 Le Lai, D1
www.saigondep.net

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204B/12 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2
www.sweetspa.vn

Temple Leaf Spa

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74 Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.templeleafspa.com

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

YCK Beauty Spa and Hair Studio

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

>>The List

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ags-vietnam@agsfourwinds.com
www.agsfourwinds.com**

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www.modernpethospital.net.vn
6298 9203**

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**53 Dang Dung, D1
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**38-40-42 Nguyen Thi Thap,
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Kids & Education



A Shot in the Dark

The ins and outs of vaccination for expat families

Text by Michael Arnold

SOME OF THE toughest issues for expat families in Ho Chi Minh City are those which would be non-issues back home. Your kids' educational prospects become a complex puzzle; playing outside without worrying about the heat and air quality are a major headache; and things that would be dealt with automatically by the public system overseas are suddenly issues that require research and decision-making where none were needed before.

One of those issues is vaccination. As a parent in my home country, vaccinating my kids would simply be a matter of following the doctor's schedule – I'd have no concerns about quality of care, it would be easy for me to find out which shots were due to be administered and on which dates, and I'd be reasonably confident that I wouldn't completely mess it up. The opposite is true in Vietnam – I've no idea if the local clinics or vaccines are any good, no idea if I shouldn't be taking my kids off to Singapore every six months for their boosters, and no idea if I'd be paying through the nose at an international clinic for the same thing that I could get at the local hospital for less than

VND100,000. My fears of messing up my kids' vaccination program and rendering them vulnerable to life-threatening diseases are suddenly not as close to zero here as they would be elsewhere.

Dr. Truong Hoang Quy and Dr. Jonathan Halevy, who practice pediatrics at Family Medical Practice, are quick to reassure parents in situations like mine. According to Dr. Quy, Vietnam's 30-year-old vaccination program is actually very good, generally administered according to the same international standards you'd expect in other countries. While some of the schedules vary in certain respects from those overseas – mainly because the risks of exposure to certain diseases are variously higher or lower here than they are abroad – they do have a very comprehensive, standardized program.

While that's reassuring, a little Google research turns up some worrying figures. In 2013, there were several reports about babies dying hours after getting a Quinvaxem shot. There was a subsequent investigation by both the Vietnamese government and the WHO, and they concluded that the vaccine

was safe – but after restarting the program, again there were reports of infant deaths.

Dr. Halevy is quick to put this in perspective. "The big issue about vaccination in Vietnam is not the vaccines themselves, but the safety issues in their administration," he explains. "For example, if the vaccine was not kept in the proper way, or if the vaccine had expired when it was given. The 5-in-1 Quinvaxem issue became significant because at the time, there was a worldwide problem with the availability of Pentaxim, produced in France and Belgium. The authorities here had to use Quinvaxem, which contains a different kind of pertussis (whooping cough) vaccination, produced in Korea."

"It might be related to the fact that the pertussis vaccines in new shots such as Pentaxim and Infanrix do not contain the whole bacteria, only certain molecules," he says. "It's known that the Korean vaccine contains the whole bacteria. It was used up to 20 years ago in all the countries in the world, but it was known to have more side effects – that's why they came up with a new vaccine that has less. But if you look

at the numbers, Quinvaxem was given to millions of kids in Vietnam. The reports were very scarce, so we're talking about 0.0000-something percent of risk of death. Of course, the vaccine is very important to prevent the death of babies from pertussis. So if you take all these factors into consideration, the Quinvaxem is still a better solution than no vaccination."

"When you look at the national view, the vaccine saves the lives of babies; it prevents pertussis from happening," he says. "There's always a tiny little risk in any medication you can get – even Tylenol can kill you. You need to take into consideration the side effects and the benefits of the vaccination – or the medication, or the medical procedure. Everything you do in medicine has two sides, it has benefits, it has side effects. You need to consider if the benefits outweigh the risks."

It should be observed that problems associated with the subtleties of vaccine storage and delivery in Vietnam are mostly restricted to provincial areas. "I think that in most cases where there are side effects, it's in remote areas, not in the center," says Dr. Quy, "because it's important that vaccines are stored in the fridge at two to eight degrees. So in mountainous areas, for example, sometimes the electricity is cut. It's difficult to store vaccines properly in these conditions."

