



VIETNAM

10-2016

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An Age-old Spirit Possession Ritual

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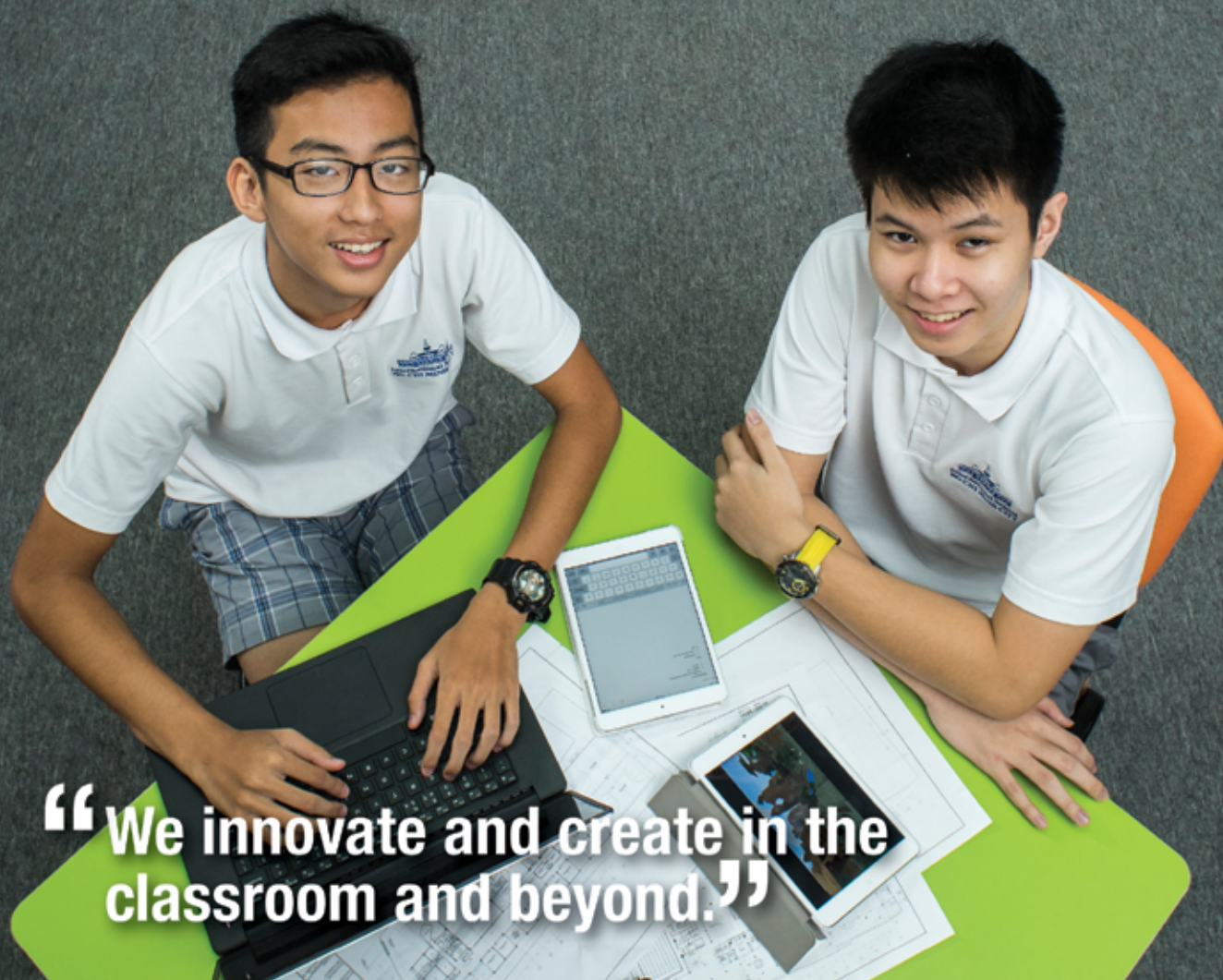
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Datebook

What's on this month...



OCTOBER 9

What: Peer Gynt

Where: Saigon Opera House (7 Lam Son Square, D1); 8pm; VND200,000

About: HBSO's concert will feature Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt* suites for orchestra. Previously, the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg had composed incidental music for Henrik Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*. Despite the great success of the production and numerous praises for his music, Grieg did briefly comment that because of various circumstances, it was not completely what he had envisioned. It was understandable as it was well-documented that the working of the music was a long and hard process for Grieg. In 1888 and 1891, Grieg extracted eight out of the original 26 movements to create two four-movement suites; themes from the suites have found its ways into popular culture.

The concert will also present works by Norwegian composers Johan Svendsen and Johan Halvorsen and Vietnamese composers Nguyen Manh Duy Linh and Vu Viet Anh.

The concert will be led by famous Norwegian Maestro Magnus Loddgard.

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



OCTOBER 19

What: Ballet with Tchaikovsky and Ravel

Where: Saigon Opera House (7 Lam Son Square, D1); 8pm; VND200,000

About: The program showcases three outstanding works: a dreamy world of shimmering long blue dresses in a classical ballet style on the music of Tchaikovsky's *Serenade*; on the other hand, Ravel's *Bolero* holds a modern style, powerful yet soulful. *Pas de Six* is a new work choreographed by talented Julien Guérin, a contemporary style being recognized through its props, costumes, visual arts and dance moves.

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

OCTOBER 15

What: Meet Magento Vietnam

Where: GEM Center (8 Nguyen Binh Khiem, D1); 8am

About: This year, the event is expected to bring together more than 1,000 decision makers, corporate leaders, technical specialists and many of the large retailers within the region to engage in the e-commerce and Magento ecosystem. A plenty of insightful sessions will be presented covering actual trends of e-commerce in general and the Magento ecosystem in particular, such as B2B commerce, digital marketing, payment & shipping methods, and the evolution of Magento 2.0. Meet Magento Vietnam is the very first Asian edition of the Meet Magento worldwide series since 2008, after successful runs in Europe, North and South America.

Contact: Visit vn.meet-magento.com for more info

OCTOBER 20

What: Rukhsana Merrise and Band

Where: Soul Academy (214-216 Pasteur, D1); VND150,000

About: London-born, singer-songwriter, Rukhsana Merrise has just dropped her debut EP, *September Songs*. With a unique blend of folk and soul, her debut is proof of how significant September 2014 was when she set to work on a bedroom project creating an intimate collection of tracks over the course of a month. Fast-forward one year later and *September Songs*, aptly gets its rather timely autumnal release. With supporting slots alongside Laura Mvula, Bear's Den and Leon Bridges (not to mention over a million plays and counting on her SoundCloud) Merrise is shaping up to be a name to watch for 2016.

Contact: Available on ticketbox.vn

OCTOBER 22

What: Vietnam Web Summit

Where: Saigon, Danang and Hanoi

About: Vietnam Web Summit is an annual event involving web developers and marketers interested in the latest updates from experts in major internet companies. With over 40 topics at each city and content contribution from Google, Facebook and Microsoft, the event will provide global insights for development and web development in particular. There will be demo shows for tech products and services from enterprises, as well as speed recruitment, among the most important values for both visitors and companies.

Contact: Visit vietnamwebsummit.com for more info

OCTOBER 26-30

What: Vietnam International Motor Show 2016

Where: SECC (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7)

About: Eleven brands have registered to take part, including Audi, BMW, Jaguar, Land Rover, Mini, Porsche, Renault, Rolls-Royce, Subaru, Volkswagen and Maserati. Owing to a larger available space in SECC, the VIMS 2016 will likely be a lot more bigger and better compared to last year's motor show.

In addition to a line-up of exotic and luxury cars, visitors will also be able to admire many attractive motorcycles, especially from BMW Motorrad, and PKL automaker has also confirmed its presence.

Contact: Visit www.tradepo.vn for more info



UNTIL OCTOBER 29

What: Hopscotch

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

About: A duo exhibition featuring new paintings by emerging artists Do Thanh Lang and Hoang Nam Viet. Belonging to the generation of young Vietnamese born at the turn of Doi Moi and coming of age into a brave new open-market economy, for their first ever collaboration with Galerie Quynh, Do and Hoang showcase two bodies of work that are markedly different from each other, and yet complementary in their shared themes of freedom and transgression.

Drenched in blazes of bold shapes and colors, Lang's paintings involve faceless figures and hypnologic settings evocative of Italian *giallo* films. The situations and actions depicted range from being unsettling to downright grotesque, their significance not immediately obvious. In one work, bodily fluid floods out from a man's lower half, as a gun appears to be pointed at a scantily clad woman. While Lang's work is inhabited by mysterious characters, Viet paints the friends around him and does so with an affection that only comes with tender familiarity. Spend enough time in the company of these earth-toned paintings, however, and one might start sensing an undercurrent of darkness.

Contact: Visit www.galeriequynh.com for more info





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www.pacificcross.com.vn



OCTOBER 28 & 29

What: Saigon Players' Rocky Horror Halloween Madness

Where: Saigon Outcast (188 Nguyen Van Huong, D2); Film starts at 7:30pm; VND250,000

About: This is the annual screening (with shadow actors) of one of the most famous cult movies of all time—*The Rocky Horror Picture Show!* Come dressed in your fishnets or stilettos or as your favorite character in the movie. They will provide props for the audience participation bits. Proceeds go to charity.

Contact: Email saigonplayers@gmail.com for more details

OCTOBER 29

What: Violinist Pham Vinh and Maestro Laurent Boer

Where: Saigon Opera House (7 Lam Son Square, D1); 8pm; VND200,000

About: The concert will open with *Linh Giac* by the late Vietnamese composer Nguyen Thien Dao, who has been an incredible influential figure in the development of new Vietnamese concert music in the past decades. Violinist Pham Vinh, with the HBSO Symphony Orchestra, will perform Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor, one of the most important and demanding works composed in the genre. The second half of the program is Bach's Magnificat, a musical setting of the biblical canticle of the same name. It is among the most popular vocal works of Bach. The twelve-movement work will be performed by the HBSO Symphony Orchestra and Choir, featuring soloists Pham Duyen Huyen, Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen, Pham Trang and Dao Mac.

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

NOVEMBER 19

What: Festive Bazaar

Where: International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC, 28 Vo Trung Toan, D2); 10am-3pm

About: ISHCMC will host its first Festive Bazaar open to the public. The marketplace will offer festive products and holiday-themed food and beverages from local businesses. This bazaar promises to be a great day out for the entire family with shopping, activities and entertainment. At the Festive Bazaar, attendees can participate in the charity silent auction with the chance to take home one of the 12 themed baskets of joy. Entertainment includes musical talent from ISHCMC Primary and Secondary students. There will also be photo opportunities with Santa Claus in the ISHCMC Festive Grotto.

Contact: Visit www.ishcmc.com for more info



14 Huynh Thuc Khang, Dist 1, HCMC

Hotline : **01203 114 266**



NOVEMBER 18 & 19

What: The Wizard of Oz

Where: Australian International School, Thu Thiem Campus (264 Mai Chi Tho (East-West Highway), D2); 6:30pm on the 17th, 4:30pm on the 18th; VND50,000

About: Grab your ruby red slippers, your oil-can, your best lion roar—don't forget your scarecrow hat—and head to the Australian International School's Thu Thiem Campus auditorium. For the first time, the AIS production team under the direction of Jacqui Gaynor brings to the big stage *The Wizard of Oz*. So if you're up for an evening filled with singing, dancing, laughing, great snacks and fantastic acting then AIS Thu Thiem Campus will be... the place to be.

Contact: Visit www.ais.edu.vn for more info

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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



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PAMPERING AT KARA SPA

Schedule a little time for personal pampering and be rewarded with a special gift to enhance your overall well-being. From October until the end of November, Kara Spa is granting a two-hour body retreat package including 30-minute sea salt body scrub, 30-minute body wrap and 60-minute aromatherapy body massage for VND1,450,000++.

Extend this blissful session with a soak in the Jacuzzi or a cup of tea by the swimming pool. Visit Kara Spa on the 7th floor of Caravelle (19-23 Lam Son Square, D1) to take advantage of the promotion.



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WOMEN'S DAY AT ANA MANDARA DALAT RESORT AND SPA

In honor of Vietnam Women's Day, Ana Mandara Villas Dalat Resort and Spa has launched an Indulgence Package with special benefits for women that includes: two nights stay at a Villa Room, daily breakfast for two, a complimentary facial or foot massage at La Cochinchine Spa, complimentary one way airport transfer, complimentary use of the outdoor heated swimming pool, walking trails, and many more. Additionally, the resort will offer 30 percent off on spa treatments, a 10 percent discount on food and beverage, and 10 percent off on excursions. All the benefits are part of a VND5,460,000++ two nights, two adults stay; and is valid until October 31, 2016. When booking, insert promotion code: "ANA/LM/ML/035" to receive the special benefits. For more info, email reservation-dalat@anamandara-resort.com.



PROMOTION AT PALM GARDEN RESORT IN HOI AN

Palm Garden Resort (www.palmgardenresort.com.vn) is offering a discount between 36 and 42 percent on accommodation. At VND2,496,000 for a Superior Garden View room per night, guests will receive buffet breakfast for two, two 50 percent discount vouchers on body massages, free use of sauna, steam bath, Jacuzzi, Wi-Fi internet access, swimming pool, and other benefits. A round-trip airport transfer or a meal for two applies for guests who stay at least two nights. The offer is valid until December 20, 2016.



YOUR MOVE

The first annual Genius Chess Tournament, organized by Genius School of Chess (GSC, geniChess.edu.vn), took place last month at Saigon Outcast with a total of 60 participants. Groups were divided into four age categories, with the youngest at five years old, to battle it out on the chess board. While some components spoke difference languages they all shared a love for chess. Chess brings many benefits to the intellectual development of children, and also opens up an opportunity for families to bond as parents can play with their children. GSC said the success of this tournament is a great foundation for them to organize more competitions in the future for those who passionate about "the game of kings."



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TROI OI!

The country in numbers

936

streets in Hanoi will be paved with one type of natural stone. The move comes as the city's pavement continues to show signs of degradation, hindering pedestrians from walking on them as well as worsening the image of the city. Le Van Duc, director of the city's transport department, said the natural

stone's biggest asset is its 50-70 years dependability, and after testing the material in several sections, the department was impressed with the stone's aesthetic and determined to pave hundreds of streets with it. By choosing only one material to pave the city, the city hopes to ensure consistency and avoid the current mix of stone materials.



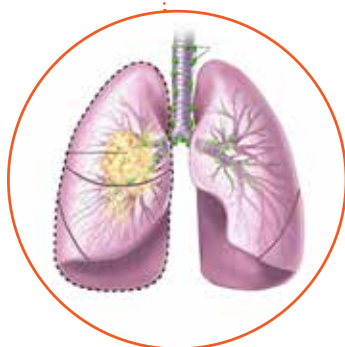
~5,000

VIETNAMESE have recently undergone sexual reassignment therapy since the Law on Gender Reassignment was approved last year. Patients who sought gender reassignment fell into three categories: those who used no medical intervention, those who received hormone replacement therapy, and those who underwent gender reassignment surgery. The majority of gender-changed Vietnamese are male-to-female transsexuals who had their surgery performed in Thailand, where the medical procedure is legal. However, the transgender population in Vietnam faces numerous paperwork difficulties, including reapplying for new IDs and criminal records.

19,000

hectares of farmland in the Central Highlands will be replanted with new coffee tress, according to the Steering Committee of the Central Highland Region. The Vietnam Coffee – Cacao Association, the

Public-Private-Partnership program and the Nestle Vietnam Company have assisted farmers with seedlings and seeds for the replacement. In Dak Lak, farmers have received 6,255 kilograms of seeds and 6.9 million seedlings. According to the coffee replanting project, from 2014 to 2020, the region will replant 120,000 hectares, including 45,600 hectares in Lam Dong and 30,000 hectares in Dak Lak. The Central Highlands is the largest coffee producing region in Vietnam, accounting for nearly 95 percent of the country's coffee area and 99 percent of output.



~22,000

people are diagnosed with lung cancer every year, while 19,500 die yearly from the disease. Lung cancer is the leading cause of death among Vietnamese males, and the second-most common cause of cancer-related fatalities among females.

new cases of lung cancer are recorded every year in Vietnam. According to figures presented by doctors at a seminar in Saigon last month, around 22,000 Vietnamese

0 **WILL BE CHARGED TO THOSE** infected with HIV if they seek legal help, according to a new project by the Vietnam Lawyers Association (VLA) and the Global Fund Supported Project on HIV/AIDS. The project plans to provide free legal aid to those already infected with HIV and those who are particularly vulnerable to being exposed to the disease, including drug users, sex workers, and the LGBT community.

“Vulnerable groups tend to have little legal knowledge so they easily fall prey to abuse without even knowing about it. Even if they do, they don’t know where to seek help because of severe social stigma and discrimination,” says Trinh Thi Le Tram, the Centre of Legal Consultancy and Medical and HIV/AIDS Policies Director.



21

PROJECTILES were removed from a garden in Huong Hoa District, Quang Tri. Peace Trees Vietnam, a US non-governmental organization working on unexploded ordnances (UXOs), moved the UXOs to a safe place to destroy. After being informed of the UXOs, a mine clearance team found 21 projectiles, each 270mm long, 57mm wide and weighs 2.8kg.

USD134,000

at the Da Phuoc Waste Treatment Complex in Binh Chanh District. While the cost is meant to also cover expenses for processing compost and producing organic fertilizers, most of the garbage has been buried underground at Da Phuoc. Such cost excludes the expenditure needed for other steps in the waste management process, namely collection, transport, and environmental control, among others.

is spent daily on treating rubbish in Ho Chi Minh City, creating heavy burden on the city’s coffers. The municipal Party’s Committee has therefore been re-evaluating the cost and operations done



5

ROAD, BRIDGE AND TUNNEL projects have been proposed by the HCMC Department of Transport, costing over VND1.8 trillion, to reduce traffic congestion in the Tan Son Nhat International Airport area. The first project would initially build a steel overpass at the intersection of Truong Son Street and a road leading to Pham Van Dong Street in Tan Binh District. The second project would upgrade and expand the Hoang Minh Giam Street section from Gia Dinh Park to Dao Duy Anh Street. In the third project, a Hoang Hoa Tham Street section would be widened. The fourth project would upgrade the Cong Hoa Street section from Tran Quoc Hoan Street to Thang Long Street. In the fifth project, a Y-shaped steel overpass would go up at Nguyen Thai Son-Nguyen Kiem intersection in Go Vap District with a branch in the Nguyen Thai Son-Hoang Minh Giam direction and another in the Hoang Minh Giam-Nguyen Kiem direction.

LIVING HISTORY

Hue is a city rich in culture and history and is recognized by Unesco as a World Cultural Heritage site, and La Residence Hue Hotel & Spa – MGallery by Sofitel enjoys a preeminent position in this mystic city

TEXT BY CHRISTINE VAN

IMAGES PROVIDED BY LA RESIDENCE HUE HOTEL & SPA



SET ON THE BANKS of the mesmerizing Perfume River, stretching over 200m along the river, La Residence has the perfect, peaceful location in walking distance of both the Citadel's Ancient Forbidden City, and the City center.

The Hotel building itself has a history in keeping with the enchanting city in which it sits. The Hotel was constructed in the 1930s in the stunning stream-line Art Deco style of the time, and was then, the official residence of the French governor in central Vietnam until 1954, a bustling Command Centre for the Americans in the 1960s and a hospital that nursed North Vietnamese soldiers during the Tet Offensive of 1968.

The grand opening of **La Residence Hue Hotel & Spa** in 2005, in keeping

with the original Art Deco design, has created one unique hotel complex that combines sensitively designed annexes to extend the original mansion to 122 luxury guestrooms and Suites, with the serene grounds and atmosphere unique in Vietnam that evokes a certain dreamy nostalgia. The extraordinary restored rooms have a unique set up and décor, which reflect the influence of the French architects and designers between 1910-1954 such as Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann and Pierre Chateau, or the stunning *Chambre Rouge* in the movie *La Chambre Rouge* (The Red Room) of Jean Pierre Berckmans in 1973. Walking along the hotel's corridors of bowed façade, long horizontal lines and nautical porthole windows, you may hear whispered tales of a bygone era.

Making its own history, the stunningly renovated and redesigned La Residence Hue Hotel & Spa has not only a fascinating history utterly unique in the city it inhabits, but also has hosted historic figures, iconic poets and authors. The familiar names of the political world are King Bhumipol of Thailand, H.E. Majesty The Queen of Denmark Margarethe II, H.E. Mr. Norodom Sihamoni - King of Cambodia, Mr. Philipp Roesler - CEO of the World Economic Forum and former Vice - Chancellor of Germany; or famous American actor & comedian - Mr. Danny Devito, Irish actor - Mr. Colin Farrell, Mexican Film Director, Producer, Screenwriter - Mr. Alejandro Gonzalez Inárritu, and many more.





