



VIETNAM  
7 — 2016



## BLACK SOLDIER FLIES

An Alternative Solution  
to Overfishing

PAGE 20

## A SONG FOR A STEAK

For Great Steaks And  
Romantic Interludes

PAGE 52

## THE ROOF OF INDOCHINA

Are You Brave Enough to  
Climb Mt Fansipan?

PAGE 76

## MEAN GIRLS...AND BOYS

Bullying in Schools  
Needs to Stop

PAGE 88

# Written By

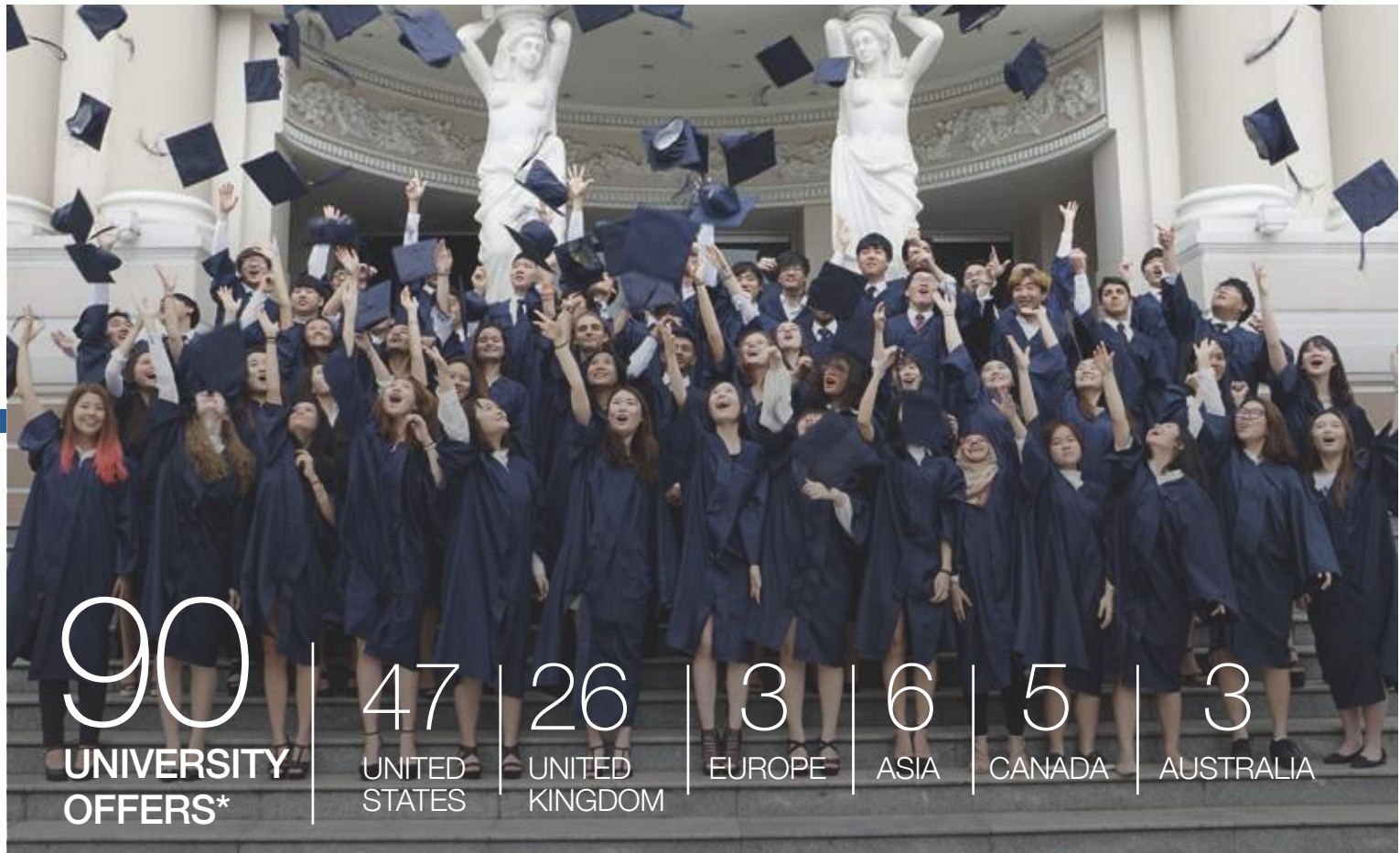


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## This Month's Cover

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Venue **Francis Xavier**  
**Wuong's Studio**

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# Contents



IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

WINE & DINE

## RESTAURANT REVIEWS

*From Asian fusion cuisines to good old-fashioned American barbecue, this month's reviews are delicious readings*

# 50

### FEATURES

#### **P10 DATEBOOK**

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

#### **P16 TROI OI**

*Find out why pigs, books and a family temple made it into our list*

#### **P18 BOUNCING BACK**

*Meet Dima, Ukrainian basketball player, hip-hop singer and hairstylist*

#### **P20 BLACK SOLDIER FLIES**

*Saving the world through craft beer and soldier flies*

#### **P24 THE PRETENDERS**

*Stand-in lovers and pretend relatives are among a colorful cast of fakers*

#### **P26 LIFE ON THE EDGE**

*Meet the mobile blade sharpening man*

#### **P32 HAPPY NEVER AFTER**

*A solo exhibition of mixed media paintings by Saigon-based artist Khoa Le*

#### **P36 THE WHIRLWIND**

*In conversation with legendary snooker player Jimmy White*





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# Contents



COVER STORY

## WRITTEN BY

*An exploration of modern writing in Vietnam*

# 38

IMAGE BY IC BY NOGCTHAN

### FEATURES

#### **P80 PATAGONIA**

*The southern end of South America in pictures*

#### **P77 THE ROOF OF INDOCHINA**

*An easy 20-minute cable car ride versus an arduous two-day trek to Mt. Fansipan*

#### **P88 MEAN GIRLS...AND BOYS**

*From humiliation to physical violence, school bullying is an epidemic that needs to stop*

#### **P90 CHILD'S PLAY**

*After-school programs give kids a safe place to exercise their brains—and their bodies—while having fun*

### COLUMNS

#### **P34 MONEY TALK**

*Comparing investment risks between here and abroad*

#### **P35 LEGAL EASE**

*Perks of having dual citizenship*

#### **P61 CHEERS!**

*Stop and smell the rosé*

#### **P92 TELL TAIL SIGNS**

*Vietnam's native breeds of dogs*



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# Datebook

What's on this month...



## JULY 9

**What:** Contemporary Vietnamese Dance and Music  
**Where:** Saigon Opera House (7 Cong Truong, D1); 8pm; tickets start at VND200,000  
**About:** Held annually in July, the program is dedicated to premiering new works in music and dance by Vietnamese and international composers and choreographers. This year's performance is called *Gone Through Love* by choreographers Nguyen Phuc Hung and Nguyen Phuc Hai, featuring Tran Hoang Yen, Nguyen Thu Trang, Phan Tieu Ly, Sung A Lung, Phan Thai Binh and Nguyen Minh Tam.  
**Contact:** Call 38237419 or 090 360 4539 for more info

## JULY 9-AUGUST 2

**What:** Sketching Vietnamese History  
**Where:** Saigon Opera House (7 Cong Truong, D1); 8pm; tickets start at VND200,000  
**About:** *Sketching Vietnamese History* is the first major solo exhibition by senior established artist Quach Phong. This exhibition showcases the remarkable ambition of a man who, as an artist, has witnessed major scenes of war; endured the struggle of a nation in its Communist cause; and assisted the growth of artistic networks between North, Central and South Vietnam—all of which he has drawn and painted, eventually becoming one of the first government arts administrators in post-war Vietnam.  
 While Quach Phong has been celebrated as a painter and war-sketch artist, his most recent undertaking celebrates the art of lacquer in a most ambitious manner. Believing in the power of the visual in the telling of history, this extensive body of work will portray the major battles of Vietnamese history; the key innovations of Vietnamese folk arts and culture; Vietnam's agricultural and urban development while also conveying the role of education in this country's growth.  
**Contact:** Visit [www.san-art.org](http://www.san-art.org) for more info



## JULY 16

**What:** Giant Swing with Masa Niwayama, NK Chan & Friends  
**Where:** The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 9pm (free before 10pm, VND100,000 after)  
**About:** Masa Niwayama moved from Hokkaido to Bangkok and began collecting vinyl over 10 years ago. With a collection of Cuban, Latin, African, spiritual jazz to reggae and vintage luk thung & molam he began to play gigs around Asia, including Tokyo, Osaka, Okinawa, Hokkaido, Bangkok, Chiang Mai and others. His popular party "Giant Swing," which features top Japanese and European DJs, has been going since 2010.  
**Contact:** Visit Facebook: [theobservatoryhcmc](https://www.facebook.com/theobservatoryhcmc) for more info



## JULY 19

**What:** Antonin Dvorak's "From the New World" Symphony  
**Where:** Saigon Opera House (7 Cong Truong, D1); 8pm; tickets start at VND200,000  
**About:** Maestro Le Phi Phi is the most successful Vietnamese in his field on the international stage, having worked with numerous orchestras all over Europe. He will lead a performance of Antonin Dvorak's "From the New World" Symphony, a cultural masterwork about the spirit of America's freedom. The program will also feature talented Macedonian flautist Strasho Temkov in works that brings forth the beauty of purity and peace.  
**Contact:** Call 38237419 or 090 360 4539 for more info





**JULY 20**

**What:** Vietnam International Fingervvve Guitar Festival 2016

**Where:** Nhạc viện Thanh pho (112 Nguyen Du, D1); 8pm; tickets start at VND600,000

**About:** This is an annual event that has been organized continuously in Asia since 2010. With the participation of famous finger-style guitarists from many countries, this year sees 16 concerts in seven countries: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore.

Fingerstyle guitar is the technique of playing the guitar by plucking the strings directly with the fingertips, fingernails, or picks attached to fingers, as opposed to flatpicking (picking individual notes with a single plectrum called a flatpick).

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

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## JULY 20-23

**What:** Vietnam International Electrical Technology & Equipment Exhibition

**Where:** SECC (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7); free

**About:** This event showcases products from electronics and electrical goods, power, renewable energy and energy conservation industries.

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

## JULY 16-24

**What:** The Kohler Bold. Art Exhibition

**Where:** Saigon House (77 Nguyen Hue, D1); free admission

**About:** In its journey to Southeast Asia, Bold. Art Exhibition, with the theme “Rooted in the Past, Looking into the Future,” will present 12 patriotic sculptures by six artists from Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnam. In addition, featured in the event are artisan premium sinks from the Artist Editions of Kohler, in which the Derring sink—the latest product from Kohler—is highlighted thanks to its outstandingly fine patterns along the basin and masterfully crafted by hand. This is the first time a Bold. Art Exhibition has been organized in Vietnam.

**Contact:** Visit [blog.kohlerboldart.com](http://blog.kohlerboldart.com) for more info



## JULY 30

**What:** Network Girls HCMC

**Where:** Saigon's Lookout (37bis Ky Con, D1); 6:30pm-9pm; VND500,000

**About:** Network Girls gives expats and local female working professions in Saigon a channel to meet each other and exchange ideas on work, living in South-east Asia and the day-to-day happenings in Saigon.

**Contact:** Visit Facebook: [networkgirlshcmc](https://www.facebook.com/networkgirlshcmc) for more info



## JULY 30

**What:** 365 – The Fifth Anniversary Live Concert

**Where:** Nguyen Du Stadium; tickets start at VND330,000

**About:** 365 DaBand have been firmly stamping their footprint on VPop's music scene and are ready to celebrate. 365 is a pop/hip-hop/R&B Vietnamese boy band under record label Vietnam Artist Agency. They made their debut in 2010 with the single *Awakening*. They also have their own reality show titled *Khao Khat Dinh Cao* that follows the group's life prior to their success.

**Contact:** Visit [vaa-agency.com](http://vaa-agency.com) for more info

## AUGUST 3-5

**What:** Vietfish 2016

**Where:** SECC (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7)

**About:** Vietnam Fisheries International Exhibition is a three-day event that showcases products from the agriculture and forestry industry. Every year, nearly 200 local and international exhibitors participate in the show. Visitors can expect to see: frozen seafood products, processed and canned seafood, dried seafood, fish sauce, machines and equipment for processing, packaging and many more.

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

## JULY 23

**What:** DJ Taku Hirayama

**Where:** The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 9pm (free before 10pm, VND100,000 after)

**About:** Hailing from Fukuoka in the South of Japan, Taku currently lives in Hong Kong. He's currently doing bookings for and operating a small underground club called Oma, which has become a pivotal venue in Hong Kong's underground dance music scene. Taku is also a resident DJ at the vinyl-only and newly opened venue MyHouse, Berlin-inspired Italian osteria Mitte and Woobar at W Hong Kong. Taku's sound can be considered an organic one; he takes inspiration and influence from his environmental surroundings, particularly when those surroundings are natural.

**Contact:** Visit Facebook: [theobservatoryhcmc](https://www.facebook.com/theobservatoryhcmc) for more info







2016: A Transition Year

### Pacific Cross Vietnam (Formerly Blue Cross Vietnam)

**ANNOUNCEMENT:** We are happy to say that we are now operating under our new name  
**PACIFIC CROSS VIETNAM.**

Thank you for continued support in 2016.  
All the best in the year of the Monkey!

For more information please visit  
[www.bluecross.com.vn](http://www.bluecross.com.vn)

## AUGUST 6

**What:** The 4th Danang International Marathon

**Where:** Danang

**About:** A four distances—full marathon, half marathon, 10km and 5km—fun run for charity. The marathon is the first professional marathon in Vietnam certified by IAAF - AIMS (International Association of Athletics Federations and Association of International Marathons and Distance Races).

**Contact:** Email [info@pulse.vn](mailto:info@pulse.vn) for more info

## OCTOBER 15

**What:** Queen of Women Power 2016

**Where:** The Adora Premium (803 Nguyen Van Linh, D7)

**About:** Queen of Women Power 2016, organized by Women Leaders International Networking – WLIN, is an event to honor women leaders who have achieved notable accomplishments in sectors such as economy, culture, society and community activities. Queen of Women Power 2016 aims to promote a strong image of “modern and beautiful women,” both domestically and internationally.

**Contact:** For candidate registration/sponsorship, call Hoa Tam at 091 660 2822. Visit [www.womenleadersforum.vn](http://www.womenleadersforum.vn) for more info.



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# The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



## TAM THANH BEACH RESORT & SPA OPENS

Hoi An Tourist Service Joint Stock Company announced the grand opening of Tam Thanh Beach Resort & Spa ([www.tamthanhbeachresort.com](http://www.tamthanhbeachresort.com)),

the first four-star international resort on Tam Thanh beach. The resort has 16 rooms and villas, Ocean Breeze restaurant, 50-seat meeting, swimming pool, and a six-room spa that includes a steam bath and a Jacuzzi.



## THE HEALING BRUSH EXHIBITION

Last month's *The Healing Brush* exhibition brought together artists from Tinh Truc Gia (The Peaceful Bamboo Family)—a Hue-based organization that supports the disabled by collaborating and empowering them to create as artists.

Tinh Truc Gia offers art as a therapy for those with mental impairment to help them integrate into the community through creative activities. These programs, which combine sales-oriented exhibitions and open-painting workshops, have helped create a network of investors and collectors, especially lovers of Brut Art, which encompasses some of

the most raw and exclusive artworks. These outstanding paintings are unconventional, individualistic, instinctive and hyperbolic in their nature. Brut Art favors spontaneity over an intellectual approach and promotes no contact with the mainstream art world—the outsiders—direct and raw, and always emphasizing the emotion rather than the intellect.

*The Healing Brush* brought these 'outsiders' onto the main stage, with the goal of reshaping our views on unconventional artists. Visit their e-exhibition now to view these native artworks: [https://issuu.com/thehealingbrush/docs/catalogue\\_eng](https://issuu.com/thehealingbrush/docs/catalogue_eng).

## HO TRAM PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP

The Asian Tour unveiled a new flagship event, the Ho Tram Players Championship which will take place April 13-16, 2017 at The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip. "The Players' Championship will be the highlight of the Asian Tour year and we could not think of a more deserving venue and event than Ho Tram," said Kyi Hla Han, Commissioner of the Asian Tour. "The inaugural [Ho Tram Open] year not only put Ho Tram on the map, but has reinforced Vietnam's position as a growing force in the world of golf and sports."

The championship will host some of the best golfers in the world including defending champion, Sergio Garcia, who will return to defend his title next April, the week after the year's first major, The Masters. The USD1.2 million showpiece will become the richest prize purse for a full-field Asian Tour event and also receive an increase in world ranking points given its increased 'flagship' status.

The Ho Tram Players Championship will be broadcast around the world in over 180 countries, reaching over 740 million households, making it one of the most watched sporting events in Vietnam's history.



### ANANTARA MUI NE PROMOTION

Anantara Mui Ne is offering 30 percent off on Pool Villas and Suites. In a two-bedroom suite you can relax and soak in a Jacuzzi or watch the sun set on your balcony and pool view. Alternatively, hide away in a spacious private villa, either beside a tropical lagoon or the sweeping sands of Mui Ne Beach, relishing the pure indulgence of a personal pool and an outdoor dining pavilion. With such a generous discount on offer, you might be tempted to extend your stay, or use your saving for unforgettable experiences, be it spa pampering, the romance of Dining by Design, or fascinating trips to explore the region's heritage and culture. For booking or more info, contact [muine@anantara.com](mailto:muine@anantara.com)



### CARAVELLE SAIGON SAYS YES TO GLOBAL WELLNESS DAY

Proud to be the first and only official property in Vietnam celebrating Global Wellness Day (GWD) 2016, a non-profit event dedicated to living well both physically and spiritually, Caravelle Saigon tailored a healthy program during the month of June. Highlights included BodyCombat and Zumba sessions conducted by California Fitness & Yoga instructors on its rooftop with Aldo Belkour and Henri Hubert, the two Ambassadors of GWD in Vietnam. Nearly 100 people participated including the executive management, Caravelle associates and families plus in-house guests joined this energizing fitness-orientated workout to not only get the circulation flowing but also to support a healthy and stress-free lifestyle.

### BAY HOTEL HO CHI MINH PROMOTION

In celebration of the hotel opening, Bay Hotel Ho Chi Minh ([bayhotelhcm.com](http://bayhotelhcm.com)) introduces a special room package starting from VND1.5 million++ per room per night. This package is applicable until October 30, 2016 and includes: buffet Breakfast for up to 2 daily, unlimited Wi-Fi access, unlimited local calls, minibar (replenished once daily), complimentary one way transfer to airport if booking is made directly with the hotel and with a minimum three nights stay, and more.



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# TROI OI!

## The country in numbers

60

**YEAR-OLD VIETNAMESE WOMAN** survived nine days trapped in a well. H'Van Ajun left her house for work in the morning and failed to return later that evening. Family members and local residents began searching but to no avail. Nine days later locals heard

a scream echoing from an abandoned well near the field she had worked and found her trapped 20 meters below. H'Van was admitted to the hospital in severe condition with a fractured left rib. The patient is now in stable condition, but her memory was damaged because she failed to recognize family members, according to her sister.



7,000 KM

**WALKED** by Europeans Simon Niggli and Christoph Obbmacher to raise funds for underprivileged children in Vietnam. The two spent more than a year walking across 19 countries since their departure on January 18, 2015. All donations

raised during their trip were transferred to World Vision, an education and development organization. The sponsorship is part of World Vision's Area Development Program, which has been in place in Vietnam for 15 years. There are now 40 Area Development Programs and 16 special projects in 15 provinces throughout the country.

VND 15 TRILLION

with downtown Saigon, is planned to help ease traffic congestion. The 9.5km overpass, starting at Lang Cha Ca roundabout in Tan Binh District and ending in Binh Thanh District, will help reduce serious gridlocks around the airport, said Le Quoc Binh, CEO of Ho Chi Minh City Infrastructure Investment (CII) JSC. The company, which has proposed to execute the project under a built-operate-transfer (BOT) agreement with the city, expects construction to start next year and be completed in three years. Streets leading to Tan Son Nhat have been suffering from constant traffic congestion as more than 30,000 vehicles enter and leave the airport every day.

**OVERPASS,** linking a roundabout near Tan Son Nhat International Airport



57

**NEW CAVES** discovered in central Vietnam. Officials from Quang Binh Province said a team from the British Caving Research Association and experts from the Vietnam National University, forest rangers and locals made the discovery. Among the new caves is one that stretches nearly three kilometers and was probably formed five million years ago under what used to be a lake. The water is gone but traces of strong currents are visible on the cave walls. Howard Limbert from the British cave association said the five-million-year-old cave has been named Hoa Huong, after the husband and wife who helped with the discovery. The association has been exploring caves in Quang Binh since 1990, creating a map to 311 of them, including the world's largest cave—Son Doong.



66

**VIETNAMESE** were caught in Japan for stealing melons. Police in Japan's Asahi City arrested the group after they stole 112 melons. The arrest was made soon after the suspects made off with the melons from a farm in Boso Peninsula. The men raided the farm at around 2:30am and targeted a brand of melon called Iioka Takami, a specialty of the city, valued at USD640, which they said they had intended to eat.



22

**ENDANGERED PANGOLINS** were rescued by a wildlife center in Vietnam. Police in Ninh Binh arrested three people who were trafficking the animals from Hue to consumers in the north. Pangolins, also known as anteaters, are facing extinction because some consider their meat a delicacy while their scales are used to make boots and shoes. The scales are also used in traditional Chinese medicine to treat conditions such as psoriasis and poor circulation, despite the lack of adequate scientific evidence.

USD 270,000

intended to pay VND3 billion for the jars, he will lose his VND50 million deposit. Second highest bidder Do Quy Hai, President of Hai Phat Corporation, eventually paid VND6 billion for them.

was the winning bid for a pair of handmade 500-kilogram jars made by famous artisan Pham Anh Dao in an auction in Hanoi. However, the bidder refused to pay, citing the excuse that he had only



5

**VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITIES** named in Asia's QS list. Vietnam has taken up five spots on the list of 350 top Asian universities recently released by British education analyst Quacquarelli Symonds. The Hanoi university is ranked 139th, up 52 spots from 2015, while the Ho Chi Minh City school climbed 54 spots to the 147th position. Can Tho University takes number 251, while Hue University and Hanoi University of Science and Technology share the 301st position. Quacquarelli Symonds says its annual ranking is based on schools' scores in nine areas such as academic reputation, faculty to student ratio, citations per paper, staff with PhD and proportion of international students.