Different Countries, Different Schedules

While it's safe enough to put your kids through their shots at a local clinic, there are some important differences between what is generally offered on the national program and what is available at an international clinic. Vaccines at some international medical centers may be more advanced than those offered locally – and sometimes there are nuances regarding certain vaccinations that local clinics may not necessarily pay attention to that may

be dealt with more effectively at private clinics – it always pays to ask.

"If a new vaccine comes out, the Vietnamese administration has to conduct research and implement a 'pilot' or test in small groups of people," explains Dr. Quy. "They have to make sure that the vaccine is suitable and safe for Vietnamese people." While this is standard practice in any country, it's common for these studies to take longer in Vietnam than they do elsewhere, meaning that newer, more effective vaccines will often take a few years before getting onto the national program.

With expats like myself, the problem is that we come from different countries, and different countries have different schedules. "It can be quite a mess," says Dr. Halevy. "A lot of people don't understand that when a certain country chooses which vaccinations to put on their program and which not, many times it's not for medical reasons, but economic reasons. A certain country will decide not to put a hepatitis B vaccination on their program, not because it's not necessary or not effective, but because economically, for that particular country, it's not cost-effective. In certain countries, they don't give BCG vaccinations for tuberculosis, because they have low risk, low exposure to TB – but in countries such as Vietnam and Thailand which are high risk, you need to have the BCG vaccination."

As with anything difficult in Vietnam, part of the solution comes from being proactive. First of all, if you go to any clinic, you need to be sure that it's working with an updated vaccination schedule. You need to be certain that the vaccinations they have cover both local and international requirements. If you live in the UK or in Germany your kids really won't need a Japanese encephalitis vaccination, but if you live in Vietnam, it's very important. You'll also need to understand that there's a difference

between countries when it comes to vaccinations, so you need to be a little more flexible. Some parents decide that they'll only follow their own country's vaccination schedule, but the key message here is that because you live in a different country, there are different risks and requirements.

"One thing I always recommend to parents when they get a vaccination, is to make sure they get a stamp, not just write the date," says Dr. Halevy. "Just writing the date, anybody can do that, so it's not proof that a child got a vaccination. If they have a clinic stamp, I always recommend that they take their

RECOMMENDED IMMUNIZATION

VACCINE	AGE	BIRTH
BCG (Tuberculosis)		
Hepatitis B (HBV) ⁽¹⁾		
DTaP (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis)	5 in 1	
Haemophilus Influenza Type B (HIB)		
Polio		
Pneumococcal (PCV)		
Rota Virus		
MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) ⁽²⁾		
Japanese B Encephalitis (J.B.E)		
Varicella (Chicken pox) ⁽³⁾		
Rabies (Pre / Post)		
Seasonal Influenza		
Hepatitis A		
HPV ⁽⁴⁾		
Typhoid Fever (Typhim)		
Meningococcal A&C		

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Should foreigners be going overseas for the Pentaxim vaccination?

It's not necessary. Availability in Vietnam is good – for the time being.

Can I get vaccines not listed on the national schedule in Vietnam?

Check with your doctor for the availability of non-scheduled and updated vaccines.

I don't know which vaccinations my child has received abroad so far.

Check your national schedule and call home if there is any doubt. The presence of some antibodies can be detected in a blood test. If there is a serious suspicion that your child has not been properly vaccinated, a booster or fresh series of vaccinations may be administered – this is not harmful.

Can my child be vaccinated for all eventualities?

Some vaccines (such as for yellow fever, unnecessary unless you plan to take your child to West Africa) are available at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases (190 Ben Ham Tu, D5). Do ask your doctor for the optional rabies vaccine if you plan to travel to areas such as Bali, where it is endemic.

Should I just skip the vaccinations and wait until we get home?

In 2014, after many parents elected to avoid the MMR vaccine, hundreds of children died from catching this highly virulent disease. Vaccinations save lives.

CATCH UP VACCINATIONS U ADULTS & CHILDREN C

VACCINE	SCHER
Hepatitis B	0, 1 month and 6 - 12 months
Polio	I/OPV series - if not vaccinated
Japanese B Encephalitis (J.B.E)	< 18 years old: 2 doses (booster) > 18 years old: 1 dose
Seasonal Influenza	First time: < 9 years old 2 vaccines 1 month apart > 9 years old 1 dose
Hepatitis A	0 and 6 - 12 months
Typhoid Fever	
Rabies (Pre - Post)	To be discussed with your doctor
MPV	

phone, take a picture of the book, and save it online. Expats tend to move from one country to the next, and they have a tendency to lose the vaccination records. It's very important not only when you're a kid, but when you're an adult and you emigrate to another country or go to college or university, they always require an immunization record. A vaccination you get today, you might need proof of it 10, 20 years from now."