La Residence Hue Hotel & Spa, proudly a luxury boutique hotel in the collection of MGallery by Sofitel, is a dedication to lovers of life, literature and culture. Be a part of luxury and share a passion for food with the talented Chef at Le Parfum Restaurant, one will delight in a fine dining fusion menu of Vietnam's very best and vibrant produce & spices combined with top quality imported products. High ceilings, hardwood – terrazzo floors, and striking balconies are complemented by opu-

lent, old world touches and paintings by colonial era French and Vietnamese artists – and when sipping Ricard in the Le Gouverneur lobby bar, keep an eye up for the stunning curving mural depicting rural scenes from colonial-era life by French artist Roland Renaud.

With top-notch service and product that the Hotel offers, La Residence Hue Hotel & Spa drew global attention with various prestigious prizes and awards from Condé Nast Traveler's Readers Choice Awards 2014 & 2015,

T+L Top 500 World Best Hotels 2014 & 2015, winner of World Luxury Hotel Awards 2013 & 2016; and many more.

Be a part of history and get ready to write your own at La Residence Hue, a one-of-a-kind masterpiece with luxurious cultural and culinary offerings. La Residence Hue Hotel & Spa is where you uncover the past and savor the present. We invite you to become part of the story.

For more info, visit www.la-residence-hue.com. ■



A WOMAN OF CONTRAST

DESIGNER THUY NGUYEN EXPLAINS THE MOTIVATION BEHIND HER DESIGNS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT HAVING A PLAN

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

IMAGES PROVIDED BY THUY DESIGN HOUSE

VISUAL ARTISTS are well-known for breaking traditional molds and rejecting the shackles of conservative culture; free-spirited Thuy Nguyen, one of this country's most vibrant fashion designers, is not among them. Or perhaps she is—it's hard to know for sure, her mind moves in swift, colorful circles, and she has no qualms about cheekily and flagrantly contradicting herself while expounding on her own artistic principles—and as we chat, she says some of the most traditional sentences I've ever heard from the lips of a Vietnamese woman.

"The traditional way is, you cannot share 50/50," she says. "The traditional way is, I'm a woman, so I take care of everything. So I really want that, I really enjoy it. To take care of all four of my kids and my family, mother-in-law, mother and father, garden and house and

everything. I enjoy it. I leave my husband 100 percent for himself, and he feels happy, and I feel happy too. So that is the traditional way." She flashes the kind of liberated smile that usually comes from female artists who believe precisely the opposite of what she has just said, and I wonder aloud if such a life isn't really a trap that places a heavy burden on women in this country. Her answer to that is simply, "No."

Perhaps Thuy's enamored with conventional women's roles is what makes her such a perfect channel of traditional femininity in her fashion. Earlier this year, her collection *Vien Man* was the standout show at the Vietnam International Fashion Week: a parade of glowing pregnant women whose heavy curves swayed comfortably in sleek, brilliantly-colored and hand-embroidered silks

that recalled dynasty-era garments of the Vietnamese peasantry. The accessories she chose for her models on the catwalk were not designer bags, but rather baskets of vegetables and tiered metal lunchboxes; many of the materials bore prints of the Vietnamese *Dong Ho* artworks that have become synonymous with Thuy Nguyen's work. Concluding with a blushing mother carrying her baby sitting up in her hands, *Vien Man* was an exuberant show of womanhood and a demonstration of the maturity of Thuy's unique artistic perspective.

"You know that I'm from a fine arts background," says Thuy, whose arrival in the fashion industry was an afterthought to her studies in painting in the Ukraine. "When I came back, I was just like any girl who dreams of being fashionable, or a designer, or owning a fashion shop. But

regarding my conceptual art, I want to show I'm from the north, and show that we have that story. Maybe you didn't see it before, now you see it. I just try to show our story. The other story is just about myself, what I feel, the way I am. Maybe people don't get it all, but if you have a baby already, you can feel it, that—the moment that you can never forget. So I will show others what I am in that moment. The clothes are just a material to show this; like a writer uses words, I use the material to show my story.”

Vien Man was in many ways a sequel to her similarly outstanding Fashion Week show in 2015, which showcased her *Lung Lieng* collection, also heavily rooted in traditional garments.

“After *Lung Lieng*, everyone talked about that show, it was like a bomb, something different from me,” says Thuy. “It was then that I changed my mind to follow a more conceptual art, to consider more ‘what do I want to say?’ Earlier, I thought that fashion is just beautiful girls with beautiful dresses, but now I realize it’s not important just to be beautiful. If you take just one dress from the collection, it’s nothing. It’s not enough. If you don’t come to the show, you won’t get that feeling. If you just look at a magazine, you won’t get the feeling that I want to say. In *Vien Man*, that is more like me, myself, what I felt at that moment. At that moment I was fully, fully, fully happy.”

WE ARE VIETNAMESE

While Thuy has placed more of herself in her fashions as her style has developed, this doesn’t mean she intends for her audiences and customers to understand her with any clarity. In fact, Thuy has a very nebulous sense of self-awareness, and approaches all of her artistic output with the expectation that any appreciation of her own identity as an artist will be incomplete.

“My painting is like, everything is not real,” she says cryptically. “Only you know the way you are, the real person you are. I don’t think color and other things in art are ‘here.’ No: You might think, I’m





sitting with you here, and maybe I look beautiful, but I might have a fake bum and fake boobs, and my mind may be fake, and all the stories I tell you may be fake. You can never know. So what is true? In my painting I feel I want to be colorful, but maybe I'm a jealous person, not beautiful like in the picture. You will only see the way I want to show you. You will not see the real thing."

I ask if Thuy sees *Vien Man* as being closer to her own reality, or if she even wants people to see her more for who she is. "Sometimes," she says, "But they cannot understand and they cannot see me, because I'm like 'this way, that way.' They can't understand a lot of things. But who cares, real or not real? That moment may be good, but maybe next month or next week you won't feel good anymore; you can buy a shirt because you want it today, but when you wear it, you might feel 'oh... why did I buy it?' So it's right at that moment. It doesn't mean forever or even the next moment."

Possibly the greatest paradox to come out of Thuy Nguyen's oeuvre is this—while she very consciously communicates in fundamentally Vietnamese artistic baselines, she also firmly believes that her non-Vietnamese markets can never fully penetrate her culture.

"Ten years ago, if you flew business class," she poses, "you could see that 100 percent were foreigners. Now it's 100 percent Vietnamese. Why? My answer

is that not so many foreigners are left doing investing here. It's because they don't understand the way we are. They make business plans, they do things like the way they are. But they don't mix with things here, and that's why they failed. Our cultural character is very strong. You cannot change me."

"I'm here, and I am Vietnamese," she continues, "but I cannot explain that to you. You will never understand. I just say, 'do it but don't ask,' but you say 'no, I want control, I want a business plan and marketing plan.' We are the Vietnamese: NO PLAN. So you don't get it, why can't there be a plan? I say, we are flexible. Everybody is flexible. Even our legal system is flexible, so how can people 'just do it, follow my plan'? So that is the point, we understand what we want. When I work with Ngo Thanh Van [Thuy collaborated with Van on the recent local blockbuster *Tam Cam: The Hidden Story*, which was replete with her traditional costumery], I understand what she wants. And she knows what she wants. And we get the same point, we run very fast together. When you know exactly what you want, one second, you can go."

Somehow, Thuy Nguyen's devotion to her traditionally-styled family life and her genre-breaking design work in high fashion still leaves her with time enough to travel overseas on a monthly basis for inspiration, all the while maintaining her various business efforts, of which Thuy

Design House (132 Dong Khoi, D1) is the central store front. Her work in fine arts continues in spite of her transition to the fashion world; she remains a prodigious painter, and she is currently preparing a major installation work that will open this November in Provence, France. One may wonder how she balances such a heavy workload—and her answer emerges naturally from her thoughts on the impenetrable nature of the essential self.

"I feel energy," explains Thuy. "I know how to share my energy, and I know how to save my energy. Everyone has 24 hours a day, it's the same. We can't do more, more than that. So when you pay, when you use your energy to follow someone else's way, you pay a lot, because you cannot touch them. So you pay maybe 60-70 percent to think, to try, to be like them, but to be yourself, you pay maybe one percent. Because you are the way you are. So you have 99 percent left to pay for other things."

"Like I said, we are Vietnamese, we never change," she insists. "If you marry with an Irish guy or a French guy... the way you are, you're still there. You still cry about something very stupid that that guy cannot understand. Even you hear the noise of a bell or something like that, you can tear up and your heart can stop. But that guy can never, never touch it. I just want to say, feel the way you are, just feel it and go, and don't fight it. Never change, it doesn't help you." ■



EMERGENCY RESPONSE

A revolutionary emergency medical service for Vietnam

TEXT BY LORCAN LOVETT IMAGES PROVIDED BY FAMILY MEDICAL PRACTICE



HO CHI MINH CITY HAS TAKEN a transformative step with the launch of Vietnam's first privatized 24/7 emergency medical response service—**EMR *9999**. The country's leading international health care provider Family Medical Practice (**FMP**, www.vietnammedicalpractice.com) announced the program in which users dial *9999 (star 9,9,9 and 9) for emergency service.

FMP's CEO Dr. Rafi Kot, who has been the driving force behind the service, described its six ambulances as "mobile emergency rooms, each able to sustain life for up to 72 hours." Eight emergency operators have been trained not only to cope with the intensity of emergency calls, but also to give life-saving advice such as guided CPR in cases where an emergency victim may have minutes to live without immediate medical attention.

Vietnam's official emergency line, 115, has been criticized for being overstretched and lacking medical equipment. Victims of heart attacks, traffic accidents, or other serious traumas, often take taxis to hospitals at risk of dying on route without medical attention.

"We are thriving to give peace of mind to the people of the city in terms of medical emergency response," says Dr. Kot, adding the service goes into effect this month.

The General Statistics Office of Vietnam recorded over 8,400 traffic accidents nationwide in the first five

months of this year, resulting in 3,588 deaths and 7,339 serious injuries. Last year saw almost 9,000 people die on Vietnam's roads, and almost 25,000 suffering serious injuries. Roads do not present the only danger in the nation: drowning is a leading killer for children with an average age of two years old per victim in Vietnam.

Dr. Kot aims to increase FMP's fleet to 10 ambulances by November, and eventually 35 altogether. In its initial months, the service will cover districts 1, 2, 3, Binh Thanh and Phu Nhuan but Dr. Kot hopes to add another district every four months until the whole city is covered.

"We are trying to overcome traffic," he says. "We are going to position the cars in different places in the city so we will close the gap."

FMP pre-tested the *9999 system in March, mimicking a cardiac arrest in Saigon Pearl. In June, the Family Medical Team also held a mass casualty trial involving the ambulances, closing its facilities to bring all doctors, emergency teams and dispatch teams to the District 1 clinic. Dr. Kot says the target time to reach a victim is 15 minutes in the daytime and 12 minutes in the night. As the ambulances have high-tech features such as links that transmit a patient's vital signs to doctors in FMP's clinics, Dr. Kot explains the most important distance is between the ambulance and victim rather

than between the victim and hospital.

"Once you reach the patients, the emergency becomes an urgency," he says. The patient will also be taken to the most appropriate hospital for their condition—not necessarily an FMP clinic. FMP screened over 1,000 bilingual candidates to fill the roles of emergency operator, which will increase to a team of 12 in the coming months. Dr. Kot hired a drama teacher to conduct role playing exercises and drills to improve performance.

The dispatch system is founded on ProQA technology from leading international EMR supplier Priority Dispatch, which has deployed similar systems to 1,600 call centers in over 52 countries. It identifies over 300 minor conditions from 36 chief complaints, ensuring the patients are properly diagnosed and the best resources for them will be at the scene. Furthermore, *9999 ambulances are the most equipped cars currently in service in Vietnam, containing telemedicine technology, extraction devices almost to every occasion and need, auto CPR units and the latest emergency equipment, which is used on par by leading OECD countries. The ambulances are far more equipped and modern than any in the region.

FMP's service is subscription-based, with prices starting at VND575,000 per person per year for unlimited emergency calls. ■



WHERE IS THE PLACE OF PEACE

Hanoian artist channels
her farming background to
create ethereal silk paintings

TEXT BY *Craig Thomas*

BORN AND RAISED IN THANH HOA PROVINCE, 28-year-old Le Thuy remains closely tied to her native region and the farming life that was her daily milieu before migrating to Hanoi at age 19 to pursue a higher education. These ties are clearly seen in the subject matter that she has chosen to focus on in the *Where Is the Place of Peace* watercolor on silk collection. The detailed depiction of the plant and animal life in Thuy's work could only be made by someone with an intimate knowledge of rural Vietnamese life.

"I consider myself lucky because of my rural background. I have a deeper understanding of the trees and plants. I see the way they move in a way that other people from a different background cannot. They may see them but they don't understand and feel about plants and animals the way that I do," she says.

There is a special pleasure in curating an exhibition by a Vietnamese artist using a material and employing a style that is both uniquely her own but also quintessentially Vietnamese. Thuy's choice of silk as her medium of expression is not lucky accident but rather taken with conscious intent as she states clearly in her artist statement for the exhibition. Silk is a material that is synonymous with this region and one which facilitates a form of expression that engenders a visceral reaction in viewers.

Her choice to work in silk is also a felicitous one for the future of the medium in Vietnam. While many contemporary artists focus on more easily commercialized media like oil on canvas or other types of media which are considered more avant garde by the art literati; it is a good and necessary thing that some of the country's most talented young artists—of which Thuy demonstrably shows herself to be a member—continue to work with silk to help foster and evolve the tradition of Vietnamese silk painting.

Portraying mainly idealized rural landscapes, village life, pagodas and historic events, there is an inherently conservative and homogenous character to much of traditional Vietnamese silk painting. Thuy's work pays homage to this thematic tradition while turning it on its head. The Vietnamese countryside is still the setting but her depictions are neither anodyne nor idyllic. They are filled with the life and death struggle of nature and often tinged with a large dollop of madness and even the macabre.

Belying her relative youth, she brings a sense of purpose and an exacting standard of professionalism to



her work that is clearly manifested in the quality of the works of the *Where Is the Place of Peace* collection.

“For me, it is not about just making a beautiful painting. That is not enough. It must reflect my thoughts, my current state of mind, in this space that I am in. Perhaps in the future I won’t be able to paint like this anymore and will paint flowers

or maybe even something abstract. But at this moment, it would be torture for me to paint in a way that did not allow me to fully express myself. It would be a form of self-deception and I do not want to engage in that,” she continues.

Where Is the Place of Peace will be exhibited at CT Gallery (27i Tran Nhat Duat, D1) until October 27. ■

Trance Formation

*I repent.
I bow to thee, deities of Heave and of the Forests,
We are here at this temple today to offer thee these thrones.
Descend to this temple,
Witness our souls.
Hear our prayers and forgive us for the
Humble offerings.
We are thine.
These offering are thine.
Please bless us with prosperity, wisdom and grace.
I pray to thee.
Please let us live in harmony and unity.
I pray to thee.*

Reply

*Witness thy souls and prayers, I do!
I thank thee for being there.
I thank thee for these offerings.
Do not fear anything.
I have come from afar.
Where I control the way things go.
Having consulted the deities, I say
I bless thee with prosperity, wisdom and grace.
I bless thy family too.
I bless thee with success in what you do.
I bless that thee are loved, I bless thee with wealth.
I bless thee.*

AMERICAN

PHOTOGRAPHER Tewfic El-Sawy spent over two years documenting *Hau Dong*—an age-old spirit possession ritual that involves supplication, spirit incarnation, elaborate costumes and singing. The following articles— *The Mother of All Things*, *The Spirit Medium* and *The Singer*—are edited excerpts from his book *Hầu Đông: The Spirit Mediums of Viet Nam*.

Tewfic El-Sawy (www.telsawy.com) is a New York City-based freelance photographer who specializes in documenting endangered cultures, religious rituals and traditional life-ways of Asia, Latin America and Africa. Known as “The Travel Photographer,” he also leads photography workshops and expeditions, publishes photo books and teaches multimedia and documentary photography. He is

one of the original faculty members of the Foundry Photojournalism Workshop. He is also the founder of the popular The Travel Photographer blog (thetravelphotographer.exposure.co).

He has produced and published a number of photo books such as *Bali: Island of Gods*, *DARSHAN* but it is his latest, *Hầu Đông: The Spirit Mediums of Viet Nam* that he is most proud of. This 170-page photo book is an exhaustive documentary on trances, possession, spirit worship, fortune telling and clairvoyance, fashion and pageantry, sacred music and hymns, faith, belief, superstition, the supernatural, nationalism and history that constitute Vietnam’s indigenous Dao Mau religion and its rituals. Tewfic is the only non-Vietnamese photographer to have documented this ancient but vibrant tradition in such depth.

All text © 2016 Tewfic El-Sawy

PHOTO TALKS

Tewfic will be giving photo talks on *Hầu Đông: The Spirit Mediums of Viet Nam* in Hanoi during the first two weeks of November 2016. The tentative venues are at Chula Fashion Space and Manzi Art Space.

Hầu Đông: The Spirit Mediums of Vietnam is available at these locations:

Blurb Bookstore:

<http://www.blurb.com/b/7257989-h-u-ng-the-spirit-mediums-of-vietnam>

Amazon Bookstore:

<https://www.amazon.com/x1EA7-x110-x1ED3-Mediums-Vietnam/dp/1367352347>





MY CAREER AS A TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHER is underpinned by a fascination with ancient religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals still observed and practiced around the world, and it is this core fascination that steers my image-making, and provides context to many of the photographic expeditions-workshops I organize and lead.

It was on such a photo expedition in northern Vietnam in late 2014 that I was introduced to a ceremony of the indigenous religion of Dao Mau. Hearing chants and music coming from the small Gia Quoc Cong Vu Van Mat temple in Bac Ha, but finding no one who could understand English amongst the audience, I asked patrons in a nearby restaurant, and was told it was a *Hau Dong* ceremony.

I had heard that term a day earlier in Sa Pa when religious music drew me to a small nondescript building on Fansipan Road. Asking a passerby what the building was, I was told it was Den Hang Pho, a temple. I walked in and met women in long red robes who were preparing a rehearsal for a *Len Dong* (or *Hau Dong*) ceremony planned for the following day. I was allowed to photograph and, despite my being in the way during their processions, the women seemed pleased I dropped by. I did not know it then, but this group of worshippers are called *ban hoi*; an ad hoc “sisterhood” who belong to a *Dao Mau* temple.

My imagination went in overdrive when I later learned *Hau Dong* ceremonies involved mediums who communicate with the spirits of the *Dao Mau* pantheon. It was the evening ceremony in Bac Ha that triggered my

The Mother of All Things

TEXT AND IMAGES BY TEWFIC EL-SAWY

interest in documenting this form of indigenous worship and adopting it as a long-term personal photographic project.

Since starting on this personal project, I’ve attended over three dozen *Hau Dong* ceremonies. Many were in the capital city of Hanoi and its suburbs, and others far in the east and north of the country, such as Hai Phong, Lang Son, Quang Ninh and Kiep Bac. Some went on all day (or all night), while others were only a few hours long.

The timings of ceremonies are based on the Vietnamese lunar calendar and are seldom advertised. The announcements are by word-of-mouth communication amongst the community, friends and neighborhoods. Some are held in large temple complexes, others in small out of the way temples and some in tiny private temples, or even in rooms. To have access and be welcomed in ceremonies wherever they are held (especially in private

settings), one must gain the confidence and trust of the community, and be accompanied by someone known to the mediums or the musicians.

ALL THE LADIES

Dao Mau, the worship of *Mau* (the Mother Goddess), is an important part of Vietnam’s folk culture and identity. Although its historical origins are not clear, many scholars believe its roots go back to prehistory when the Vietnamese worshipped nature and its manifestations. It may have originated in the farmlands where people worshipped the heavens for favorable weather; worshipped earth for bountiful harvest; worshipped water to avoid disastrous floods and lastly worshipped the country’s highlands because it provided defense against northern invaders (China and Mongolia).

The Mother Goddess religion is

based on the worship of goddesses. These goddesses are the Lady of the Kingdom, *Thien YA Na* (The Lady of the Realm), *Ba Chua Xu* (The Lady of the Storehouse), *Ba Chua Kho* and *Princess Lieu Hanh*. It is associated with spirit mediumship rituals—known in Vietnam as *len dong*, *hau bong* or *hau dong*. It is also practiced in other parts of Asia, such as Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Dao Mau can be described as a syncretic religion mixing elements of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, with substantial influences from other indigenous religions of Vietnam. Each domain, or realm, to which the spirits are assigned, have a specific color, and determine the color of the mediums' costumes, headdress and even ritual implements. The color red is assigned to the domain of Heaven, the yellow to the Earth domain, the white to the Water domain and the green to the Mountains and Forests domain.

Since *Dao Mau* was born in the oral tradition, it does not exist in written form. The tradition lived on for millennia, passing from generation to generation through ritual, ceremonies, songs and dances and poetry.