**IF YOU'D ASKED** Dmytro Guchko (call him "Dima") 15 years ago what he was born to do, he wouldn't have hesitated to tell you that his life's sole purpose was to play basketball for the Ukraine. Like most professional athletes—including his father before him, who'd played volleyball for the Soviet Union—his chosen sport was all he knew.

Prepped since early childhood, Dima studied in Pennsylvania under an athletic scholarship, and then returned home to play for the big leagues. Everything was going according to plan until one day, after noticing that Dima had been left sitting on the bench for a few games, his father decided to go over the coach's head and ask the president of the association what was going on. Word got back to the coach, who responded by cutting Dima from the team altogether. It was "Thanks for playing, Dima, your entire career is now over." Where do you go from there?

You'll be forgiven if your answer isn't "go to Vietnam and open a hair salon in Thao Dien," but these days that's exactly where you'll find Dima, training young hairdressers and dealing out some very fine international-style cuts. It's not an exile by any means—since leaving professional basketball, he's had an exceptionally successful career as a stylist (and he's arguably been even more successful as a member of a famous Ukrainian hip-hop group, but that's another story to be told another time). His greatest achievement in life hasn't turned out to have anything to do with shooting baskets, but rather helping to save a child with spinal cancer following an unexpected encounter with Cristiano Ronaldo. If Dima's story means anything at all, it's that when you reach that point where you have nowhere left to go, that's when destiny starts playing some of its best tricks on you.

"It was like a big drama," says Dima of the day his world of basketball unravelled, "because I didn't know what to do with my life, and my friend, he was a hairdresser, said 'why don't you come to my salon, I know you know how to cut hair...'" This wasn't in fact true—Dima's experience in grooming hair was essentially limited to knowing how to shave—but being drunk after a party at the time, the idea seemed to make sense, and so he soon found himself being introduced to his friend's salon's owner as "our new stylist."

Inexplicably, the bluff worked. "She said 'OK, what do you know how to do?' and I said 'I don't know... nothing!'" says Dima. "Then she said, 'sit down and

watch, maybe one day...' I was in this salon for two or three months, and she actually paid me. This lady actually paid me to be there. So that's what made me go even more, because I could learn and have some money to get around the city. Two months later, I started cutting hair; three months later, I accidentally won a championship. There weren't too many nominees, and those who were there, they just didn't do a good job. I was the only one who did a very decent cut. So they just decided to give me first place, and I was like seriously cutting hair for not even two days. Everybody said 'OK, he needs to learn now.' Then everybody was just pushing me around in different schools... and at some stage—I just liked doing it. Even when I didn't know how to cut hair, people left the chair like.... 'Yeah... this is cool, man.' That was my appreciation. That's when I knew that I would stay there, because people appreciate what you're doing. They did since the very beginning."

Dima's background as a professional athlete turned out to limit his options as a hairdresser in an unexpected way.

"I went to different schools, to different courses and actually started calling people to practice on," Dima remembers. "You have to understand, after being a professional basketball player, where you have newspapers writing about you and stuff, and then you call people, 'let me cut your hair, man,' I would have to step it up a notch with my emotional thing—because it was like I gave up basketball for hairdressing, and no one will understand this in professional sports. I was always hiding that fact. I was taken from the heavy athlete's world to hairdressing, where at least 50 percent of the hairdressers are gay, minimum, especially where I'm from, you know what I mean? This put me in a position where I did not have the chance to be a regular hairdresser. I either needed to be really good or just get on with something else."

Making the decision to take hairdressing seriously meant Dima had to "come out" to his staunchly athletic father. "When I told my dad I was becoming a hairdresser," he recalls, "he was like, 'is there something wrong with you son? Are you OK, want to talk?' He did

# BOUNCING BACK

MEET **DIMA**, UKRAINIAN BASKETBALL PLAYER, HIP-HOP SINGER AND HAIRSTYLIST

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD**  
IMAGE BY **NGOC TRAN**





not understand, he got upset, actually, he was like, 'how could you touch the hair of some girls' or something like that, it was an ugly comment." It wasn't until Dima had completed studies in a fine Moscow academy that his father changed his tune: "Then, my dad couldn't find the time to get a cut with me, because I was so busy with everyone else, and he was like bitching to everybody, 'can I get a haircut please!'"

## THE CHRISTIANO CUT

Driven to be as exceptional a hairdresser as he'd been as a basketball player, Dima spent a number of years studying, traveling, and working in various salons picking up techniques. Before long, he was making more cutting hair for Toni&Guy in London than most people—let alone hairdressers—were making back in the Ukraine. The day he found himself staring at the back of the head of Cristiano Ronaldo, however, was another of life's surprises.

"It was the European championship,

I got a phone call, I was in my hometown of Lviv at the time," says Dima. "Portugal were based in Poland, but they had a game against Sweden in the Ukraine. So they rented the whole hotel for them. I got asked if I could go to cut hair, simple as that. I went there, and I saw the whole Portuguese team, and I was like, what?? And then Christiano comes and he says, 'So you're my hairdresser.' I'm like, yeah, I'm the hairdresser. After I got searched by an army of police and stuff."

"I gave him his regular famous cut that he cuts all the time, he doesn't change his style," says Dima. "That's the sort of cut I like doing, those short lines, creative things for a guy. I gave him some advice, and I gave him the hair gel as a present, which is a purple hair gel. He went to the game later that day with purple hair, I was so happy."

That one haircut proved to be a lucky break for Dima, who suddenly found himself both the focus of national attention and the proud owner of a new football jersey signed by the members of the Portuguese national team.

"All the TV shows in the Ukraine

were talking about it," he says. "It was the finals of the European championship, Portugal and Spain, and so they invited me to a big football show to talk in the studio. Then when I was waiting to go and talk about what I did, before me there was a little kid, he had cancer, and they were raising money for him. They were talking about him, and the whole story was about this boy, why he was sick, and that he was a big fan of Dynamo Kiev and the Ukrainian national team. Then I came out, it's my turn, and they say 'Hey, you cut Cristiano Ronaldo's hair, how did it happen, how much money did he give you, how was he in person,' and all this and that. I said, 'Let's cut that whole crap, I'd like to help this kid, and I want to sell this jersey that I have for as much as we can, and let's make it a lot.' And the next day we had another show, a political talk show. There was one guy, he was very rich, the owner of a football team. He called, he came to the program and brought two stacks of money, went on the TV, and he said 'Dima, I want to buy that jersey.' I sold that jersey for USD200,000."

Months later, on the way to the airport to take a flight to Vietnam, where he'd been recruited to help set up a Toni&Guy salon, Dima received a call to let him know that the boy had recovered from his surgery. He never got the chance to see him again, however—by the time he landed in Saigon, the Ukrainian Revolution had broken out and there were violent clashes on the streets of Kiev. Even though the Toni&Guy position didn't work out, he felt it wise to stay right here, where it was relatively safe.

Two years of unpredictable fortunes later—along with some fairly intense basketball matches playing for Saigon Heat—and you'll now find Dima at 90/10 Quoc Huong fronting A Cut Above, a pleasant, well-equipped salon of his own in a warm Thao Dien villa. Be sure to ask him about his experiences as a famous rapper while you're there—the man has a lot more stories to tell.

"I like to share things that can help other athletes realize that there's a life after sports," says Dima, who plans to write a book about his unusual life. "Where I come from, when you play professional, you make a lot of money, but then after, you spend it, and life is not interesting anymore. You have kids and stuff, but you don't really play ball anymore, and you don't really know how to do anything because you spent all your life playing sports, that's it. So the message there is that if you want to achieve something else, you really can." ■



# Black Soldier Flies

**Saving the world through craft beer and soldier flies**

TEXT BY **TAYNE EPHRAIM**  
IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**

**IN THE BACK LOTS** of Thu Duc's sprawling university campus one man and his hand-built fly farm is on a mission to save the world's oceans. It's a quest that involves the unlikely combination of craft beer, an endangered anteater and an oversized tropical fly, and Nick Piggott plans to take it all the way. He's a man out to change the world.

"Basically it's like this," he says as we chat at a downtown café with the monsoon crashing down outside the windows. "The oceans are running out of fish at the same time as the world's middle class population is booming. There's a serious problem and the world is just waking up to it."

Nick's answer to this problem lies with an unlikely suspect—the black soldier fly—a large, wasp-like insect native to Vietnam he has hatching by the tens of thousands out at the Research Institute for Biotechnology and Environment on the edge of Saigon.

But to understand Nick's mission, we have to go back before the insect farming and aquatic doom and gloom, all the way, in fact, to Africa.

## The Problem

The story begins with a fishing expedition off the coast of Sierra Leone, where Nick was living with his then girlfriend, who was attached to the British Embassy at the time. Some friends had a boat and got him to go fishing with them. He was hooked. He then started reading up on ideal spots for fishing holidays and all things fishing, and that's when he came upon the Armageddon that's unfolding beneath the waves.

"I started reading things like, go fishing now, because in 15 years time there'll be no fish left. I had no idea it was that bad," he says. "I knew, for example, that bluefin tuna are becoming really rare because the Japanese are fishing it out of the water, and the same with the Brits and the North Atlantic cod, but what you don't really read about are the shoals of small fish that nobody really eats but get fished up to be processed and then fed to other animals. They're catching something like 5 million tons a year of these little fish. They cook them up in these big industrial ovens,

squeeze all the moisture and the oil out, and then ship them around the world to be reconstituted into fish food and chicken feed. These little fish, the correct term is "pelagic" fish, they're very high in protein and used to be cheap, but over the last 10 to 20 years the supply has dropped through the floor, and the cost of it has shot up through the roof. So now people are trying to find other sources of protein. Right now they're sending boats down to the Antarctic to start fishing out all the krill—that teeny and oh-so-vital bottom part of the food chain. It's an absolute disaster."

The race is on. As the world's middle class population explodes, particularly in regions like Southeast Asia, India and China, the demand for fish, a staple food in this part of the world, is outstripping the rate at which they are able to replenish themselves in the sea. In order to keep up with the demand, fish farms are popping up all over the world to try to plug the gap. As one pundit put it, "If aquaculture didn't already exist, we'd have to invent it."

But therein lies the problem.



"All those fish farmers are fishing the little fish out of the sea," Nick explains. "They're raising their fish on other fish. Sometimes at a ratio of more than one to one, which means more fish are going into the fish farm than are coming out of it. It's insane."

And this is where Nick's black soldier flies come into the picture.

## The Idea

Nick's brainchild is to use protein-rich insect larvae in place of pelagic fish. A simple enough concept, you'd think, but one not without its obstacles. Since the mad cow disease epidemic, food monitoring bodies have set up strict rules as to what may and may not be fed to livestock animals, and this includes fish. Insects, it seems, are yet to make the agenda, still banned by default for the time being.

"There's a lot of excitement about the project. It has the potential to really blow up, and Vietnam in particular with its marshy Mekong basin is well placed to prosper from it, which is why I'm here and not somewhere else," says Nick. "But nobody, it seems, wants to move first. The EU is waiting for more research and the Vietnamese government also. But it works. You can trust me on that when I say this stuff works. And it's going to work miracles."

The black soldier fly is Nick's ideal candidate: quick to gestate, easy to raise, abnormally high in protein compared to other insects, and native

to the region. "Black soldier flies don't bite or spread disease and I have it on good authority that they are not a pest, in the technical sense of the term."

The process is quite simple. Nick breeds the flies in his laboratory and fly farm on campus. Some of the larvae grow into adults and reproduce, while the bulk of them are slaughtered and then reprocessed into high-grade fish feed. Already he has a number of takers in the area, even in this early research phase with the project barely off the ground.

"How exactly do you slaughter fly larvae?" I ask. I'm imagining a kind of scaled-down slaughterhouse for insect vermin with a miniature conveyor belt and clockwork mechanical guillotine.

"You freeze them."

"And what do you feed them?"

"Believe it or not, beer. Have you heard of the pangolin?"

## The Beer

The pangolin looks something like a two-legged armored personnel vehicle from the future crossed with an echidna. It's a curious scaly critter with an appetite for ants and holds the title of having the longest tongue in the animal kingdom. It also holds one other title, and a much less celebrated one at that. The pangolin is the world's most smuggled animal; thank the affluent and under-educated Chinese for grinding exotic animals and animal parts into

powders to extend virility. It's an animal whose plight is dear to the heart of Luis Fernandez, the man behind Tê Tê beer.

"I'm a biochemist. I'm not actually a brewmaster," Luis announces. "But I do love beer." The name Tê Tê has two meanings. One is a strong feeling, which Luis describes as "pleasant and weird at the same time. Like an orgasm." The other is the Vietnamese name for the pangolin.

"It was when we were trying to come up with a name for our beer that we discovered the pangolin and its sad story," Luis explains. "See, the saddest part about the pangolin is that it's such an obscure animal that no one really knows about it, and so nobody cares. And the people that do know about it believe it has magical properties, and they try to catch it and turn it into a powder that they think can cure cancer and increase virility and whatever else they believe. So the hope is that through this beer and its name we can at least raise some kind of awareness to help this animal."

Luis and his brother have been brewing their line of pangolin-inspired Belgian wheat beer for about a year now, which is the same amount of time Nick has been raising his flies out in Thu Duc.

"As a scientist, I love the project," Luis says, speaking of Nick's work. "It's all about finding a sustainable way to feed the world's booming population without stripping the oceans bare. When Nick told me about what he was doing,







right away I wanted to be a part of it.”

And that way, strangely enough, was through his beer.

Luis and his cohorts were at the Belgian beer festival brewing out the side of a shipping container in Cargo Bar when Nick stumbled across their enterprise. They got to talking and realized their two projects could benefit one other quite nicely. “Luis came to the lab at the university, which is just around the corner essentially from his brewery, and had a look around with his science brain and realized I could use some help,” Nick says.

As it turns out, Nick’s flies, like many Saigon denizens, have quite the taste for crafted beer. Well, the waste product, in any case. For each new batch of beer Luis brews, he bags up and sends the processing waste of wheat, rye and bran over to Nick at his laboratory to raise his next brood of soldier fly larvae. “I’ve tried a whole slew of waste products for these flies, but nothing gets them going more than what comes out of Luis’s vats. Hot, steamy, fermenting beer hops,” says Nick.

And thus the unlikely partnership was forged.

“Saving the world through craft beer and soldier flies,” Nick quips.

## The Lab

The university offered Nick his own space for the project on their research campus and threw in a couple of eager interns for good measure. I ride out along the highway, following the snaking construction of the Saigon Metro, out to Thu Duc where Nick has his laboratory set up in a grassy back lot behind the research building, to take a look.

I find Nick’s green Bonus parked out front. Insects shrill all around and white butterflies flutter over the long grass. The research building itself is like a half-forgotten Soviet rocket silo in the jungle.

“It is a strange edifice,” Nick

agrees. “And perhaps an odd place to start a fly farm. But it’s not without certain benefits... and charms.”

Nick points out the separating machine, which was built by the engineering faculty to his own specifications. “Like I said, having your laboratory based inside a university campus has its advantages.” When the machine was finished, created just the right size to be hitched to the back of a moped, Nick found himself seated backwards on his intern’s Wave carting it wagon-style across campus back to his lab.

Nick introduces me to the interns in question: Thu and Nhon. They take me out back to where Nick has his set up of netted-off breeding pens amongst the elephant grass. He shows me around his jerry-built facility, which is like a series of bird aviaries but for insects. Industrial trays of fermenting beer waste line the floor. Nick runs them through with a rake and the trays suddenly come seething to life in a mass of fly larvae. I’m reminded of the roiling insides of a volcano. The pigmy pigs squeal in excitement from the pen next door.

“I sometimes go over there with a handful of treats,” Nick says. “Like to see?” He drops a handful of writhing maggots into the palm of my hand.

“These have got to be the biggest maggots I’ve ever seen,” I say.

“These ones are only medium size,” Nick says, taking them back and turning them over in his hand. “The adults get to more than half the size of my pinky finger. Then they go into pupa, like a butterfly’s chrysalis. When they come out they’re black soldier flies. But don’t worry, the name is misleading. There’s nothing militant about them. They don’t bite. In fact the adult flies don’t need to eat at all. Nine days to breed then they die. All the nutrients they need are stored in them when they’re larvae. That’s why they’re so protein-rich and make such great feed. Watch this.” Nick goes over to the pigpen, a rustle of excited snorting from within, he drops the handful of larvae into their trough and the pigs go into a frenzy. “They love it. You can imagine what it’s like with the fish.”

The first colony of flies Nick hand-raised himself from larvae caught on campus with use of his ingeniously handmade traps from which he collected his first fly eggs, rather than going through the inconvenience of ordering larvae online.

“One hundred percent locally sourced,” he laughs. “Hand-reared flies. These babies are gonna help save the world.”

It’s an uncertain future into which Nick and his quest is headed, but he has high hopes. “What you see here is only the beginning,” he says. “The next step is to move from laboratory to factory: scale up and expand. And as the volume of larvae grows, the hope is that the production of Saigon’s craft beer brands like Tê Tê grows along with it. We have a lot of hungry little mouths to feed. And those mouths, with some luck, are going to help us to eat our way out of the mess we’re in. The world’s oceans may just depend on it.” ■







# "BAI" ADVERTISING AGENCY "XIN CHAO" CREATIVE CONNECTIVITY AGENCY

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

**GIANT BILLBOARDS, PRINT AND TELEVISION** were regarded as the top tiers of marketing, the best money could buy. However, with the advent of the internet, and social media titans such as Google, Facebook and YouTube over the last decade, this has changed considerably. The consumers are more connected to the internet than ever, 40 million internet users in Vietnam, 30 million smartphone owners, and this is fast growing beating the Asia Pacific penetration rates. Citing wider reaching scope and far better cost effectiveness, slowly but inevitably, digital marketing has been taking over its traditional counterpart. And this requires advertising agencies to adapt, and evolve.

Such an agency is Happiness Saigon ([www.happiness-saigon.com](http://www.happiness-saigon.com)) - recently launching its creative connectivity agency vision on the 3rd of June with its 1-2-3 Connectivity seminar consisting of interactive sessions presented by co-founders Karen Corrigan, Geoffrey Hantson and Alan Cerutti.

Happiness Saigon is the new kid on the block in Vietnam's agency landscape. Happiness focusses on thinking that over encompasses traditional (TV, print, billboards) and digital marketing. And as such develop communication that delivers happiness, as happiness is known to be an economic lever. *Oi* had an interview with Alan Cerutti -

co-founder/CEO of Happiness Saigon to find out more, what this new kind of marketing agency is all about.

"Instead of advertising or pushing the image of particular brands in a singular way consumers, we create ways for brands to generate connections with their customers through a consumer journey centric approach connect," Alan explains. "At Happiness Saigon we believe we no longer focus on the consumer, but on his behavior, and the multiple amount of connections the consumer has with multi-media touchpoints. He has evolved because of the digital era. Our job is still about finding strategies, and creative concepts that are relevant and will lever cognitive or emotional connections, but we need to think exponentially and translate this message in 3603 content along that consumer journey."

"For the next few years Happiness is planning to prove its unique responsiveness to change, and it will be about re-inventing the category and even the business itself. Happiness says goodbye to the old era of advertising," Alan says. "Both in the work and in the way we work. 'Creativity' is still remaining at the core. Because it's creativity that will make sure brands will not only pay 'Share of Voice' but will also earn 'Share of Choice.'"

Happiness is becoming a new kind of agency that works in a new kind of way. Where KPI's and dashboards will be at

the core of the whole working-process. With slow, fast and real-time content that can be adapted here and now if needed. With Co-Creative Management where the triangle client-agency-consumer will be in constant interaction to get the creative concept and the content first right and then great.

What Happiness Saigon does is a sophisticated weaving of digital tools, traditional marketing instruments and the language of human emotions to imprint a brand into the lives and experience of its audience. One recent example is its work for Coca-Cola Share a Coke, Share a feeling testifying that marketing requires a great deal of creativity as well as a deep understanding of the consumers.

The agency's approach proved to be successful. Over the past year and a half, Happiness Saigon has garnered an impressive portfolio, having designed and carried out many successful campaigns for big clients such as Coca-Cola, NIVEA, Bosch, UNICEF, among others.

Moving ahead, Happiness Saigon looks forward to expand its name and base in the region as well as proving its unique responsiveness to changes. And it's off to a great start. In June, Happiness Saigon won 14 shortlists and 2 Lions at the International Festival of Creativity Cannes Lions, proving to lead the industry by leading the way and showing that Vietnam can compete on the global scale when it comes to creativity too. ■



TEXT BY NPD KHANH  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

# The Pretenders

Stand-in lovers and pretend relatives are among a colorful cast of fakers

*Text by* NPD KHANH  
*Images by* NGOC TRAN

**“I’VE MET 25 SETS OF PARENTS** and have worn 50 wedding dresses,” proclaims Giang Anh, a 24-year-old medical student. “But I have never signed a marriage certificate.” Before you jump to conclusions, Anh is not a con woman out to swindle men, she’s a professional bride for hire and the grooms are her clients.

“My life sounds like a plot from a romantic comedy, doesn’t it?” says Anh. “Poor medical student trying to pay the bills by playing bride to men whose parents pressure them to settle down.” However, her role is not part of a film, it’s acted out in real life in Vietnamese society where traditional parents still expect their children to marry early - as young as 20. But the younger generation is hoping to break away from traditions, focusing more on building a career and marrying at a later age, while some require the protection of a heterosexual marriage while they go through gender and sexuality issues.

Royal Wedding, the organization Anh works for, is disguised as an event management company. It employs a large number of part-time actors committed to a single role—romantic

partner—and solicit business on the internet or through other service intermediaries such as wedding dress boutiques or wedding photography studios.

Her first assignment was nerve wrecking. “My first client was a gay man who couldn’t come out to his ultra-conservative parents,” shares Anh. “He had a good job and an image to uphold, but he lived in Hanoi and up north people aren’t as accepting of the LGBT community as we folks down south are. At 31, people were constantly asking him why he had never brought a girlfriend home or even to a party. He contacted my company looking for a southern ‘bride.’ We had a big wedding, just so everyone knew he was getting hitched.”

“I was so nervous I lost 2kg during the entire process. I couldn’t eat properly and I worried constantly that I might mix up my pretend parents’ names,” she continues. “His parents were nice people, conservative but nice. I had bouts of guilt for deceiving them. The wedding day was also during Valentine’s week and I had received date proposals from three guys in my med class. I remember the wedding ceremony...30 minutes before the ceremony I

clutched my cellphone and prayed those guys wouldn’t call me then I remembered that I could turn the phone off! I wasn’t thinking straight that day.”