With different needs for different expat families who need to be mindful of the fact that they'll need to be immunized against two different

exposure conditions – those of here and those back home – parents can still elect to vaccinate at local clinics and ask directly for vaccinations that are not prescribed at the national level.

The doctors' own clinic follows a very similar schedule to the national recommendation. "We took the recommendation of the Center for Disease Control in the US, and we took the schedule in Canada, the WHO recommendations, and we created a standardized vaccination schedule," says Dr. Halevy. "We took the vaccinations recommended specifically in Vietnam, such as typhoid, meningococcal,

Japanese encephalitis and hepatitis A, and we added that to ours. So what you get here is very comprehensive."

"We put a lot of emphasis on vaccinations," he says, "because as pediatricians, preventative medicine is the major pillar of pediatrics. We emphasize vaccinations, regular checkups, developmental checkups – because when you detect problems earlier you can treat them earlier, and this will have better outcomes."

All medical information provided in this article is for reference only. For medical advice for your children, always consult your family doctor. ■

VACCINATION SCHEDULE: CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS

03/2016

1 MONTH	2 - 3 MONTHS	3 - 4 MONTHS	4 - 6 MONTHS	9 MONTHS	12 MONTHS	15 MONTHS	18 MONTHS	24 MONTHS	4 - 6 YEARS	ADOLESCENT	BOOSTER	
1 st												
1 st												
2 nd												
3 rd												
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd		4 th				DTaP	Tdap	Tdap	
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd		4 th							
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd		4 th				O/IPV			
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd									
	1 st	2 nd			1 st				2 nd			
					IMOJEV			Booster 1 - 2 years				
					1 st			2 nd				
					3 dose series: 0, 7, 21 - 28 days				Rabies series			
			Below 9 years old, please see the schedule below 1 dose every year							1 dose every year		
					1 st dose		2 nd dose (6 - 12 months after)			Hepatitis A series		
										0, 2, 6months		
								1 st			Booster every 3 year	
								MCV(6)/MPV		Booster		

UPON ARRIVAL IN VIETNAM: OVER 6 YEARS OF AGE

DOSE	BOOSTER
th	
ted in the past	
oster 1 - 2 years)	
month apart	1 dose every year
	Every 3 years
doctor first	Booster not necessary for Pre-Rabies
	Every 3 years

GENERAL INFORMATION

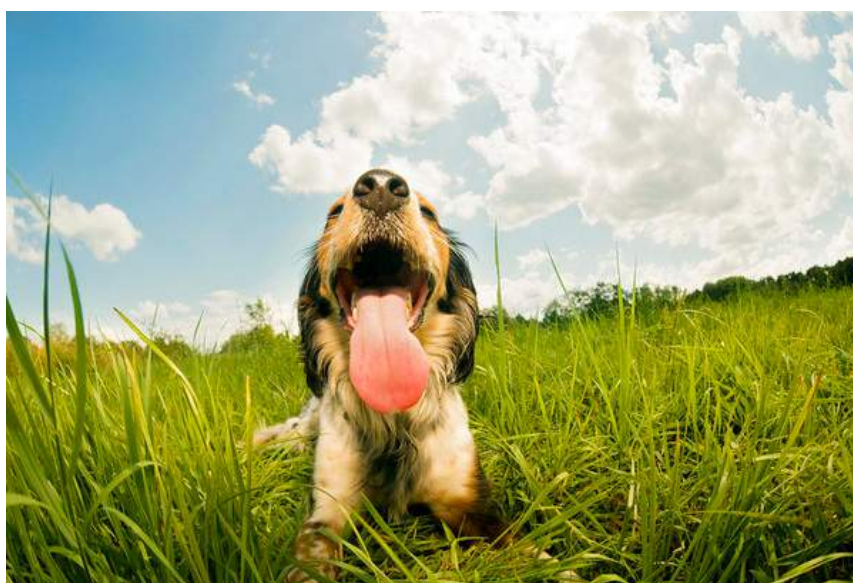
- ⁽¹⁾HBV: Last dose should be given at least 2 months after previous dose and after 6 months old
- ⁽²⁾MMR: 2nd dose can be received as early as 3 months after the 1st dose
- ⁽³⁾Varicella: 2nd dose can be received as early as 3 months after the 1st dose
- ⁽⁴⁾HPV: Recommended for males and females from 9 years old to 26 years old
- ⁽⁵⁾MPV: Meningococcal Polysaccharide vaccine - Recommended for children > 2 years old in special high risk groups, residents or travelers to countries with hyperendemic or epidemic disease and if present during outbreaks caused by a vaccine serogroup. Requires booster every 3 years
- ⁽⁶⁾MCV: Meningococcal conjugated vaccine - Recommended for all children at age 11 - 12 and adolescent before entering college or boarding schools. Booster after 2 months