The basic difference between *Dao Mau* and other religious traditions (including shamanistic beliefs) is that it is not concerned with life after death, but with life now. It is essentially a woman's religion, and is concerned with people's success, health, material benefits and good fortune during their time on earth, rather than in the afterlife.

In contrast with other universal religions, the cult of Mother Goddesses has neither a structured doctrine nor an organized clergy. It is grounded in daily life's tribulations and contentments, and is concerned with the here and now of people's existence, which explains its appeal to the younger generation. It also extols Vietnamese traditional values, virtues and naturally, its history and culture.

Hau Dong is one of the primary rituals of the *Dao Mau* religion and embodies the worship of mother goddesses in Vietnam. It is technically a ritual of spirit mediumship and literally means "receiving the incarnations of spirits" in Vietnamese. There are variations of the term, such as *len dong* ("mounting the medium" or "going into a trance"), and *hau bong* ("servicing the spirits").

The religious buoyancy of the past two decades in Vietnam increased the opportunities for earning an income from mediumship. Many mediums make a reasonable income from their religious work and depending on their marketing acumen can become quite wealthy.

The ritual of *Hau Dong* takes between two to seven hours, and must start by submitting petitions to Buddha and to the spirits of *Dao Mau* for the ceremony to proceed. This is carried out by a spirit priest (*thay cung*) capable of reading and writing the petitions in archaic Sino-Vietnamese language. These men (as they always are) are Buddhist "masters" who were brought to Buddhist temples at a young age, and are taught the ancient Vietnamese characters along with written Chinese, but remain laymen throughout their lives.

The ceremonial rites start with mediums sitting at the center of the area in front of the altars, surrounded by at least two assistants (*hau dang*). Dressed in simple white satin pajamas, they light incense sticks, chew on betel leaf-areca wads, and may smoke. They often close their eyes and sway to the rhythm of the *chau van* music. ■





The Spirit Medium

TEXT AND IMAGES BY TEWFIG EL-SAWY

MY NAME IS Le Thi Thu Trang. I am 33 years old, married with two children, a shopkeeper in Hanoi, and I am also a medium, a *thanh dong*.

I became a *thanh dong* when I was 25 years old, at the time I got married. Before that time, I had severe insomnia and whenever I managed to sleep I was always dreaming of Ong Hoang Muoi (the Tenth Prince of the Pantheon of the Mother Goddess religion). In these dreams, he always asked me to wear yellow clothes. I was vaguely familiar with *Hau Dong* but wasn't interested in it. So I started to research this belief, and after a year of studying it, I was paired with Ong Hoang Muoi. This pairing didn't hap-

pen in a temple or pagoda, but at home. I took it more seriously and visited temples more frequently, and on a regular basis. This caused a rift between me and my husband Dao Ngoc Doanh, and we separated for a while.

In 2013, my husband took me to a large temple where a *Hau Dong* was being performed, and while watching it I became entranced, and my whole body started to sway. I was possessed by my husband's great great great grandmother, and entered my mind and body, ordering me to accept my being paired with Ong Hoang Muoi.

My teacher-master is Nguyen Van Ba who lives in Phuc Lai, Bac Ninh Province, instructed me to return to my



husband and his family to settle down, and enact my destiny alongside them, and that they would be welcome me back. He told me to go to Tam Phu temple in Gia Binh, Bac Ninh and that it would be the right one for me.

Since I became a *thanh dong*, I sleep much better and have no nightmares or disturbing dreams like in the past. I am always surprised whenever I am about to start a *Hau Dong*, I get a vision—or a dream—of Ong Hoang Muoi falling to Earth, and giving me the necessary instructions.

After a difficult time, I now have the strong support of my husband and his family for my *thanh dong* work. I am jubilant about this. He and his family help me to prepare for

ceremonies. As I have no special temple, I meet the spirits in many temples and we have to travel to many locations to choose one. It then takes 2-3 months in advance preparation to have a good ceremony. The expenses can vary from one ceremony to the other. It depends on the number of guests, the temple and the distance from Hanoi.

I don't have a specific temple, but I always meet Ong Hoang Muoi at Tam Phu temple where I am paired. I only perform two ceremonies every year or whenever he advises me to have one. During a ceremony, I am still aware of all happening around me. I also listen to *chau van* songs to make it easy for the spirits to come in my body.

I know many people think *Hau Dong* is superstition, but worshipping the Mother Goddess is a religion, and not superstition. Thanh Mau gave birth to the whole universe, so it's not superstition. When I am performing a ceremony, I feel that my whole family is getting its benefit.

Female mediums find it much more difficult than men to become *thanh dong*. The process is more challenging, and women have more duties at home. My husband and I have to work to support our family, and it's not easy to be a medium and work at the same time.

Costumes are very important to me, and I ordered 22 sets from tailors working in Thuong Tin village. They are expensive, but I take good care of them and keep them in a special box.

I noticed that *Hau Dong* has become more popular among the young people, especially those born in 1990-91. However, their interest is just superficial, and they like it because of the fashion, the styling and the music. To get involved in it, they would have to spend a lot of time, effort and money and they don't want to do that. Only those who get *can dong*, the divine calling to become a medium, can get the necessary support from their families, community and friends. Otherwise, it is impossible. ■



The Chau Van Singer

TEXT AND IMAGES BY TEWFIG EL-SAWY

MY NAME IS Trinh Ngoc Minh, I'm 36 years old and live on Hang Buom. I was born and raised here. During my childhood, I was always near temples and as a four-year-old I walked into the nearby temple and witnessed my first *Hau Dong*. It was there that I saw a male spirit dressed in blue, and I could not stop obsessing about him.

Realizing I loved music, my parents sent me to a famous school of music. At the graduation, my classmates who are *hat van* singers took me to a *Hau Dong* ceremony, and after attending a few ceremonies, I became enamored with this type of devotional music and singing. I felt it was a valuable art

of Vietnam, and I researched it, and gained more knowledge. My teacher is Nguyen Tat Kim Hung who lives not far from here on Hang Bac. He is one of the greatest and most famous in Vietnam. I always admired and respected him since my first meeting with him.

It was not until I was 24 years old that I really got involved in *Hau Dong* and started to take it seriously by participating as a singer in as many ceremonies as I could find. A year later, I formally started my own career of *Hau Dong* so that makes it 11 years that I'm a professional. My temple is Den Hang Bac, a few minutes walk from my home. When I started this career,

I just thought I was paired with fate, and never considered being a Master. I have much support from many, especially my parents who gave me much help to choose this profession.

It was financially very difficult at first, and I couldn't get enough money for my ceremonies. I had just married and had no stable job and very little money. It was very expensive to finance even a single ceremony. I was offered by the National Art and Culture to sing *hat van* as an art form, but I quit after a short time because *Hau Dong* is much more important to me. Both are my soulmates to which I direct my passion and dreams.



Hau Dong is the cultural spirit of Vietnam. Only those with true hearts can follow this belief system. When you have a strong belief in it, you get peace in your whole life. The spirits are intangible, and cannot be touched or seen. When people face life difficulties but cannot share these with other people, they resort to the sainted spirits.

Before a ceremony, there is a magnitude of things to prepare. Counting only costumery, the number could go up to hundreds excluding jewelry and accessories. For a perfect *Hau Dong*, many people do important backstage tasks, and yet they are generally unseen. When an individual wishes to hold a

ceremony, they have to start it by wearing a scarf which represents the intersection between the dead and the living. Before being covered by the scarf, they are human but when under the scarf, they offer their bodies to the spirits. They are then able to foretell future events. However, they are aware of everything around them because the spirits only borrow their bodies. The *hat van* singers are the storytellers, and both need synergy in their understanding to have a successful ceremonies.

In ceremonies, a male medium can act as a female spirit, and vice versa. Males become graceful and feminine when they represent female spirits, and the reverse is true. In *Hau Dong*,

there is no distinction in genders.

You ask about the cost of ceremonies. The cost can range from VND20 million to VND1 billion. Like a dinner party, it really depends on many factors; the number of guests, the quality and quantity of food, the medium, the location of the temple and many other things.

I have many favorite temples. They are historical ancient temples, and national treasures. My two favorite spirits are Hoang Bay and Hoang Muoi (The Seventh and Tenth Prince of the Mother Goddess Pantheon).

There are many benefits to *Hau Dong*. Many sick people who cannot be cured in hospitals find they are healed when they attend a ceremony or two; even from the most hazardous diseases. There are many such cases that I know of. The advice given by the spirits through the mouths of mediums must be followed. There are always distortions in every religion, and we must be careful of mediums who distort the truth.

Many Vietnamese believe *Hau Dong* is superstition, and some even consider it to be ridiculous but it was recognized as a national religion of Vietnam. It was also submitted to UNESCO to be recognized as an intangible cultural heritage in 2017.

Superstition involves something unethical or of amoral values. The spirits are respected and idolized, and the Vietnamese must reject actions that give a bad name to this religion or that affects its purity.

The participants in *Hau Dong* ceremonies have many diverse reasons to get involved. For instance, they may gather and invite many people to their ceremonies when they are in need to make more money. As with Christianity, some in the audiences ask for health, others ask for wealth and others ask for luck in their business and in their love life.

The costumes come from many places such as Ha Dong, Thuong Tan and most especially Hang Quat street. To prepare for a ceremony, mediums need at least 15-17 sets of colorful costumes. Some of the costume designs are so elaborate that they need some twelve months to sew and embroider. Costumes are critical to the success of the ceremonies, and must be treated with the utmost care.

Being a *dong thay*, I wish I could spread the true meaning of *Hau Dong* and guide people to the right way of morality, the good aspects of life. *Hau Dong* is a way of life, a deep seated culture that helps people and their lonely souls. It is the spiritual beauty that only belongs to Vietnam and nowhere else.

I hope more and more Vietnamese people will respect *Hau Dong* and experience it to relieve their souls by praying and have their wishes listened to by the spirits. I also hope this faith will reach a worldwide audience. ■



WAITING TO INHALE

**Sick and tired from breathing in toxic air,
Tom Druk decides to put a mask on the problem**

TEXT BY TAYNE EPHRAIM

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

ACCORDING TO A RECENT ARTICLE on *The Guardian*, air pollution kills more people every year than malaria and AIDS combined. New studies have even revealed that metallic nanoparticles accumulate in the brain over time in abundant quantities and can be linked to Alzheimer's disease.

Levels of toxicity in the air have been on the rise in parallel to the meteoric growth of Asian cities like Saigon over the last few decades, but are now reaching critical levels. With more and more cars hitting the streets every day, smog regularly chokes out the sun over the sunny Saigon skyline. The time to seek out some form of protection has never been more pronounced.

I sit down for a chat with Tom Druk, co-founder of Air Quality Blue (AQblue, www.aqbluemasks.com, VND150,000 for 5 masks or VND250,000 for 10 masks) masks, on how best to save our lungs and brains.

Tom started AQblue after moving to Beijing in 2014 and feeling the effects of the horrendous air pollution there firsthand. Frustrated with his deteriorating health and unsatisfied with the inadequate mask options on the market, he decided to start making his own.

"Beijing is famous for having atrocious air. I moved there in the winter and immediately felt the effects of the pollution. I was staying in a hostel in the Hutong area of the old city, an area with very old buildings with no insulation, where they put blankets over the doors to try and keep the heat in. I would wake up the first two weeks and it felt like someone was physically sitting on my chest, it was that bad," Tom says. "So I went out and bought a mask, one of the medical masks so popular in this part of the world, with the little teddy bears on it or whatever. Mentally I felt much better, thinking that now I was protected, but I still felt bad."

Back then it was a very hard task to find a comfortable, affordable mask that could effectively filter out air pollution

particles. After some research, Tom discovered that even certain Western-branded masks were found to be counterfeit.

"I felt that the only way to maintain quality control over protective masks was to manufacture them myself," he says. And so he and his partners opened their own factory in Vietnam with the intention of exporting them to China. However, after living in Saigon and jumping on a motorbike himself, it didn't take long to see that the need for protection from air pollution here was just as dire.

Typically, a reading of above 100 micrograms per cubic metre is considered unhealthy (Vietnam's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment considers up to 300 to be a 'safe' level). The Air Quality Index (AQI) is an international index used by government agencies for judging air quality.

"In the 150 to 300 range of the AQI, the pollution becomes visible. You can see it as a hanging smog in the air," Tom says. "At a level of 500, which is the upper level of the index, you're getting to something like *Mad Max* territory. What we're trying to explain to people, though, is that you should be wearing a mask even when you can't see the pollution. If you wear a mask for the worst days of the year, that's great, but if you're not wearing the mask for all the other days where it's still over 100, it's actually much worse for you. Think of it as a constant low dose of harmful particles, the smallest of which are entering your bloodstream and then into your heart and brain where they accumulate. You really need to wear it all the time based on what the AQI reads. For anything over 100 you should have some kind of protection."

As of last year, Saigon now has its own real-time air quality monitor set up on the roof of the US Consulate in District 1, accessible online (aqicn.org/map/vietnam). Today as I sit writing this on an overcast afternoon, the index sits at a yellow 'moderate' level of 59. Hanoi, meanwhile, reads at an orange 'unsafe' level of 139. To compare, last October, while Saigon was blanketed with appalling smog which

officials were quick to blame on Indonesia's raging peat fires, the index reached a 'hazardous' peak of 365. Beyond an AQI level of 300, it is advised that you remain indoors.

Where Saigon gets tricky is the AQI, comparatively speaking, isn't that bad here. We have a monsoon season and lots of rain. "The problem here is that the pollution is very localized," Tom says. "You might have an AQI reading of 50 on the roof of the embassy, but down on the street at peak hour on a busy road like Cach Mang Thang Tam, the reading could be as high as 300 or more. The exhaust fumes coming out of those hundreds of idling exhaust pipes become trapped in the canyon formed by the tall buildings. What people need to understand is that the long-term effect of taking in such harmful fumes and particles day after day is fatal.

"People think just by wearing a medical mask, they are protected," Tom continues. "But that's simply not the case. While they do block out the largest of particles, the ones you can see, they offer no protection at all against the smallest and most deadly particles."

This is a problem which is not unique to Vietnamese cities. A 2013 Hong Kong study explored this 'street canyon' effect of air pollution by placing an air quality meter on the roof of a bus and driving it through the city. What they found was that the air quality on narrow streets which formed a canyon with tall buildings on either side was much worse than wide roadways that had even ten times the amount of traffic.

"If you think about Saigon, though, here it's a lot worse," Tom says. "So many of the city's streets form these canyons, and the amount of congestion that becomes stuck inside during peak hour is enormous. Dirty buses, thousands of motorbikes, and the ever-increasing numbers of cars which clog the streets."

A lot of the intensity of this pollution also depends on the climate. "Some cities are never going to be as bad as other cities," Tom says. "For example, if you compare with Beijing, which is an arid basin surrounded by coal plants and encroaching desert, Ho Chi Minh City has it much better, having a tropical climate with a rainy season and being not too far from the coast."

While the rain and humidity help to control the pollution to some extent, it's the *type* of pollution here that is really bad. It's also really bad for masks with the oil in the air from combustion engines destroying most pollution mask filters very quickly.

"Engine exhaust particles, which form the bulk of Saigon's air pollution, are very, very small, smaller than 0.3 micrometers," Tom explains. "It also depends a lot on the type and age of engine, the kind of gasoline, and the proximity you are from the engine. Some these ultrafine particles get as small as 0.05 micrometers when they come out of the tail pipe, and become bigger as they leave."

There's a physics to the way these particles hang together in the air once they get jettisoned out of the exhaust pipe. Generally, the further from the exhaust pipe you are, the bigger the particles are going to be. "It's like asteroids colliding in space," he says. "But instead of blasting apart, these microscopic particles combine or stick together when they encounter each other. The nanoparticles which come out of the engine hit other particles and dust in the floating air, and very quickly you have a mass building up that you can see."

As a simple way for people to wrap their heads around the nano-scale size of these particles, Tom and his team devised a classification system to help people get an idea of the scale of just how tiny these particles are, based on food. "So picture a grain of sand. That would be at the upper end of the particle matter (PM) spectrum. A grain of sand measures at about 90 micrometers, or PM90. Using our Chinese food scale, PM90 is a marinated pig on a spit. Easy enough to stop, right, even by putting your hand over your mouth. While at the smallest end of the spectrum you have particular matter of 0.3 micrometers, or PM0.3. That's a grain of uncooked



rice. These guys are the particles that are so tiny they directly enter the bloodstream once they are in the lungs. In terms of mass, something like 90 percent of pollution particles in the air, when you're stuck in a Saigon traffic jam, are of this size. So imagine a grain of rice next to a pig. That's how small the particles are which our masks are able to block."

The whole thing is a percentages game in terms of how much of what is in the air you're actually absorbing into your body. PM0.3 is the lower end of the particle scale you can actually ingest, but also the most dangerous. AQBlue's moto-R mask stops 95 percent of particles 0.3 micrometers and larger. The accumulation of such particles in the brain and vital organs is attributed to heart attack and stroke, and possibly also Alzheimer's disease. What it does is aggravate genetic predispositions and makes these things worse, which is why it's contributed such a high number of deaths each year.

READY TO EXHALE

Mesh filters become impractical with particles as small as PM0.3. The particles shoot straight through the net. What it takes to stop them is static electricity. Tom's masks employ something called an electric filter, which is charged with static electricity during the manufacturing process. Such filters were developed in the 90s and are standard in workplace safety masks used on construction sites and in manufacturing.

"It works like an electromagnet and pulls the particles in," Tom explains. "They get curved in like a magnet. These exhaust particles carry a charge, which is what allows them to 'stick' together. This filter is the main reason our masks are different to the standard face masks on the street. Without a filter, with an electro-static component, you're exposing yourself to the smallest particle matter, the really bad stuff."

But even with the crucial electric filter, a mask won't be properly effective unless it forms a seal around your face. Medical masks, seemingly the go-to choice of protection



for most Saigon denizens, still allow air to come in through the sides.

"The whole mask itself needs to be the filter," Tom stresses. "You'll know right away if you've got a mask that doesn't work because it won't be hot. The filter material acts as a natural insulator. If it's not sealing your face, it's not going to work."

For this reason Tom's masks employ an air valve to release the moisture and cool off your face. "A lot of people when they see the mask think the valve is what's stopping the pollution from getting in when in fact it's what's letting the air out. It's what makes the mask breathable and comfortable to wear."

While there are other companies offering masks with the same electro-static filter, you often have to go to some length to acquire them, whether that be through a hardware or camping supply store or by paying up to USD40 for one online. But what is perhaps the most disturbing aspect to the manufacturing of these filtered masks is the lack of regulation and misinformation being bandied about when it comes to what works and for how long.

AQblue base their efficiency standards off the US Center for Disease's NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) guidelines

in the production of their air pollution filters. "But outside the workplace there is no regulatory body on air pollution protection devices or the use of filtering masks, not in the US, not anywhere in the world," says Tom. "So these companies who make these things and distribute them to the general populace can just say whatever they want. You have these medical masks that say they're air pollution masks when they're nothing of the sort. It's a joke. Even these hi-tech expensive masks you find on the internet can only last up to a few weeks at most, no matter what they're advertised as."

It's a scary thought. Surgical masks, for example, were designed to protect patients from the transfer of fluids and bacteria in the hospital environment and offer little to no protection from harmful exhaust particles. Even worse are the cheap and colorful variety found out on the street, which can do little more than stop sunburn and dust. Yet people still hold the belief that they are somehow filtering out air pollution.

"Some of these masks you're seeing out on the market could even be doing more harm than good in the long run," Tom tells me. "For example, masks which employ a carbon filter, which is designed to trap gas, are only supposed

to be used for up to two weeks. After that the filter becomes saturated and actually starts leaking the carbon back out again. And yet I've seen packaging on some of these masks which say they can be worn for up to three months. It's blatant misinformation and it's harming people in the long run."

"If it says it's good for up to two weeks, some people will keep using the mask beyond that anyway, thinking they're saving money," he adds.

But it's not just carbon filters which limit the life of protective masks. All filtered masks degrade over time. The pollution in the air builds up on the electric filter and it degrades. The longer you use a mask the less effective it becomes at its job.

After talking to Tom, I feel almost afraid to leave my own house for fear of inhaling nanoparticles of metal dust from exhaust fumes and having them make their way up into my brain. My cavalier attitude towards simply holding my breath while overtaking a bus now seems a little naïve.

"It's all about raising awareness," Tom says. "People need to know how to protect themselves and their loved ones. At the end of the day, that's the most important thing. That's my mission." ■

ITCHY & SCRATCHY

Tips on how to safeguard our furry friends from ticks and fleas



WE ALL LOVE TO CUDDLE UP to our furry family, but the soft and warm fur that we so love is also the perfect hiding place for pesky parasites!

Far more than just a nuisance these tiny fleas through to large ticks feed on our pets' blood, causing skin problems and can spread fatal diseases. Vietnam is a veritable heaven for these parasites because of the warm and humid weather and the vast amount of suitable habitat. Fortunately, there is a lot we can do to help protect our pets.