In contrast, the equally fake divorce that followed three months later was a hushed procedure to which only the ‘jilted husband’ and his family were privy. The flashy wedding served its purpose—nobody pestered the newly divorced man about settling down again.

Other clients, on the other hand, use the service as a way to appease parents or uphold familial duties. For example, Anh’s male colleague was hired by a woman whose dying elderly parents didn’t want to see their only daughter left alone without a man to take care of her. They made her promise to marry before they died. A successful businesswoman with no interest in marrying before the age of 28, she hired a pretend groom to ease her parents’ worries.

“What was she to do? Months away from the old madam and sir’s funeral and she was hard-pressed to produce a man lest her parents go to the grave still worrying about her. So she looked around and found us. It was a match made in heaven. No staged divorce



required afterwards. Everybody was happy," says Anh. However, not every assignment has a 'happy ending.'

"Pregnant clients are the most complicated," says Anh. There are no official statistics but Dr. My Hanh, head of the obstetrics department at Hung Vuong hospital, believes that one in every 10 babies delivered in her hospital belongs to a single mother. Every year more than 1 million babies are born in Vietnam. "You can say single moms created my new profession. The hire rate of groom to bride is three to one."

"But there are few men willing to play pretend husband to expecting mothers," Anh explains. That's because they are put through far more stringent conditions. Not only do they need to be good looking, courteous, fashionably dressed and eloquent, they must also love children and be dependable because the service is no longer hire-a-groom, but rather hire-a-husband/father.

"We call them Mr. Perfect," she shares.

Not unlike homosexual clients, single mothers are under societal pressure and, at times, outright ridicule. For some, being a single mother is a stigma that follows not only them but also their children for the rest of their lives, so the services offered by Anh's employer serve as a protective cover. The hired husband performs every duty a real husband would, (except for those in the bedroom), and a rental contract can be as long as a year post nuptial and comes with a high price tag: VND200 million for the wedding, then

VND20 million for each month after.

According to Anh, despite the high payout, her colleagues often refuse the assignments. "It's the emotional entanglement," she explains. "It's not like a fake wedding where you are only required to look pretty and make good conversations with your client in front of the family and wedding guests. This is as close to the real thing as you can get. He takes care of her when she's alone... which is a lot of the times. He consoles her when she feels down. He takes her to the hospital on the due date. He stays by her side after the birth. He is the face and the name her family and friends associate with the baby, but he's not her real husband. You can't go through something like that by just pretending."

## How to Apply

The process of choosing a hired wife/husband is extensive and modeled to the specific needs of the client and their situation. Beyond the immediately apparent criteria such as age, mannerisms, physical appearances and other less obvious factors such as background, education, zodiac and elemental signs - even the client's parents' preferences are taken into consideration.

"Some parents want their in-laws to be government workers or have stable corporate jobs, while others are happy as long as their children are happy," she says. The level of services and fees that Anh's company offers varies. The full package, which includes renting the

groom/bride along with fake extended relatives, wedding planning, catering, photography services and even fake paperwork can cost as much as VND200 million. Or clients can choose the basic service of hiring a fiancée/fiancé for a home visit to entertain the parents for a day or two, priced at VND2 million to VND3 million.

Royal Wedding even offers a three-year follow up service free of charge. "Sometimes we'd have a client requesting the presence of their 'spouse' for a parent's visit or other formal occasions." After the three-year expiration, follow up assignments are charged the usual rates.

Does Anh think what she's doing is morally wrong and deceptive? "I'm probably the last person to be asked whether it's right or wrong seeing as it's how I'm making ends meet," she replies. "But, in my honest opinion, we live in an increasingly complex society. Who can say what is right and what is wrong? The people who come to us have their reasons, and as long as they harm no one, do we have a right to judge?"

There is one thing she has learned from her years of working in the industry. "It's frightening to see people living so recklessly and so naively. And I still get more and more work every day. When you get down to it, it is only in a society heavy with outdated preconceptions and fraught with intolerance that a service like this can exist and prosper. It's easy to point fingers and say that's illegal or morally wrong, but I think we should all look at each other with a more understanding eye." ■





# LIFE ON THE EDGE



Meet the mobile blade sharpening man

TEXT BY JOHN DAVIS  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

**“HE’S ONE OF** the few left in Saigon; there’s no use for them anymore,” says 67-year-old Thuy pointing to the old man sharpening her kitchen cleaver. “I’ve been using him since I was young. Today’s society is wasteful. The young people now use something once or twice and then throw it away and buy a new one. They don’t care. I can afford to buy a new knife but I don’t want to, this one I’ve had for so long and it fits my hand perfectly. New does not mean better.” Fortunately for Nam, people from the older generation reject the disposable mentality.

Nam’s business card is his recorded voice on a loop through a bullhorn: “*Mai dao oi!* (Sharpen knife!),” which

gives shout every morning for the past couple of decades while cycling through alleyways and neighborhoods. Nam has been in this trade for longer than he cares to—or can—remember. He started as an apprentice to his father, who had worked as a sharpener for 50 years and who passed on to him the old tradition of a sharpener’s knowledge and skill. “It’s not because I was particularly interested in the trade; I just did not want to stay at school,” he says. Like most beginner, the truant kid made a lot of mistakes, cutting himself often and sometimes had to pay customers for ruining their scissors.

“The trick is holding the blade at the angle against the grindstone and

applying the right amount of strength to sharpen it,” Nam explains. Straight on grinding will blunt the knife within seconds, while too much force will wear away the metal. “Steady hands are also important,” he adds. Every knife he sharpens feels like his first one, the same excitement of decades ago, yet with much more dexterity and artfulness. How does he know he got the right edge? He does it just by listening to the sound and feel of the blades as he performs a cutting gesture, just the way our parents warned us not to. He files the knife’s sharp end on a grindstone and splash a bit of water in between to clean away the accumulated mass or to cool the hot knife down.





‘A DULL KNIFE IS THE KITCHEN’S MOST DANGEROUS TOOL’



It usually takes a few minutes to sharpen a knife or a pair of scissors.

Nam's workstation consists of a motor-operated grinder that sits on the back of his motorbike (an upgrade from the bicycle he started with). He carries with him a small bottle of water, a grindstone and sheets of sandpaper. He's been asked to sharpen scissors, meat-slicing blades, swords, tweezers and any metal items that have lost their edge.

As the old man works, he chitchats about how 99 percent of knives are stainless, which is a mix of chrome and carbon steel. "It's hard to find the right balance between your chrome content and your carbon steel. One gives you corrosion resistance, the other

gives you strength. A lot of cheaper knives don't have the right balance so they can be prone to rusting and staining and not holding their edge. The handles, over time, will get worn out and can split because of the heat." As you can see, Nam's an expert on steel, he can tell cheap from expensive at a glance. There's something about the act of sharpening a knife, he says, that's deeply satisfying: the spin of the grinding wheel, the rocky song of metal meeting grit. It requires concentration to a degree almost transcendence.

"A dull knife is the kitchen's most dangerous tool," he continues absentmindedly. "A sharp knife is your friend. A sharp knife does what you want it to do." Wooden blocks to

store knives in also prompt his scorn, as do the mechanical sharpeners so popular in modern kitchens. "Every time you pull a knife out of the block, you are cutting against the wood and dulling the blade. And the sharpeners take way, way too much steel off."

Until the past decade, he sharpened knives at dozens of restaurants, barbers and wet markets in town but now he's lucky if he gets five customers a day. Nam doesn't see a bright future for his trade. A handful is still around but as a profession, he acknowledged, knife sharpening holds little appeal for young people. His own sons chose to work in other fields, and the few apprentices he has had over the years did not last long. ■



# ANIMAL INSTINCTS

ELEGANT, CURRENT, SEXY AND PRACTICAL,  
UMBRELLA'S PRE-FALL COLLECTION USES ANIMAL  
PATTERNS ALONGSIDE BOLD BLOCK COLORS TO  
MAKE STATEMENT PIECES FOR THE MODERN WOMAN















CLOTHES & ACCESSORIES UMBRELLA BY DOAN QUYNH NHI  
(35 LY TU TRONG, D1)

PHOTOGRAPHER HUYNH LAM

MODEL KIM PHUONG

MAKEUP & STYLIST HIZASHI

LOCATION HO DA





Maze

# HAPPY NEVER AFTER

A SOLO EXHIBITION OF MIXED MEDIA PAINTINGS  
BY SAIGON-BASED ARTIST KHOA LE

*Interview by* CRAIG THOMAS *Images provided by* KHOA LE

**KHOA LE** is a young visual artist who also works as an illustrator and an author of short stories and picture books for children. Her diverse skill set is on full display in the fantastical creations of the Happy Never After series. Khoa's prodigious imagination and ability to work with various media combine to create works that are each fairy tale worlds in and of themselves.

In preparation for her upcoming exhibition, we ask Khoa about her work, her latest collection and her influences.

**Can you tell me about where you derive the inspiration for your paintings? Were you a big fan of fairy tales when you were a child?** Being an illustrator and an author of many children's picture books, I am always a loyal audience of the fairy tale. I think that they are an unlimited source of

inspiration because it is almost the first approach to beauty; a version of "literary-arts" for children (possibly through the first picture book or through bedtime stories). But I think

that when we become adults, we all are induced to forget them, unconsciously or consciously, because we assume they are just "childish stories." On the contrary, a fairy tale is an adult story that is retold



Glided Shoes





that contain our darkest thoughts and the secrets and scars that we keep hidden. I don't think this is entirely a bad thing. Nonetheless, we should from time to time look into these dark places. They are a part of what makes us human and they also have aspects that are beautiful and have their own value which should be respected.

**In addition to a certain macabre quality, many of your works like Fairest feature an absurdist sense of humor to them. Can you talk about that?** Many friends of mine have told me that I do have at times a somewhat sarcastic sense of humor. I think this is true to a certain extent and at times it can appear in my paintings. For example, in the piece *The Fairest*, I really do not want to reveal my thoughts and would prefer to let the viewers feel and tell their own version of the story. Each of my paintings usually has several levels of meaning and there is room for all interpretations. Some of my friends have seen *The Fairest* and commented that to them it represents "the revenge of the trophy wife." Maybe that is a sign of the humor that viewers feel when they see my work?

*Happy Never After is on display at Craig Thomas Gallery (165 Calmette, D1) until July 20. ■*

in a different way to make them more joyful and suitable for children. But as an artist, I want to bring to my fellow adults fairy tales of their own. There is not only romance and flying fairies, but also the woes, pain, loneliness and struggles of the maturation process. Hiding behind metaphorical images, it is a disillusioned world of adults. But at the same time, there is also a beautiful inner world which is rich and deep where there is not only the "happy ever after," but also many other important things.

**Could you describe for me step-by-step the process of making your work from inspiration to the final product?**

I create the materials that I use in my paintings by experimenting with different types of materials (types of colors, chemicals, etc.) to make different textures and patterns. I then scan what I have created onto the computer, and combine everything together in the drawing process on the computer. The paintings are then printed in monoprint and mounted on canvas. Finally, they are coated with a layer of resin. This ensures that the paintings are waterproof and that the vivid colors will endure.

**Are there certain writers/tales that you find particularly interesting or who have influenced your work?**

A number of writers have served as a source of inspiration because I like reading books in my spare time. I am not, however, someone who can read and critique books professionally. Usually, I choose to read what I like and I decide whether I like a book or not within the first 20 pages. I particularly enjoy stories by Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Jean Paul Sartre and Haruki Murakami.

**Many people have commented on the darkness in your work when seeing**

**previous pieces? Do you find them dark and where does that darkness come from?** I think there are some dark elements in my paintings. Perhaps partly because I myself am somewhat introverted and prefer to focus my attention on the inner qualities of people rather than the exterior flash around them. I believe that almost all of us, to a greater or lesser extent, have inner worlds in our subconscious





# HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

Comparing investment risks between here and abroad



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

Dear Sven,

What advice do you have for a Vietnamese/US dual citizen who wants to buy a house in the US instead of saving money in Vietnamese banks or investing in domestic assets in such unstable conditions? And what about renting the house while staying in Vietnam? I'm looking to buy a house in Houston because it seems to have the cheapest price range in the US. Also, my wife is a Vietnamese citizen and would like to know if it would be possible for her to purchase a house in her own name abroad.

**ALTHOUGH INTEREST RATES** on deposits in Vietnam might be relatively high compared to the US and Europe (which are almost zero), it is important to note that when all your savings are denominated in Vietnamese dong you open yourself up to risks relating to currency depreciation. The most important risk in terms of the long-term value of your dong is that the government and the economy as a whole would very much like the value of the dong to decrease over time to make Vietnam's exports cheaper than neighboring competitors and thus allow the economy as a whole to grow. The fact that you would like to invest in the US and have your savings/assets valued in dollars means protecting your purchasing power over time.

Buying property in the US seems plausible because the country has universal property rights and one of the world's oldest democracies, meaning you would be able to take legal action against any person or government entity that tries to lay claim on your property without proper cause.

Your US citizenship is key because solely as a Vietnamese citizen you would not be able to transfer money

to the US for the purpose of investment and would only be able to do so if you could prove the transfer was to finance either: emigration, education, travel, supporting a family member or making payment for a good or service consumed in Vietnam, and concrete proof needs to be shown to your banker. Therefore, it would be easiest for your wife to have joint ownership of the property with you, which would be paid for from your accounts.

In terms of investing in US real estate specifically, there are various trends you should consider before settling on this option. Demographics and property purchasing trends have changed quite substantially in the US. Younger people are saddled with more student debt and wages have not increased much in the past 20 years, meaning more people are living with their parents for longer and the frequency of home purchases has decreased over time, which would be a dampener on your property investment in the future. In terms of timing, the best opportunity would have been in mid-2008, just after the real estate crash in the US, you would have found many bargains then. Generally, real estate prices have recovered substantially and are almost at pre-2007-

2008 levels as measured by the S&P/Case-Shiller housing price index.

Looking more specifically at Houston, the obvious driver of the property market is the oil industry, which makes up more than 50 percent of the tenants in the metro area. Even though you say prices are still cheaper than some other cities, when looking at the All Transactions House-Price index measured by the Woodlands-Sugar Land, prices in Houston are currently at an all-time high. Relative prices paired with the bleak prospects within the city's biggest employer, oil and gas, means there is not much room for growth in property prices and your investment. Try looking at other cities like Chicago, which has a more diversified tenant base and currently has lower relative prices compared to 2008.

In terms of taxation, you would be liable for: state property taxes, which in Texas are 1.93 percent of purchase value (one of the highest rates in the country), federal income taxes which you would pay on the rental you receive from your tenant based on your tax bracket and capital gains taxes equal to 20 percent that you would pay on the profit you make on the property once you sell it. It's important to note that if you are living in Vietnam and have the rent you receive from your tenant remitted to your bank accounts in Vietnam or wherever they are held, that you will still be liable for the above taxes as the US, Philippines and Eritrea are the only countries that tax their citizens on income earned regardless of where they live. Perhaps consider securitized property investments such as Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) as these are far more liquid, give your assets to a diversified pool of property investments that are far more efficient from a tax reporting point-of-view. ■



# THE VIET KIEU TREATMENT

## Perks of having dual citizenship

Dear Marijn,

I recently started working in Ho Chi Minh City as an architect. I have heard the term “*Viet Kieus*” used a lot but I don’t really know what it means exactly. I’ve also heard that they enjoy many benefits, for example with investment. Is that true?

**EVEN THOUGH** the term “*Viet Kieu*” is widely used in practice, you won’t be able to find it anywhere in Vietnamese laws. From a legal perspective, a more accurate definition would therefore be “Vietnamese residing overseas.” According to the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are roughly 4 million Vietnamese people living overseas, and the biggest communities can be found in the US, Cambodia and France.

There are various reasons why Vietnamese people live overseas. It probably goes without saying that many moved to the US after the liberation of Saigon in 1975, but others had already moved to France during the colonial period. In more recent times, immigrants have moved to countries such as Australia, Japan, South Korea and countries in the European Union for family, economic or educational purposes. Around the world you can find Vietnamese communities with names such as “Little Saigon” and “Little Hanoi.”

The role of the *Viet Kieu* in society, and the attitude of the Vietnamese government towards them have evolved positively over time. Since 2013, the Constitution of Vietnam explicitly mentions that *Viet Kieus* form an integral part of the Vietnamese community. It also mentions that the State shall encourage and provide favorable conditions for them to preserve the identity of the Vietnamese national culture, to keep close contacts with their families and their home country, and to contribute to the construction of Vietnam.

Now what does this special status mean in practice? You rightfully asked me whether *Viet Kieus* enjoy any preferential treatment in terms of doing business in Vietnam. In order to answer that question, we need to know

how Vietnamese law defines this group of people. There is not a single, unified definition, but the one under the Law on Vietnamese Nationality is helpful in this regard: “Vietnamese residing overseas are Vietnamese *citizens*, and persons of Vietnamese *origin*, who permanently reside in foreign countries.” This means that the following groups are covered: a) people holding Vietnamese nationality, b) people who used to hold Vietnamese nationality at the time of their birth, and c) the children and grandchildren of group a.

Note that neither the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises, nor the Vietnamese Law on Investment contains any provision that specifically favors *Viet Kieus*. Instead, these two fundamental laws make a distinction on the basis of *nationality*. Under the law, there are “domestic” investors (any individual with Vietnamese nationality, or any company without a foreign investor being a member or shareholder), and there are “foreign” investors (any individual with a foreign nationality, or any company established in accordance with foreign law). Domestic investors are exempt from the sometime burdensome rules and procedures that would apply to their foreign counterparts.

This means that *Viet Kieus* who have lost or given up their Vietnamese nationality may want to consider restoring their Vietnamese nationality in order to benefit from a preferential treatment under the Law on Investment. Also, Vietnamese nationals who concurrently have another nationality may choose whether to invest as a domestic or foreign investor.

One sector in which *Viet Kieus* do enjoy special treatment is real estate. Under the Law on Residential Housing, for example, *Viet Kieus* who own a



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.

residential house enjoy the same rights as Vietnamese individuals and companies who actually reside in the country. For example, the housing quota and the 50-year ownership limit that apply to foreign owners of residential houses do not apply to *Viet Kieus* who hold Vietnamese nationality. Furthermore, the Law on Real Estate Business states that *Viet Kieus* can invest in the construction of houses and buildings on land leased from Vietnamese individuals, family households and companies for the purpose of leasing it out. This is something that foreigners and foreign companies are not allowed to do.

Another way in which the government tries to encourage *Viet Kieus* to return to their home country and/or to invest in Vietnam’s economy is by granting tax incentives. For example, Vietnamese tax law states that income in the form of foreign currency remitted by *Viet Kieus* shall be exempt from personal income tax. This incentive is apparently working quite well as the World Bank has estimated that the total amount of so-called “inward remittance” for Vietnam in 2015 was more than USD13 billion. In addition, *Viet Kieus* without Vietnamese nationality receive favorable conditions when obtaining residence permits and visas.

Finally, subject to certain conditions, *Viet Kieus* who decide to resettle in Vietnam do not need to pay import duties and value added tax on their first imported car and motorbike. As if there weren’t enough motorbikes in Vietnam, already!

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](mailto:legal@oivietnam.com). ■





# THE WHIRLWIND

IN CONVERSATION WITH LEGENDARY SNOOKER PLAYER **JIMMY WHITE**

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD**

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

**THERE WAS A TIME** when snooker demigod Jimmy White would have been out all night after an event like the match he played in Ho Chi Minh City last month, narrowly beating local legend Luong Chi Dung in what must have been the Saigon Pool League's most intense "battle of the gladiators" in a good long while. Known professionally as "The Whirlwind," Jimmy's nickname is only partially a reference to his dazzling, fluid showmanship on the baize, and equally as much a reflection of the life of boozing, big spending, and partying that once typified the mad world of one of the greatest snooker players of our time.

When Jimmy emerges from his hotel suite, he looks positively refreshed—he turned in at 11pm the night previous, and claims he didn't touch a single drop of alcohol for the whole evening. A beefy geezer from the rough patches of South

London, Jimmy has come a long way from the days when, as a pasty, scrawny young troublemaker with a gift for potting balls that couldn't be rationally explained, he became the working man's hero and people's champion in one of the world's most civilized sports.

"I was very lucky last night," he chuckles in the cartoonish accent of a British pub fight. "10-9 on the 9, you can't get closer. I can't pronounce his name, but he's a good player. I'm not a pool player; pool players and snooker players hold the cue totally different. They swing their arm round, I don't know why, and we're straight. That's how it is with pool, even if they've started off as snooker players—most pool players have always played snooker to begin with, but they always go back to the start. To completely turn to pool, I'd have to change my style, but I'm not that good, I'm too old to change."

This is not Jimmy's first foray into Vietnam—he stopped by a couple of years ago with Ronnie "The Rocket" O'Sullivan to help a friend promoting vodka in Vietnam (that supremely underfunded idea didn't go down too well) and he was here 12 years back putting on a simple exhibition to what seems to have been a crowd of stunned mullets. "I don't think there's much snooker here," he observes, "It's mainly pool. But it's very up and coming in Vietnam, compared to what I see in Asia. I'm coming back next year, and in the meantime, I'm going to do a bit of research to see if there's any way we can do a snooker exhibition. Maybe in a hotel or something. In Kuala Lumpur, they're big on snooker. Obviously all over China's huge, Thailand... just Vietnam, I've got to do a bit of research to see if there's any Asian Olympics for snooker here."





## THE DEVIL'S DANDRUFF

One of the purposes of last month's event, organized by Offshore Investment Brokers, was to bring some attention to Jimmy's biography *Second Wind*, which not only traces the career of the equivalent of a pop star in the world of snooker, but also reveals his darkest secret—throughout his years of success, he was thoroughly addicted to cocaine, something he'd managed to keep out of the tabloids until the book presented a chance to warn others off the drug.

"I call it the devil's dandruff in the book," he says. "I'd been using cocaine for years, but I'd hid it very well. I'd been clean for ten years, and it was just time to tell that story really. If I could stop one person taking one line of cocaine, then I'm happy with that. There's a few other stories in there, I just wanted a clean slate. I started playing again reg-

ular, last ten years or so I've been in and out, doing exhibitions, not really practicing that hard on the snooker. So I just thought I'd get it out there, get it done."