Catch up vaccinations for adults & children over 6 years of age are not always necessary for all diseases.

If the vaccination status of you or your children is unknown please discuss this with your doctor.

BEAT THE HEAT

HOT WEATHER TIPS FOR YOUR PET



MANY PET OWNERS in Vietnam often ask me how to help their pet deal with the constant heat and humidity here, especially those who have moved here with their pets from colder climates. Fortunately there are several simple things you can do to ensure your furry friend is more comfortable in this tropical climate.

WATER

Always provide fresh water. In lower temperatures animals quite often drink less but in higher temperatures they have to drink much more to keep themselves well-hydrated and avoid dehydration – which can have severe consequences. The first signs of dehydration are dry gums, sunken eyes and poor skin elasticity – if you notice any of these signs you should never ignore them and seek veterinary advice immediately.

Remember when you go for a walk with your dog you should always bring water and a bowl and offer it regularly – the same when you are traveling by bicycle, motorbike or car. If you stop to have a break, remember to give some

water to your animal. You can also use the water to wet your pet's coat and feet if they start to get too hot.

SHADE

Never leave your pet outside without easy access to a well-shaded area with plenty of water, and ideally in an area where there is some air movement. Leaving your pet alone on the balcony or roof is never a good idea – it doesn't take long for them to get overheated and start to experience heatstroke.

This is especially important if you leave your animal in a car – with the magnifying effect of the glass windows even only a few minutes can lead to heat stroke. It's not only the temperature that rises rapidly in the car but the ambient humidity too, which means that the harder your pet pants to reduce their temperature the less effective it becomes – sometimes minutes can mean the difference between life and death.

If your pet is panting, drooling or breathing very fast after it was left in the car or in any hot place take them to your vet immediately.



Dr Anna is one of the veterinary surgeons at Animal Doctors International (www.animaldoctors.vn). Anna's special interest is neurology in which she gained experience in referral hospitals in Germany and Switzerland. Anna has moved to Vietnam following a successful stint as senior veterinarian for an animal charity in Thailand.

SWEAT

The only way that your dog can lose heat is through their paws and panting. This is really important to remember especially when you're out and about in cities as the temperature of the ground (especially concrete and tarmac) can prevent any heat loss from their paws. The most effective way for your dog to cool down is through panting so if you need to muzzle your dog (to prevent them eating or for safety reason) it's very important that you choose a style that allows them to open their mouth adequately.

HAIR

It seems logical that clipping your pet's hair short is a good way to cool them down. Actually, this is not the case because the long hairs protect against the sun's rays and prevents heatstroke as well as being an integral part of how your dog's physiology works to regulate heat. If you have a very active long-haired dog and are outside in the heat the best option is to trim only the hair underneath the abdomen where there is no direct sunlight.

CLOTHING

While your pooch may look cute in their new clothes remember that they can't tell you how they feel and wearing clothes can make them very hot. This is especially true with waterproof clothing as it traps the heat inside and can quickly cause body temperatures to rise.

WHAT TO DO

If you notice any of the signs of heatstroke following these steps:

- Soak your pet with room-temperature water (never use iced water as this prevents heat loss)
- Wrap your pet in cool wet towels
- Wet your pet's paws with medical alcohol to encourage heat loss
- Call your vet and let them know you are on your way so they can prepare
- Go to your vet immediately ■



Adrienne is a passionate Montessori Specialist who joined Saigon Star International School in September 2012.

MONTESSORI OR NOT?