FLEA 101

Most fleas are so small it's rare to see them without a microscope, but we can often see other signs of their presence. Fleas will often leave droppings (dark brown) or eggs (white) deep in the fur, or you might notice your pet scratching or licking more than usual.

While animal fleas cannot live on humans they can jump on for a short time and cause some nasty irritations on our skin.

Prevention really is important as once you get a flea infestation in

your home it is incredibly difficult to get rid of *all* the eggs that the fleas leave in the environment. These eggs especially persist in carpets, sofas, soft bedding and areas of high humidity.

TICK 101

There are two main types of tick prevalent in Vietnam: hard bodied and soft bodied. The soft-bodied tick is easier to spot on your pet as they often swell to the size of a raisin, however, the smaller hard-bodied tick is just as dangerous and is often passed over on a quick tick check.

When these ticks attach to your pet they cause irritation, so your pet may start scratching in that general area. The best way to check is to thoroughly look through your pet's coat on a daily basis, paying special attention to between the toes and around the eyes and ears.

If you find a tick it is important to remove it *as soon as possible*. Forget nail polish, alcohol and salt, these techniques can actually make the situation worse. Just follow this simple method: Using fingernails or tweezers, grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull straight up, don't twist.



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

PREVENTATIVE OPTIONS

Luckily for our pets (and us) there are now a number of tools available to help prevent these parasites from feasting, some are more effective than others, so here is a brief overview of the offerings:

Shampoos and Powders

These are the least effective options as they have no residual activity, only target parasites currently attached, have little effect on ticks and in some cases the ingredients can be toxic to our pets too.

Collars

High-quality collars impregnated with chemicals are very effective against ticks but less so against fleas. Make sure you check the brand and the duration of activity as this can vary significantly.

Spot-Ons

There is a wide range of spot-ons available, including some generics. Make sure you compare like-for-like and ask your veterinarian for advice as not all brands use the same ingredients, and some can be fatal if used on the wrong breed or species. These spot-ons tend to be very effective against fleas but less so for ticks but they can be used in combination with the collars.

Tablets

Recently there are new products coming to Vietnam like NexGard—this is a convenient monthly tablet that is effective against both ticks and fleas.

Home Remedies

Some people use tea tree oil (careful, it's toxic!), brewers yeast or cider vinegar to prevent fleas and ticks. There is no scientific evidence to support these claims so it is best to use them in conjunction with a tried and tested preventative.

Prevention is always easier than treatment. Keep using preventatives when you don't find any parasites—it means it's working. No treatment is 100 percent effective and there is no substitute to keeping a close eye on your pet and regularly checking their fur—that's what all those cuddles are for! ■



A member of the Paris Bar, **Antoine Logeay** has been practicing law first in France, mainly in litigation and arbitration, then in Vietnam for three years as an associate of Audier & Partners based at its Hanoi office. Also a member of the Paris Bar, **Caroline de Bellescize** has been practicing mainly business law and real-estate law for three years in a French law firm and is currently an associate at the HCMC office of Audier & Partners. Audier & Partners is an international law firm with presence in Vietnam, Myanmar and Mongolia, providing advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

THE KIDS ARE NOT ALL RIGHT

What to do if you suspect child abuse

Dear Antoine and Caroline,

I hear my neighbors yelling all the time. They have a kid and I have seen him several times with bruises on his body. I am very worried about him. Do you know if there is anything I can do to help him? Do I have an obligation to inform the authorities? However, I don't know for certain if he's being physical abused, it's just a suspicion.

IT IS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTAND that in Vietnam, parents may sometimes use mild physical punishment on their children because of their traditional belief of "spare the rod, spoil the child," however, severe punishments on children are considered child abuse and, of course, punishable by law.

Vietnam has even promulgated (and recently reformed) a specific law on child protection. Under this amended law many acts are now considered abusive and are prohibited, including beating or mistreating children, any acts affecting their development by hurting them emotionally, acts hurting their dignity or honor, acts of humiliation, intimidation, segregation and neglecting them.

Based on the law and your description of you neighbors' behavior and the visible bruises on their child's body, it seems reasonable to conclude that your neighbors may be beating their son. Vietnamese law stipulates strict penalties for parents who beat their children. The parents, if found guilty, may receive either a caution or a fine between VND5 million to VND10 million but, most importantly, their parental rights may become limited. The child may be

handed over to relatives for nurturing, care and education, or to surrogate families, child support establishments, or social relief establishments if the child has no relatives. In addition to that, under the criminal code, offenders may be subject to a harsher penalty of two to five years imprisonment if the mistreatment causes the child to suffer from continuing mental torment and/or any health damages.

Now let's go back to your question on how to approach this situation. Firstly, you might consider talking to your neighbors to find out if there's another explanation for the child's bruises and to let them know that you are concerned about the child's welfare. Perhaps you can ask other neighbors if they share your concern and ask them to help if there are any language barriers. Raising the issue directly with the parents may be enough to lead to a change in their behavior. However, if there is no improvement or if your intervention leads to any threat to yourself or the child's safety, you can reach out to the local authorities for help (see further details of the appropriate authorities to contact below). We understand you're hesitant to report the situation to the authorities because of

the lack of evidence. In compliance with the law, it is your responsibility to protect the lives, bodies, dignity and honor of children. Furthermore, the physical and moral safety of a child is at stake. Therefore, you should not wait until you have concrete evidence before reporting this matter to the authorities but inform them as soon as possible of the situation and the grounds for your suspicions. If it appears, after an investigation, that the child was not mistreated, you will not be subject to any penalty provided that you have acted in good faith.

In practical terms, if you would like to report any acts of abuse or mistreatment against children, you can contact the National Child Protection Hotline (19001567) for the fastest assistance, or you can report the matter directly to the nearest police station, the district People's Committee or the head of the residential area. Once the authorities receive your report, they will investigate the case and take action against the parents if mistreatment of the child is proven. Please note that if a child is mistreated by a foreigner living in Vietnam, the authorities still have the rights and obligations to protect them as Vietnam has joined the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Vietnamese government has issued a new Law on Children in 2016, which will take effect on June 1, 2017. The implementation of this new law is considered an important step in the direction of protecting children in Vietnam. Specifically, children would have the right to be protected from all forms of physical and mental violence and all acts of infringing upon children's rights, shall be promptly prevented and handled. *Every month, Antoine and Caroline answer legal questions from readers. If you have any legal question you want answered, send them to legal@oivietnam.com.* ■

BANKING GLOBALLY, LOCALLY

WAYS TO DIVERSIFY YOUR BANKING NEEDS OUTSIDE OF VIETNAM



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.

I am an American citizen and have been running a small textile business in Vietnam for just over five years. Since my company is incorporated solely in Vietnam, I have been conducting all of my corporate and individual banking activities through my Vietnamese bank accounts. Although I am quite satisfied with the service I receive, I am often frustrated when having to conduct international transactions, both personally and in a corporate capacity, as I have to physically visit the bank and complete various documents. I am also prone to receiving phone calls from my bank every time I receive payments from abroad, inquiring the reason for receiving these funds. Is there any way I can open bank accounts internationally, making it easier to facilitate my global transactions?

THIS IS AN EXTREMELY COMMON issue and talking point we encounter when speaking with clients and the community in general. The reason that banks in Vietnam make it difficult for expats, and even more so for Vietnamese citizens, to make international remittances and transfers, is because the State Bank of Vietnam needs to protect the local currency from excessive outflows and potentially uncontrollable devaluation of the currency. Therefore, it's not the banks that are purposefully trying to make your life difficult.

You have a number of options when it comes to opening bank accounts internationally. Your first two obvious choices would be Singapore and Hong Kong. In the past, it was fairly easy to open a bank account in Singapore while living in Vietnam. However, since the beginning of 2016, Singaporean banks have been making it increasingly more difficult for non-residents to open accounts because of increased issues with money laundering. For example, to open a personal bank account with Citibank in Singapore you

would have to physically visit a branch in the country and open an account with an initial deposit of USD200,000. Minimums are much lower in Hong Kong, but you would have to physically visit a branch in Hong Kong to complete the account opening.

International business banking, in your case, would be a different kettle of fish as you would not be able to use an international bank for your Vietnamese business entity, and would have to incorporate a holding company, in either Hong Kong or Singapore, from which you would be able to open an international business account for that entity. Incorporating holding companies in the British Virgin Islands was quite popular in the past, and it has become increasingly difficult to open accounts in either Singapore or Hong Kong for these types of entities.

An optimal solution would be to open accounts in the Isle of Man, which is a respected self-governing international financial center located off the North West coast of the United Kingdom. A banking group known as Standard Bank is located on the island,

and they offer international personal and corporate bank accounts at low minimum deposit levels. Additionally, you would be able to open a corporate account for entities based in most jurisdictions, on condition that you can provide detailed shareholder and financial information relating to the corporate entity in question. Individual account holders are also required to provide detailed information about personal wealth and cash flows because of the banks strict anti-money laundering policies. The great news is that you would be able to open this type of account from Vietnam, and have all your documents certified by your independent financial adviser in Vietnam. Also, as an American you would be accepted as an account holder, which is advantageous because most banks would not accept US citizens because of compliance issues relating to FATCA legislation.

Opening international accounts can be an arduous process, but extremely beneficial in the long-run with the added value of protecting your assets and making international transactions much easier. ■

LUXE LIVING

A younger and more sophisticated generation of shoppers with markedly different tastes, aspirations and consumption habits is reshaping the landscape of luxury in Vietnam. Educated, well-traveled and tech-savvy, they are emerging as the new target market and luxury brands are there to cater to them.





ACCELERATED GROWTH

**Vietnam's nouveau riche are
driving the luxury boom**

TEXT BY JON ASPIN

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN





VIETNAM IS EMERGING AS A PROMISING market for luxury cars. And what has changed is that premium auto sales are now being made by authorized, rather than unofficial, importers: BMW appointed Euro Auto, Porsche entered the country with Prestige Sports Car, and Mercedes-Benz began imports. When the USD97,000 Audi Q5 was first introduced, orders came in so quickly that customers, most of them younger than 36, had to wait at least three months to get one.

In 2009 Maybach-Motorenbau, a German maker of ultra-luxury autos, manufactured just four limited-edition Maybach 62S cars priced as high as USD500,000, and two of them were sold in Vietnam. The USD600,000 Ferrari 458 Italia has been sold in Vietnam. In 2014, four new brands appeared in Vietnam: Bentley, Jaguar, Infiniti and Mini.

It shouldn't be a surprise that life in the fast lane has never come cheap, but what you get in return is a lifestyle and a statement. Van Trung Dao, the Sales & Marketing Director at Auto Modena, the official Maserati dealer in Vietnam, says customers in this segment buy "exclusivity, personalization and performance."

Opened in January of this year, Maserati is new to the Vietnam market and is hoping to upgrade Vietnamese buyers into the supercar category from the popular Lexus, Audis and Mercedes they've become used to. "For Vietnamese drivers, Maserati is very new to them. They know about Ferrari and they know about Lamborghini, but not Maserati. So for Vietnamese buyers, this will not be their first

[luxury] car in this segment," says Van.

The Italian brand has set a very high bar of their own in terms of design, performance and street appeal, delivering the Ferrari feel and sound without the Ferrari price tag, according to Van. Sitting in both the new Levante, Maserati's answer to local demand for high-end SUVs, and the Quattroporte GTS, which it calls a "triumph of elegance, technology and power" I did feel richer, but not USD350,000 richer, which is about the starting figure for negotiations.

As we talk, potential customers roll up to the showroom driving the competition. Audis, BMWs and a Lexus are all there at different times during our visit, even a Bentley owner turns up to browse, or perhaps it's just his driver. Van tells me you never know with these types of customers, sometimes you don't meet them until it comes time to sign a contract. "They send their driver, they send their son, they send their family," he says. "Some of the profiles of these people are incredible."

CALL THE DOCTOR

Joe Creazzo, or Dr. Joe, from Adelaide, Australia is a professional car tuner here for the last 15 years, and is well-known in the luxury car industry. He attributes the recent growth in the luxury market to new money in Vietnam; successful business owners are happy to reward themselves with the status symbol of a high-performance car.

"The Vietnamese still have this attitude where they want to stand out," says Joe. "They want status and they want to be unique. It's all about that. There's

no doubt that over the years, we've done the most top level tuning in this country, everything from Rolls Royce and Ferrari to Maserati, Porsche and Mercedes." With a PhD in aeronautical engineering, his business started through word-of-mouth, and has grown from there. He remembers a time driving around Saigon and barely seeing two or three cars on the road—those times have changed.

Joe says the culture around these types of cars is also getting better though, despite a lack of infrastructure to actually drive them properly. "Where before you'd have people not knowing how to drive or how to look after these cars, the level of knowledge has improved. I get fewer phone calls now from people at two o'clock in the morning who can't get out of neutral."

In this way, Dr. Joe has become a luxury brand himself. It's all tongue-in-cheek, but it's an important part of his business when they spend the type of money they do. "I'm the guy they ring," he says, "when they've got a bit of money to spend, they want the job done correctly, they can trust what's being done and they don't have to worry about it."

The fully imported luxury car market in Vietnam is still growing, despite heavy taxes being levied to encourage the purchase of locally-built cars. As a whole, it remains niche, but established suppliers like Mercedes, Porsche and BMW, regularly report double-digit growth. In the future, with free trade agreements with Europe and the Trans-Pacific Partnership to be ratified, it would appear only logical that the likes of Maserati, Ferrari and Lamborghini will report the same. ■

HAUTE JEWELRY

Mischelle Thuy White on living her life through gemstones

INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

IMAGES PROVIDED BY DAMIAN BY MISHELLE



THROUGHOUT THE RISE OF CIVILIZATION itself, nothing has been more consistently definitive of luxury, wealth, and power than the gemstone. Today, precious stones have just as much gravity and desirability as they did in eras past—and those who dedicate their creative output to perfecting nature's most dazzling rocks are literally on the cutting edge of beauty itself.

"Gemstones have been coveted, pursued, fought over and traded for thousands of years," muses Saigon's own premier artisan jeweler, Mischelle Thuy White. "Fashions and tastes may have evolved since lapis was mined from Afghanistan in the 7th millennium BC and amber beads were being produced in the Orient, but the essence has remained the same."

Mischelle's jewelry atelier and showroom Damian by Mischelle (www.damianbymischelle.com) in District 2 has been operating in Vietnam since 2002, producing contemporary works of wearable art easily recognizable for their striking, sumptuous designs. Her own love for the craft stems from early childhood, although it was only in her later years that her creative focus rested on gemstones. Acquiring her design skills in her native France, she went on to develop her knowledge of gems in Antwerp, where she was greatly inspired by leading Belgian diamantaire, Eddy Elzas.

"I was always a curious and yet determined child," she says. "I didn't grow up dreaming of jewelry, but I always wanted to

know how things worked to solve practical problems, like how to make something move or work in its surroundings. The love for gemstones and design came once I was a teenager and could understand what I was looking at through the windows of Place Vendome. Many years later, the desire to problem-solve remains at the heart of good design. It is a subconscious element of how I approach each client commission today."

This month, *Oi Vietnam* interviews Mischelle Thuy White to learn more about her stunning fine jewelry and philosophy of design.

HOW DOES BEING BASED IN SAIGON INFLUENCE YOUR DESIGN AESTHETIC?

As a designer, you are influenced by every experience that you have. Things you see, hear or smell. It can be during a quiet moment on a beach up north or during a hectic crossing of a road in downtown District 1. Ideas can come at the strangest times.

Being in Asia certainly influences some of the shapes and ideas that we design around. The flowers and animals, for example. But there is always a global element. It can be something as casual as a music video that I am watching with my daughters or as intense as a recent trip to Miami, an audio-visual encounter that will inspire a future collection, I am sure.

Inspiration truly is everywhere.



Mischelle Thuy White



WHAT IS THE NATURE AND SCALE OF YOUR MARKET IN VIETNAM—ARE YOUR CLIENTELE LOCAL VIETNAMESE, OR FOREIGNERS, AND HOW ACTIVE IS YOUR BUSINESS HERE? IS IT PREDOMINANTLY "TIGER WIVES"?

Damian By Mischelle was founded here in Vietnam using local craftsman and developing their skills over time. The business has grown and developed alongside Vietnam over the past decade, so naturally this accounts for a very large part of our Asia-wide business.

Within the domestic market, the vast majority of our clients are Vietnamese. Many of our female clients own and run their own businesses. They are independent, successful and always looking for something unique to them. And that is why our bespoke business has expanded so fast within Vietnam.

WHAT IS YOUR IMPRESSION OF THE LUXURY INDUSTRY/ MARKET IN VIETNAM?

When I first came to Vietnam in 1992, the luxury market simply did not exist. So the developments in markets such as real estate, automotive, fashion and accessories have been incredible to see and be part of, in particular over the past decade. The pace has been both breathtaking and inspirational to us as a business.

Of course, the luxury market is a global one. Vietnamese now travel extensively. They now have access to the entire spectrum of e-platforms and are highly informed. They demand the best and they can pay for it.

WHAT COMPELS YOU PERSONALLY TO BE A DESIGNER WHO WORKS WITH GEMSTONES?

It is all about passion. I love beauty, color and composition. Being a designer gives me the platform to be able to create bespoke jeweled art that both surprises and delights our clients. The nature of gemstones themselves is also so unique that each stone has a story to tell. And the way that the story comes alive within a piece is something that, even now, is only revealed in the final stages of the composition.

Honestly, I cannot think of anything else that would give me this kind of creative freedom and the ability to express beauty. So, jewelry designer it is!

WHAT DIFFICULTIES DID YOU HAVE TO MASTER IN YOUR STUDIES IN JEWELRY DESIGN?

Expanding the range from women's to men's jewelry was both a conceptual and design challenge. Men are very different creatures when it comes to jewelry as well as most other things, I suppose. They can be simultaneously much more conservative than my female clients and yet surprisingly avant garde at times.

What they are willing to wear and how they will



wear it requires an altogether alternative approach that starts at the very design foundation. I love that challenge, and perhaps that is why we now have such a large body of design work that is specifically for men.

HOW HAS YOUR WORK MATURED SINCE YOUR TIME IN ANTWERP, AND WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS ALONG YOUR PATH?

Antwerp was more technical and focused primarily on diamonds. My learning after that incorporated all of the other fine colored gemstones that you now find throughout our collections.

As for the design side, that has been an evolution consisting of time spent working with pieces, developing setting techniques and finding the best format for expressing ideas. There truly is no substitute for experience and practice.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE EDDY ELZAS, AND WHAT DID HE TEACH YOU?

He is a lovely man and a diamantaire from the truest tradition. His passion and love for diamonds were instrumental in guiding me to the path that I am on today. I owe him a great deal for that.

WHAT ARE THE CORE DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT YOU CONSIDER IN BUILDING A JEWELRY COLLECTION?

Beauty. Originality. Composition. These are the essential elements that must underpin every collection that we produce—whether it is for women or men.

YOUR WEBSITE QUOTES YOU AS EXPLORING THE "VERY FRENCH ART OF CULTIVATING THE PERFECTION OF THE UNSEEN." HOW DO YOU APPLY THIS IN CREATING YOUR JEWELRY DESIGNS? WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE FRENCH JEWELERS' TRADITION THAT YOU CHANNEL INTO YOUR CREATIVE WORK?

There is an art form to the work. A sense of balance and proportion. A composition framework that is hard to define but it is just there. It comes from the history of France, from her artwork, her architecture and her people. It is the emotion that you feel when you see a piece of French jewelry. It is very French and very different. Do you see?

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOUR GEMSTONES CAPTURE LUXURY, ENERGY, FEMININITY? HOW DO YOU REFLECT AVANT GARDE, CONTEMPORARY FASHIONS IN YOUR PIECES?

The style of Damian By Mischelle can oscillate between a

tradition-rich invisible-set ruby eternity ring and a diamond-encrusted skull complete with a working jaw and emerald eyes. With almost 80 percent of our work being bespoke commissions, the tone of our pieces varies enormously.

A young female CEO may want something unique and yet everyday practical, while a 40-something entrepreneur wants a piece that makes more of a statement. This is part of the design challenge that we face every day. To create pieces that work with specific clients and yet which are still unmistakably Damian By Mischelle.

HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE INVISIBLE SETTING IN YOUR DESIGNS?

Typically, invisible setting will feature in higher-value pieces with more complex designs. We often use it to create smooth set surfaces across curved areas, perhaps a leaf or a butterfly wing. Or it may consist of baguette diamonds that create a backdrop for a signature colored gemstone, such as a red spinel or Colombian emerald.

WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF AS LIVING IN A WORLD OF LUXURY AT THIS POINT IN TIME? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR LIFESTYLE, AND WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

Our products are very luxurious, and so are our events, but that is the world viewed through a very corporate lens.

My own life is rather more simple. I enjoy spending time with my family and with my many dogs. I take my greatest pleasures from some of the least complicated experiences—like sharing food and stories around the dinner table. And after an intense day of Damian By Mischelle, I like to retreat with my loved ones to a peaceful environment—very far from the fast lane of glamorous events and the glare of publicity.