In coming out as a cocaine addict, Jimmy has clarified what's been something of a curiosity to those who've been following his career since the early 80s. Jimmy White has botched no less than six opportunities to claim the title of world champion, making him six times the second best player in the world. In his book, he admits: *...ultimately, it was behaving like that which cost me 10 World Championships. No disrespect to the other players around, but I genuinely believe my name would be on the trophy 10 times if I hadn't found coke.*

A 2012 documentary on Jimmy's life story—which admittedly oversimplifies a complex and disorderly career that even he himself claims is most aptly described in the word "whirlwind"—

paints the World Championship as his one unattainable goal that to this day he still believes he can win. He was first pipped at the post for the title by his snooker idol Alex Higgins—who became a lifelong friend until succumbing to illness in 2010. He credits losing that match as saving his life: "I was sort of gone from, quite famous in my little town and sort of getting away with a few things, to being world famous. So everywhere I went I could—how can I put it—have fun. I didn't take advantage of anyone, the only person I did any damage to was myself. Where I come from, it was like, if you've got money, you should go out and celebrate. When I got famous, I could go everywhere in London. This is 1980, I'm only 18 then. At 22 if I'd won the world championship... I was on a really crazy rollercoaster at the time. I had a collection of fans that I don't think he ever did. We loved him, he made the game. Every snooker player that's playing now, Alex Higgins made."

Jimmy lost the title most frequently to a figure often painted as his arch-enemy, Stephen Hendry, who won the Championship seven times. At the mention of his name, Jimmy still visibly shivers. "He's coming back to play next year," he says. "He's been retired for years. Most bizarre, I've been practicing in a club called Frames in Coulsdon, and I've been getting there at half ten in the morning to practice, at the same time he's walking in there and playing. How bizarre is that, of all the snooker clubs in the world, and he's playing in mine. We're all right, I've known him since he was a kid, I helped him out when he was a young thing. You know, he was a very focused young man, and that's what... watching him for three years, just floating around and doing nothing... He retired too young."

In spite of those who tell him that, at his age, taking the World Championship is mere fantasy, Jimmy remains determined. "I still think I can win it," he says without batting an eyelid. "It's not like boxing or football. In two-and-a-half months I've lost 11.5 kilos. That's a real good sign. Even in playing pool last night, I really wanted to win. I've still got the drive, I've still got the game, that's the most important thing. If I didn't have the game, I wouldn't play." ■



# Written By

An exploration of modern writing in Vietnam

Image by **NGOC TRAN**





# Bestseller

In Vietnam, like it or not, this is the age of the young writer

*Text by* CLAUDIA THAI



**YOU CAN ALWAYS** pick up a lot about a country's national psyche from a glance at its literature. It's one of the roles that good writers inevitably assume, to reflect and express the zeitgeist of their culture—something not always appreciated until years into the future when the works they leave behind remain the most intimate snapshots of their age. In the case of Vietnam, however, there's little need to wait out the decades to figure out the signs of the times, because the massive influence of global and commercial culture on local writing—they call it glocalization—is patently obvious from the moment you walk into the bookstores.

In her 2013 thesis *New Voices*,

Vietnamese cultural studies lecturer Dr. Dana Healey argues that the modern Vietnamese writing voice is intimately tied to the advent of the reformist economics that culminated in the *Doi Moi* renovations of 1986. In essence, publishing in Vietnam shifted from an ideology-driven function of the State to a marketing platform dedicated to putting out whatever sells. "The most conspicuous manifestation of the dominance of the market," she writes, "is reflected in the boom of popular literature in Vietnam... for the first time, the 'value' of a book bears direct correlation to its market potential rather than its ideological impact."

In Vietnam, like it or not, this is the

age of the young writer. Those who were writing at the crossover point as Vietnam started its national reforms still had their roots in the very dramatic writing styles of the revolutionary era—Nguyen Huy Thiep, Duong Thu Huong, Bao Ninh, Pham Thi Hoai, Nguyen Duy and others—and they simply haven't been able to keep up with the tastes of emerging internet-generation readers. That's not to say that the quality of writing in Vietnamese has improved within the relatively relaxed modern cultural environment—most commentators would tell you that Millennial literary quality has a lower benchmark than in previous ages, producing work typified by short sentences, fragmentation, and quick



moving plotlines reflecting the brevity of modern communication methods (such as texting and social media posts).

For many reasons, it has become the role of the younger generation of writers—those whose unorthodox creativity and experimentation have contributed to the transformation of Vietnamese literature—to provide exciting, modern and individualized prose as entertainment in a reading culture in which books are perceived, produced, and distributed as merchandise for consumption. To some, this has cheapened the art form; others celebrate the vibrant literary scene that has evolved in Vietnam over the past decade, altering the ways books are written and enjoyed.

Nguyen Huu Tinh, Chairman of the Association of Vietnamese Writers, has been very open in interviews about the pressure that contemporary writers experience from a public which demands “literature that is easy to read, but not necessarily of outstanding literary merit. Average is what sells, which makes it more difficult to reach the heights of creativity.” The new popular literature here is also attracting attention from established figures who find the increasingly ‘unruly’ writing appearing on the market difficult to accept. In Healey’s words, being creative, avant-garde and commercially successful while still complying with bureaucratic considerations is an arduous task, as “pop culture is definitely at odds with official ideas of Vietnamese culture.”

### Flying off the Shelves

The rapid transitions in Vietnamese publishing have given rise, for the first time, to the Western concept of the bestseller. They first showed up in translation—successful, internationally-popular books were eyed by global-savvy publishers as potential moneymakers on the local market—but it wasn’t long before local writers began to attempt a homegrown version. If you ignore pub-



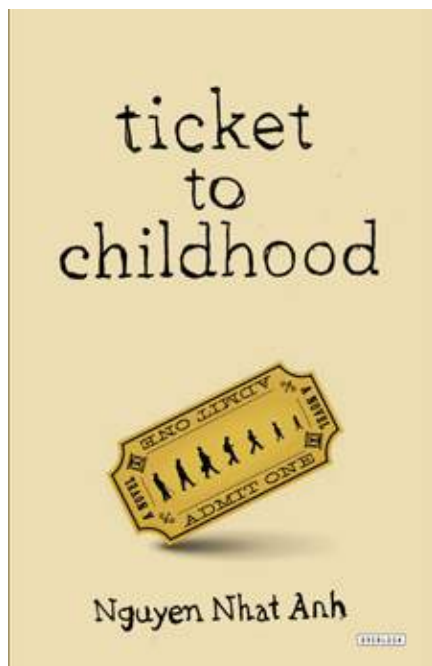
lications released on modern channels (ePublishing and downloadable audio books, etc.) then this country’s first domestic bestseller in print is usually considered to be the collection of short stories *Canh Dong Bat Tan* by Mekong writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu, which sold over 108,000 copies and achieved 24 editions. Set in a southern village with poor farmers serving as the main characters,

the collection largely deals with the unstable life of a father and two children after their mother runs away with her lover. The book resonated with local readers immediately on publication, and Nguyen Ngoc Tu is still considered a star on the Vietnamese literary scene, having won the Southeast Asian Writers’ Award (SEA Write) for her outstanding contribution to Vietnamese literature.

Nguyen Ngoc Tu is among a number of modern writers who defy the suggestion that local literature has taken a sharp dive in quality. Since the year 2000, a number of genres previously neglected by Vietnamese writers began to proliferate—thrillers and horrors, crime fiction, young adult fiction, women’s fiction, romance, chick lit, biography, travel writing, action adventure and others. This has been particularly evident with the emergence of many fine female authors who represent a new feminist streak in local writing, particularly in urban genres typified by explicit female sexuality and the exposure of cultural traditions that symbolize and subordinate women. “Women’s literature has enjoyed significant growth in the last decade,” writes Healey, “and the literary







works of urban-based female writers can be perceived as particularly symptomatic of the deep changes happening in society. Despite the fact that the female writers do not form a homogenous group, they nevertheless share many similarities: they are young, educated, independent urban residents who possess a good command of a foreign language (usually English) which enables them to travel and engage with foreign cultures either through work or leisure. They are also highly visible through their (self) representation in the media and internet. Their writing is characterized by heightened feminist consciousness and reveals how female subjectivity and agency are being reconceptualized in a globalizing consumer-oriented Vietnam."

While much of new Vietnamese writing is by its very nature unavailable to non-Vietnamese readers, it may still profit those with a passion for the field to gain some insights into the country's new literary wave. The following are the names to watch out for in translation—and for those whose Vietnamese studies have progressed to the point where enjoying a good book in the language is possible, then these are some of the first writers you should put on your reading list.

### Nguyen Nhat Anh

Great writers are always both introspective and highly observant of the society in which they live; they are the greatest commentators of any social era. Anh fits this description extremely well, and it's thus fortunate that he's one of modern Vietnam's most prolific writers.

Writing for both young and mature adults, Nhat Anh's most famous work is the extended *Kinh Van Hoa* (*Kaleidoscope*), which consists of a staggering 54 volumes and has since been developed as a TV drama under the same name.

Most of his works are short stories about lives of teenagers. His bestselling story *Cho Toi Xin Mot Ve Di Tuoi Tho* (*Ticket to Childhood*) was his first work to be translated into English, released in 2014.

He has often been called the storyteller of Vietnamese children. Through his work, readers tend to feel as if they are taking a journey back through their childhood, filled with innocent thoughts, actions, and dreams. This is due to Nhat Anh's deep and implicit understanding of Vietnamese teenagers, something that has allowed him to resonate with readers throughout Vietnamese society.

### Duong Thuy

Cosmopolitan globetrotter Duong Thuy writes her bestsellers based on her own worldly experiences; her work *Oxford Thuong Yeu* (*Beloved Oxford*) is available in English and narrates a romance between a young Vietnamese girl and a British man she meets while studying at the university. In her writing, readers discover a clear, simple and fun storytelling method. Her characters are mostly young people who are still on their way towards finding themselves, learning to explore their life and to find love. These characters, just like their author, drift from country to country; and on that journey they find everything they have and have not expected.



### Di Li

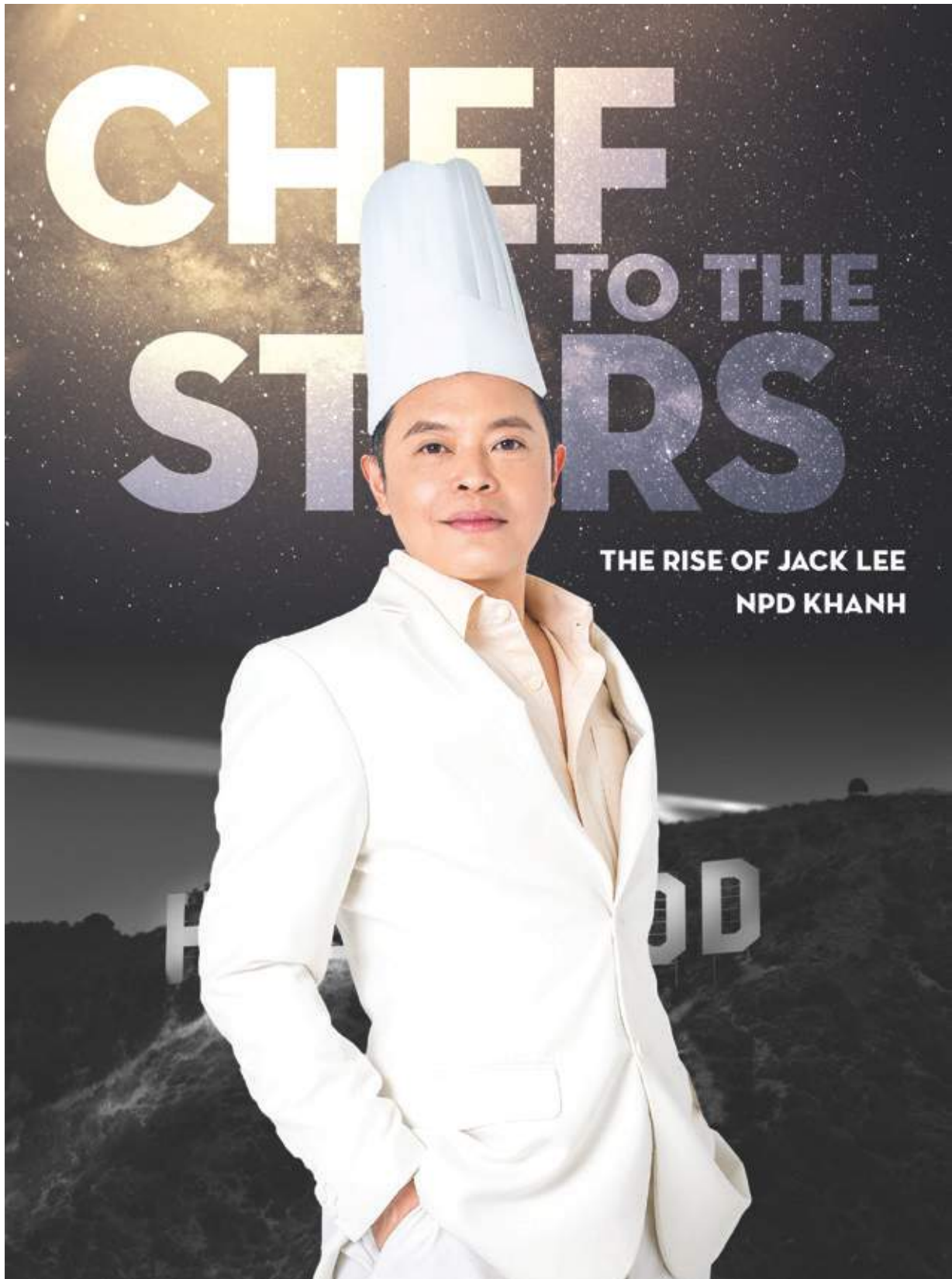
A rare female writer of Vietnamese crime fiction, Di Li is considered one of the most inspiring, glamorous, and successful Vietnamese young writers. Since 2007 she has published about 30 works, including short stories, fiction, biographies and journals. Her mystery thriller novel, *Trai Hoa Do* (*The Red Flower Farm*) published in 2009 is an impressive four hundred pages long and became a huge success after she hooked her readers by serializing and publishing 34 chapters online before announcing they'd have to buy the book to read the rest and solve the mystery. The book was also published regionally and received rave reviews in South Korea and Japan. In addition to crime fiction, Di Li has also written educational books for Vietnamese students. ■



# The Story of My Life

Fascinating lives captured impeccably in print forever

*Text by* **MICHAEL ARNOLD**





**WHEN MY FATHER** passed away in 2010, he was about halfway through writing a memoir. I found the fragments on his old, failing PC hard drive, which miraculously survived just long enough for me to copy the files before it too blinked out of existence. Ironically, the documents concerned his attempts to deal with the death of his own father in the early 70s, and told the story of a trip he'd made to the Greek islands to claim a small plot of land that Granddad had left behind.

I decided to do him one last favor, so I cleaned up the text and sent what he'd written to a print-on-demand publishing service, intending to give a few copies away to family members. It wasn't until I had the physical book in my hands that it really struck home—that memoir was all I really had left of my father. He didn't leave behind many photos; his personal possessions didn't say much about who he was or how he lived. When I thought back on what I knew about his life, I realized I wasn't particularly clear about the details; I had a handful of anecdotes that I might be able to pass on to my own children, and that was it. Without a book, Dad's life story would have eventually vanished. Now, at least, I have something to pass on down to future generations.

It's this sentiment that I find quite compelling when it comes to biography as a form of writing. If you consider the billions of lives that were lived before ours—the lives of our people, of our ancestors, each of them unique, each of them the story of one human soul set against the backdrop of a certain time and a certain place—each of those men and women once looked out at the world just as we do now; they breathed as we do, thought as we do, hoped as we do. They died, just as we will. The things they did with their lives still influence us today, but in most cases we simply don't know who they were. Of all those hundreds of millions of stories, the vast majority were never written down, and so almost all of them are now completely gone.

Creating a legacy, of course, isn't the only reason why people put their life story on paper. A biography can be a game-changer for someone trying to boost their credibility in a certain field – political candidates have them written before an election campaign, while entrepreneurs find them invaluable self-promotional tools to secure speaking engagements, fresh business,

and media interviews. For celebrities, biographies are immediate best-sellers in almost every case, for the simple reason that the nature of fame itself is to have an admiring audience at the ready, eager to know more. The marketing work for a celebrity book as merchandise is largely already done.

Different approaches to book marketing in Vietnam do have an impact on the concept of what a biography is for – few local persons-of-interest see a biography as a merchandising opportunity, and presume that life stories are only ever written at the denouement of a successful career, perhaps as a form of eulogy. A recent counterexample of this trend has been the idol book written for the Vietnamese boyband 365, as discussed in *Oi Vietnam* last month—even since that review, the book has gone on to make unprecedented sales and prove that the biography-as-best-seller format is just as viable in Vietnam as it is elsewhere.

Next month, Metro Writers (*Oi Vietnam's* sister company) will release two of our first volumes for general publication. The first is the biography of local celebrity chef and regular contributor to our magazine, Chef Jack Lee – whose life story traces a series of remarkable (and often comedic) twists in fortune that saw him become a television personality both here and in the US. Jack's story touches on themes of racial inequality and the disillusionment of *Viet Kieu* in America, as well as opening a window into Hollywood through the stories of the countless A-listers Jack cooked for in his career in celebrity catering. *Chef to the Stars* will be published in Vietnamese shortly as *Dau Bep Cua Nhung Ngoi Sao*; the English version will be available online in following weeks.

The second book produced by our team is a translation of wartime correspondence between two journalists who became important national literary figures, Vu Tu Nam and Thanh Huong. Written between 1950 and 1968, *Letters in Love and War* is a quotidian account of life north of the 17th parallel in the form of love letters tracing the couple's courtship and marriage, which served to sustain a love that was perpetually overshadowed by warfare. The book will be available in print in limited numbers, as well as online both here and internationally.

*Those interested in having their story set to the printed page, bio-*

*graphy writers, and publishing speculators seeking to invest and work with local celebrity figures are always welcome to contact us via our website at [www.metrowriters.com](http://www.metrowriters.com).*

#### **Excerpt from Chef to the Stars – the Rise of Jack Lee by NPD Khanh**

In those days, **Three's Company** was the only bright spot of his life, a fantasy realm where he could escape from the harshness of reality. He found its simplicity appealing in a world suddenly made complicated. Jack Tripper was everything Meatball wanted to be. He was white and accepted, while Meatball was yellow and existing on the fringe of American society. He was flamboyant and larger than life, while Meatball was a meek Asian boy who couldn't draw too much attention to his family. He was honest and cheerful and while he got into trouble frequently, he got out none the worse for wear just as often. Meatball also liked the fact that Jack worked a chef—underpaid and underappreciated, yes, but a chef nonetheless. The scenes of Jack Tripper cooking up a storm to impress his lady friends brought forth memories of Meatball's mother and the pre-1975 charm of French restaurants. It was a happy and much less complicated time than his life was at that moment.

When the going got too tough, sometimes Meatball would think: *I wish I were Jack*. Jack was big and tall and white and happy and privileged and accepted, and most importantly, he had a say on where his life was going to. He said he wanted to be a chef, and that was what he was. No one could tell him otherwise. Little Meatball, on the other hand, was everything Jack was not. Meatball didn't look like he would survive in America for a whole lot longer, but Jack wouldn't have a problem. Sometimes, when things became too much, Meatball wished he could crawl inside Jack Tripper's skin and be big and strong and bold and happy in a world that loved the color he now wore. He imagined it would be like wearing magic armor—safe, warm, protected.

So one day, when their paperwork for the green card arrived, and his auntie called him over to ask what English name he wanted to be called by from then on, Meatball didn't waste a second to reply. He already knew who he wanted to be.

"Jack. I'm going to be Jack."

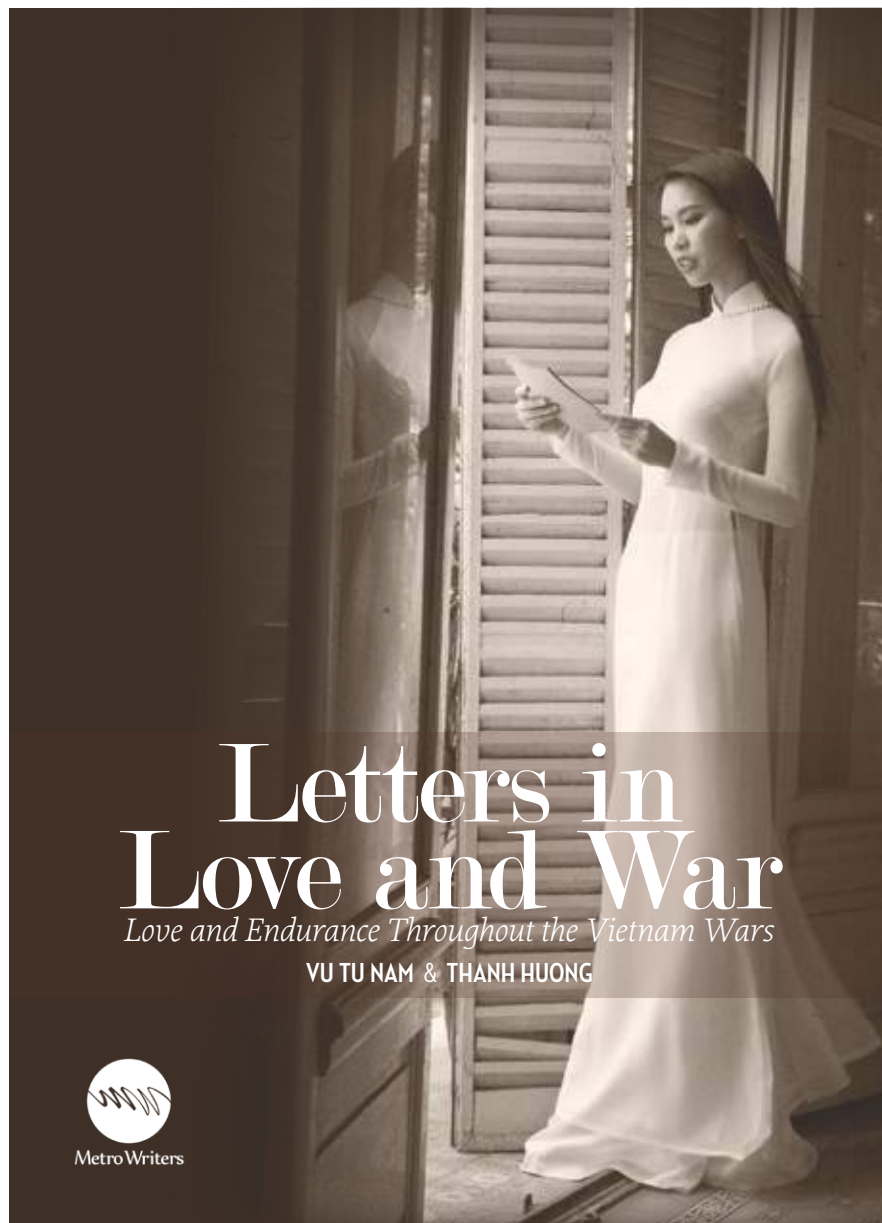
**Excerpt from Letters in Love and War, Vu Tu Nam & Thanh Huong**

*"I'm sitting here alone, the night is quiet, the soldiers are all on their way to some activity somewhere, the clock is frozen. It is supposed that at this time, I have the right to have you by my side... our 'sacrifice', as you say, has no meaning to compare with the extreme suffering of our people caused by the enemy. For the whole afternoon, I spoke with the old woman, my hands are still full of words..."*

*"Hanoi these days has been under terrible bombings, you may be worried about me a lot. Actually, it's a bit tense; yesterday afternoon they were launching bombs for two hours. Hang Chuoi—in front of our agency—was hit by a rocket, four houses were destroyed. We all ran to the basement and stayed there for two hours. The whole basement vibrated. The embassy area was under rocket fire too (you may have worried a lot when reading the news of the embassy nearby our house)."*

*"I already read your article on Van Nghe magazine. I was really moved, the images of the children looking for the bird's nest, the young men under the menace of the enemy's planes, still processing rice while reading Hugo's books... these 'peaceful images during wartime' make people feel both moved and full of hatred for the Americans. Let me know your working agenda."*

For 18 years, journalists Vu Tu Nam and Thanh Huong composed inspiring propaganda for their comrades in the Vietnamese north—while in private, exchanging letters to sustain a love that was perpetually overshadowed by warfare. Their correspondence—never originally intended for public release—remains an untarnished record of life to the north of the 17th parallel, an untold story of the Vietnam War that attests to the universal human experience of life and love in every age. ■







# The Restoration Lab

In the hands of a team of skilled surgeons, rare and antique books get a new life

*Text by* **NPD KHANH** *Images by* **ADAM ROBERT YOUNG**

**IN THE HEART OF** Ho Chi Minh City lies a secret hospital - a tiny well-kept and well-loved operating room the size of a shoebox apartment. There are three surgeons, two operating beds, and ten nurses and caretakers who oversee a total of 3,000 inpatients in addition to a fluctuating amount of close to one million entries in and out every year. However, to be admitted to this hospital you must meet two criteria: you have to be rare and antique, and be made out of paper.