A fine line between imagination and fantasy

WHEN IT COMES to Montessori, many parents who have been through the process of picking a school must have heard of it. It's an education method designed by Italian physician Dr. Maria Montessori in the early 20th century. After her intensive observation on how children learned and developed, she developed a unique approach to teaching. Instead of teachers deciding what children should learn, Dr. Montessori materialized the learning content and let the child follow their interests and needs to choose what they want to work with. The main job of a Montessori teacher is to step back in order to follow the child, to observe and guide them to the materials that cater to their interests and developmental needs. The Montessori Method caught on throughout Europe, North America and Asia. In today's conventional classroom, it is not uncommon to spot a Montessori-inspired material or activity.

After reading my brief summary of the Montessori Method, some of the parents out there may feel a bit uneasy - allowing the child to decide what to learn, isn't it a bit wild? True, the Montessori Method is not for every child. As a Montessorian, I believe that every child is unique so that's why Montessori lessons are usually very individualized. Children are just like seeds. Different seeds require different nutrients, or education methods. Here are a few major differences between the Montessori Method and conventional methods.

In Montessori, children choose an activity because they want to, not because they are asked to or that they will be rewarded. One fundamental

guideline of the Montessori Method is to do the right thing at the right time. Dr. Montessori believed that a child has their own inner schedule to develop certain parts of their body and brain, which she called "Sensitive Periods." And if the child is given the right stimulus, the child has a better chance to reach their utmost potential. That's why Dr. Montessori urged Montessori teachers to follow the child, as the child's choice of activities will reveal to us their inner schedule and thus Montessori teachers can guide the child to the right materials and stimulus. For the same reason, you will rarely see a Montessori teacher cheering "good job" or "well done" or giving out candies or stickers because we want the children to choose the activities because they are really interested in them, not because they want to get attention or rewards.

In Montessori, competition and correction from teachers are avoided, while cooperation and appreciation is encouraged. Every Montessori classroom is a community composed of children of different ages, doing a great variety of activities. An older child may show a younger child how to handle a material or a younger child might observe an older child working. Even if a child makes a mistake when working, thanks to the design of the materials, children are likely to notice the error themselves. One of the reasons why we avoid comparison among peers or correcting the child directly is that we want children to build confidence, to have the ability to self-correct and to learn from investigation.

In Montessori, there is a fine line between imagination and fantasy. You may find costumes of police officers or

doctors in a Montessori classroom, but you will never find a Captain America costume. Yes, in children's eyes, both police officers and Captain America fight bad guys but young children won't understand that Captain America is not real. Both Superman and the Wright brothers can fly but Montessorians consider Superman as fantasy. While the Wright brothers used their aeronautical understanding to fly - that is imagination, which was based on real life. Some people think of Montessori as rigid but we do encourage children to use their imagination which is derived from their understanding of the real world, real life.

I'm happy to be a Montessori teacher and I don't mind investing hours of my personal life to learn more about it, because that's where my interests lie. So I believe that children are most happy and learn most efficiently when they are doing something they really like. However, in my years of teaching, I also see some children work better with competition or tangible rewards, that some children are more of a visual or auditory learner than one that learns through hands-on experiences, and that some children are so into Elsa that I had to make a milk carton 'microphone' for them to sing *Let it Go!*

Not everyone agrees with the Montessori Method but education is never one-man's job. It takes the child, the parents, the family, the teachers and the school's efforts to make it work. So when choosing an education method or a school, the best policy is to find one that both you and your child are happy with. Going for Montessori or not, it comes down to what is best for each child. ■

>>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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Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC

Primary & Secondary Campus:

2, IE 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

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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 Truong Toan, D2

+84 (8) 3898 9100

admissions@ishcmc.edu.vn

www.ishcmc.com





The International School Ho Chi Minh City – American Academy

ISHCMC – American Academy is a U.S. curriculum secondary school, preparing students aged 11 to 18 years old for success at universities worldwide. Early university credits, through SUPA and AP courses, a 1:1 University Counseling Program, and an extensive EAL program sets our graduates on the road to success with 100% acceptance rate and U.S. \$1 million scholarship fund to overseas universities.

16 Vo Truong Toan, D2
+84 (8) 3898 9100
admissions@aavn.edu.vn
www.aavn.edu.vn



Also...