YOU ARE KNOWN TO BE INVOLVED IN CHARITY WORK. WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO HELP THOSE IN NEED, AND HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR BUSINESS AND STATUS IN THE WORLD OF THE WEALTHY WITH YOUR WORK FOR THE POOR?

The Heart Institute program for providing lifesaving operations to underprivileged children is something that I am personally very passionate about and this is the major focus for the charity efforts of Damian By Mischelle.

In fact, our entire family is involved in the annual gala to raise money for the operations. The children volunteer for the event and actively help raise money during the evening, we donate jewelry for auction, we encourage our clients to participate—it is a very special experience.

WHY DO WE BUY AND LOVE PRECIOUS STONES? WHAT DO THEY REPRESENT TO US AND WHAT HAS DRAWN PEOPLE TO THEM ACROSS THE AGES?

They represent beauty, rarity and value. Many were believed to have healing or other powers, and indeed some still do according to *feng shui* masters. For example, emeralds have been sold in the markets of Babylon since 4,000BC and were believed to offer healing, vitality and hope, and were a particular favorite of Queen Cleopatra. Today we still see many clients who are guided to one gemstone or another by a variety of beliefs. I don't think that it really matters what the motivation is as long as they love what they wear.

For others, the attraction is purely aesthetic. A case in point—sapphires have been popular for many centuries, and we still work with a number of larger examples of these in our bespoke work.

When it comes to diamonds, there is a growing emphasis on the investment value of fancy colored diamonds. Over the past ten years, there has been much more demand not just for yellows but also pink and more recently green diamonds. Across the color spectrum, these have appreciated in value by much more than colorless diamonds, and this is a trend that seems likely to continue. ■

POUR LUXURY

Coffee given the fine wine treatment

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

IT'S OFTEN SEEN AS A GREAT PITY that for a country producing around a fifth of the world's coffee, most of the cultural significance of the beverage is lost on the local market. Coffee is a marvelous and complex drink, but whereas the finest things in life are always a matter of taste, a truly cultured palate is still one that must be trained. The ability to taste quality is a highly-developed art—the reward being a rare experience of flavors that the average tongue is unable to properly discern or judge. The exquisitely subtle characters of coffee, however, are a blunt axe in Vietnam, where anything that's black and sweet enough can pass for a cup of Joe.

Master barista Nguyen Canh Hung, whose specialist coffee house Bosgaurus (Saigon Pearl Villa 1D5, 92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh) opened earlier this year, is leading the resistance against coffee illiteracy in this country—and is now offering highly specialized taste training sessions to awaken the senses to the full bouquet of the coffee bean. Hung is a relatively recent convert; it was only while undergoing work

training in Amsterdam that he stumbled upon the largely European art of coffee tasting and promptly lost his heart to it.

"In my mind, I thought all coffee was the same," says Hung, who has since studied under world champion barista Hidenori Izaki and now deals exclusively with Australia's leading coffee hunter, Sasa Sestic. "When I was in Europe, I went to some cafés, and they gave me an introduction to coffee. I was so surprised, I didn't know anything about it. They told me to forget what I'd learned before, just taste and 'listen' to the coffee. Was it sweet? I said 'Yes.' What kind of sweet—fruity or caramel, or sugary? I said it was fruity. They asked, 'What kind of fruit do you think you can taste?' I said 'Something like a berry.' Then they gave me some of the coffee essence, and I smelled it, it was like a blueberry. I said 'Really? This flavor is in the coffee itself? That is when I started to really like it, and I wanted to study it.'"

"That's when I started traveling," says Hung. "I went to Sweden, Stockholm, studied with Johan & Nyström; I went to the Netherlands to study at a coffee academy there, many



places. I went to Greece with the European Barista Guild, and this year I'll go to Estonia with the European Roasting Guild for training. I came back and I saved and spent money to invest in Bosgaurus. I wanted really good equipment. I want people to know more about specialty coffee. I want people to give more respect to baristas—here in Vietnam, the barista's job is not respected. In Europe or Australia, it's different. People have a lot of knowledge about coffee. That's why I learned, and now I give all my knowledge to my baristas, I train them. Now they can talk to customers about coffee, they're like coffee ambassadors."

Bosgaurus Café is designed with an open plan to involve customers as much as possible in the process of preparing good coffee. The ground-floor tables are positioned in an arc around the sleek black Giesen roasting machines and counters in the center; guests are more than welcome to watch the beans being roasted, ask questions, and even operate the espresso machines if they're keen to learn.

Hung fetches a batch of Ethiopian beans from his temperature-controlled chamber downstairs and demonstrates how the roasters work. It's high-tech stuff; computerized controls run *Cropster* roasting management software that allows roasters to carefully manipulate temperatures to match proven heating profiles, and Hung carefully adjusts the flame and airflow to ensure a consistent roast. As the beans turn in the drum, they gradually lose their green color and grassy aroma, passing through yellow and then ochre hues as they approach "first crack," sounding one by one like a batch of popcorn. Following the roasting curve on screen, Hung coaxes the beans into a rich brown and then drops them into a rapid-cooling tray which sucks out the heat before the beans cook and char.

You could brew a cup of coffee with it immediately after roasting, but that would be a mistake. "It depends on what you want; it's like wine, this is young coffee," explains Hung. "After roasting, your coffee has a lot of carbon dioxide, it takes time for it to balance inside the bean, so you need to experiment for yourself exactly how long you need for aging it. Exactly like wine, you'll find the right point where the taste and the flavor is balanced. You can drink this coffee now, but it's too smoky,

so you'll get a roasted flavor. If you like that, you will use it immediately. For young coffee, if you can't extract it right, it's a little salty. If you extract it dry, there will be more acidity. So you need to know how long to brew the coffee. My preferred taste is somewhere after one week. For espresso, sometime after two weeks. Of course, you can use sooner if you want. It will depend on your preference, your skill, your customers, what you can do."

This particular batch has a natural blackcurrant flavor—something that itself takes a bit of explaining. "Again, it's exactly like wine," says Hung. "The place where coffee is grown, the soil and everything there, makes the coffee have that kind of flavor. Tropical fruit, strawberry... some coffee has a lemon flavor. It's natural."

To demonstrate his point, Hung produces a tray of a hundred coffee essential oils, the result of variations in the internal chemistries of different varieties of beans grown in different areas, climates, and elevations. Just as he says, coffees likened to strawberries and lemons absolutely manifest those flavors, and they're obviously revealed when smelling the oils. Baristas, according to Hung, train themselves to detect these subtle hints in the final brews.

"Your brain is a database of flavors and aromas," says Hung. "You can remember them, so when you smell and taste coffee, you can recognize them. We practice it weekly, sensory training. If you can't remember it, then when you smell the coffee, you can't say what's inside the coffee."

LISTEN TO THE COFFEE

Hung produces another barista tool, a coffee flavor wheel that specialists refer to in order to confidently judge and clarify subtle differences in taste. "There are about nine central flavors," he explains. "We have two basic tastes, one is sweet, one is sour and fermented. Beautiful coffee is generally floral or fruity. Then we have spicy. For the green, vegetable flavor, it means it's not roasted so well. Raw, beany vegetable, you know it's not well-cooked. The 'roasted' part is where it's too dark. You have tobacco flavor, burnt—too dark. Some coffee when you drink it, you know immediately there's some problem from its roasted





flavor. In fruity, you have berry, you have grapefruit, citrus.”

“From Africa, South America, Central America, Asia, there are different flavors,” he says. “Because of the soil, because of the altitude. The way you grow the beans. If you grow coffee higher on the mountain, you get more floral and fruity beans. Lower, you get more nutty and spicy. The way you roast it has a lot to do with how you can expose this beautiful coffee flavor. Floral and fruity, that is the best. Vietnamese coffee is mostly nutty. Until now, for Arabica beans, we have good coffee here, but it hasn’t reached the specialty coffee level yet.”

Properly judging the flavor of coffee is done during a process known as cupping. Bosgaurus has dedicated cupping stations upstairs; customers who’ve taken the one- or two-day courses (or anyone with an interest) can hire the area to practice—companies sometimes hold special-interest events here for staff. Hung demonstrates the cupping procedure by producing three small ceramic bowls; we compare the coffee we’ve just roasted with a Vietnamese blend and another slightly immature roast from Panama. After smelling the grinds, 10g of each blend is introduced to 94°C water at a ratio of 1:17. The floating grinds cover and hold the flavor in the brew for four minutes; we then “break” the surface by slipping a spoon into the side and stirring three times as the aroma lifts powerfully from the disturbed crust. To taste the coffee, we take off a small spoonful and sharply draw it onto the tongue in a loud sup.

“We judge based on the roasting color, the fragrance and aroma; we judge on the flavor, the taste, the acidity,” says Hung. “For acidity, we need to see what kind of acidity is in there. You

have five organic acids—the first is citric acid, which you can find in lemon and passionfruit. Another is malic acid, you find a lot in green apples. After that, you have tartaric acid which is in grapes; acetic acid, which you can see some in anything fermented; and lactic acid, as in yogurt. The last is not an organic acid—phosphoric acid. You can find a lot in Coca Cola and Pepsi! All of these are within the coffee itself, not added afterwards.”

“Then you have body,” he continues. “Body is how your mouth feels. When you put something in your mouth, you can feel its weight. If you’ve ever tried skim milk—or milk with a little water in it—compared to whole or creamy milk, you will know how your tongue can feel the heaviness of the liquid. As well as that, you have texture, like how plain water moves over your tongue very fast; unlike juice, which has a lot of texture. So that is what we call body. Then, we judge for balance and uniformity—normally when we cup, we take five, and they must be equal. The flavor should be clean, a little sweet. Arabica is highly sweet compared to Robusta. Then at the end, you have ‘overall’—that’s if you like it or if you don’t like it.”

No matter how experienced the coffee taster, and no matter how accurately the elements in the coffee can be analyzed in the cupping process, the overall score given to each blend will depend on individual preference. “It’s down to personal taste in the end,” Hung admits. “For example, with the lemon taste, it has very intense acids, which is very tasty—but the quality of that, is it good? Maybe it’s high, but it’s not necessarily bad. That’s why in the business, when you’re cupping, people say ‘let the coffee talk to you’—and just listen to the coffee.” ■



SMITTEN BY BRITAIN

**Le Méridien Saigon's Saturday
bubbly serves up affordable luxury**

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

WHEN KEROSENE LAMPS became popular in the homes of the wealthy in the early 19th century, dinner time was pushed fashionably later for Britain's elite, a privilege to eat even after the sun had gone down. That, however, led to a first world problem. What to do between the main meals of breakfast and dinner? First world problems demanded first world solutions. In the mid-1800s, the enterprising Duchess of Bedford introduced a late afternoon snack to chase away her "sinking feeling" between meals, and "high tea" was born, blossoming into a quintessentially British social occasion.

Leave it to the French, though, to popularize a British invention, as Le Méridien Saigon introduces "Bubbly Saturday," superbly priced at just VND600,000++ for two, including free flow of specialty coffees, premium teas and a three-hour sweet and savory buffet. Better yet, your pocket won't even miss the

extra VND125,000 for a free flow of sparkling Prosecco, an upgrade the Duchess herself would wholeheartedly embrace. Easily the best value high tea in town, the French chain is out to make a decidedly 1% experience accessible to the 99.

While there are many forms of high tea (in itself a misnomer, as "high" tea originally referred to the high dining tables where a heavier meal was eaten by the working class, whereas "low" tea was actually the more dainty tea ritual served on low tables in the withdrawing room), they all involve tea and scones and Le Méridien Saigon does both beautifully. The tea is premium Ronnefeldt, established in 1823, predating the venerable Duchess of Bedford herself. Tea lovers can select from eight loose leaf teas, representing a veritable global journey with Spring Darjeeling from the southern slopes of the Himalayas, Vanilla Rooibos from South Africa and Indi-





an Masala Chai. I opt for the Le Méridien blend, a heavenly floral concoction that whisks me straight to the lavender fields of southern France, raised pinky finger optional.

"Tea"tolers can opt instead for any of the coffees on the menu, including espresso doppio, cappuccino, and frappe cookie (a double illy espresso blended with honeycomb ice cream and homemade cookies). There's also a DIY hot chocolate stand, with chocolate coins (white and dark) and a host of powders (cocoa, matcha and cinnamon). Seeing me fumble at the seemingly idiot-proof induction cooktop, a helpful barista sped over to whip me up a frothing cup of decadent hot chocolate (melted dark chocolate coins with a pinch of cinnamon), my second, but definitely not last, drink of the afternoon.

The second necessary component of any self-respecting teatime is scones—rich and crumbly thanks to cold fat and working the dough as little as possible. I try both the regular and blueberry scones, topped with a generous dollop of sweetened cream and an even more generous helping of the homemade jams. While the fruity grape and tart passionfruit were very good, it was the orange jam, lumpy with peel and spices, that was the standout.

Le Méridien Saigon's high tea is served in the Latitude 10 coffee lounge, a stylish industrial space heavy on clean lines and tones of cold grey (seriously, it's very cold because it's just off the lobby, so bring a cover up), made warmer by wood floors, pops of orange, and wraparound windows looking out over the Ba Son Shipyard. Seating is arranged in clusters around low tables and ottomans, leaning more towards business meeting chic than

hipster living room. The food is most definitely Instagram-worthy, starting with the matcha madeleine topped with matcha cream and a fresh raspberry, the contrasting greens and reds sure to light up any Instagram feed. Equally easy on the eyes was the chocolate mousse cake, with its glossy dark chocolate shell topped with a white chocolate heart, and the matcha citrus, a pillow of mango-infused cream on a spongy green tea base. The French flair of the hotel came through fabulously in the assortment of colorful macaroons and signature eclairs, ranging from classic vanilla to the praline-filled Paris-Brest to the toasted Lime & Lemongrass. Additional toppings of marshmallows and chocolate were available in case guests felt the urge to Julia Child their way to their own creation.

Unlimited savory bites were also on offer, ranging from ham and cheese sandwiches (crusts removed, naturally) and panini with grilled vegetables to smoked salmon on brioche and a delicious cheese with rustic apple compote served on a raucously orange carrot bread.

By the end of the afternoon, I attempt to rouse myself from the best self-induced sugar-and-caffeine coma ever, and head out to the fading Saigon light, having thoroughly indulged in one of Britain's best gifts to the world this side of Harry Potter and fish 'n chips.

Le Méridien Saigon serves high tea daily from 2-5pm (VND290,000++ per person, VND450,000++ for 2) with a special Bubbly Saturday high tea buffet (VND600,000++ for 2 people, VND725,000++ for 2 including free flow of Prosecco). Menu items change regularly. ■

MADE FOR HIM

The men in Saigon are dressing better
courtesy of Quynh Tran

TEXT BY JON ASPIN IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



A NEW CONCEPT IN FASHION is trending. Vietnamese men are starting to open up to the idea of bespoke clothes and are realizing that getting the perfect fit is worth the time and extra expense. The demand is driven by young men, often in their 20s and early 30s, who want to carve out a more individualized sense of style as opposed to what's available to every other person. Even as fashion week unfolds around the world last month, more and more celebrities are foregoing big brands and catwalks to buy customized pieces from

professional tailors who place emphasis on details, service and quality.

While the word “bespoke tailoring” may conjure up images of Gieves & Hawkes and Huntsman on Savile Row with customized suits costing in the thousands, now companies such as Saigon-based Cooper & Co. offer more affordable options that are still created based on the same model as their British counterparts.

Surveying the shop's new location on 53B Nguyen Du in District 1, far from assaulting customers with prod-

ucts, or being overly ostentatious, their retail space is inviting and allows a collaborative atmosphere between tailor and client. And that's exactly what they are keen to encourage says Quynh, who has a Fashion Merchandising Degree from the US, and have spent time at fashion giant Nordstrom.

“A lot of our customers are repeats,” says Quynh Tran, co-founder of Cooper & Co. “We keep a file on all of their measurements, their likes, dislikes and what they'll be doing in the suit or outfit. As a bespoke tailor, we aim



for perfection, and an initial consultation with us goes for 30-40 minutes. This is where we establish trust."

It was her time as a stylist at *Esquire Vietnam* that inspired her to start her Cooper & Co. "I realized that there was a demand for this [here] because there were a lot of local brands for women, but not enough for men so they were either going out of the country or buying suits from Hugo Boss at USD3,000 a piece." She remembers borrowing clothes for magazine photo shoots and then being very worried about damaging them on the way back to the stores. "I wanted to create something of good quality at an affordable price. Our suits start at USD400 and go up from there."

According to Quynh, no one wins in the traditional transactional, fast fashion retail model. How often do you leave the high-street feeling like you've just bought something you didn't really want? At Cooper & Co this would never happen she assured me. "We cater to a young, dynamic audience who understand the importance of high quality clothes that fit."

It's all about added value she explains, and it goes back to her fondness for even the smallest things, like hard-to-get buttons, one-off threads and unique patterns. "I've always been interested in the details, so we're very detail oriented," she says. It's about combining the ideas of the customer, the work of the tailor and her trained staff's suggestions to create a suit or an outfit that no one else can legitimately claim to have. It's a level of personalization that's being embraced all over the world.

"Not everyone will look like Ryan Gosling or Bradley Cooper, but it's our job to take customers ideas, combine them with our own and meet in the middle. If you're giving people the best service you can, you need to be honest, and make appropriate suggestions," she says. "Initially my partner and I wanted to establish a lifestyle brand to educate the market on how to dress and in essence be more polite, so that's still a long-term goal we have."

Keen to disassociate Cooper & Co. from the word "luxury," Quynh says it's something that's now affordable to more and more men, but it doesn't mean they aren't still picky. "They know what they want and they know what they look like. We want them to walk out of the door here and feel like they're going to nail that performance, or nail that presentation."

For many, that's a luxury they can't afford not to have. ■

Wine & Dine

QUAN BUI GARDEN







VIETNAMESE SOUTHERN COMFORT

Quan Bui Garden recently opened in District 2 and has become a neighborhood favorite

Text by MARTIN ZORRILLA AND SONIA GREGOR

Images by NGOC TRAN

LONG BEFORE WE ENTERED the charming, foliage-wrapped **Quan Bui Garden** (55 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien, D2; www.bui.restaurant) we smelled enticing aromas wafting down the street. Quan Bui Garden is a culinary and green oasis amidst the high rises and fast food franchises that are slowly taking over District 2. Through a garden gate and around a coconut tree lie an outdoor terrace lined with mosaic tables and matching cast iron chairs and an attached restaurant with floor to ceiling glass windows. Service is laid-back yet efficient and welcoming, and the authentic Vietnamese food quite superb, with an emphasis on southern Vietnam's finest ingredients and sauces.

We sat on the patio under an overhanging sake (breadfruit) tree and started with drinks. Intrigued by the obscure ingredients listed, we tried a pleasantly tart West Indian cherry and hog plum juice (VND69,000). It had a wine-like astringency that paired perfectly with the rich sauces

throughout our meal. From the cocktail menu we sampled the jasmine (VND100,000), a gin, Cointreau, Campari and lime juice creation that was herbal and floral in flavors.

With four restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City, the Quan Bui brand is rapidly becoming a trusted name in the local dining scene. Each restaurant features a unique menu and distinctive ambiance. While their original Tan Dinh location is cozy and serves northern Vietnamese cuisine, the Quan Bui Garden serves a range of Southern dishes and creates welcoming open spaces.

Although distracted by our pleasant surroundings, we did focus on the menu long enough to choose starters. The set of fresh spring rolls (VND69,000) featured thinly sliced shrimp and pork backed up by a perfectly formed core of perilla and basil. They were served with two kinds of dipping sauce—one sweet and spicy, the other a rich peanut sauce. Our Quan Bui salad (VND149,000) was an instant favorite. Tender strips of squid were tossed with crunchy coconut shoots, bell peppers



and lotus stems. The salad was topped with peanuts and crispy fried shallots and served with crispy shrimp rice crackers.

Our first main was a bubbling clay pot of braised pork meat with coconut (VND89,000). The coconut meat had just enough bite to balance the tender pork, all of it swimming in a rich caramelized sauce. We mopped up the sauce with spoonfuls of steamed white rice. Next up, the sautéed prawns with onions and bell peppers (VND139,000) hit the spot with a just-spicy-enough satay sauce. The menu offered enough prawn dishes to keep any seafood enthusiast happy, and it is easy to see why they are a specialty here. The prawns in our dish were sizably large and cooked to juicy perfection. Dining in a garden made every bite taste that much more fresh, although we did miss the poetic chance to try the tiger prawn wrapped in breadfruit (VND119,000) while dining under a breadfruit tree.

Quan Bui Garden struck us as a guaranteed crowd-pleaser. It offers an impressive range of dishes representing regions

from central to southern Vietnam, with a special focus on southern-style *banh xeo*, or Vietnamese savory pancake. The restaurant also has an extensive array of vegetarian dishes, ensuring that no one goes home hungry. Brunch enthusiasts must try the sets offered from 8am to 3pm. Just seeing the brunch options (*banh xeo* and iced coffee anyone?) ensured our return one lazy Sunday in the future.