The hospital goes by the name of The Department of Preservation and Restoration, shortened to simply Preserve and Restore (PAR) by its residents. It is the youngest department of the restricted access area of the Ho Chi Minh City Library of General Sciences, and is the only place in all of

southern Vietnam where dying books - rare and antiques, maps, documents, and aged torn papers that have seen firsthand the turmoil of Vietnamese history - can be brought back to life. PAR has three main functions: preservation, restoration, and digitization.

PAR officially started in 2000 when the Library of General Sciences invited two antiquarians from Cornell University (US) to Vietnam to provide training to their staff. Prior to this, PAR was simply a book binding room. Its true origin, however, began much earlier than that, in as early as 1996 when the then-Director of the library, Nguyen Thi Bac, was sent on a one-person training trip to the US. It was from Bac's trip that knowledge of antique book restoration began trickling back to Vietnam. Out of the original staff in 2000, only one

remains till this day - a senior staff member named Quy who now acts as the chief specialist restorer and main surgeon of the entire operation.

"It's a quiet, patient thing, what we do. As you can see, not many people actually know about us," says Kim Anh, the chief of PAR. "It's an unglamorous and unforgiving job that requires your full attention to the most minute of details over weeks or even months at a time. A single page can take as much as a month to restore, a full-size book as much as half a year or longer. And we have a total of 3,000 rare antique books to care for, and beyond that, nearly one million public titles that also need someone watching over them."

"The environment needs constant monitoring - PAR's main and storage rooms, the cellars, shelves, and the



offering its services to outside libraries, museums and private collectors.

"I won't say it's tough asking for funding," says Kim Anh. "We do have funding, of a sort, VND40 to VND50 million per year. Sometimes a couple hundred million if we need new equipment for digitization." This amount is roughly the equivalent of a national football team member's monthly salary.

"What I will say, however, is that there's still not enough attention paid to the importance and necessity of book restoration. Out of our three functions, the fund is actually almost exclusively for the digitization team since it's the only one mentioned in the government charter on the preservation of our cultural heritage. Preservation and restoration have to get their funds from those earmarked for digitization. There is no charter and no campaign that calls for book preservation and restoration. So while people on the outside are clamoring for the creation of an online library of our digitized historical texts, the real articles are left forgotten and locked away to rot in our cellar."

Despite these challenges the staff at PAR aren't daunted. "We have done this for more than a decade. We are plenty patient," they say. "And we are teaching other people, other libraries in other provinces about book restoration and preservation. We are making sure the knowledge we got from our foreign teachers isn't lost along with the old generation."

"If I have to put it in words," says Kim Anh, "an antiquarian restorer is both a doctor and an artist. A doctor because you really have to know what you are doing and be really meticulous about it. An artist because only an artist can work on a single piece, on a single cause for months or years and not grow tired of it. Truly, it's a job fit only for the most fanatic of book lovers." ■

processing rooms - the entire building actually. No sunlight. We have blinders on all the windows and somebody is always checking on the sun. Heat and humidity, neither of which are easy to control, of course, but if we don't do that, the texts will either rot away or dry up and fall apart."

She adds: "The tools we use are that of real surgeons. Scalpels, chisels, cutters, standing scopes, clamps and forceps, even surgical room needles. We have them all. A surgeon can walk into this room and he wouldn't lack for a small operation. The only few things we have that aren't taken from a surgeon's tool list are things specific to our specialty, such as paper thread used for

sewing up tears, non-acidic paper glue, or a handheld bookbinder's iron. There is no room for error, since the books we are working on are considered national treasures and part of the Vietnamese cultural heritage. They are hundreds of years old. Some of them are on the verge of falling to pieces and probably would have if we hadn't sealed them up. The government has strict rules regarding our handling of these books and texts and one slipup is all it takes to see a veteran staff out the door."

#### **Self-preservation**

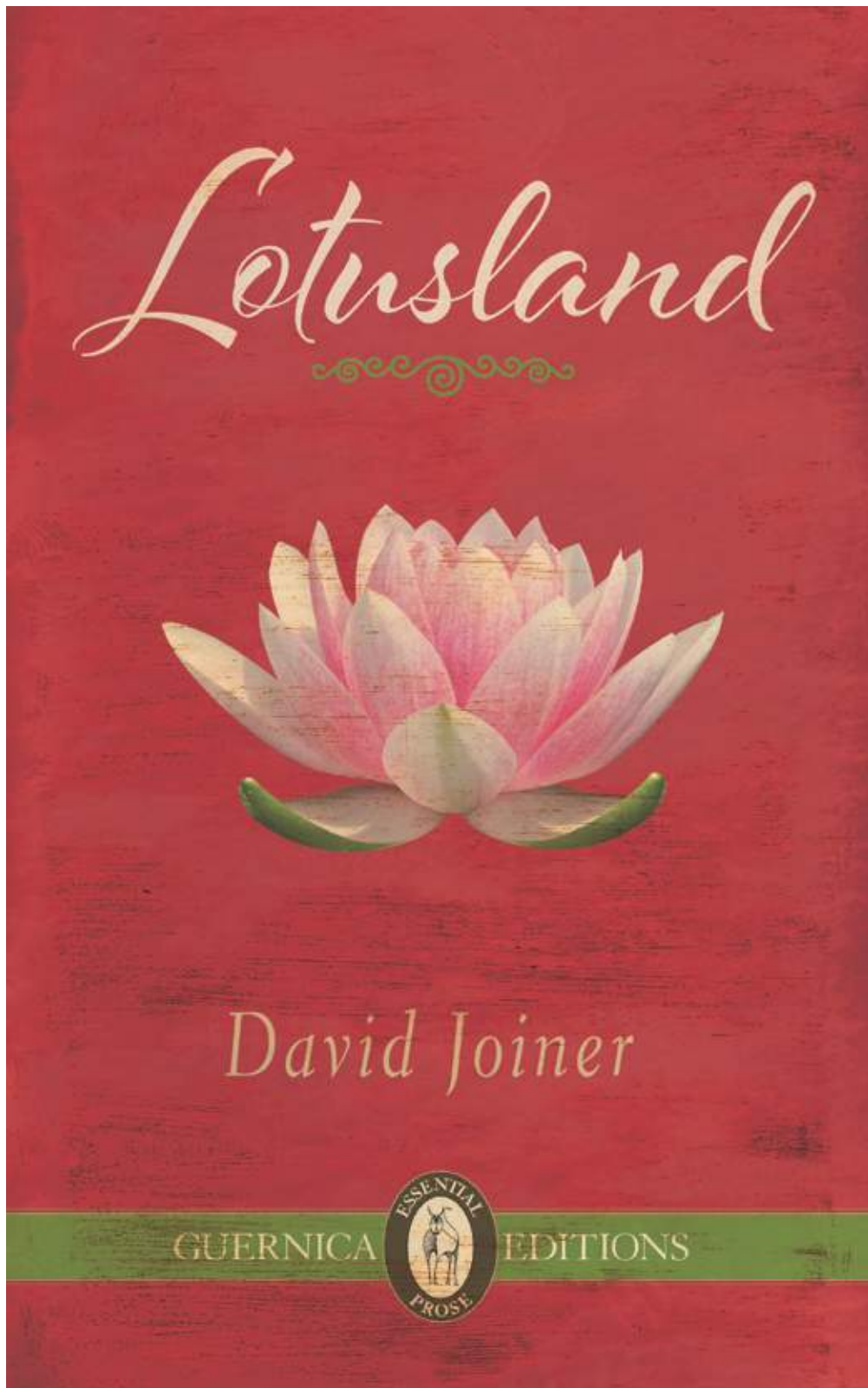
From that first starting point in 2000, it took a full five years for the department to grow to a level where it could start



# The Expatriate Experience

An American author captures the highs and lows of foreigners' lives in Vietnam

*Text by* LORCAN LOVETT



**LOTUSLAND** is defined as a place that induces idle pleasure and luxury; it's also the title of author David Joiner's debut book, which weaves together tales of the expat experience in Vietnam. But rather than a blushing elegy on the joys of a far-flung paradise, the novel is an authentic account of expats struggling with love, money and trust in the realities of Vietnamese culture. Native characters are keen to leave their homeland, too, and so many allures of this lotusland swirl paradoxically into illusions.

Set in the early 2000s, the tale serves as an antidote to the conveyor belt of tired fiction about a war that ended more than 40 years ago. It's a formative time not only for Vietnam, which is on the brink of joining the World Trade Organization, but for its protagonist, 28-year-old Nathan.

Like Joiner, Nathan is an American writer who has embraced the Southeast Asian nation—some of the lead's experiences are drawn directly from his own—yet the 46-year-old Ohioan is keen to point out the similarities end there.

"Nathan is kind of a jerk," he laughs, "and I'm not...I'm not Nathan but, you know, the characters are filtered through me."

The books open with Nathan meeting Le, an enigmatic pink-haired painter, for the first time. Nathan, a struggling journalist, immediately falls for Le as their train rumbles past paddy fields on the way to Hanoi.

Initially she skips the formalities and suggests a businesslike deal: Nathan would help her obtain a visa for the US and, in return, the young woman would be his 'girlfriend,' signaling that she could offer him sex.

"Sex is one way for women in particular to get power where otherwise they have none," says Joiner. "It's something that I don't think will last forever in Vietnam as the country develops, the economy develops and people aren't forced to make those difficult decisions."

"The relationship between Vietnam and the US too, it's a power thing. Vietnam needs the US. I'm not saying they whore themselves to the US but there's a power dynamic and there's a power dynamic in relationships between Westerners and Vietnamese."

Nathan and Le's relationship blossoms into a genuine romance, but falls short of preventing Le from gambling everything for the American dream. A distraught Nathan turns to his old friend and compatriot Anthony, one of the many jaded alcoholics tied up with a Vietnamese family to grace these shores.

Several people gave Joiner the impetus to create the character of Anthony, who has struck gold with a real estate business, two kids and his wife Huong.

Nevertheless, the man has been beaten down into a state of bitterness and stress. He admits his marriage reeks

of resentment and infidelity, comparing it to a business, "the sole aim of which is to put forth good face to the world."

Vietnam is "hurtling forward myopically...there's no grand plan," he tells Nathan, and that it's "lost its identity in the stampede to make money."

Anthony's in-laws have moved into his home without acknowledging his presence and his children hate him, which is in no way helped by his lack of the Vietnamese language.

Joiner, who now lives in Japan, recalls meeting foreign men who were kept on the periphery of their own families because of their apathy for learning Vietnamese. "The fathers couldn't communicate with their children but the mothers could and the mothers were very controlling of language in their family."

A distraught Nathan accepts a lucrative role selling houses in Hanoi with Anthony's company. The decision sidelines his writing ambitions and life in Saigon. "These days the only traces most foreigners left were underused belongings, humdrum gossip and old lovers," Nathan considers, as he disappears from the south without a footprint.

Amid the vivid descriptions of Vietnam's beauty and traditions, we then begin to see the self-serving motives of each character crash or come to fruition. The personal flaws are clear in Le, Huong, Nathan and Anthony, but that doesn't stop one craving to discover their fates, especially for those who've seen Vietnam firsthand.

Joiner is conscious of avoiding one-dimensional stereotypes when creating foreign characters. A Vietnamese person may be portrayed as a spirited entrepreneur or an avaricious opportunist. Both, however, would be a shallow description and so Joiner used detail, real people, events and experiences to submerge deeper into the characters' psyches.

"I'm a lot more careful when trying to portray a Vietnamese person," he

says. "Politically, it can be a very difficult thing to deal with, portraying someone from another culture. You do have to be cognizant of differences and think hard about how your portrayal of them is going to be taken by readers. Authors play with stereotypes all the time. Some people are successful at overcoming them, others simply don't get there."

On the international stage, the mention of Vietnam still often provokes images of war despite its people and economy progressing far away from that era. The consequences of war are touched upon in *Lotusland* when Nathan visits a hospital treating children with health problems related to Agent Orange.

"I'd always felt that the continuing effects of Agent Orange in Vietnam were underreported in Western media and I wanted to bring them to readers' attention," says Joiner, who visited the hospital himself.

It's particularly relevant to the real world, as Monsanto, the US biotech company that manufactured the devastating poison, has been quietly welcomed back into Vietnam to cultivate genetically modified animal feed, even as it refuses to compensate its Vietnamese victims.

Joiner came to the country in 1994 and became the first American since the end of the war to live and work in Dong Nai Province. Working as a teacher in the countryside, he had an abundance of free time and not many distractions. After reading copious amounts and writing several 75-page letters, the thought struck him that he might be a writer.

"If you're even not writing about Vietnam, it's still a good place to be a writer. It's an inexpensive place and it's still very stimulating just generally."

"One has a sense of adventure just going out for a meal and you can't really get that in your own country; just crossing the street is an adventure. You get the chance to really get close to people who are living lives that you





admire or are curious about. There are so many human stories that you can't find in the west; they're just fascinating."

Agents saw *Lotusland*—written intermittently over seven years—as a hard sell, according to the author. A novel set in contemporary Vietnam was less attractive to publishers than the tried-and-true formula of war stories.

That being said, the literary community in Vietnam and international readership for stories about the country are both expanding. In April 2015, a month after Joiner's debut was published, *Viet Kieu* author Viet Thanh Nguyen released *The Sympathizer*, which went on to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

Joiner felt he had no access to a literary scene while in Vietnam, but that it's "probably better now than it's ever been." He explains that the industry is paying more attention to Southeast Asia and audiences are interested in hearing from the large pool of talent in the *Viet Kieu* and Vietnamese populations.

"There's more knowledge about Asian culture now than there's ever been before. That's beneficial for people writing about Vietnam, for example, but I do still think there's a disconnect between potential readership and the industry itself which is so focused on what has been successful before."

He'll test the waters again with an upcoming book set in the early 90s, a story about love and infidelity among river dolphin researchers in the Lower Mekong Basin of Vietnam and Cambodia.

#### **Excerpt from *Lotusland***

*Nathan tossed and turned on the hard lower bunk of his sleeperclass room. He peered at his cell phone; it would take 30 more hours to reach Hanoi. He was struck by how things were always a long wait for him. Nothing was simple, and whatever seemed certain had a way of being turned on its head without warning.*

*The sound of the train was low and whooshing, like the winds of a relentless rainstorm. Whenever the train pulled into a station the lull of stillness became just as loud, howling inside him, heightening his restlessness.*

*Lying there, discomposed by his companions' snores, a premonition of endless night took hold of him. Unable to stand it, he left the room.*

*In the passageway a young man sat on a stool with his face buried in a copy of the Army Newspaper. There was nowhere else to sit, though Nathan did see, at the end of the last train car he was in, that the door was open and led to a small platform.*

*He stepped outside and sat down. The*

*night was cool and full of starlight. With his legs dangling over the edge he watched a mosaic of moonlit fields emerge from a tangle of trees now receding on both sides of the track.*

*Nathan turned around at the sound of someone approaching the platform door. He was surprised to find a young woman with a train issued blanket draped over her head. It was an odd way to wander through a train, and coming outside alone and as late as this piqued his interest. As she stood in the doorway considering the small space that Nathan occupied, or whatever was on her mind, he gestured for her to sit with him.*

*She tugged the blanket from her head and, when she slipped into a shaft of moonlight, her hair appeared as pink as a rose.*

*Her age was hard to guess, though she was young, between 20 and 25. The more he looked at her hair the more its shape came to resemble that of a rosebud: it enfolded her face so that the ends nearly met beneath her chin.*

*She wore loose-fitting pajamas and tatami sandals. She asked him for the time—*Trời ơi, một quá . . . Bây giờ là mấy giờ rồi?* Her pronunciation—z's in place of y's and r's; ch's in place of tr's—was lilting and feminine, yet distinctly northern. There was something almost startling about the Vietnamese she automatically used, and it pleased him that she would.*

*He pulled out his cell phone and saw it was just after two. Hai giờ rồi.*

*Hai giờ hả?*

*The northern accent was easier for him because it distinguished more between sounds. Yet there was something cold and hard about the northern way of speaking, a wintry almost martial quality. But maybe it was only Hanoi's chill weather and thick cloud cover that bled the color from the streets, buildings, even the clothing of the people, and made him feel this. For there was something warm and inviting about this pink-haired young woman.*

*"What are you doing out here?" he asked.*

*"I came outside to get a phone call." She rubbed her eyes. Under the dark sky he couldn't tell if she was merely tired or had been crying. "Why are you out here?"*

*He didn't feel like explaining his insomnia. "I can't sleep on trains."*

*They were silent a moment watching their knees sway back and forth. He pushed himself backwards until he leaned against the wall.*

*"Going to Hanoi?" she asked.*

*"Yes."*

*"Why didn't you take a plane?"*

*"I must have forgotten I can't sleep on trains. Where are you going?"*

*"Same as you."*

*Watching her yawn into her hand, he asked if she lived there.*

*She shook her head, finishing her yawn. "I live in Saigon. But I'm moving to America."*

*Her plan to move to America stirred his curiosity. "Why are you going to America?"*

*"To make a life for myself." She turned away as if his interest made her uncomfortable.*

*It occurred to him that she had notably large eyes—like an infant's, he thought. She was as disarming as anyone he'd ever met and he found her alluring.*

*"Are you married?" she said, turning back to him.*

*Nathan held up his ringless hands.*

*From out of nowhere the train came upon a crossing. Two streetlights stood opposite one another and bathed yellow a strip of stony dirt. An old man in a dark green uniform pulled a lever to lift the safety cross on each side of the railroad.*

*"You should go back to your room," the girl said. "If your girlfriend wakes up, she'll worry you're not there."*

*Her clumsy attempt to learn if he was alone amused him. "Maybe her snoring keeps me awake."*

*She lifted her thin eyebrows and glanced down the corridor. "It's late. I'd better go back myself."*

*"What about your phone call?" When she didn't answer he said: "In that case, why not keep me company a little longer?"*

*"It's late," she said again. She bid him goodnight and disappeared through the doorway.*

*The blue night suddenly telescoped, reduced to a receding square: a window onto a dream fading rapidly into nowhere. He grew colder in the chill night. For a moment he felt like he was traveling away from life itself. But in the next moment the feeling passed. He saw that the train had only entered a tunnel. A high metallic wailing began to echo off the tunnel walls; a moment later utter darkness curtained everything he'd just passed through. ■*



# Wine & Dine

NOSSA STEAKHOUSE







# A SONG FOR A STEAK

INSPIRED BY A SONG, SIMON NGUYEN WANTS GUESTS TO FALL IN LOVE WITH HIS STEAKS AND EACH OTHER WHILE YOU'RE AT IT

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



**“IT’S A LOVE SONG,”** says Simon Nguyen of the ballad that provided the inspiration for his intimate little bistro on 36 Pham Hong Thai, D1—**Nossa Steakhouse**. “*Nossa, nossa... ai se eu te pego...* I worked at the Sheraton before, when they still had the band; they used to sing this song almost every day. After the boy meets the girl, she changes his life, it’s perfect. It’s why I opened a restaurant called Nossa, to make sure every customer falls in love with Nossa and comes back.”

In retrospect, putting together a steak restaurant with romance in mind turns out to have been a pretty good strategy. It’s already survived two years in the competitive local market, and if the cozy interior and sharply-focused Italian menu are anything to go by, it has

certainly provided the ideal backdrop for a goodly number of perfect dates. It’s tiny, yet private enough for several couples to focus exclusively on each other; a quiet terrace offers a park view over the New World hotel while still feeling well-removed from Saigon. Inside, the incandescent bulbs cast a warm light over the tables-for-two; an exposed colonial-era wall is whitewashed like a Mediterranean villa while the natural colors of the timber ceiling panels recall the bare wooden structures of Simon’s home town in the Mekong.

With such a well-defined dining concept, I’m curious as to why the restaurant has remained so intimate after two years in business, when a larger or follow-on venue in another location would seem to be the obvious next step.