American International School

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

www.ais.edu.vn

Australian International School (AIS)

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

www.aisvietnam.com

British International School (BIS)

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

www.bisvietnam.com

Deutsche Schule Ho Chi Minh City International German School

Deutsche Schule (IGS) offers a German curriculum from Early Years to Grade 12 which is approved and supported by the German government. IGS is staffed by native German, Vietnamese and English speakers who have many years of teaching experience. We offer a link between Vietnamese and German culture, an international program with German standards and the immersion of German culture into everyday life.

www.igs-hcmc.de

Renaissance International School Saigon

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

www.renaissance.edu.vn

Saigon South International School

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

www.ssis.edu.vn

The French International School Saint Ange

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


www.sa-saigon.com

The Montessori International School of Vietnam

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

www.montessori.edu.vn



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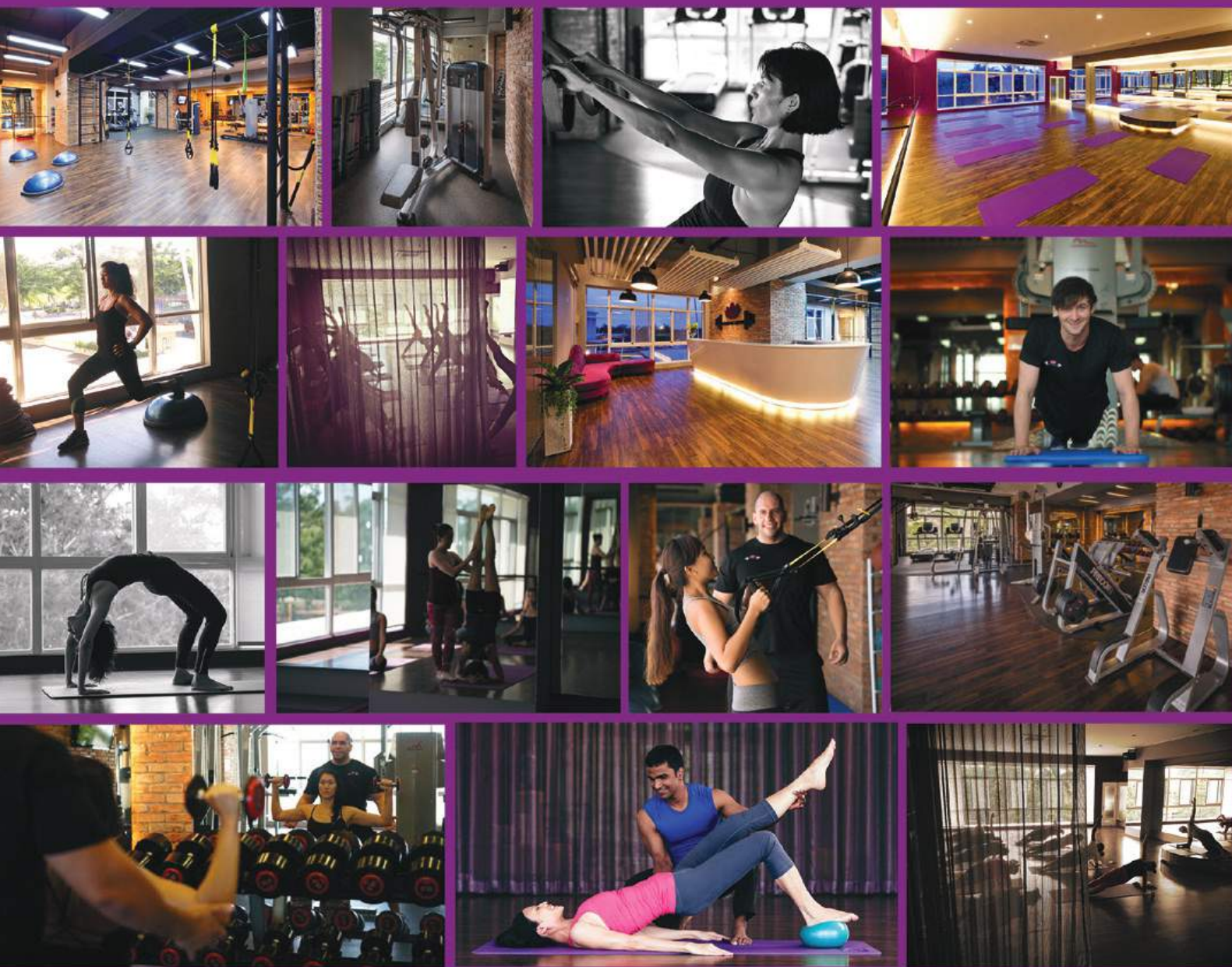
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