We finished our dinner with one of Quan Bui's signature desserts—cream passionfruit—served inside the beautiful fruit itself. They hit the spot, with a smooth consistency and the pure taste of fresh passionfruit. We lingered long after finishing the light dessert. Enjoying the cool breezy night and the precious stillness of our surroundings.

With plenty of space at their disposal, and several local bands on-call, Quan Bui Garden often host events. They have already hosted popular wine tastings nights, in addition to smaller celebrations like birthday parties and anniversaries. ■

JOIN THE CLUB

A HEALTHY MEAL DELIVERY SERVICE FOR BUSY
PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE TIME TO COOK

Text by JOEL ZORRILLA

Images by NGOC TRAN



THE IDEA BEHIND

SAIGON KITCHEN CLUB is simple: pair a nutritionist with a chef, use the freshest ingredients, put it on a motorbike and deliver it directly to the customer. Their menu is incredibly diverse, taking influences from global cuisines while adding creative touches to make their dishes unique. One of the most noticeable aspects of their food is the incredible freshness of the ingredients. As you bite into the vegetables and fruits, it's as if they were picked that morning, nothing is frozen and defrosted, and nothing is thrown to

chance. If you're on a diet or just want to eat healthier, this is the kitchen for you. I received a full day package for four days, and with an emphasis on keeping calories low, freshness of ingredients and nutritional balance, **Saigon Kitchen Club** uses pure olive oil and premium sea salt (with lots of minerals) and no MSG. I was not disappointed with the results.

BREAKFAST IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MEAL OF THE DAY.

Day 1: A fluffy and decadent omelet placed in a nest of lettuce, accompanied by a bean smoothie. As I

am a huge fan of eggs in all shapes and forms, this was a spectacular fusion of healthy and delicious; the bean milk smoothie although it sounds strange was a very satisfying trip down an unknown road.

Day 2: Fruit salad with chunks of banana, dragonfruit, watermelon coated in a befitting layer of yogurt. I'll be honest, it was the healthiest start to any day I've had in months.

Day 3: The pumpkin soup was nutty, sweet and just the right amount of salt. Ever had pumpkin soup for breakfast? Me neither but I am now officially a fan.



Day 4: Unfortunately, I had to skip it because of an early meeting.

MY LUNCH OPTIONS WERE FUSIONS OF EAST AND WEST WITH A TOUCH OF SAIGON KITCHEN CLUB'S OWN VARIATIONS ON THE DIFFERENT DISHES.

Day 1: My favorite was the marinated and grilled slithers of pork served in a bed of crisp green lettuce and a pile of white beans. I am a huge fan of beans and it was a great combination of the three ingredients, reminding me of comfort food from Latin America. The pork was marinated beautifully and cooked to a tender conclusion.

Day 2: Saigon Kitchen Club came through successfully with an Indian style curry with pork cubes. The curry was rich and creamy with just enough heat, while the pork was soft and juicy.

Day 3: Pork strips with pumpkin and a side of beans and lettuce. This lunch was a slightly different variation from the day before because the highlight this time were the slices of beautifully cooked pumpkin and the strong Korean red soybean sauce, which complemented the pork, beans and lettuce well. This was accompanied by an interesting salad consisting of red, yellow and green bell peppers, thinly sliced and cooked, alongside slices of ham and a light

dressing.

Day 4: Probably the healthiest of the four, as well as being the closest to Vietnamese cuisine, was an amazing vegetable and chicken soup in a very rich broth. The delicious soup was partnered with a spectacular mixed salad with grilled prawns, pomelo carpels, lettuce and mint leaves coated with a light layer of dressing.

MY PHENOMENAL DINNERS WERE:

Day 1: A carrot and cabbage Chinese influenced soup with crunchy carrots and green vegetables. This was accompanied by a healthy twist on the popular local staple, *mi xao haai san* (fried noodle with seafood), served with classic Vietnamese rice noodles, stir fried vegetables, succulent whole prawns and moist slices of squid. It was as if they had jumped out of the sea into my pile of noodles.

Day 2: I was pleasantly surprised by what would be my favorite dinner by Saigon Kitchen Club: brown rice served with sautéed onions and grilled fish with tartar sauce. I must emphasize the seasoned fish was grilled perfectly. Fish can be a tricky protein to cook, a bit too much and it becomes rubbery, not enough and the center is raw. This was a flaky and decadent.

Day 3: My favorite staple from Saigon Kitchen Club, brown rice, however, this time it was paired with pickled

cabbage and beef cubes and vegetables, all well balanced with flavors to match. This was accompanied by vegetable soup that included my favorite type of mushrooms—oyster mushrooms—and it was spectacular.

Day 4: Marinated prawns with brown rice and sweet pickled radishes. It was a home run, the prawns were tender, the brown rice and pickled radishes complementing it in spectacular fashion.

To order simply go to www.saigonkitchenclub.com and follow the step by step ordering instructions. They have several packages to choose from:

1) For the working couple who don't have time to cook, you can order five dinner sets for VND880,000 two people.

2) If you prefer just having lunch delivered to your office, you can get the five lunch sets for VND450,000 for one person. Ideal if you don't have enough time to step out to a restaurant.

3) For a full week, three meals a day for five days it's VND880,000 per person.

4) Family packages can save you a lot of time otherwise used for shopping, preparing and cleaning after a long working day. ■



MOT, HAI, BA, DZO!

A new player enters Vietnam's growing market of craft brews

Text by LORCAN LOVETT Image by NGOC TRAN

VIETNAM'S ROMANCE with craft beer is brewing into something more serious with the upcoming launch of Ho Chi Minh City's biggest craft brewery project.

East West Brewing Co. built its impressive brewery from scratch after razing derelict buildings to the ground in District 1's Ly Tu Trong Street. Once the doors open in December, it will join a blossoming community of independent brewers.

The enterprise is not only making a rotating selection of ales, porters, and stouts, but offering consumers the chance to witness the production process first-hand. East West's head brewer Sean Thommen, 37, will hold three-hour classes where customers can make their own style of beer in a 100-liter system, producing 300 bottles. The brew will be barrelled and, when it's matured, the rookie brewers can drink their creation at the brewery or at home.

Sean has 15 years of brewing experience in Portland, Oregon, an American city renowned for its microbreweries and craft culture. Speaking of his new role, he looked forward to showing people what goes on "behind the curtain." In this case, it will be the 100-liter system and a 1,500-liter system, churning out traditional and Asian-influenced tipples.

"That's when people get that this is really a hands-on thing, see how it's made, see everything about it," he says. "People can see it's right here, made across the bar. The more people learn

how to brew, the more passion they get for it, and the more that bleeds off into other people. It has a snowball effect and helps us out a lot."

And for those who don't make the trip to East West, its beer will be available in supermarkets across the city as well as bars, restaurants and nightclubs.

The layout of East West includes car parking and cold rooms on the ground floor. An upstairs side entrance leads guests to the 60-person tasting room and 80-person restaurant while in the background the brewery systems sit on an elevated platform. Including the distribution network, the sheer scale of this operation shows an unprecedented confidence in the local craft beer market; all the more impressive considering it barely existed less than three years ago.

Of course, there's the light, fresh people's favorite, *bia hoi*, found on street sides from north to south. In Ho Chi Minh City, a group of Czech-German style brewpubs have served 'yellow' and 'black' pints for a while, too, but other than these, quality, independent brews were relatively unknown.

Platinum pale ale changed that with its introduction in June 2014; its hoppy, slightly bitter taste warmly received by expats and curious Vietnamese. Since then, a tight group of brewers including Pasteur Street Brewery, BiaCraft, Te Te, Fuzzy Logic, and Phat Rooster, have got the ball well and truly rolling.

East West's second brewer, Saigon-born Trung Dau, 33, hopes to attract

more of his compatriots to the trend.

"Our idea is to educate Vietnamese people and revolutionize drinking," says Dau, who became passionate about quality beer during his five years of studying in the Netherlands. "Our place is the biggest brewery right now but we hope others will open. We are in one big team. Craft beer is a healthy drink—people don't know a thing about that."

Independent breweries and big beer companies such as InBev (Beck's, Budweiser) are investing in the Southeast Asian nation's boozy potential. The population drinks three billion litres annually, according to a report from the Vietnam Beer Alcohol Beverage Association (VBA) earlier this year—more beer than anyone else in Asia besides China and Japan.

Added to this thirst are tempting demographics: the Vietnam Growth Report 2015 indicated that 85 percent





Photo taken from above the construction site of the future East West Brewing Co.

of the country's 90-million strong population is aged under 40. It also has a growing middle class with the disposable income to drive sales of high-end beer.

But forget about Budweiser and the other giants, many expats and Vietnamese agree that suds don't come more refined than craft beer. Quality and consistency, says Sean, will be at the top of the agenda at East West. "For me personally, the purity of beer is water, hops, malt and yeast. If you can make those ingredients shine in a beer, that's technically more rewarding to me, doing just that, but I do also love to get creative and work with unusual ingredients. I really appreciate the people who are doing that around here, too.

"It's important to balance creativity with technically sound brewing. Something that I have learned is there's a lot of people making creative beer but everybody really wants something that they make over and over again to be

consistent and done right," he adds.

All of the company's hops will be sourced from New Zealand, Australia, Germany, and the US, providing for its selection of between 10 and 12 beers on the board at a time. These include its flagship drink, East West Pale Ale (6%), zesty with undertones of mild honey and a floral aroma. With scents of pine and melon, the Far East IPA (6.7%) is set to be another favorite, and running alongside are a group of traditional choices. Look out for wheat ale Summer Hefeweizen (5.9%), which uses Germany hops, the Modern Belgian Dark (8.1%), and the Modern Belgian Blond (7.6%). The big hitter, Independence Stout (12%), is perhaps an option best nursed throughout the night. Sean says their Coffee Vanilla Porter (7%) uses coffee beans sourced from a farm in southern Vietnam.

"(The buyer) works with the farmers to help them to sustainably grow coffee,"

he says. "We're trying to find local farms, and work with local people.

Hinting at his future concoctions, he adds, "We will do long running seasonal beer—rye gold, Belgium triple, traditionally based." And with the 100-liter system, he wants to get creative. "We'll do all sorts of fruit and herb infusions."

East West will also boost its repertoire by potential collaboration with Stone Brewing for the first three months of next year. The tenth largest craft brewer in the US, Stone Brewing seeks out artisanal brewers across the world to show the public "there are more and better choices beyond the world of industrial beer," according to its mission statement. With the help of breweries like East West, Vietnam has just begun exploring this rich and flavorful new world.

Follow their pages on Facebook or Instagram @eastwestbrewery for updated info on the opening. ■



A CULTURAL BUSINESS

MR. JOONG HO UNDERSTANDS, PERHAPS BETTER
THAN ANYONE, THE IMPORTANCE OF A CLEAN
COFFEE MACHINE AND EXPLAINS WHY

Text by **MICHAEL ARNOLD** *Image by* **NGOC TRAN**



Images Provided by Vovos

“A VERY IMPORTANT POINT is that the coffee business is a very *cultural* business,” observes Mr. Joong Ho, CEO and Chairman of Vovos Corporation (www.vovos.vn)—coffee merchants and importers of fine coffee machines, among other things. It’s a pre-emptive answer to an unasked question: why a talented businessman with 25 years of experience in Vietnam—who built the immensely successful Dalat Milk brand from scratch—would have transitioned into this far more bespoke, smaller-scale industry. “It’s not just about making money, producing a large quantity and making big money, something like that. Even when you produce small quantities, as long as you have your own style, your own brand, this business is possible.”

It’s an unsurprising point of emphasis for a man whose various business endeavors in Vietnam have always served as a backdrop to more artistic pursuits, foremost of which is a passion for antiques. Decades in the country have provided ample opportunities for Mr. Ho to acquire precious ornaments and treasures of the past; he surrounds himself with them rather than keeping them stuffily displayed in cabinets, and even his business premises themselves are located in an historic building in the hopes of giving it some protection from the wrecking ball. It’s a fixation that Mr. Ho’s business partners sometimes find difficult to understand, watching him spend lavishly on investments of no practical value while they endure extended rounds of heavy negotiations with him on minor price points—but for him, a commitment to life beyond business is an integral part of his commercial strategies.

“What kind of antiques survive 1,000 years, 100 years, 2,000 years?” he poses. “2,000 years is maybe luck, but to survive 200 years until now, without any scratch, without breaking, how? For example that statue,” he points at a fine artwork in the corner of his office, “that’s from 1882, 150 years. No scratch, nothing. But it survives. Why? Like a business, this one has its own quality, history. Everybody trusts this statue is fine. So, it survives. But even a good quality mass product like this coffee cup—your mother uses them for ten years, maybe if one breaks, she’ll throw the rest away. But a beautiful one, she’ll keep for you, your sister. So, it lasts a long time. Business is the same.”

Vovos was founded a decade ago to deal with the challenges of distributing milk in Ho Chi Minh City. The idea to open a coffee business under the brand occurred after Mr. Ho decided that the time was right to cash out of Dalat Milk to seek new horizons. “When we had the milk business, coffee shops were among our major customers,” he explains, “and in Ho Chi Minh City, most of the well-known coffee shops used our milk. So I was proud that we gave good service for milk, but with the coffee, I didn’t see the same thing. It was very unmanaged in quality. If you buy coffee beans in the supermarket or at the market, you cannot trust the coffee quality. Sometimes due to chemicals, or sometimes it’s the same brand, but today different, tomorrow different.”

“For most people, milk is milk,” he explains. “In Europe or New Zealand, maybe you don’t care whether the milk is from Fonterra or from Anchor, you don’t care. Which one is cheaper today? Is there any promotion, is it nearby me? I’ll

buy that.’ But in Vietnam, it’s totally different because quality control from the farmers is not so easy. If you buy coffee in the market and use a grinding machine, it will break down because they put some chemicals and butter in it. If you’re burning something with butter, there’s nothing good in it for your health. But people don’t care so much, and then the butter makes it sticky, which breaks the machine. Then after being stuck in there for one week, it spoils. But people can’t see inside, so they don’t care.”

The decision for Vovos to become an importer of coffee machines, in fact, has its base in Mr. Ho’s own experience with a broken coffee maker that could not be fixed, despite the fact that it was supplied by a very reputable company.

“As I told you, coffee is a cultural business, even machines,” says Mr. Ho. “Some coffee machine companies are really commercial companies, just looking for money, not caring about after-sales service. But if you’re a café and one day the machine breaks, your business is down for the day. Every machine needs maintenance, just like a car. But this machine has direct contact with food, so it must be more carefully maintained than a car. As in my experience, I broke a small machine. Two months later, it still wasn’t fixed, but I drink coffee every day. What did I have to do? I had to buy another one while waiting for them. Still, it didn’t come back. So I learned about this.”

“Honestly, we invest too much in after-sales service,” admits Mr. Ho. “We sell coffee machines from selected companies that are very sincere about long-term business. They work with us, because we have the ability to import by the container. I’ve visited most of the coffee machine companies in Europe to find which are suitable for the Vietnamese market. Then I selected.”

The key to the firm’s commitment to quality lies in its maintenance program, designed to spare customers from the same frustrations that Mr. Ho experienced with his own machine at home. “At Vovos, we don’t look for big money, big business, it’s not a priority,” says Mr. Ho. “We actually have a French and a Portuguese expert in the machines on our staff. So in Vietnam, if you have two foreign experts taking care of your machines, you never can make money! Of course, there are many good local engineers here, but with after-sales service in Vietnam, already the culture is very so-so. So if you want to change this mentality, you need something strong. So for the machines we sell, we check them every month. Even if there’s no problem, every month we schedule a check-up. Every month minimum, one time.”

While Mr. Ho acknowledges that his coffee project will take a long time to grow despite his own solid experience in management, he’s not phased at all by the prospect of sticking with his strategy for the long haul.

“If you build a business with heritage and culture inside, with something you like, you can survive a very long time,” he says. “So, if you have a good outlook, or good business practices on the inside, people will never throw away your company. They will never break relations. Just like antiques.”

Visit the Vovos Café and coffee machine showroom at 142 Le Thi Hong Gam, D1. ■



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.

The PRICE on TASTE

The difference between cheap and expensive wine



THERE'S A POPULAR BELIEF that the more expensive something is the better it is, but is it really? Well, it depends, and it actually depends on many things.

Let's start with the main point: you like what you like and you should drink what you enjoy rather than what experts tell you are the best. It's especially true if you are just starting to drink wine because in most cases you are still months, if not years, away from developing the palate and nose needed to appreciate everything that great wines have to offer.

If you don't believe me, organize a blind wine tasting at home with friends, and without them knowing the wines or prices, and without sharing information, it is likely that different people will choose different wines as their favorite.

So although you should experiment and be open to try new things, remember what you like and, by the way, what you like will change over time.

Going back to price, unless you drink to get drunk avoid most entry level wines. With very few exceptions, they are all low quality, and likely to be high in unnatural chemical compounds. Why? Because there are two main ways to make wine, the first is

by following natural aging methods, which takes time and money; and the second is adding chemicals into the wine, which, although legal, will help most people achieve a big lasting hangover, and is the reason why most novices initially don't like wine.

Let's look at the reverse economics of a bottle of wine you buy in a restaurant. Chilean wines are usually the cheapest, and let's say you pay VND600,000 for a bottle to go with your dinner, the value of what you're really drinking, excluding the winery profit, will be around VND22,000.

However, if you increase your purchase of a bottle by 67 percent to VND1 million, the value of what you drink is almost four times, or in other words, you pay 67 percent more and get something worth four times more.

The way big wineries produce entry level wines at a low cost is by mass producing them, and if you give it some thought, the only way to produce, let's say 20 million bottles of a wine, all tasting the same, when grapes come from different vineyards or even different areas, is by using chemicals, chemicals that will end up in your body.

If you visit wineries, especially in the old world, where a lot of importance is given to the terroir, you will see how grapes harvested in vineyards just a few hundred meters away produce totally different wines even if made by the same winemaker. So now is the time for you to decide the balance between paying little for entry level wines and having a good quality, healthier product. ■

Bottle in a restaurant	600,000		1,000,000	
Restaurant margin	350,000	250,000	580,000	420,000
Importer margin	100,000	150,000	140,000	280,000
Transport and tax	85,000	65,000	155,000	125,000
Cost bottle, label	43,000	22,000	43,000	82,000
Cost of wine		22,000		82,000



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Wine & Dine

BARS



Aperitivo

Italian cocktail and wine bar Aperitivo has quickly established itself as a favourite in Thao Dien's bar scene. Cosy, friendly, and chic, with a quality cocktail and wine list, delicious deli sandwiches by day and night, Aperitivo is a great place to relax and unwind after work.

80b/c Xuan Thuy, Thao Dien, D2.
9am – late, closed on Mondays



Harry Casual

This sports pub has five floors including inside/outside area on the ground floor, a lounge area, 4 pool tables, 6 dart boards and a rooftop bar. Along with good selection of 70s, 80s and 90s hits with attentive staff and pub grub.

RI/49 Hung Gia 3, PMH, D7



Last Call

Saigon's king of cool, Last Call is renowned for the finest cocktails in the mellowest of settings. Slink your way back to the Seventies in the velvety interior or watch over the passing crowds from the laid-back terrace. Funky (and even sexy) to the core, this classy establishment is fittingly close to the Sheraton.

59 Dong Du, D1
3823 3122



O'Brien's

Two-storey Irish-themed bar and restaurant that offers a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere. Known for its excellent food menu, this is a fun place to socialize while shooting pool or playing darts. They occasionally have live music.

74/A3 Hai Ba Trung, D1



The Deck Bar

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

38 Nguyen U Di, Thao Dien, An Phu, D2
info@thedecksaigon.com
3744 6632



The Fan Club

The largest sports bar in Saigon, with all the live sports available on 12 large HD screens, an exciting place to watch your team win! A great selection of food & beverage. We also have a enclosed relaxing garden for the family.

The Vista, 628C Hanoi Highway, An Phu, D2
www.dtdentertainment.com
Facebook: The Fan Club

Also Try...

Broma Saigon Bar

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

41 Nguyen Hue, D1

Donkey Bar

An open air, but well cooled bar in the heart of Bui Vien on the site of the once popular Stellar cafe. A cut above the regular backpacker haunts in style and offer. Downstairs is a modern bar with flat screen TVs showing sports, a huge circular bar and tables, and outdoor seating for people watching. Upstairs are air conditioned rooms, pool table and outdoor deck.

119 Bui Vien, D1

Game On

Game On is one of Saigon's biggest sports bar, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. The bar also has an extensive drinks menu including coffees, juices, beers, wines, vodkas, and more. Game On also boasts a function room for corporate meetings or private parties.

115 Ho Tung Mau, D1

onTop Bar

Located on the 20th floor of Novotel Saigon Center, onTop Bar provides views over Saigon from an expansive outdoor terrace. The venue offers a menu with over 20 cheeses, cured meats and both Vietnamese and international-inspired tapas.