Simon, it seems, is in no rush: “I just don’t want to go too fast, it’s not good,” he says simply. “Slowly but well-paced in Vietnam is OK. In the long term, we need money to survive, sure, but passion and a sense of patience is more important. This first restaurant is like my baby. Open one, and you can have a lot of time to take care of it and pamper it; open many, and you won’t have enough time for them all, it’s a problem.”

We arrive on a rainy afternoon as the venue comes into its own under darkened skies, the half-light from the windows brushing calligraphic shadows through rain-streaked glass; perhaps inspired by the mood, we settle in and order fresh cocktails while choosing our steaks. There are other options on the menu (including a modest set of





Vietnamese items for a local date), but Nossas *raison d'être* is its selection of American and Australian beef steaks. The one you choose comes down to personal preference, of course, but as a rough guide, you'll find the American beef more textured than the softer Australian Angus. Be very specific if you want them bloodier, as the kitchen tends toward the well-done side by default. The cocktails (VND120,000) are strong and heavy on the fruit—my Nossas Sunrise is a murky maroon with its syrupy apricot and grenadine base, giving it the aftertaste of a heady mulled wine, while the brilliant yellow Nossas Passion is brighter in tone with a refreshingly gentle kick.

After a complimentary home-baked bread with chickpea dip, we take our starter salads (VND149,000). The Nossas Rainbow comes with its

ingredients laid out in spectrum stripes; it delivers a range of tastes, but what really makes it work is the sweet corn against the savory chicken chunks. We also try a good, earthy Caesar salad with salmon, nicely salty with the bacon pieces and shaved parmesan—it's pleasing to have real croutons too, as opposed to chopped-up bits of toast.

The grilled US prime beef grain-fed tenderloin (200/300/350g for VND599,000/VND639,000/VND788,000) is the real deal; it is rough and delicious, coming with juicy side vegetables and a wine sauce that manages a distinctive bouquet of marmite (if you know what that is). The meat is very good; it's also easy to manage with the fine imported Dutch cutlery, entirely deserving of its own mention. My partner enjoys a surf & turf (VND599,000), that allows her a

120g hunk of grilled Australian prime grass-fed black Angus beefsteak in creamy mushroom sauce with half a Canadian lobster that is sweet, fragrant and lightly peppered, textured and fresh. The mains are filling but not burdensome enough to ignore the desserts (VND99,000); we try an orange chocolate mousse (a wonderful jaffa cake with a zesty marmalade peel garnish) and a richly coffee-drenched tiramisu.

If you're not having the cocktails, do flirt with Nossas's short but well-planned wine list—heavy on the reds, as you'd expect, with a good selection of Wolf Blass Eaglehawks by the glass (VND130,000). Take a bottle of Hunter's Marlborough Riesling (VND990,000) if you're among the minority having seafood: don't feel embarrassed, it's as good as the steak, but do be careful not to let it dampen the amorous vibe. ■







# Elevated Twist

Qui Lounge puts Western accent on Asian cuisines

Text by JOEL ZORILLA Images by NGOC TRAN

**QUI LOUNGE** (22 - 22bis Le Thanh Ton, D1) is not a bar, nor is it a lounge or restaurant—it's a perfect balance of all three in one space. The industrial copper-plated lighting fixtures above the bar set the scene, the elegantly lit shelf of top brand whiskeys in the back beckoned us while the DJ spinning house music created the mood, and the divine food completed our evening. One comes to Qui to see and be seen; a clientele of young

business people, expats and locals alike pervades the establishment with energy, lively chatter and occasional flirting.

As we relaxed into our seats and perused their fusion menu, we were looking forward to sampling creative combinations of Japanese, Vietnamese and Western cuisines. To start we ordered the *Jamón ibérico Bellota* (60gram for VND550,000 and 100gram for VND850,000). *Jamón ibérico* is one of the finest cured meats and Qui not

only has it, they have the best version—the *bellota*. For those of you who don't know, *bellota* in Spain means acorn and the black Spanish pig spends its entire life basking in green pastures eating acorns. A pig that eats acorns produces the best possible leg of ham which, after the long curing process, is the perfect mix of salty sweet nuttiness. The dark red meat coupled with the golden strips of fat is nothing short of heaven, the perfect complement to the







amazing ambience. But I can't stop here, the fantastic combination of gourmet platters that came to our table were all fusion concepts that hit its mark, fusion food being a dangerous rope to walk on.

Another standout appetizer was the Wagyu beef *gyoza* (dumplings) with *foie gras*, truffle and *kabayaku* sauce (VND180,000). Matching Japan's world-renown wagyu beef with coveted ingredients—truffle and *foie gras*—and it's a tour de force to be reckoned with. The intense flavors from two distinctly different cuisines were absolutely mind blowing. To further enhance our dining experience we ordered a glass of Montgras Estate Cabernet Sauvignon from Chile (VND150,000 per glass and VND690,000 a bottle). A further complement to the wine was Qui's flank steak of the day, which was Australian Black Angus beef (VND320,000), tender doesn't come close to defining this melt-in-your-mouth masterpiece. It was juicy, cooked medium rare and plated beautifully.

The second entrée was an elevated twist on a simple local dish—the spring roll. The King prawn with grilled pork roll (VND110,000), served with Vietnamese herbs and a pineapple fish sauce for dipping, was a sensational ride through textures and tastes. The pineapple fish sauce added the perfect amount of sweet, coupled with the crunch of the Vietnamese herbs, the tender meat, possibly the best fresh spring rolls we'd ever had. Speaking of fresh, I must mention the simple, yet fantastic, fresh medley of their signature salad (VND160,000), a combination of at least three different greens, asparagus, avocado and *yuza* dressing from Japan. The dishes so far were a testament to Qui's dedication to bringing in only the finest ingredients from around the world as well as locally.

Rumor had it that Qui had a certain flair for producing some of Saigon's most exotic cocktails, so naturally we had to indulge. My companion had the Sakura sour (VND200,000), a drink

that can easily star in *Mad Men* or *The Great Gatsby* with its understated class and refined taste. I, on the other hand, indulged in the more tropical Sea Freeze (VND240,000) served in a seashell. As I sipped I imagined the sand around my toes and the waves crashing against the rocks. Both drinks were strong enough to send us into a light buzz. The guys behind the bar were clearly just as talented as those in the kitchen.

Our decadent evening finished with a decadent Black sesame crème brûlée with pink grapefruit (VND120,000), and it was as strange looking as it was delicious. The torched upper layer was just the right amount of crunch while underneath was creamy indulgence, then combined with flecks of *buoi* made it a sweet winner.

Qui's drink list is extraordinarily diverse, the creativity behind the globally-inspired fusion menu is matched by its selection of spirits, wine, cocktails and both Scottish and Japanese whiskeys. ■



# ALLEY DELIGHT

COZY AND CHARMING, THIS HIDDEN GEM IS THE GO-TO SPOT  
FOR DELICIOUS FOOD AND DECADENT DESSERTS

TEXT BY **NATE NIVENS**

IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN AND KESERA**







**A COZY CAFÉ** tucked away in an alley off Le Thanh Ton, **Café Bar KESERA** (26/3 Le Thanh Ton, D1) has a bit of everything for everyone. And if you love bagels then Kesera is *the* place for you, offering some of the most authentic bagels in Saigon. Try their plain bagel with salmon, cream cheese, avocados and shrimp then wash it down with a cup of piping hot coffee and it's like you've traveled to New York City, the bagel capital of the world. The menu is diverse but with a focus on Western and Japanese fusion, along with salads, burgers and several Thai, Indian and Korean dishes, and a wide selection of homemade cakes including my favorite—cheesecakes.

Kesera has two floors, the ground houses the bar with table seating, and live music every Saturday night, while the upper level has two relaxing dining spaces with comfy sofa chairs. We started our lunch with the Teriyaki duck (VND120,000) and Japanese scallops (VND190,000) as appetizers. The duck was expertly cooked and tender, presented on a bed of arugula drizzled with a sweet teriyaki reduction sauce. The freshness of the arugula, crispiness of

the duck skin and juiciness of the meat formed moreish bites one after another. This was a great start to our lunch. To follow were scallops served on intricately latticed asparagus. Precision timing is crucial when preparing scallops—too long on the pan and they become rubbery while not enough time will leave them uncooked and slimy. The two scallops perched on top were seared off and cooked to perfection and left us in the mood for more Asian flavors, so we ordered a glass of wine and a Strawberry beer cocktail from their wide selection of beers and fine wines. It was crisp and not overly strong for an afternoon meal.

Soon the main dishes made their way to our table. The Roasted pork belly (VND125,000) with a ginger sesame based sauce and a vegetable relish was a good marriage of flavors and textures—juicy and tender morsels of deliciousness. It was a creative take on a common Vietnamese dish seen in most *com tam* eateries.

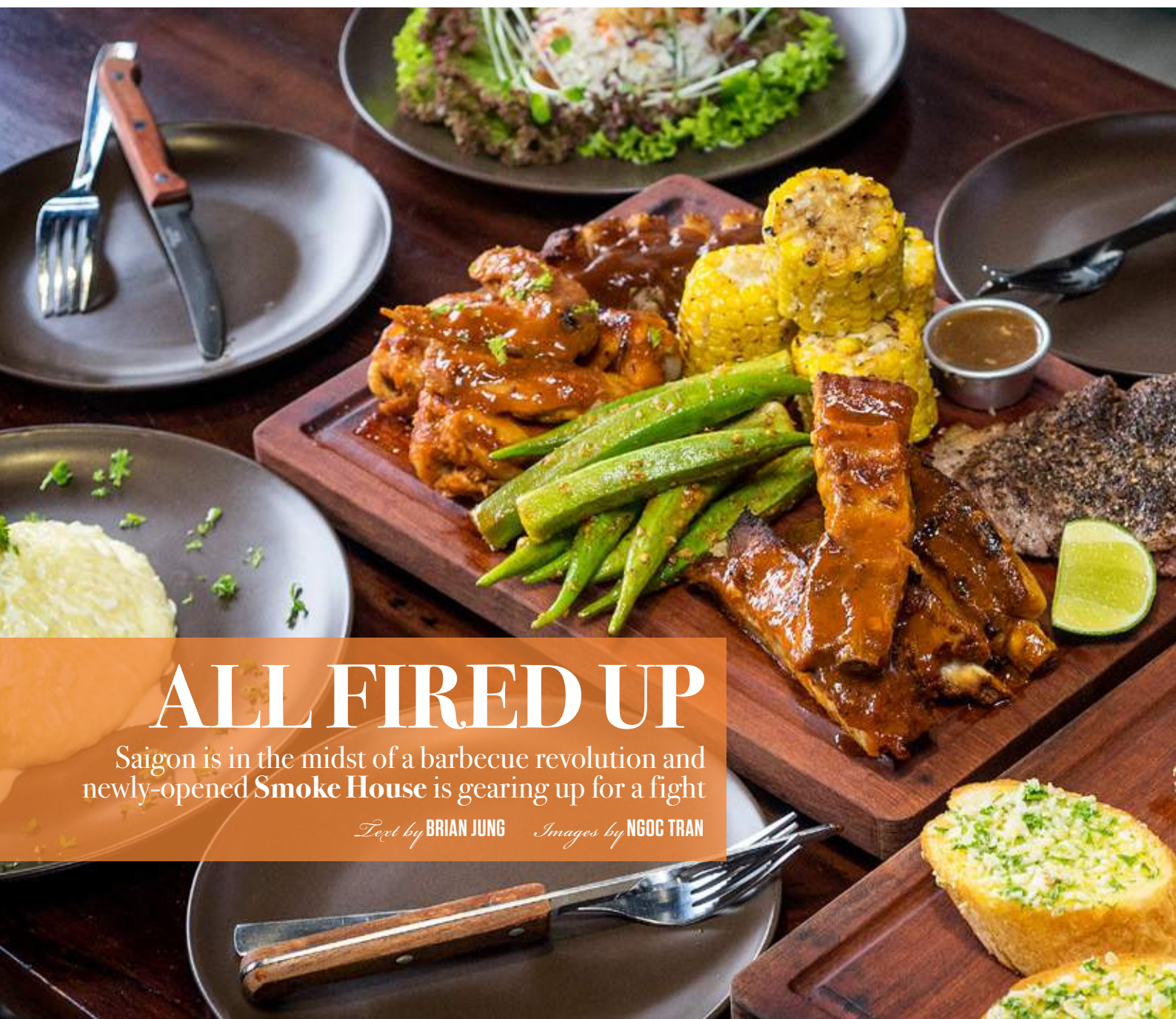
As an avid bagel lover, who hasn't had a good bagel in a good few years, I couldn't leave Kesera without trying their famous "best bagels in Saigon." Fighting the traditionalist in me who

wanted to order the classic salmon and cream cheese bagel instead, and taking advice from my lunch companion, I ordered the more interesting item on the menu: the Shrimp and basil bagel sandwich (VND80,000) served in a bed of grated carrots and a mayonnaise-based relish. The bagel was boiled and baked as it should be and would make a New Yorker proud, and obviously baked that morning. The amalgamation of creamy relish, crunchy carrots and roasted shrimp inside the glorious baked halo of dough was phenomenal.

We ordered the Blueberry cheesecake and the Rare cheesecake (VND55,000 per slice each) accompanied, of course, by a cup of coffee. The blueberry was exactly as I was expecting, a New York style baked cheesecake with lightly whipped cream cheese and a perfectly crunchy biscuit base. However, the winner of the two was the Rare cheesecake, which was served drizzled with a passionfruit sauce. The cheesecake itself was light and creamy, but accompanied with the tartness of the passionfruit and you end up with a bold and decadent dessert serving as a glorious finale to our journey through Kesera's menu. ■







# ALL FIRED UP

Saigon is in the midst of a barbecue revolution and newly-opened **Smoke House** is gearing up for a fight

*Text by* **BRIAN JUNG**

*Images by* **NGOC TRAN**

**HO CHI MINH CITY'S BBQ CRAZE** is growing stronger every year. It seems everywhere you turn there are new BBQ places springing up and Thien Do is hoping to capitalize on that. Having recently returned from several years in Chicago, he decided to launch **Smoke House—All American BBQ & Grill** (34 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh). While Chicago is more likely to bring to mind images of cold winters and gooey slices of deep dish pizza than ribs and brisket, that's not to say Chicago doesn't have good BBQ. In fact, most Chi-Town foodies will tell you there is definitely good BBQ to be found, and if you happen to be in the area stop by Honey 1, Smalls or Green Street Smoked Meats. It's not so strange then that Thien brought back

some smoky ideas from his time there.

Smoke House stands out with its huge signboard and aluminum pounded walls, with plenty of casual seating over two floors. While the interior lacks a unique 'Chicago' or 'American BBQ' design, it is an open air space – so for those who were expecting to munch on hot ribs in cold air-con, I advise you to dress light. On some nights when the skies are clear the roof is automatic and can automatically retract.

To start, I ordered Garlic bread (VND35,000), and Honey BBQ wings (VND85,000). The former came out topped with tons of garlic and melted butter—absolutely delicious on top of crunchy crispy bread. The wings were equally good with crackly skin peeling away easily while a rush of hot

steam revealed juicy, tender chicken meat. The BBQ sauce was lighter and slightly sweet, which was nicely complemented with a swig of ale.

When it came to the main course there was no doubt. I had the Big Fat Ass BBQ (VND545,000): ribs, rib eye, Peri Peri chicken, smoked lean shoulder meat and two sides (mashed potatoes and cole slaw) came heaped on top of a wooden chopping board. The ribs, by which all BBQ places will be judged on, oh my! They parted easily and slid off the bone to sit in a heap of tender and tangy fatty meat. The BBQ sauce wasn't their final version and it was apparent some work was needed because it was a little watery and didn't have a tangy sweet punch that a lot of good BBQ sauces have. Actually most BBQ restau-





rants guard their BBQ sauce recipes with killer robots and moody Doberman Pinchers so it will be good to see Smoke House develop theirs in the future.

The rib eye was ordered medium rare and it was so done to perfection. It had just the right amount of pink, there were no dark red patches to suggest uneven cooking. I did notice the rib eye was tenderized and pounded thin. There are various schools of thought about this but for me it was juicy, peppery and had just the right degree of delicious chewiness. Next came the Peri peri chicken, which was made famous by Nando's in South Africa, unfortunately, it did not taste of the iconic peri peri sauce. The chicken, slightly dry, needed to be dipped in sauce to juice it up. The smoked lean shoulder meat was neither smoked nor lean as I saw plenty of delicious soft fat, but it was definitely tender and juicy nevertheless. The smoker currently isn't doing the job but Thien assured me they are committed and are currently building their own custom smoker—

now that's dedication to the craft.

The platter came with wasabi mashed potatoes, in addition to my side order of mash, a bit too much starch even for me. No melted butter or gravy with the mashed potatoes which made them a bit dry – so my advice is to order it with gravy. I'm used to more mayo in my cole slaw but it's just as well this slaw didn't have as much—my waistline thanks you Smoke House.

To finish off this feast, I had to try a couple of desserts. There's only three on the menu so hopefully they'll be bringing in more classics—real cheesecake or a slice of pecan pie would be welcomed. I ordered the Lemon tart (VND75,000) and the Chocolate “pudding” (VND75,000) which turned out to be Chocolate lava cake. Since most BBQ places aren't known for having great desserts I was pleasantly surprised by how delicious these were. Lemon tarts are not common in Asia so I was very happy to dig into this one. Not overly tart and with a light, sweet whipped crème fraîche that was a perfect match to the tanginess, all on a delicious crumbly crust. This was amazingly good—a must order item! The Chocolate “pudding” lava cake exploded with a touch from the spoon and quickly created a molten chocolate pool on my plate and was cooled off by a dollop of vanilla ice cream. Perfectly baked and excellent as well.

Since the Smoke House had only been opened a month when I visited, there are certain things they are working hard on improving and definitely once they get their smoker up and running (which I'm told is very soon) that will help immensely. The passion of the owner, the attentiveness of the staff and a great location will also help with their success. I'll be back for that lemon tart, you can count on that. ■







# TABLEFORTWO

MEET THE CHEF BEHIND THE MENU AT THE GRAND HO TRAM STRIP  
INTERVIEW BY CHRISTINE VAN IMAGES PROVIDED BY THE GRAND HO TRAM

## JEAN-FRANCOIS

**METEIGNER** was born and raised in France and earned his first apprenticeship at the upscale restaurant Troisgros when he was just 15. After three years there, he went to Bordeaux where he worked at Le Chapon Fin—took a brief hiatus to serve in the army for one year—then returned to Le Chapon Fin before moving on to Paris. In Paris, he further his culinary experience at L'Archestrade—a 3-Michelin star restaurant run by Chef Alain Senderens.

The traveling chef left France for Los Angeles in 1980 and soon found work at L'Orangerie, where he became Executive Chef at the young age of 26. During the next couple of decades, Jean-Francois would open critically-acclaimed French restaurants La Cachette and La Cachette Bistro in Los Angeles—60 percent of the menu was French, all prepared using French techniques, but with an international approach to food.

This international man of food has upped and left the West Coast for Vietnam. One of the founding team of The Grand Ho Tram Strip, Jean-Francois originally joined the resort as Executive Sous Chef and was promoted to Executive Chef in 2015, a role which sees him assume responsibility for the development and management

of all food and beverage outlets. He'll meld Vietnamese ingredients with the *cuisine naturelle* he's spearheaded since his days as a mere lad of 15.

**With your promotion as Executive Chef what changes have you made? How will you make The Grand not only a beach resort destination but also a dining destination?** We are working on getting all our outlets to a new level of upscale presentation, especially at The Grand Bistro and Cantonese restaurant Jù Bào Xuân. We've implemented our new concept at KHÓI Barbecue with live seafood on Friday and Saturday, which is doing fantastic. The plan in the future for us is to find a space to do a Michelin-level restaurant with an Asia Western fusion menu in an upscale décor.

**You were chef-owner of La Cachette, which garnered praise for reinventing bistro classics; can diners expect the same at The Grand Bistro?** We do a lot and we use *sous vide* cooking techniques mostly with imported meat from Australia, France and the US. We recently debut high-end food and wine tasting dinners every two to three month with Jean Bernard as sommelier. We use lots of imported product and started our fusion recipes for those events.

**How are you incorporating Vietnamese ingredients or Vietnamese cooking styles to your menu?** Of course a lot of Dalat vegetables and fruits, and all our seafood come from Vung Tau. We use local ingredients when we can, such as beef, chicken, ducks, pigs, vanilla, chocolate, coffee and rice. We try to use Vietnamese more than imported products.

**For first time diners to The Grand Bistro, what is the one dish they must order that represents you?** I don't want to be stuck with just one style of food, so I recommend ordering many: French duck with orange ginger sauce  
Seared *foie gras*  
Homemade smoked salmon  
Australian lamb chops with thyme, mint and apricot couscous  
Tournedos Rossini with truffle sauce and *foie gras*  
Baked oysters  
Seafood and avocados tower

**You already have a cookbook out called *Cuisine Natural*. Can we look forward to another one inspired by Vietnam and its food?** That would be a fun project with my team at The Grand Bistro, will love to work on one yes. ■





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



## Life in Pink

Rosé wines have gone from peripheral fancy to an essential element of a wine lover's repertoire

**PERHAPS THE THING** that most surprised me regarding wine when I arrived to Vietnam was that hardly anyone was enjoying a glass of rosé. With the hot tropical weather and nice terraces all around, I was expecting people to be drinking rosé by the bottle if not by the magnum. With the exception of a few customers in the old Vino shops, rosé was nowhere to be seen.

I enquired, and it seemed that a lot of the local population rejected rosé thinking that it was poor quality wine, a blend of low quality white and low quality red, and a type of wine that only women would enjoy. They could not be more mistaken.

Rosé is pink wine made from red grapes. In case you did not know, when you press the grapes to make juice, even if the grapes are

red, the juice is white. Yes, you read correctly: juice from red grapes, that is used to make red wine, is white.

Like red wines, rosé wines get their color from the juice being in contact with grape skins. The difference with red is that in the case of rosé such contact is limited in time so the wine becomes pale red, or rosé color, rather than the full red, but this does not affect the quality at all.

Regardless of the method used to produce rosé, high quality grapes are used resulting in high quality wines; they may look pale pink (if they spend little time in contact with grape skins) or dark pink (if contact is longer), but the product is usually a fresh, interesting, often complex, wine which is great as an aperitif or paired with light dishes.