167 Hai Ba Trung, D3
3822 4866

Purple Jade

Lively and cosmopolitan, Purple Jade is a must on any nightlife agenda. The lounge offers an innovative menu of tasty snacks and signature cocktails in a sleek and chic aesthetic to complement the chilled-out vibe.

1st Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon
dine@icasianasaiagon.com
6pm until late

Saigon Saigon Bar

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

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

Xu Bar

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

71-75 Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.xusaigon.com



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Barista School & Training Café

140 Yersin, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

CAFÉS



Bach Dang

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

26-28 Le Loi, DI



Café RuNam

No disappointments from this earnest local cafe consistently serving exceptional international standard coffee. Beautifully-styled and focussed on an attention to quality, Cafe RuNam is now embarking on the road to becoming a successful franchise. The venue's first floor is particularly enchanting in the late evening.

96 Mac Thi Buoi, DI

www.caferunam.com



Chat

A quaint cafe with a red brick wall on one side and a mural of everyday life in Saigon on the opposite. A friendly staff serves smoothies, juices, and a good array of Italian-style coffee such as cappuccinos and lattes for cheap, prices start from VND15,000.

85 Nguyen Truong To, D4



En Tea House & Restaurant

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

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

3832 9797

Facebook: Enteahouse



The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, DI



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.saiгон.newworldhotels.com



Kabin

Dine Cantonese-style by the river at the Renaissance Riverside's own Chinese venue decked out with flourishes reminiscent of classical Qing period tastes. Kabin's cuisine is known for presenting new takes on traditional dishes as well as for its more exotic fare.

Renaissance Riverside Hotel,
8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1
3822 0033



Li Bai

Thoroughly traditional Chinese venue at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers offering choice oriental delicacies against a backdrop of fine Chinese art. This opulent venue, open throughout the day, is one of the city's more beautiful restaurants in this category.

Level 2, 88 Dong Khoi, D1
3827 2828
www.libaisaigon.com



Ming Court

The best in Chinese cuisine with a unique Taiwanese focus in a Japanese hotel, Ming Court is classy in its precision and graceful without compromise. It's certainly one of the city's most impressive venues for fans of the cuisine, and nothing is left to chance with the venue's signature exemplary service standards.

3rd floor, Nikko Saigon Hotel
235 Nguyen Van Cu, D1



Ming Dynasty

Ming Dynasty serves authentic Chinese food in a setting reminiscent of an old Chinese palace. Specialties include dim sum, abalone and dishes from Guangdong.

23 Nguyen Khac Vien, D7

Also Try...

Hung Ky Mi Gia

An old mainstay on the Chinese cuisine trail with well over a decade in operation, Hung Ky Mi Gia is known for its classic mainland dishes with a focus on delicious roasts. Safe and tasty Chinese food.

20 Le Anh Xuan, D1
3822 2673

Ocean Palace

A place for those who love Chinese food. The large dining room on the ground floor can accommodate up to 280 diners. Up on the first floor are six private rooms and a big ballroom that can host 350 guests.

2 Le Duan Street, D1
3911 8822

Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

The brainchild of an overseas Chinese/Vietnamese architect who wanted to build something extraordinary in his home town, this venue combines the architectural features of seven world heritage structures blended into one. The

cuisine is just as eclectic with representative dishes from several major Chinese traditions.

12 Duong 26, D6
3755 1577
www.7kyquan.com

Shang Palace

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


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

Yu Chu

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

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



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

SPANISH



Olé

With all the warmth you'd expect from a decent venue in this category, Olé serves authentic and tasty Spanish favorites with great tapas and highly-recommended paella. Family-run venue with a passion for great food and good service without undue fuss. Feel at home.

129B Le Thanh Ton, D1
012 6529 1711



Tapas Saigon

Tasty tapas at Vietnamese prices not far from the center of District 1. Fresh ingredients, broad menu with food prepared by a Spanish chef. Best washed down with authentic house sangria.

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



VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill

VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill only uses the freshest ingredients, many imported from Spain, for the most authentic tapas experience in Saigon, starting from under VND50,000/plate. Cool décor, indoors and outdoors eating areas, a well stocked bar, and great wines from VND60,000/glass (sangria just VND130,000 per HALF liter). Delivery available.

90 Cao Trieu Phat, D7



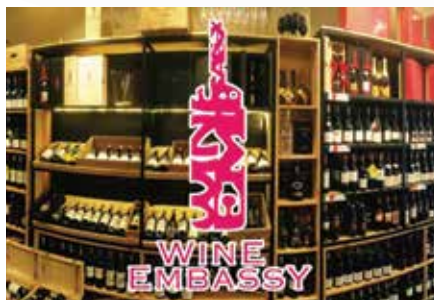
WINE



RubyRed Italian Wine Store

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

206 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2



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 la carte menu items.

10D Nguyen Thiep, D1
www.augustinrestaurant.com



La Creperie

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

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



L'essentiel

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

98 Ho Tung Mau, D1
094 841 5646



Le Bacoulos

Le Bacoulos is a French restaurant, bar and lounge that serves French cuisine, bar food like burgers, fish and chips alongside vegetarian options like spinach soup and Greek salad. There's also a garden to unwind in with a glass of wine or enjoy a game of pool.

13 Tong Huu Dinh, D2
3519 4058
www.bacoulos.com



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

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 Buoi, D1



Tandoor

Tandoor has recently moved to a new location. The restaurant serves authentic South and North Indian cuisine, with set lunches available, in a spacious dining area. Offers free home delivery and outside catering. Halal food.
39A - 39B Ngo Duc Ke, D1
39304839 / tandoor@tandoorvietnam.com



The Punjabi

Best known for its excellent tandoori cooking executed in a specialized, custom-built oven, Punjabi serves the best of genuine North Indian cuisine in a venue well within the backpacker enclave, ensuring forgiving menu prices.
40/3 Bui Vien, D1



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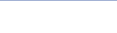
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ITALIAN



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 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 Forchetta

La cucina La Forchetta is located in a hotel building in Phu My Hung. Chef Gianni, who hails from Sicily, puts his passion into his food, focusing on pastas and pizzas with Italian meat and fish dishes as well delicious homemade desserts. Most of the tables are outside, so you can enjoy a relaxing outdoor dinner.

24 Hung Gia, PMH, D7
3541 1006



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



R for full review, please visit: www.oivietnam.com

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



Miyama Café

Miyama Café was born from an ambition to transport a truly modern Tokyo cafe into the midst of bustling Saigon. From grand desserts to inspired modern Japanese food and service, Miyama Café's minimalist space and large glass windows allow diners to views of the bustling city below. They use the finest and freshest ingredients to create beautiful and delicious set meals and desserts.

Takashiyama Saigon Centre Mall
Level 3-01
(08) 2253 1076
www.miyamacafe.com



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 Bui, 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 Bui
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 Bui 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 Bui, 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

STEAKHOUSE



Canada Steakhouse

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

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



Corso Steakhouse & Bar

The steakhouse boasts an open kitchen with private dining areas. With an extensive wine menu, contemporary Western and Asian cuisines and a wide range of sizzling steaks cooked to your liking, this is the ideal choice for a special celebration or formal business dinner.

Ground Floor, Norfolk Hotel, 117 Le Thanh Ton, D1
3829 5368
www.norfolkhotel.com.vn



New York Steakhouse

New York Steakhouse is definitely in the upmarket category and serves exclusive American imported beef dishes, with a whole range of steaks from rib eye, New York strip steak and tenderloin being popular options.

25-27 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, D1



Nossa Steakhouse

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

36 Pham Hong Thai, D1 / www.nossa.vn



Pho 99

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

139 Nguyen Trai, D1



Wild Horse Steakhouse

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

8a/Id1 Thai Van Lung, D1
www.wildhorsesteakhouse.com



Baba's Kitchen
 164 Bui Vien, District 1
 49D Xa Lo Hanoi, District 2
 Phone: 083-838-6661 & 083-838-6662

Open 11am to 11pm
 North & South Indian food

Halal & vegetarian dishes
 Of course we can cater!
 order online at vietnammm.com & eat.vn
 "Baba brings India to Vietnam"



Full Menu
www.woknroll.vn

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SUPER FAST DELIVERY!
 0122-690-8881





Scan for the full menu

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

17A Ngo Van Nam, D1

First Floor, 39 Ly Tu Trong, D1

55 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien, D2



Five Oysters

Five Oysters serves authentic and excellent Seafood & Vietnamese food with SG Green beer at VND12,000 as well as a promo of VND10,000 per fresh oyster daily. There's also a rooftop, a great place to start or end the night! Recipient of Certificate of Excellence 2014-16 from Tripadvisor and Top Choice 2015 by Lianorg.com. Recommended by VNexpress.net, Lonely Planet, Utopia and Saigoneers.

234 Bui Vien, D1



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



Also Try...

3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1

3821 1631

Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Com Nieu

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

59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3

3932 6363

comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com

comnieusaigon.com.vn

Cuc Gach Quan

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

10 Dang Tat, D1

3848 0144

Hum

Hum is a vegetarian restaurant where food are prepared on site from various

fresh beans, nuts, vegetables, flowers, and fruits. Food are complemented with special drinks mixed from fresh fruits and vegetables.

2 Thi Sach, D1

3823 8920

www.hum-vegetarian.vn

May

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

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

8am - 10pm

Propaganda Bistro

Spring rolls and Vietnamese street food with a Western twist. Serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. The restaurant features

hand-painted wall murals in an authentic propaganda style.

21 Han Thuyen, D1

3822 9048

Temple Club

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

29-31 Ton That Thiep, D1

3829 9244


templeclub.com.vn

Thanh Nien

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

11 Nguyen Van Chiem, D1

3822 5909

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

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



BoatHouse

With amazing views of the Saigon River, the restaurant's open seating plan is the ideal space for business lunches, romantic dinners and lazy weekend brunches. The menu is international with focuses on Mexican and American comfort food. There's live music almost every night of the week.

40 Lily Road, AP5C, 36 Thao Dien, D2
boathousesgn@gmail.com
+84 8 3744 6790
www.boathousesaigon.com
www.facebook.com/boathousevietnam



Cuba la Casa del Mojito

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

91 Pasteur, D1
3822 7099



Eleven

Eleven 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 38222605
Mail : info@elevencafe.com.vn
Facebook : ElevenCafeVN
Website : www.eleven.com.vn



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



Ngon Asia House

Contemporary three-storey bistro that welcomes you with style and leads you into a house of sumptuous colorful food cultures, rich in both in flavors and inspirations. More than 350 savory street dishes from Korea, Japan, China, Thailand and Vietnam come together in one designer space. The drinks menu includes a great selection of wine, cocktails and smoothies. If you can, grab a table by the tall glass windows overlooking the Nguyen Hue Pedestrian Walkway – a great spot for people watching.

Facebook: [ngonasia](https://www.facebook.com/ngonasia) / www.ngon-asia.com
2nd - 4th Floors, Saigon Garden
99 Nguyen Hue, D1
08 3821 3821



Rose Garden

With its main focus on Vietnamese cuisine, Rose Garden also has an extensive international menu that includes pastas, sandwiches and wraps. Located with the backpacker district, the restaurant is a great spot for people watching and soaking up the city's vibrant atmosphere. The freshly made juices come highly recommended.

232 Bui Vien, D1
(08) 6680 0847
Facebook: [RoseGardenSaigon](https://www.facebook.com/RoseGardenSaigon)



Saigon Kitchen Club

Saigon Kitchen Club specializes in fresh, healthy and perfectly-portioned meals delivered to your home or office. They offer a variety of packages: Full Day, Lunch, Family and Weight Loss. The ingredients used are 100% pure olive oil, brown sugar, brown rice and strictly no MSG; giving diners exquisite and healthy meals. Place order through the website www.saigonkitchenclub.com or call **0888.629.788**



twenty2one

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

Travel & Leisure

CON DAO





ARCTIC BLAST

A photographer's guide to Iceland

TEXT AND IMAGES BY **DANNY FERNANDEZ**

ICELAND IS EXPERIENCING a boom in tourism, and for good reasons. It surpasses expectations of those in search of nature, beauty and the unanticipated. I recently spent two weeks on an unforgettable road trip of the island.



Goðafoss

Although nowhere near being the largest, Goðafoss (“waterfall of the gods”) is easily the most beautiful waterfall in Iceland. The waterfall was named because of its important role in Icelandic history. In the year 1000, lawspeaker Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði was forced

to make a decision that would forever change the fate of Iceland: deciding the country's religion. After meditating for 24 hours, Þorgeir declared the country to be Christian. The story continues that after the decision was made, he threw his pagan carvings of Norse gods into the

waterfall, giving the waterfall its name.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS: *Goðafoss can be photographed from both sides, offering different perspectives of the waterfall. Use caution if you decide to climb any of the rocks because they are very slippery.*

Jökulsárlón

Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon is one of the most visited attractions in Iceland. As the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier recedes, large luminous blue icebergs drift through the lake and slowly towards the Atlantic Ocean, creating a stunning and surreal sight. Once freed from the glacier, the icebergs can spend up to five years bobbing, melting and refreezing in the lagoon, forming an ever-changing panorama. I recommend visiting this icy ‘beach’ on the other side of the road where you can witness hundreds of icebergs being washed up on black sand beaches.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS: *As with other landscapes, the best time to photograph is either at sunrise or sunset and you’ll be repaid with more interesting light and colors in your photos.*



Icelandic horses

“There is no more sagacious animal than the Icelandic horse. He is stopped by neither snow, nor storm, nor impassable roads, nor rocks, glaciers, or anything. He is courageous, sober, and surefooted. He never makes a false step, never shies. If there is a river or fjord to cross (and we shall meet with many) you will see him plunge in at

once, just as if he were amphibious, and gain the opposite bank.” — Jules Verne, *A Journey into the Center of the Earth*

Icelandic horses have been purebred in Iceland for more than 1,000 years and can be found all over the country.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS: *When photographing*

animals, a good zoom lens comes in extremely handy (I used a 70mm-200mm lens). As with all wildlife photography, be aware of how you approach the animal. Walking up to one too quickly is likely to scare it off. Luckily, Icelandic horses are generally tame, curious and welcoming to strangers, making them a pleasure to photograph.

The plane wreck at Sólheimasandur

On November 21, 1973, a US Navy Douglas Super DC-3 airplane was forced to land onto the black sand beach at Sólheimasandur, in the southern part of Iceland. Fortunately, everyone on board survived but the plane was beyond repair and abandoned, leaving behind its eerie weather-beaten shell, and a very unique photo opportunity.

The remains of the plane can be a little difficult to find (they lay around 9km from Skógafoss—a well-known waterfall), and access requires a bumpy drive (or walk) over a barren and vast mountain-lined landscape. Since word got out about the location of the wreck, tourists now flock to the ruins to take photos. Arrive either early in the morning or late in the day to get the best chance of having the twisted metal to yourself.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS: When photographing a well-documented landmark, why not try some long exposure photography to give your image a different look to others? Long exposure photography is when the shutter of the camera is open for a long time. This turns anything that moves into a blur (the clouds), yet keeping anything inactive sharp (the plane wreck) and can add a sense of movement to an image. To achieve long exposure photography during daylight hours, a strong ND (neutral density) filter is needed. An ND filter is like a set of sunglasses for your camera, and reduces the amount of light entering the lens, allowing you to make creative photos with slow shutter speeds. A tripod is essential for long exposure photography.



House on lake (Djúpivógur)

Djúpivógur is an often-overlooked small, charming fishing village (population 370) located on a peninsula in eastern Iceland; most people quickly pass through it to catch a boat to a tiny offshore island named Papey where seals and nesting seabirds live. As you enter Djúpivógur, all roads seem to lead to the harbor and a public art display made up of 34 large polished

granite eggs, each representing a different local bird. Djúpivógur is a great place to rest and stop for a meal during the beautiful journey along the eastern fjords. It's difficult to imagine that this peaceful village was once invaded by North African pirates in 1627. The pirates raided farms before heading back to sea with dozens of newly-acquired slaves.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS: *Cloudy skies reflected in cold water can give photos a monochromatic and moody feel. Look for splashes of color in a subject to make it stand out in the photograph. Also make use of the rule of thirds—in this photo I positioned the house on the lower right third of the image and waited until the flock of ducks occupied the space in the opposite third before taking the photo.*



The northern lights: Everywhere (if you're lucky)

If you are lucky enough to witness the northern lights (also called Aurora Borealis) they may prove to be the most breathtaking part of your Icelandic trip. This spectacular light show can frequently be seen in Iceland from September until March on clear and cold nights. The two contributing factors of seeing the northern lights are the amount of solar activity at the time, and the weather. A clear, cloudless night and a location away from light pollution are your best chances of seeing them. Check out www.en.vedur.is/weather/forecasts/aurora/ for info on solar activity and weather.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS: *The best way of capturing the northern lights is with long exposure photography. Because there isn't much light entering the camera (you will be shooting during the night), the shutter will need to keep open for a long time. Other things to consider are to use the widest possible aperture of your lens (lowest 'f' number, for example, f2.8, f1.8 etc.) and also use a high ISO (but be aware that the higher the ISO, the grainier the photo becomes). A tripod is essential when photographing the northern lights. Patience and warm clothes will also make it a more enjoyable experience. ■*



If You Go

- A camper van is a great way to see the island at your own pace. There are many rental companies catering for all needs. Book in advance to get a better deal. 4WD vehicles are needed to access some parts of the country.

- If you are doing a road trip, make sure you always have enough petrol because you can go for stretches without seeing a petrol station.

- The weather in Iceland is incredibly unpredictable. Make sure to check the weather at least once a day. Bring suitable clothing with plenty of layering because it can go from sunny to stormy and back again within a few hours, and being suitably prepared will enhance your experience of the trip.



BEAUTIFUL NATURE AND DARK HISTORY IN THE VIETNAMESE SEAS

Text by LORCAN LOVETT
Images by JAMES PHAM *and* LORCAN LOVETT

Paradise Regained

AFTER EIGHT HOURS OF CHUGGING for 100 nautical miles in a ferry off the southern coast of Vietnam, the lush, rugged archipelago of Con Dao took shape.

In the sitting rooms, passengers stirred from their ad-hoc life jacket beds, and a sit-down karaoke marathon came to a reluctant end, the microphone finally being dropped on an empty seat. The journey's only seasick sufferer, a middle-aged woman, lay crucified. Her husband cradled over her groaning frame, banishing the vomiting by yelling that land was near.

On the upper deck, the captain stood tall as his vessel weaved its way through colorful fishing boats. Below him, 28-year-old Anh, a marketer who I had just met, turned to me. "Many locals told me this island has more ghosts than people," he said. Haunting spirits seemed incongruous on possibly the most charming and relaxing destination in Vietnam, but Con Dao's past is as dark as its beauty is enticing.

The former penal colony was known as Southeast Asia's Devil's Island—only with a lower number of escapees. The French seized the 16 islands in 1861 and built prisons on the fringes of dense jungle; many still stand today. Captured Vietnamese revolutionaries were sent here and inevitability shared their knowledge with incarcerated comrades, building their vision for an independent Vietnam. Seeing that vision through, however, would often mean surviving the infamous cells with ceiling bars dubbed 'tiger cages.'

Historically salient to Vietnam, these prisons are now part of most tourists' itinerary when visiting Con Dao.

The destination is also home to a sprawling national park, marine life including the endangered dugong or 'sea cow,' empty beaches, and a languid vibe. Lonely Planet placed the islands in its top five Best for Asia in 2016. from Ho Chi Minh City hover around VND1.8 million while food, drink, and accommodation are more expensive on the islands. Yet budget travelers can catch the day time boat from Cat Lo Dock in Vung Tau at 8am for VND390,000 (seat) or, if the weather and schedule are good, an overnight boat at 5pm for VND200,000 (bunk).

My girlfriend and I planned to catch an overnight boat but we arrived at the dock's ticket office ((064) 383 8684) too late. Still, the day boat was comfortable and quicker. The sailors, who were proud polyglots when it came to saying "hello," excitedly welcomed us, the only foreigners on-board. They invited us into the mess where we drank rice wine amid the dried fish skin and cigarette butts. Embarking at Ben Dam Harbour on the biggest island of Con Son, we shared a small truck with five other travelers to the main town for VND40,000 each. A hotel next to Con Son Café on the seafront rented us a motorbike for VND120,000 per day. We rode for 20 minutes on the quiet coastal road and diverted down a sandy track 1km before the even quieter airport.



Bai Dram Trau, the curving stretch of sand at the end of the track, was our accommodation for the next three nights. It was late afternoon, the remaining few holidaymakers were traipsing back to their minibuses, and the family who ran the beach's snack hut were closing up. They offered us a tent for VND300,000 per night or a sleeping bag and wide sun loungers for VND50,000. Enjoying the ocean breeze, we chose the latter.

Having a motorbike was essential on Con Son. Other options—taxi and *xe om*—are expensive and scarce. The local market served delicious *bun thit nuong* (VND35,000) and *café sua da* (VND15,000) for breakfast. Life is horizontal on the islands and it shows in the faces of the 6,000 or so inhabitants, a majority of whom are military. This laidback attitude contrasted with a populace seemingly addicted to Red Bull. Phu Hai Prison, a short ride from the market, was open to visitors. Here



we got a heavily diluted sense of the system's brutality. Two parallel lines of two metre wide pits ran down the middle of the detention buildings, divided by overhead walkways. Decades ago, inmates crammed into the pits, tortured from above by the guards.

Gaunt mannequins replaced the previous captives in the jail, which is the largest of 11 on Con Son, and was opened a year after the French took the island. I once interviewed a resistance fighter who was taken here. Now in her late 60s, Be Tu described it as “the worst time of my life.” From her four years there, she recalled guards sprinkling her and four others in her cell with quicklime and water, burning their skin and eyes. She was whipped and beaten for refusing to salute the guards. She ate meagre rations of worm-infested rice and was given a small can of water every blazingly hot day. Countless friends died, she said, because of a lack of medicine.



STRANDED

Nature is a perfect antidote to the heinous side of humanity, so we drove to the national park, spotting the odd monkey along the way. A 40-minute hike across a stone path flanked by Bodhi trees took us to Ong Dung Beach, named after a curious myth. In the late 1700s, a wealthy but morally bankrupt man murdered his wife, a highly skilled martial artist, by throwing a coconut at her head. Penniless and guilty after an almighty binge, he fessed up and was exiled to this bay on the western part of the island for 10 years. There were worst places to be stranded, which we found out soon enough.

Our plan to take the overnight boat on the second evening failed due to bad weather between the mainland and us. We consoled ourselves with beer and *hai san*, a spicy seafood soup, and returned to our deserted beach. It was the same story the next day, no ferry. We messaged our fellow shipmates Anh and his friend Tam who were also stranded. Anh was well traveled, having recently returned from couchsurfing and hitchhiking across Africa. He crowned these islands as one of his favorite places. “It’s my second time here,” he said. “I really love it. I

love the nature; here they know how to protect it. Local people are so friendly, and there are not many people around. I can swim naked if I want. We can do anything. We are free.”

Anh had returned to help soldiers release turtle hatchlings into the sea on a neighboring island. We both agreed this was a sound military pursuit. Then all four of us hiked for seven kilometers in the national park, our trek christened by a large water monitor lizard that ran across the path. Four women and a boy made conversation as we passed Hang Duc Me, a grotto to the Virgin Mary. They said about 400 Christians lived on the islands, and that this shrine was made a century ago. Plaques inscribed with “*merci*” covered the inside of the cave, the oldest dating back to August 15, 1945—the day Japan surrendered in the Second World War and Ho Chi Minh declared an independent Democrat Republic of Vietnam.

Reaching a desolate coast of dead coral, we skirted across the rocks and found another way back to the road. At this point in the late afternoon, the seafront was stirring with vendors who sold corn, meat sticks, and sweet treats. I stocked up on deep fried pasties for VND5,000 each and





wafers wrapped in the algebra homework of the seller's daughter. Fishermen ended their day, anchoring at the town's main pier, Quay 914, named after the number of prisoners who died building it. Shadows passed over the colonial buildings, salt bitten and sun bleached. Roots pervaded the sidewalk and embraced every nook and cranny in the decrepit walls.

As the gulls gave up their pursuit of a school of fish, I swam out into the sea and looked back at the sleepy town. Suddenly, the last of the sky's blue was swallowed into a dark amber; a squall was rolling in from the depths, and this amber light, the same color as the sand at twilight, showered over the island until all that could be seen was a black, mountainous ridge. I swam back to the shore, the night beaming with stars and the golden headlamps of trawlers. Although it was tempting to wait another day for the boat, commitments back in Saigon pushed us to get the plane the next morning. Otherwise, delays to the ferry would simply mean more time in this relaxing haven. ■



>>The List

Travel



Ana Mandara Villas | Dalat

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



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www.boutiquehoianresort.com



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32 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Phan Thiet
+84 62 3741 234
www.chamvillas.com



Cham Garden Restaurant

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

32 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Phan Thiet
+84 62 3741 234
www.chamvillas.com
www.facebook.com/chamgardenmuine



InterContinental Nha Trang

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

32 - 34 Tran Phu, Nha Trang
(058) 388 7777
www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com



Mia

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Bai Dong, Cam Hai Dong, Cam Lam, Khanh Hoa
0583 989 666
www.mianhatrang.com
info@mianhatrang.com



Pullman Danang Beach Resort

Located on the stunning white sands of Danang beach, the stylish Pullman Danang Beach Resort is an oasis of activities and facilities for the modern traveler. With an idyllic setting on the silver shores of Central Vietnam, this luxury resort is perfect for a family holiday or romantic beach getaway.

Vo Nguyen Giap, Khue My, Ngu Hanh Son, Danang
0511 395 8888
www.pullman-danang.com



Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa

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

26 - 28 Tran Phu, Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa
058 2220 000
www.sheratonnhatrang.com



The Island Lodge

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

390 Ap Thoi Binh, Thoi Son, My Tho
073 651 9000
www.theislandlodge.com.vn

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www.avedaaherbal.com, avedaaherbal@gmail.com
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5412 4773



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9am - 11pm. Open 7 days p/week



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0838 247 433

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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

Temple Leaf Spa

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74 Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.templeleafspa.com

YCK Beauty Spa and Hair Studio

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

>> The List

Business

INSURANCE



Pacific Cross Vietnam (formerly Blue Cross Vietnam)
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4th Floor, Continental Tower, 81 - 83 - 85 Ham Nghi, D1 3821 9908



Also try ...

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21st Floor, 115 Nguyen Hue, D1

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

IF Consulting
IF Consulting has for 20 years provided advice to individuals and businesses in assessing health/accident risk and finding the best suitable solution. The company is independent and Vietnam-based.
90-92 Dinh Tien Hoang D1 www.insuranceinvietnam.com

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

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

Prudential Vietnam
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Unit 25F, Saigon Trade Centre 37 Ton Duc Thang, D1

RELOCATION



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K9
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192 Hoang Dieu, D4 www.phongkhamthuyk9.com 091 382 0812

AEC Pet
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New Pet Hospital & Spa
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53 Dang Dung, D1 www.newpethospital.com.vn 6269 3939

Saigon Pet Clinic
Founded in 2008, Saigon Pet Clinic's goal is to open the best animal welfare veterinary clinic in Vietnam. They combine skill and technology to ensure your pet gets the best possible care.
33, 41 street, Thao Dien, D2 www.saigonpethospital.com 3519 4182

Sasaki Animal Hospital
The hospital is managed by a team of skilled doctors from Japan and Vietnam. Services include grooming and general care.
38-40-42 Nguyen Thi Thap, Him Lam, D7 www.sasakihospital.com 2253 1179



Kids & Education



A photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a white button-down shirt over a white tank top, sitting in a bed and breastfeeding her newborn baby. The woman is looking down at the baby with a gentle smile. The baby is lying on its stomach, wrapped in a white cloth with a floral pattern. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

GOT MILK?

Breastfeeding in Vietnam was not what she expected

TEXT BY ANGELA NGUYEN



“THIS BABY FEEDS from his mother’s milk,” I answered in my newly-acquired language. Stepping out with a newborn in Vietnam, I had expected the typical questions to be “Boy or girl?” or “How old?” But what I heard was very different: “No Breastfeeding!”

Local friends, waitresses, fellow passengers on the city bus, taxi drivers, the neighbor’s housekeeper—everyone in this foreign land wanted to know if my baby was breastfed. I answered with quiet confidence, “My baby drinks milk from his mother.”

Living in a developing country, I assumed breastfeeding in Asia happened for all babies. After all, breastfeeding is very economical and many countries in Asia offer some of the most generous maternity leave laws in the world. However, it took some time to understand the complexity of their perspectives on breastfeeding in Asia. Not everyone thinks breastfeeding is all that great, so it took fortitude and commitment to fight through the shame and to continue nursing my child during my stay in Vietnam.

From young mothers I often heard, “I couldn’t feed my baby. I didn’t have milk.” I wanted to take these moms in my arms and say, “I’m so sorry. They lied to you. You have milk for your baby if you’d only use it!” These moms were shortchanged the opportunity to breastfeed because of ignorance. Somewhere deep in the psyche of their mothers and the neonatal nurses in the hospital was the belief that formula was a better source of nutrition than breast milk. Despite the US Department of Health and Human Services pronouncements on the importance of breastfeeding, many Americans also don’t believe breastfeeding is all that important.

Ignorance about a scientific problem called nipple confusion is rampant. This problem happens when newborns and mothers find bottles easier during the first days following birth. But the long-term consequences are significant as children and mothers never learn to properly breastfeed.

It is difficult when doctors and nurses tell parents to only give babies formula because their patients believe them. Mothers are often told something similar to “your baby was hungry, and you don’t have milk.” Aware of this practice, I

taped self-published notices in the local language to my son’s crib that read: “This baby only breastfeeds.”

In parts of Asia many middle-aged women have a perception that breastfeeding is dirty and something animals do. Only the unclean, uncivilized, uneducated would breastfeed. So, I quietly took my place, stereotyped as the unclean, uncivilized, and uneducated by breastfeeding in Asia—but I held firm to my belief that breastfeeding was right for my child.

Southeast Asian grandmothers, with pride sparkling in their eyes, would say to me, “We have money to buy milk powder (formula) for our grandchild.” These grandmas had raised their children during a famine. Some days, they had only the runoff water from cooking rice to give their babies. With increased wealth and food, these grandmas scraped together what money they had to get only the best for their grandchildren. The look on strangers’ faces communicated disapproval for my not buying the best for my baby.

Other developing countries experience the same perils when parents arrive in urban areas where “science” influences their decisions to breastfeed. The best way to feed, these mothers will often conclude, is the formula powder that came in shiny cans from industrialized nations.

“Many of the women from the countryside usually do breastfeed, even up to one year, even if the lactating mother is malnourished. But when these women come to Saigon, they see the women here bottle-feeding with formula, and believe it is better. Then they start changing their ways,” says my local friend.

From an impoverished, underprivileged, rural woman on the city bus, I heard condemnation. One moment stands out in my memory about breastfeeding in Vietnam, when I met a fellow traveler who was going to peddle a few handmade trinkets in the city. She asked, “Does your baby breastfeed?” although by this time, my one-year-old son had weaned. I was quietly relieved to be able finally to give the acceptable answer. “My son drinks powdered milk.” My relief was vain and fleeting when she looked at me with pride in her accomplishments and in pity for my failure. “My baby is two years old, and she will still drink milk from her mother.” ■

CHASING CHARMANDERS



A phenomenon that's stirring up fun, fans and a bit of trouble as well

TEXT BY TAYNE EPHRAIM

SINCE LAUNCHING IN AUGUST Pokémon Go has taken the country by storm, and globally it is already being named as the most viral mobile application of all time. Even before the game was officially released in Vietnam, scores were downloading it onto their phones, eclipsing other heavy-hitters like Flappy Bird and Candy Crush in no time at all.

For the uninitiated, the game has players scouring the city in search of virtual monsters using a digital map which overlays the real world. Players then travel to 'Pokéstops,' often public locations like parks, museums, train stations, and historical monuments, to collect Pokémon eggs and buy Pokéballs and potions. Many Pokéstops are located centrally in District 1, which some have sighted as a potential boost to tourism sites, with the Saigon Post Office alone home to two Pokéstops. Bitexco Tower and the Ho Chi Minh Museum also double as game locations.

Tao Dan Park in District 1 is reputed to be the most popular place for players of the game to meet. Players congregate and fight their Pokémon in 'gyms,' which are often placed over important landmarks, such as the Notre Dam Cathedral. Gyms are controlled by colored teams who battle to retain supremacy over these sites. Along Ton Duc Thang Street it's common to see scores of young millennials with their heads in their phones, often still straddling their bikes, waging silent contests in the floating Pokémon realm, superimposed over the real one in its signature blue light emanating from their phones.

I encounter some players one afternoon by the river and ask why the game has become so fixating. "Well, I couldn't catch a girlfriend, so catching Pokémon seemed the next best thing," one young man laughs, mid-way through battling a

Charmander. "It's like re-living my high school days," says another. "Only now I'm playing it all over the city and not just under the table at school."

Vietnamese enthusiasts of the game have taken it one step further by attempting to cheat the system. They create fake public spaces in the Google Maps marker tool outside their houses, schools and workplaces. Local shop owners have also caught onto the craze, doing likewise in an effort to attract more customers. The idea being that the game will be duped into marking these spaces as Pokéstops so they don't have to go out in search of the real thing. Google Maps in Vietnam has suspiciously begun to change since the game's inception with many of these fake public spaces cropping up about the city in a phenomenon that is said to be uniquely Vietnamese, and a unique headache for Google, with requests for these new locations sent in "every two or three seconds," according to the Google Maps team.

Players are also encouraged to rack up 'miles' to hatch their Pokémon eggs by driving around the city, often doing so phone in hand with the app draining battery power. The city's taxi drivers have also been quick to jump on the craze and the opportunities it presents to make a quick buck by charging up to VND250,000 an hour to drive players about the city in pursuit of the elusive creatures, offering "air condition, music and free water" in an effort to entice customers in their hunt for more Pokémon. For many motorbike drivers, however, the game all too often serves as a tempting distraction in an already distracted city. Increase in both motorbike accidents and phone snatchings have already been attributed to the game.

The viral craze has even reached the outer limits of the city

where players can be encountered at all hours scouring the streets on their motorbikes, phones in hand, in search of the elusive creatures.

STOP POKING AROUND

But while providing a boon to idle hands and minds, Pokémon Go has become a thorn in the side of military and government departments around the world. In France, the army has effectively added the game to its list of potential threats in the worry that dubious players may use the game as a front to infiltrate sensitive sites. In Indonesia, a Frenchman was arrested after inadvertently stumbling into a military base in search of Pokémon while playing the game, and subsequently let go after a good old-fashioned scolding. Meanwhile, in an ironic turn, the Indonesian cabinet secretary boasted to reporters that he had captured a number of Pokémon at the presidential palace in Jakarta.

The game has also been attributed to a spate of unlikely deaths, with insouciant players reportedly falling off cliffs and being struck down by cars, or negligent truck drivers engrossed in the game running down pedestrians. In Guatemalan, a young man was even lured into calculated ambush based on in-game locations and shot dead.

But it gets more bizarre. The game has been blamed for everything from robberies and road deaths to stampedes to, according to the Chinese military, a bizarre conspiracy plot between Japan and the US to undermine China's military satellite secrets. Players in Bosnia have been warned to watch out for landmines while playing near risky areas, and an Egyptian cleric has gone so far as to place a fatwa on the game itself.

In Vietnam, the game has already prompted an official ban in government offices and around military and other

sensitive sites. The government has also requested that the game developers remove Pokéstops from pagodas and memorials. Signs have even been employed across the city on busy streets such as 3/2 warning players against playing the game while driving, the first time such measures have been taken against a game before, in an effort to stem traffic accidents by neglectful drivers with their heads stuck in their phones, transfixed on the hunt for more Pokémon.

In Cambodia meanwhile the game has been banned from the notorious S-21 Cambodian Genocide Museum, Tuol Sleng, after tourists and locals alike stumbled onto its grounds in search of Pokémon, some even playing the game while being toured about the site and in the midst of all its horrors.

Thailand also wants to ban the game from cultural landmarks such as the Royal Palace, Buddhist temples and hospitals. Other Thai officials, meanwhile, have called for the incorporation of more gyms and Pokéstops in popular sites in an effort to boost tourism, pinning their hopes on the game and imploring the ministry to go so far as to create infographic maps with tips and locations of where best to find the virtual creatures, an attitude mirrored by Singapore retailers who have invested in Pokémon "lures" in an effort to attract more traffic to their stores.

Vietnam has one of the fastest growing smartphone markets in Southeast Asia, if not the world, with a burgeoning demographic of game-addicted millennials eager for their next fix, with sensations like Flappy Bird giving way to Pokémon Go. So it seems that despite the controversy, the game appears here to stay, at least for the time being, as its Pokémon-hunting enthusiasts, undeterred, continue their strive to "catch 'em all." ■



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www.renaissance.edu.vn

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www.ssis.edu.vn

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www.montessori.edu.vn

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www.aivietnam.com

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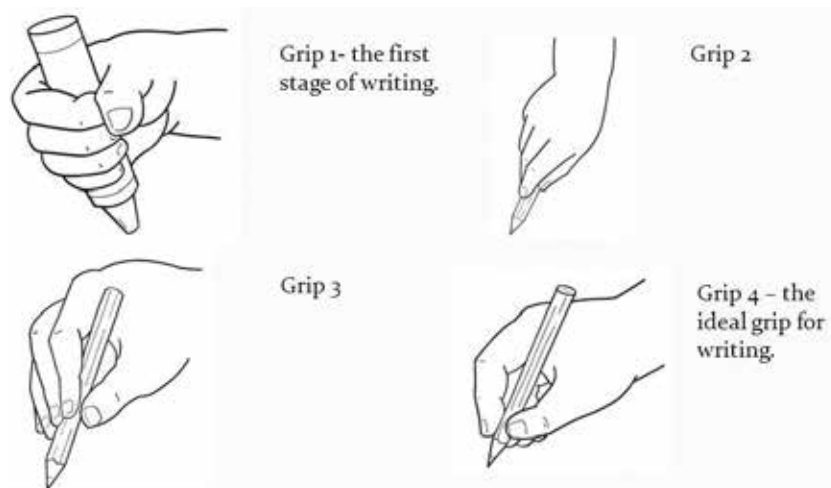


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GETTING A GRIP

Understanding the stages of early writing



THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF THINGS that you can do to prepare children to become successful writers. The stages of physical writing development in the Early Years can be tricky and different children show different levels of dexterity at different times. It is useful to know the various phases of 'grip' children move through as they progress to becoming confident writers.

1/ FISTED GRIP

When your toddler first grabs a thick crayon and puts it to paper (hopefully not to your walls!), this is the grasp you could be seeing. It is a "fisted grasp," and your toddler will be using movement from the shoulder to get the crayon to move across the paper. All fingers grip around the crayon like a fist.

2/ PALMAR GRIP

As your toddler gains more control over arm and hand muscles, you will see this "palmar grasp" being used. Here, the pencil lies across the palm of the hand and your child's elbow is held out to the side a bit. The shoulder muscles are steadier, and your child is using the arm muscles to move the crayon around, as well as the shoulder muscles.

3/ PINCHER GRIP

This grip is a perfectly mature grip for a four-year-old. You will notice five fingers holding the pencil. With this

grip, the wrist is usually held off the table and wrist movements are used for coloring. The crayon is also often held very tightly initially, but as the hand muscles develop, you should see a few finger movements emerging.

4/ TRIPOD GRIP

By age five or six, or even a bit later with some children, they should be comfortable using a mature three-finger pencil grip. At first, the fingers will be held stiffly and your child may still use wrist movements to draw and color, but as the finger muscles become more skilled, your child will be able to use finger movements to draw and to form letters.

It is crucial not to force your toddler to hold the pencil the way a school child does, with three fingers on the pencil—you may do more harm than good. It is very hard to "unlearn" a poor pencil grip later in life. In this instance, practice definitely makes imperfect. Once a child has learned to form letters incorrectly, re-teaching them is a very difficult task. How we try and help children to improve their letter formation is crucial and if we go about it the wrong way it can put them off writing altogether.

Each stage of holding a pencil or crayon is dependent on how "steady" the shoulder and arm muscles are. As your child develops physically, and takes part in lots of fun gross motor



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activities such as crawling, climbing and pushing, the shoulder and arm muscles will get stronger and steadier, and this should help your child's pencil grasp to mature as well.

The biggest inhibitor to attainment in any area of education is self-esteem. With high self-esteem anything is possible, with low-self esteem nothing is worth trying. Just putting pencil to paper can be challenging enough for some children, but to then tell them that the way they are doing it is wrong can be the final nail in the writing coffin.

When a child is forced to use a "proper" pencil grip before the shoulder and arm muscles are ready to support it, you may find fine motor problems emerging, such as holding the pencil in strange ways, messy work and even avoidance of drawing and coloring tasks.

SWITCHING GRIPS

Don't be surprised if you see your young child switching between pencil grips. As the shoulder and arm muscles become stronger and steadier, your child should switch less and less. We can liken this to a baby learning to walk—when his legs are tired of walking, he goes back to crawling, but as his endurance and skill improves, he will walk more and more.

So don't discourage your child from going back to an earlier grip; instead, promote correct pencil grip development by doing some gross motor activities to strengthen the shoulder and core muscles and use some fine motor activities to improve hand and finger strength and dexterity.

Above all, mark making in the Early Years should be fun! Allow your child to experiment with different tools such as paint, crayons, chalks, pencils or even play dough. And it doesn't have to end with stationary. Try spraying shaving foam into a tray and make marks with your fingers, draw in the sand with a stick or hide items in jelly and squeeze them out with your fingers! ■



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