Provence in the South of France

and Navarra in the North of Spain are probably the two most famous areas specializing in rosé wines. However, new styles and real jewels are produced in other areas like Castano rosé, which is about to arrive to Vietnam, a fresh delicious wine made from Monastrell grapes (Mouvedre) in the Mediterranean, an easy to drink delicious wines offering an amazing value for money.

So if you have not done so yet, start exploring rosé wines. Make sure they are cold and enjoy them the same way you enjoy life, without having to worry too much about it.

*Both RubyRed (206 Nguyen Van Huong, D2) and Wine Embassy (41 Quoc Huong, D2) have a good selection of rosé wines on offer. ■*

# Wine & Dine

## BARS



### Air 360 Sky Lounge - Events

This rooftop bar combines vibrant music, fancy designs and 360 degree view of Saigon's skyline to make it one of the best spots for drinks, lounging and events.

**0974 58 77 88**

22-23 floor, Ben Thanh Tower,  
136-138 Le Thi Hong Gam, DI  
[www.air360skybar.com](http://www.air360skybar.com)



### Chill Skybar - Dining

A modern lounge, bar and dining space that is considered the first "Skybar" concept in Vietnam. It is perched on top of AB Tower, exclusively on the 26th and 27th floor with views of the city's skyline.

**0938 822 838**

Level 26, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai, DI  
[www.chillsaigon.com](http://www.chillsaigon.com)



### La Vie En Rose

Combining sophisticated decor with live music and a extensive vintage wine, La Vie En Rose is the go-to place to while away your worries.

**0936 933 833**

21st floor, Ben Thanh Tower, 136-138 Le Thi Hong Gam, DI  
[www.lavieenrose.com](http://www.lavieenrose.com)



### 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, DI



### 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](mailto: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](http://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, DI

### 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, DI

### 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, DI

### 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@icasianasaiigon.com](mailto:dine@icasianasaiigon.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, DI  
3823 4999  
[www.caravellehotel.com](http://www.caravellehotel.com)  
11am till late

### Xu Bar

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

71-75 Hai Ba Trung, DI  
[www.xusaigon.com](http://www.xusaigon.com)





# CAFÉS



## Bach Dang

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

26-28 Le Loi, D1



## En Tea House & Restaurant

En replicates the feeling of the old Saigon by modern Saigonese, complimented by authentic Vietnamese cuisine and deluxe teas, for anyone who wants to look for Saigon's sense of nostalgia and friendliness.

308 - 308C Dien Bien Phu, Ward 4, D3

3832 9797

Facebook: Enteahouse



## MOF Japanese Dessert Cafe

Tet Yokoso New Menu

(12/28 - 3/13). Ring in the Japanese

& Lunar New Year with vibrant

& wonderful flavors at MOF. Using traditional and all-natural New Year ingredients like rice, yuzu, and matcha. MOF is proud to present Tet Yokoso. Rush into MOF to try these auspicious & authentic desserts to help you start 2016 with a lucky charm!

Somerset Chancellor Court, GF, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai &

Mac Dinh Chi Corner, District 1, HCMC

(08)38239812

www.mof.com.vn



## The Library

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

Ground Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon,

Corner Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, D1

3520 9099

dine@icasianasaigon.com



## The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1



## Also Try...

### 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 Café

There's rarely a tourist who's been through inner-city Saigon and hasn't stopped in on the super-friendly-looking Ciao Café. It stands up well as an expat mainstay too, with its fashionable décor 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 décor, 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

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

### Shang Palace

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

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

### Yu Chu

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

**1st Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon, Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, D1**  
**3520 9099**  
[www.intercontinental.com/saijon](http://www.intercontinental.com/saijon)





# SPANISH



## 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**



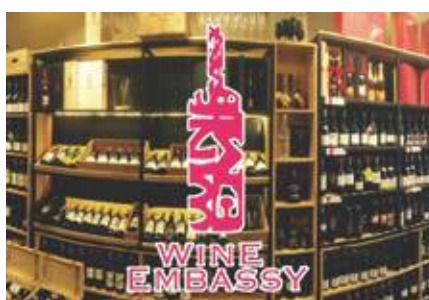
# WINE



## 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**



## Wine Embassy Boutique

Established in the heart of Thao Dien since October 2014, Wine Embassy aims to offer wines for all budgets and from all over the world carefully selected by our Resident Sommelier.

**41 Quoc Huong Street, 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.

**23A Le Thanh Ton, D1**

### 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**



# 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 <sup>®</sup>

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

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



## L'essentiel

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

98 Ho Tung Mau, D1  
094 841 5646



## Le Bacoulos <sup>®</sup>

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



## 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



## Le Bouchon de Saigon <sup>®</sup>

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

40 Thai Van Lung, D1  
www.lebouchondesaigon.com

## 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.

11 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

### 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.

39 Tran Ngoc Dien, 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



## 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



## Natraj

Known for its complete North & South Indian cuisine, Natraj's specialty is its special chaat & tandoori dishes. Parties, events & catering services are available, with Daily Lunch Thali and set menus. Available for delivery. Complete menu on Facebook.

41 Bui Thi Xuan, D1  
6679 5267 - 6686 3168  
www.facebook.com/natrajindiancuisine



## 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 Bui, D1



## Tandoor

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


39A - 39B Ngo Duc Ke, D1  
39304839 / tandoor@tandoorvietnam.com



## The Punjabi


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


40/3 Bui Vien, D1







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# ITALIAN



## Ciao Bella

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

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

*Ciao Bella*



## Inter Nos

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

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



## La Bettola

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

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



## VIII Re

VIII Re Eight King Italian restaurant is an open space setting serving grilled dishes, pastas and wood oven pizzas. Internationally known chef Roberto Mancini brings his vast experience at five-star hotels to his restaurant.

R432 Le Van Thiem, Phu My Hung, D7

## 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



## 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



## KESERA CAFE BAR

Café Bar KESERA is an ideal space to offer you fresh meals. We are here cozy and friendly serving specialist coffee, Japanese beers, fine wines, freshly baked homemade cakes, bagels and delicious Western and Japanese fusion foods. Live music every Saturday night.

**26/3 Le Thanh Ton, Dist 1.**  
0838 270 443



## Lavastone BBQ

Modern Japanese Yakinitiku 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, DI**  
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, DI**



## Sushi Dining Aoi

Sushi Dining Aoi is one such restaurant, where the whole atmosphere of the place evokes the best of the culture. With its typical Japanese-style decor – the smooth earthen tones of the wooden furniture and surrounds, the warmth and privacy of the VIP rooms – it's possible to believe you're in a more elegant realm.

**53-55 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, D3**  
3930 0039  
www.sushidiningaoi.com



## Yoshino

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

**2A-4A Ton Duc Thang, DI**  
3823 3333

## 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, DI**  
3823 8793  
www.blanchystreet.com  
11am - 10:30pm

### Chiisana Hashi

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, DI**  
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**



# 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**



## 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**



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 Chanh, D1  
6294 8787**

**[www.canadasteakhouse.com](http://www.canadasteakhouse.com)**  
**Facebook: [Canadasteakhouse219c](#)**  
**10am - 11pm**



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, District 1  
3829 5368  
[www.norfolkhotel.com.vn](http://www.norfolkhotel.com.vn)



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.



A stylish restaurant featuring Italian cuisine and Western steaks with a wide selection of imported steaks from Australian and the US. Nossa brings food and decor together to create a cozy ambiance. With an attention to bringing authentic flavors, we provide good food, good prices and good taste.

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



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

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



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





# VIETNAMESE



## 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. New Quan Bui Garden just opened in District 2.

[www.bui.restaurant](http://www.bui.restaurant)

17A Ngo Van Nam, D1  
First Floor, 39 Ly Tu Trong, D1  
55 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien, D2



## 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](mailto: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



## 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](http://www.en.timebistro.vn)



## Also Try...

### 3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1  
3821 1631

### Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

### Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

### Com Nieu

Famous for its inclusion in the Anthony Bourdain *No Reservations* program, the venue is best known for its theatrics. Every bowl of rice is served in a terracotta bowl that is unceremoniously shattered upon serving. Unforgettable local food in a very pleasant traditionally-styled venue.

59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3  
3932 6363  
[comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com](mailto:comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com)  
[comnieusaigon.com.vn](http://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

### 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](http://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.

19-21 Dong Khoi, D1  
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](http://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](http://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](http://www.lemeridien.com/saigon)

**BAMBOO**



## 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](mailto: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](http://www.lemeridien.com/saigon)

**Latest Recipe**



## Ngon Asia House

Contemporary bistro that welcomes you with style and leads you into a house of sumptuous colorful food cultures, rich in both flavors and inspirations. More than 350 savory street dishes from Korea, Japan, China, Thailand and Vietnam come together in one space.

**99 Nguyen Hue, D1**  
08 3821 3821  
[sales@ngon-asia.com](mailto:sales@ngon-asia.com)



## 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**



## Chanh Bistro

Chanh Bistro Rooftop Saigon is an international restaurant, café & bar with comfortable seating and a beautiful, romantic view on the rooftop of a 7-floor building. Chanh Bistro has set lunches on weekdays, selected from "A la carte" Menu for only 110.000++ VND

**Floor 6th, 43 – 45 Ho Tung Mau Street, Dist 1.**  
38214969  
[www.facebook.com/chanhbistro](http://www.facebook.com/chanhbistro)

10:30 - 24:00



## twenty21one

A new casual dining venue with an innovative tapas menu divided into two categories: Looking East, and Looking West, with dishes such as Crispy shredded duck spring rolls and Bacon-wrapped dates stuffed with Roquefort blue cheese. There are two dining levels: an upstairs mezzanine and downstairs are tables with both private and exposed positioning (open-air streetside; and a terrace by the pool out back).

**21 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3**

**TWENTY 21 ONE**



## 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.

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# Travel & Leisure

MT. FANSIPAN









# *The Roof of Indochina*

*An easy 20-minute cable car ride versus an arduous two-day trek to Mt. Fansipan*

*Text by* LORCAN LOVETT *Images by* DU DUC KY

**I WAS WIPING** the sweat off my brow, scanning the jungle canopy we had just broken through, when the old Australian took his first fall. Seventy-two-year-old Will missed his footing and the pull of his backpack threatened to send him crashing onto my head. He lurched forward, instead, and smacked his knees against the stone slope.

At that age, climbing any roof is fraught with danger. Will's peers get their kicks from cleaning the gutters on their bungalows whereas he was

ascending 3,143 meters to Indochina's rooftop at the tail end of the Himalayas. The veteran traveler caught his breath and struggled on, enduring the latest of a string of challenges threading back to the 1950s. Whether he made the top or not, our 10-strong team would venerate his gritty spirit.

A number of energetic tourists still opt for the two-day trek to summit Mt. Fansipan, or *Phan Xi Pang* in Vietnamese, although now there's a 20-minute alternative that's made this once remote

vista more accessible than ever.

After more than two years of construction, Sun Group opened its record-breaking cable car in February 2016. It took off for the first time from Muong Hoa Valley near the holiday boomtown of Sapa. Set near Vietnam's border with China, the VND4.4 trillion project scooped two records—one for the world's longest three-rope cable car at 6,282 meters and another for the world's biggest ascent between the departure and arrival stations at 1,410 meters.





company has its counter arguments, like the ripe economic benefits such an attraction will bring to the area. It's also no stranger to controversy: currently it's sitting on plans to build another cable car through Son Doong Cave, the world's largest, after thousands of people worldwide signed a petition to stop it.

"Cable car is dirty nature," said our 20-year-old H'mong guide Nhia. "Broken nature." The young guide from the village at the foot of the mountain, Cat Cat, speaks his native language, broken English and Vietnamese. Taking the same job as his father, he began guiding tourists up Fansipan four years ago.

Nhia skipped over a stream to fetch some wild berries, his fruit picking punctuated by laments of a drop in climbers since the cable car opened. Although Hoang Lien Son National Park pays him a fixed wage of VND300,000 for every two-day trek, fewer climbers means fewer tips and a more vulnerable future on the mountain. The prospect didn't seem to dampen his spirits too much. Sporting the classic H'mong footwear, a flimsy prototype to Crocs, he yo-yoed up and down our pack, blithely ripping bits of cardamom leaves and thorny coriander for chewing.

This cheerful manner persisted, despite the fact that Nhia's family was rocked days before by a loss not uncommon in the mountainous region around

Lao Cai and Sapa. He would come to tell me about it after a few hours of rambling together. Blissfully unaware, I stumbled across the roots of beech trees to the lunch spot at 2,200 meters.

After this point, the trail turned from dense jungle to forest. Wild orange and white orchids, magnolia and blossoming red azaleas colored the narrowing ridge. Mountain toads croaked in a pond off the bushy, rolling path and, in the distance, mist spread across the craggy peaks, enveloping the cable car and, eventually, the walkers in front of me.

Over 2,000 species of flora and 327 fauna species have been discovered on Fansipan so far. Nature perpetually replenishes the landscape, seen in the blackened patches of deforestation that are hastily filled by clumps of dwarf bamboo. Whether this environment could live in harmony with the breaching wave of sightseers is a question that has worried many, but, like the rest of Vietnam, the north is facing unstoppable change.

With that change is the Faustian sting of mass tourism. Often described as Vietnam's very own Swiss Alps, Sapa has always been a desirable location. The town was a fashionable mountain retreat for Hanoi's colonial society in the first half of the 20th century, and then its glamorous epoch was stunted by war and hardship.

Skeptics would be forgiven for seeing these claims as hyperbole dreamt up by some delirious tour operator. The reality, however, is that the pods, carrying 30 to 35 people each, can deliver 2,000 people per hour to the peak; the same number of people who reached the summit over the entire year in 2014.

Critics argued the dramatic spike in visitors would spoil the natural beauty of the mountain and strip away its significance as a destination for climbers. Sun Group pressed on regardless. The





During the 1990s, the reviving tourism industry helped lift Sapa out of stagnant poverty. Now, more than ever, the local H'mong people are diverting their focus back to domestic and international travelers again. Handicrafts, jewelry and courting dances are being packaged into novelty experiences for visitors while traditional forms of income, like agriculture, are taking a backseat. The influence of new money has given the town a cynical edge that expresses itself through peddlers chasing tourist buses and resenting the passengers inside.

People still come though, because the beauty of the people, with their hemp clothing dyed with indigo, and the unblemished landscape can be easily found in one of the remote villages outside of Sapa. Ultimately, if tourism is helping put food on the tables of the indigenous community, authenticity loses its importance.

Adventure company Sapa Sisters hires only H'mong women for guides and focuses on taking trekkers to secluded spots in the region. Its director, Ylva Landoff Lindberg, said the construction of the cable car impacted littering in the area and took land away from farmers. "I have gone up to Fansipan with the cable car myself," she said. "The view was fantastic and the travel in the cable car was surprisingly fascinating. But, except the ride, the visit on the top, with its pagoda, shopping center and the stairs they have built the last part of the way, is rather depressing."

The complex Ylva mentioned was about three hours from base camp—tin

shacks set at 2,800 meters—where the two porters waited for us. Carrying towering crates of eggs and other provisions, these women had no idea they had won a race against two competitive Dutch students in our group.

We feasted on beef, tofu and rice. A rooster's head that was balanced at the top of its barely cooked limbs was offered, too, but with its glazed eyes staring grudgingly at the diners, there was a silent consensus to leave the bird alone.

The night was filled with noises of scratching moles, rodents' tapping feet and cats' screams. None of us had expected a stay in the Hiltons, besides; we were off again at 3:30am. We scrambled up ravines, ladders and a rope in the darkness, hoping to make the summit in time for sunrise. Our bodies were aching: the trek demanded a good level of fitness without a lot of mountaineering experience.

The track became dense again, this time with thickets of bamboo. I looked down to see a sludgy mess of toilet waste, about 20 minutes from the top. It was oozing from the construction site; the pagoda and shopping complex, which looked some time from completion.

Nhia caught up and recalled the experience of a fastidiously clean German woman who he guided up the mountain a month before. She fell into the "dirty water," he said, her face speckled with brown, and, in the same posture as Willem Dafoe on the film poster of *Platoon*, cried: "When?"

We both failed at suppressing a laugh. I asked Nhia if he had plans

later that day. He was going to visit the body of his father-in-law who was decapitated in a motorbike accident on the treacherous route from Lao Cai to Sapa two days before. Coincidentally, I had been stuck in the unfolding traffic jam. A large truck stacked with cages had crashed into the side of a bridge, and seemingly, Nhia's family member. It was a reminder that no matter how many restaurants or cable cars the area gets, traveling on the far north's winding roads should be done with caution.

The summit was whipped by rain and the view drowned in fog. Considering the wet season was well underway, we had been lucky with the weather on the climb. We'd been told to anticipate bad conditions at the top. Perhaps the real surprise was the strong sense of accomplishment we all shared.

The old Australian was the last to arrive. He clambered up the final step, blood dribbling down his forearm from a fall in the bamboo. "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers," he said with Shakespearean spirit.

He was right for the moment, but in one hour's time the spot would be chockablock with cable car passengers who had trod up 600 steps for the inevitable selfie fest.

More than half of our group felt too tired for the descent and returned in the cable car. Will breathed in the air, picked up his backpack, and began climbing back down. Indochina's highest mountain will continue to be more than a cable car ride for those who dig a bit deeper. ■







# Dream Machine

*Flying to a whole new level on an Airbus A350-900*

*Text by* **MICHAEL ARNOLD**

*Images provided by* **CATHAY PACIFIC**

**THE EVOLUTION OF TECHNOLOGY** over the last 25 years has reshaped metropolitan life in many conspicuous ways. It's perhaps odd that with so many changes to life on the ground, technologies in the air have been slow to follow suit. For Cathay Pacific, however—connecting to destinations worldwide out of its regional hub in Hong Kong—2016 represents a big jump forward with the introduction of the Airbus A350-900 XWB, which first landed in Ho Chi Minh City early last month. Cathay Pacific has ordered 48 A350-model extra wide body aircraft, which will be flown regionally before being deployed to expand their long haul network, beginning with connections to Gatwick and Dusseldorf later this year.

While for the airline, this upgrade to the entire fleet is part of a company-wide convergence on their cornerstone “life well traveled” concept, for the passenger, the A350 flight experience feels like a step towards a journey on a starship. The aircraft and fit-out are culminations of industry-wide innovations in everything from materials, aerodynamics and avionics to seat and cockpit design. It's a dream

machine in every way—bigger, faster, stronger, quieter and greener—and it is poised to improve flight experiences for everyone traveling on this airline.

In a special presentation to the media, A350 project leader Robert Taylor went through a staggering summary of the technological improvements to this aircraft over earlier models, listing its incredibly strong and light carbon-fibre fuselage, purring Rolls Royce engines and adaptable aerodynamic profile as bringing the aircraft 25 percent more efficiency than you'd expect from a regular airplane. “It's like a Formula 1 sportscar compared to a double-decker bus,” he says. “Because it has less drag in the air, it saves fuel, and can have a slightly higher cruise speed. This airplane cruises at .85 times the speed of sound, which is higher than a conventional aircraft. Which also means you get there a bit quicker.”

One of the more interesting features for passengers is the A350's software-controlled LED mood lighting. “We can control the colors in the cabin,” says Taylor. “At 17 million colors, we can simulate sunsets, sunrises, and all phases in between, which from a passenger's experience reduces jet-

lag, because you try to get the body into a psychological time frame.”

Ultimately, though, the seating configuration is the key to anyone's flight experience, and in this regard, Cathay Pacific has improved on comforts throughout the aircraft's three class zones—including an increase in seat pitch, retractable arm rests, and dimmable, adjustable reading lights. These are particularly evident in the Studio F. A. Porsche-designed business class and premium economy berths, which can be transformed according to how the passenger wishes to use the space—whether that be to work, dine, relax, or sleep. Personal TVs are larger in all classes, and the remote units are touchscreen devices—passengers in business class can view content on their monitor as well as on their handheld. If you're really aggressive with time, try watching two movies at once!

Beyond the physical technology, what has to be the Holy Grail for the modern traveler is the ability to check Facebook at 6,000 feet. Join the mile-high Wi-Fi club for a small access fee and be sure to Facetime your mom from far above the clouds. ■



# *Patagonia*

*Images by* JIMMY VAN DER KLOET

*Perito Moreno Glacier in Santa Cruz Province, Patagonia  
This ice field is the world's third largest reserve of fresh water*









*View of Mount Fitz Roy, just outside El Chalten village, Patagonia*





# >>The List Travel



## Ana Mandara Villas | Dalat

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



## Cham Garden Restaurant

Cham Garden Restaurant is located inside Cham Villas Boutique Luxury Resort. Set in the midst of a lush tropical garden, this cozy and quiet restaurant serves Asian Fusion, Vietnamese and Western Cuisine. The ideal place for a romantic and exquisite dinner.

**32 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Phan Thiet**  
**+84 62 3741 234**  
[www.chamvillas.com](http://www.chamvillas.com)  
[www.facebook.com/chamgardenmuine](https://www.facebook.com/chamgardenmuine)



## Cham Villas - Boutique Luxury Resort

Best resort in Mui Ne. 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](http://www.chamvillas.com)



## Fusion Maia | Danang

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



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



## Mia

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



## Pullman Danang Beach Resort

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**Vo Nguyen Giap, Khue My, Ngu Hanh Son, Danang**  
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[www.pullman-danang.com](http://www.pullman-danang.com)



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**058 2220 000**  
[www.sheratonnhatrang.com](http://www.sheratonnhatrang.com)



## The Island Lodge

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**390 Ap Thoi Binh, Thoi Son, My Tho**  
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[www.theislandlodge.com.vn](http://www.theislandlodge.com.vn)



# >>The List Health & Beauty

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www.nhakhoadrhung.com



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125 Le Thi Rieng, D1

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57A Tran Quoc Thao, D3

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Villa 1, Hem 21 (21/1) Xuan Thuy, Thao Dien, D2,  
www.avedaaherbal.com  
(08)3519 4679 / 090 697 7110  
avedaaherbal@gmail.com  
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### Maison Mikiu Boutique Salon

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8 Ton Dat Tien, D7  
5412 4773



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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

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

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

# >>The List

# Business

## INSURANCE



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### Liberty Mutual Insurance

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**15th Floor, Kumho Asiana Plaza, 39 Le Duan, DI  
3812 5125**

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41 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, DI  
3821 3316**

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www.agsfourwinds.com**

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www.phongkhamthuyk9.com  
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**A12-A13 Nguyen Huu Tho, Kim Son Project, D7  
www.modernpethospital.net.vn  
6298 9203**

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emergency care and grooming services such as washing and nail trimming.  
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6269 3939**

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www.saigonpethospital.com  
3519 4182**

### Sasaki Animal Hospital

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





# Kids & Education



# MEANGIRLS... AND BOYS

From humiliation to physical violence, **school bullying** is an epidemic that needs to stop

TEXT BY SOPHIA CHEN



**I HAVE BEEN OVER-WHELMED** by the sweetness of kids I teach at school. One student, seeing me without an umbrella, ran backward through the rain to walk with me under his. Another classroom, after a lesson on the differences between Tet and Christmas, pitched in to buy me a new pair of work shoes (mine had become worn out because size 9 shoes are hard to find in Vietnam) as a Christmas gift.

However, it was only recently when I witnessed, firsthand, otherwise sweet kids turn into brutes taking pleasure in harassing a fellow student. The target was a shy boy who stuttered and so during group work they would mock him by constantly repeating the first

syllable of his name. Not just one or two kids, several of them. The victim would try to ignore them and continue his work but the bullies were relentless. When he finally walked away, another kid—the instigator and leader of the group—pushed him. Some of the students also shoved him while the rest observed with mixed reactions. I separated the victim from the bullies and made the students return to their seats. Later that evening I was racked with guilt and concern because I had done nothing else to address the problem.

Last year the US had 2.7 million cases of bullying among 50 million children, however, statistics on bullying in Vietnam are harder to find because

corporal and verbal punishment in the home is not uncommon, therefore seeing the same violence spilled into school is seen as normal—but that may soon change after a recent bullying video went viral and made national news in Vietnam. Last year a 90-second video clip showed a schoolgirl driven into a classroom corner then punched by three girls. The image came to an end with a boy shouting, "How dare you do something against us!" and throws a pile of plastic stools at the victim's head.

The video was traced back to Ly Tu Trong Junior Secondary School and the school board discovered that the incident had actually occurred three months earlier, during a break where the victim





## Mob Mentality

Some well-intentioned teachers worry that identifying a situation as “bullying” can harm the victim’s ability to “adjust” to being a victim through pretending it’s all in good fun. A teacher who tells a student, “No, the kids aren’t laughing with you, they’re laughing *at* you,” undermines a crucial defense mechanism of denial, a denial that also maintains harmony in the classroom. If everyone assumes that everyone is OK with the joke, nobody feels uncomfortable.

Typically, behavioral problems are dealt with through a group consensus. If a student acts out, there’s a discussion during class with the student present to talk about solving the problem. I once saw this happen after a student stole money from another kid. I remembered that got solved by getting the kids to sit around looking like terrified deer discussing what happened. The point is to reinforce the social cost of poor behavior, which in this case meant instead of learning the entire class had to uncomfortably stare at each other. This keeps kids accountable for their actions.

With bullying, sometimes submission to the leader of the group actually reinforces the ostracism of the victim. The group is the problem, and the group solves the problem. The “face-saving” solution—in which bullies explain that they are just making jokes, that they didn’t mean harm—is presented to the class in a way that inclines the class to believe the problem has been resolved. It is easier to approach that solution than to have a more difficult conversation about bullying, especially when the victim is in the room, and especially when most of the kids are complicit as bystanders or audience members. The point of these interventions is to pave over problems by restoring group harmony—because restoring the appearance of harmony is considered just as valuable as solving the actual problem.

Meanwhile, high school kids interviewed about bullying see it as a necessary tool for forcing students into adapting to social norms. According to research paper *Bullying the meek: a conceptualisation of Vietnamese school*

*bullying*, students often used the term “meek” (*hien lanh*) when explaining bullying and its victims. When asked why he thought meek students were bullied, a boy from Hai Phong, who himself was bullied and considered meek by his classmates, explained, “Because they are considered weak people by others. They bullied me to do things that I otherwise would not do because I was shy. It helped me to try new things and I think I am more confident now. As far as I know, all students who witness bullying practice three no’s: no knowing, no hearing, no seeing.”

In an environment where students are forced to spend almost all their time together, they live under their own set of rules that aren’t always acceptable in society. Students tend to follow the pack, to think the way everyone else is thinking. I’m sure most students are against bullying, but often don’t know how to stop it so this is where schools and parents can play a crucial role teaching kids what to do when bullying occurs.

**Talk to your kids.** It’s not always easy to get your kids to open up to you. But that doesn’t mean you should stop trying. Ask every day about their day—who they ate lunch with or played with at recess. That will lay the groundwork for your children to pipe up about little things before a crisis emerges. ”

**Be an example.** Your kids are watching—and learning from—your behavior.

**Look for changes in your child’s behavior or belongings.** If an outgoing kid becomes withdrawn or a strong student’s grades drop, take notice. And pay attention to personal items that are missing, torn or mysteriously show up in their belongings. These signs may indicate a child is being bullied or bullying someone else.

**Treat the problem.** Your response to bullying behavior will depend on the incident. For starters, the child must alert a parent or trusted adult when feeling threatened, intimidated or excluded. Then document the incident, and reach out to your allies: teachers, parents, principals and friends. Remember that the person doing the bullying requires help, too. ■

reportedly failed to listen to the head of the class. This proved that relevant authorities and the public rarely hear of school bullying unless it is unofficially reported, such as on the internet.

Students usually won’t defend a victim, and may join in to keep attention away from themselves. They tend to follow the consensus and if the consensus is “say nothing” then kids either become reluctant bystanders or an amused audience. Students are good at hiding bullying, even as victims. I often see students alone at their desk during pair work activities. I assumed the students just weren’t interested in participating. I never considered they weren’t being allowed to take part.

# Child's Play

After-school programs give kids a safe place to exercise their brains—and their bodies—while having fun

TEXT BY AMANDA MITCHELL  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



**WHEN I WAS A KID**, I had a few afterschool activities available to me: Girl Scouts, high school track, summer camp...and not much more than that. But today, the possibilities for children can be overwhelming. Depending on where you live, you could choose anything from soccer to computers, equestrian to baton twirling, taekwondo to pottery making.

How do you even begin to choose? As you browse through all the websites, sift through the brochures, talk with your spouse and children, and consider these questions: What are my goals for this activity? What do you hope your children/family will gain from them? What skills will this activity teach my children? Perhaps you want your children to make new friends, get exercise, learn how to work hard physically, or explore a potential talent. Whatever your goal, let that direct your selection process.

Once you have an activity in mind,

take stock of the skills it could teach your children. Different activities tend to teach different skills—from teamwork to responsibility to creativity. Now it's time to look honestly at an activity and consider the time commitment and cost it entails. Is your family ready for the cost and time the activity requires? Can I put all (or at least more than one) of my children in this activity?

During their early years I really wanted to give each of my four children the perfect opportunity to explore their gifts. I wanted each to pursue whatever activity their particular interests inspired. So I signed Mimi up for ballet and Brian for baseball, put Jane in soccer and took Dennis to karate. It was a nice idea but before long I was going crazy driving all over Saigon accommodating four different schedules! The hectic pace made our family feel scattered and stressed. So I drastically reduced. We decided all the kids would swim on a year-round team and play

in music class. It was such a relief to have our schedules align, and our kids enjoyed being in a larger team together. I know many families want to let their children do many different activities in hopes of giving them every advantages in life, but I don't like to watch a parent become exhausted from running her kids to and fro...and ultimately feel like she has to give up on extracurricular activities because they have too much on their plate. In my particulate situation, it worked beautifully (for the kids and me) for us to condense our activities. Would something similar work for you?

## The Company You Keep

As we all know, coaches can have significance influences on children. Do I like the coach/leader and the other families in this activity? What is the coach like? Do you respect their teaching and character? Also, I hesitate to include this because I don't want



to over generalize or imply that you should only interact with families just like yours but I would encourage you to consider the types of families you'd interact with in a given activity. Would you enjoy their company? Would your children benefit from spending time with them? My kids participated in swimming and band while they were young, and then soccer and music in their high school years. At least where we lived, the families and children involved in these activities tended to be hard-working and encouraging. They were just the types of people I wanted to influence my own children.

Of course I would also encourage you to involve your children in the decision. If they really want to try a particular activity, consider giving it a trial run. Or maybe give them a way to show you they're serious. If your daughter is begging for piano lessons, for example, you might work out an agreement that she can start lessons if she practices 10 minutes a day for the next month. Then agree you'll re-assess after three months of lessons. Who knows? Maybe your children really will fall in love with music, art, dance or whatever it is they keep asking (nagging) for.

How can I help my kids explore their talent? Do you suspect that you have a budding artist, public speaker or dancer in your house? Perhaps a trial



run of a certain activity will help you find out. There are many schools and centers in the city who offer trial runs, it may not be posted on their website but it doesn't hurt ask. Or perhaps there are other ways to encourage these interests. From the moment he knew it was possible, Brian loved to make films. Jane is a natural artist who constantly created with her hands. When we discovered these interests, my husband and I helped Brian nurture his gifts and purchased amateur equipment for

his birthday. Whenever an art course came up within our schedule, we signed Jane up. The projects she created in these classes were the foundation of her art school portfolio. That portfolio provided her with both entrance to her school and a scholarship to attend. Brian went on to study filmmaking in college, and now produces films as part of his full-time work. They both developed skills that will give them a venue for expression (and, hopefully, income) their entire lives. ■



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Phu Quoc Ridgeback Dog

# Going Native

Exploring the special dog breeds of Vietnam

**VIETNAM IS HOME** to beautiful living national treasures that few people know about. The treasures are steeped in myth, legend and cultural folklores. Brave and strong hunters, fierce protectors and loyal companions to the indigenous people of Kien Giang, Phu Quoc, Lao Cai and Ha Giang. They are Vietnam's native dog breeds: the Phu Quoc Ridgeback, the H'mong and the Bac Ha.



## The Bac Ha Dog

If there is any one of Vietnam's breeds more obscure and lesser known, it is the Bac Ha dog of Lao Cai Province. They are prized for being highly intelligent and easy to train. They possess a thick fur coat ranging from black and gray to tan and brindle. They originate from the cold, damp treacherous mountainous regions of northern Vietnam and their physical appearance reflects this geography. Bac Ha breeders do not recommend owning them in southern Vietnam because the intense heat and humidity can lead to severe skin rashes and loss of fur.

## The H'mong Dog

The H'mongs are a very ancient,



Image by Khanh Ngoc

'primitive' breed raised as guardians and hunting companions by the ethnic H'mong. Their hunting instincts are largely unchanged by man and close to their ancestral wolves. They are powerful dogs, born with naturally 'docked' short tails, long straight muscular legs with a thick coat of fur in shades of black, brownish red, black and white, and brindle. Dedicated admirers are forming dog clubs throughout Vietnam to help preserve, promote and create awareness of this primal breed. The clubs' activities are recognized by the VKA (Vietnam Kennel Association), with official breed standards published. H'mong dogs and their owners have representation in the Native Dogs in Vietnam Club with an annual national dog show featuring the H'mong and the Phu Quoc Ridgeback.

## Phu Quoc Ridgeback Dog

This dog is only one of three global breeds that possess a peculiar, sword-shaped ridge of hair that runs along its spine, growing in opposite direction from the rest of their fur. Other breeds include the Rhodesian Ridgeback (Africa), Thai Ridgeback (Thailand) and an obscure larger, long-haired Cambodian Razorback originating from the north of



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

Cambodia near the Laos border.

Phu Quoc Ridgebacks have uncanny combined characteristics of a cat, monkey and fish. They have webbed lining in their paws to allow them to run on sand and swim in water and are known to catch fish. They climb trees and jump over high gates with ease and are always spotted on the roof of a building or on the top of a tall fence. They run like cheetahs and have flexible cat-like bodies. They hunt alone or strategically within a pack in stealth mode and with precision.

They make an ideal pet because they are medium sized and low maintenance (short haired requiring a quick bath once a month and little grooming). They are sociable with family and other pets and very playful. They are intensely loyal and make a great guard dog. However, they are bundles of energy and you need to run those long legs every day—not recommended for apartment living.

And let's not forget to mention the myths surrounding their origin. One story is that they originated from the consummation of a jackal-type of dog on Phu Quoc with the mythical 'Fu-Dog' that possessed a ridge along its back, dating to the period of the Le Dynasty. Another story involves King Gia Long, the first king of the Nguyen Dynasty who fled to Phu Quoc after losing a battle, who was befriended by a dog and was told where to find refuge. For the dog's reward the King placed his sword on the dog's back magically transforming a ridge of fur—some do have a ridge that looks like an ancient sword with a primitive design. No one knows the true story of their origin.

If you do travel to Phu Quoc there are still a few elders left that will sit with you and state passionately their respect and love of these amazing dogs. ■



# SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

Summer break doesn't mean it's time for your child's brain to take a break

**FEW PEOPLE** would resent children having more holidays than adults. Their brains are, after all, going through great change and need more time to rest and recuperate than their parents. However, even as a teacher who is fortunate enough to enjoy the same holidays as his students, I find the long summer break a rather curious arrangement.

What is known is that its origins go back to the 19th century. Whether or not the current school calendar was first built around the agricultural one (and the need for children to work on the farm during the summer months) is not fully known or agreed upon, but what strikes me as odd is that governments and schools around the world continue to adhere to what is now a somewhat archaic tradition.

The long summer break gives us a modern problem—the summer learning loss. This loss of learning is no longer just a phenomenon, it's fact. Therefore, continuing with this practice is not conducive to maintaining learning gains. One could even go as far as to say that it goes against the main aims and objectives of schooling.

At a time when schools are under more pressure than ever before to improve learning, it seems even more bizarre that schools have not already moved towards a more learning-focused arrangement. Reasoning such as: "that's the way it's always been" and "we have to fit in with what other schools do" simply doesn't seem like any reasonable justification to me.

One cannot help but wonder, then, how schools might organize their school calendar differently if they had the freedom to start with a blank piece of paper and no agenda other than what is in the best interests of their students.

So, while I foresee change in the future, for now I accept the situation as it is and wonder how to make the best of it. As a teacher, that means encouraging parents to take on the responsibility for maintaining their

child's academic learning during the long summer break, but first that means overcoming a barrier.

For many parents, there is a subconscious way of thinking that learning is something that only happens in school and their child's learning is the school's responsibility. But there is, however, an undeniable correlation between how much interest a parent takes in their child's education and how well that child tends to perform at school. Parental support is then not just a summer-holiday issue, it is something required all year round.



Of course, every parent has different expectations regarding how much home learning their child should be doing each evening. Some parents expect two hours of homework, others none at all. For schools, that makes home learning a thankless and almost impossible task to get right.

A rethink is therefore required. Rather than the teacher attempting to plan the right amount of learning for each child, a better situation would be one whereby the teacher guides parents toward being able to source their



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

own home learning. Parents would then be free to pick and choose what they want their child to study more of—and how much—as they see fit.

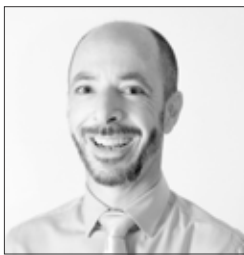
Whatever a family's preference, whether they place high value on reading, spelling and handwriting, or whether they want their child to pursue sporting excellence or to master a musical instrument, they could each be pointed in the right direction. The direction parents go in is a very personal choice and comes down to the type of child each family wants to develop.

My personal standpoint is that children already spend a sufficient amount of time in school and should therefore be free to pursue other learning opportunities in order to become well-balanced, well-rounded individuals.

Unfortunately, another strong misconception exists that 'learning' relates only to academic subjects, and yet learning exists in many different forms and occurs in many varied situations. Whether it's baking a cake, visiting the zoo, practising a musical instrument or building something out of Lego, the common factor is learning. No matter whether it's something that has been done before or it is something new, the neurones in a person's brain will be firing and the synapses getting stronger. That is learning.

Despite being a strong advocate of children being able to pursue non-academic learning opportunities outside the regular school day, during the long summer break in particular, the teacher in me hopes that parents will help to maintain their child's academic learning by overseeing just a little bit of practice each day.

Maintaining reading habits, exploring fun maths websites and playing board games which involve words and numbers are great places to start, but asking for tips and advice from your child's teacher will lead to other ideas that you might not think of yourself. ■



Martin Grist (IB MYP Coordinator), Janelle Codrington (IB DP Coordinator) and Paul Gordon (College Counselor) from ISHCMC.

# FYIONIBDP

## Should my child study the IB Diploma?



**AS GRADUATING STUDENTS** from across the world receive their International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB DP) examination results, the International School of Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC) has cause to celebrate with outstanding offers to 90 universities and nearly UD1 million in scholarships awarded to ISHCMC's Class of 2016.

We sat down with ISHCMC's Janelle Codrington (IB DP Coordinator), Paul Gordon (College Counselor) and Martin Grist (IB MYP Coordinator) to find out how studying the IB DP prepares students for future success.

### How does the IB DP prepare students for success in university?

Universities are seeking students who are innovative, service minded, critical thinkers and independent learners. Students with an IB DP education

are uniquely prepared for the highly rigorous university environment, and are greatly valued by admissions officers who understand that students have already undertaken a curriculum equivalent to the first year of university.

### How does the Middle Years Program (MYP) prepare students for the IB DP?

At ISHCMC we offer all three IB programs for our students—the IB Primary Years Program (PYP) from 2 to 11 years old, the MYP from 11 to 16 years old and the IB DP from 16 to 18 years old. This allows for a seamless transition as students progress through the grades. The MYP curriculum in particular builds upon the learning process through a blend of concepts, skills and knowledge. By using concepts as a way in to learning, it encourages students to look beyond individual facts and see links and connections

across subjects. This transfer of knowledge prepares students for the IB DP and also for universities and careers where often there is no one correct answer, and where "knowing what to do, when you don't know what to do" is a vital life skill.

### What differentiates the DP program at ISHCMC from other schools?

The DP program in ISHCMC is unique in that it is highly individualized and student focused. The counselors and the DP coordinator work with individual students from as early as Grade 10 in preparation for the IB courses and Diploma. Individual conferences are conducted with every Grade 10 student and every Grade 11 student, along with their parents, to ensure the subjects chosen are an appropriate fit for their chosen universities and courses. Counselors meet with all Grade 12 students in order to assist with university applications.

### How do ISHCMC students perform in the IB DP compared to world averages?

ISHCMC is proud to be Ho Chi Minh City's first IB World School with the longest history of graduating IB DP students. We annually see students going to the top universities worldwide, and believe our students' excellent IB preparation gives them a distinct advantage in the admissions process. Our students' acceptances this year include: Seoul National University, New York University, Hong Kong University, University College London, University of Melbourne and University of Toronto. Our students also enter some of the top art programs in the world including SCAD (Savannah College of Art and Design), Pratt Institute and Parson's School of Design. ■



# THE TESSELLATION SENSATION

**Inter-school mathematics celebration showcases Nobel 'mathletes'**



**THIS SPRING**, the first annual Nobel Education Network mathematics celebration challenged Nobel students to showcase their skills with numbers and share their enjoyment of mathematics. Organized by maths teachers across the Network, the event was designed to bring Nobel Schools closer together while celebrating the wonder of mathematics and honoring Nobel's "mathletes."

Early Years and Primary students participated in a variety of fun, maths-related activities. The students invented rhymes to help memorize times tables, and learned about tessellations—mosaic patterns made of shapes fitted together repetitively without gaps. The students looked for examples of tessellations in their environment and in the artwork of M.C. Escher, and at the European International School Ho Chi Minh City they worked in teams to create their own designs using tiles at the edge of a swimming pool.

"The younger students were so excited about making the tessellations," said Natalie O'Connor, Nobel's Network Development Manager. "We received calls from parents the next day asking 'What is a tessellation? My four-

year-old won't stop talking about it!'"

For Secondary students, the event included an inter-school maths competition. Students in Grades 6-8 competed in the Inter-School Junior Mathematics Competition, while Grades 9 and 10 students competed at the Senior level.

First, the students completed puzzles and maths problems individually. The best performers were then placed in teams that competed against each other within each school. Finally, the winning teams from each Nobel School competed against each other for first place in the Network.

"The teachers worked very hard to choose games and puzzles representing a variety of maths disciplines," said Ms. O'Connor. "We wanted to present students with a range of problems that they wouldn't be able to solve easily."

In the Junior competition, teams from Amadeus Vienna, European Ho Chi Minh City and Nobel Istanbul competed. Amadeus Vienna and European HCMC also fielded Senior teams. The team from Nobel Istanbul won the Junior division, while European Ho Chi Minh City—who have also recently had great success competing against other



Iain Fish is the Head of School at the European International School Ho Chi Minh City.

international schools in Ho Chi Minh City in the Saigon Mathematics Competition—took Senior honors.

"Celebrating maths complements our IB approach, because it requires students to think and to inquire. It also challenges us to find talents within our students that we can foster," said Ms. O'Connor. "Giving them this opportunity both acknowledges their achievement and challenges them to continue to improve."

The maths celebration also emphasized the critical skills of teamwork and problem solving. "We strive for authentic learning by putting our students in real world situations," explained Ms. O'Connor. "In the 21st century, we require more of our students than just knowing a formula. Problems are defined and solved by teams. So even though this is a maths competition, it requires the same skills students will eventually need in the workplace."

The organizers are already beginning to plan next year's maths celebration, which will include even more challenging puzzles along with mentoring and coaching for the mathletes.

"Hosting this type of event gives our students the opportunity to challenge their own perceptions of their talents, and reach for even higher goals," said Ms. O'Connor. "We want our students to be inquirers and thinkers, and to reflect on their successes. Internal motivation drives our students towards excellence, so we actively explore ways to offer those opportunities."

*European International School Ho Chi Minh City is an IB World School offering an academic and supportive English language education for students ages 2-18 years. For more information, please visit [www.eishcmc.com](http://www.eishcmc.com) or contact the school via email [info@eishcmc.com](mailto:info@eishcmc.com) / telephone number (+848) 7300 7257.* ■

# >>The List Education

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#### Primary & Secondary Campus:

2, IE Street, KDC Trung Son,

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5431 1833-34-35-36

office@theabcis.com

www.theabcis.com



### EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City

The EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City is an IB World School offering an academic and supportive English language education for students aged 2-18 years. EIS is committed to educating students to become creative critical thinkers and problem solvers. Students are immersed in a multicultural learning environment which values multilingualism. Language programmes at EIS include Spanish, German, French and Vietnamese.

730 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2

www.eishcmc.com



### International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

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

92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh

+84 (8) 2222 7788/99

admissions@issp.edu.vn

www.issp.edu.vn



### Saigon Star International School

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

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www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



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## Also...

### American International School

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

[www.ais.edu.vn](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.montessori.edu.vn)



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