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VIETNAM

3-2017

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ẤN PHẨM CHUYÊN ĐỀ QUẢNG CÁO - MIỄN PHÍ

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OI VIET NAM

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Biên tập: Tạ Quang Huy

Thực hiện liên kết xuất bản:

Metro Advertising Co., Ltd
48 Hoàng Diệu, Phường 12, Quận 4

In lần thứ bốn mươi lăm, số lượng 6000 cuốn,
khổ 21cm x 29,7cm
Đăng ký KHXB: 4048-2016/CXBIPH/19-158/TN
QĐXB số: 1138/QĐ-TN
ISBN số: 978-604-64-6016-9

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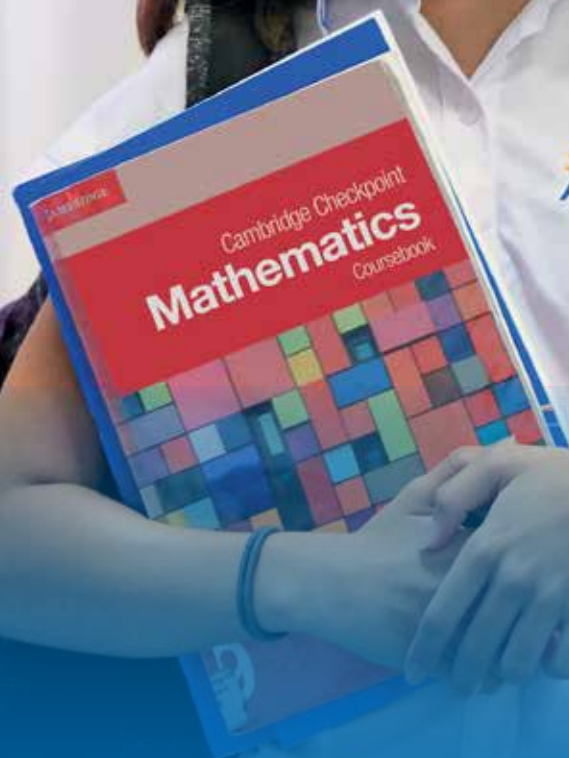
Before investing in binary options, read this

P66 RECIPE OF THE MONTH

*Make your own sizzling **banh xeo** deliciousness*

PANAM - THE BACKROOM / IMAGE BY NGOCTRAN

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Saturday - 11 March 2017

9am - 11am

Thu Thiem, Thao Dien and Xi Campuses

More information and to register:  aisvietnam.com/openday



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SATURDAY BRUNCH

Chit Chat at the Café Restaurant

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Datebook

What's on this month...

MARCH 8-13

What: The 6th Buon Ma Thuot Coffee Festival and the Central Highlands Gong Culture Festival

Where: Buon Ma Thuot, Dak Lak Province

About: A number of activities are scheduled, including a coffee expo, the fourth investment promotion conference for the Central Highlands region, a workshop on coffee, a street festival and elephant racing.

The gong culture festival will feature gong performances, reproduced traditional rituals of ethnic minority groups, a wood statue carving contest, an exhibition and award ceremony for the artistic photo contest entitled "Buon Ma Thuot coffee and Central Highlands gong culture space", a thematic exhibition on the history of the Central Highlands coffee and the Central Highland food street.

Contact: Visit www.festivalcafe.vn for more info

MARCH 10

What: Marc Romboy

Where: Apocalypse Now (2B Thi Sach, D1); free until 11pm, VND100,000 after

About: The German-born DJ, producer and label boss has become synonymous with a soulful, vocal-infused house and techno sound that has taken him all over the world. He is also the sole mastermind behind the influential Systematic Recordings label and has been since 2004. 2013 saw him release the captivating *Taiyo* (an album made in collaboration with Japan's Ken Ishii that married Marc's hardware techniques with Ken's love of digital synths to stunning effect) while a year later came *Shades*, a personal compilation of new tracks, career highlights and standout remixes. Topping off the latest chapter in this enduring pioneer's musical adventure was the *10 Years of Systematic* compilation, which includes Audiojack, Jimpster and Dusty Kid. The compilation made it in the Beatport Top 5 Albums and remained in the Top 20 weeks after release. should.

Contact: Visit heartbeatsaigon.com for more info



MARCH 18

What: Le Dîner en Blanc

Where: Undisclosed public space

About: This annual secret affair promises another unforgettable evening of elegance, beauty and magic, as it takes over an undisclosed public space whose location is only revealed minutes prior to the commencement of the event. To maintain the uniqueness of Dîner en Blanc as well as staying true to tradition, guests must observe certain requirements: Registration is mandatory; Once confirmed, each guest's participation becomes mandatory, regardless of weather conditions; Dress code: elegant and white only; Table setting: all white.

Launched in Paris in 1988 by François Pasquier and a handful of friends, Le Dîner en Blanc has become a worldwide epicurean phenomenon. Dîner en Blanc - Paris now attracts over 10,000 people each year. What was a "friends and word-of-mouth only" event has grown into an international sensation celebrated on five continents.

Contact: For full details on the event's rules and regulations, visit international.dinerenblanc.info/about





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MARCH 22-27

What: Art for You

Where: Mai's Gallery (3A Station, 3A Ton Duc Thang, D1); 9:30am-8pm

About: The premise is simple and essentially follows the trend of affordable art fairs that have gained global appeal over recent years. It's an art exhibition that is geared towards selling art that is more affordable, removing the sometimes elitist nature of more traditional art gallery sales and create an event that is enjoyable, exciting and welcoming for those looking to pick up a bargain or just get some inspiration and discover new artists and their work.

With five previous events under their belt in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Manzi Art Space and Work Room Four combined their respective artists' portfolios to offer work created by over 100 artists sharing in excess of 300 works of art. The work is selected and curated to fit certain criteria. These are not the oversized show-stopper canvases or the prohibitively expensive sculptures of the solo show domain. Artists are specifically requested to peruse their repertoire and select older unsold works, preparatory sketches and smaller prints or photography (and create new work) that they feel are good value. Prices start at USD25 and are capped at USD900.

Contact: Email artforyouvietnam@gmail.com for more info

APRIL 1

What: Roller Dash

Where: Saigon Star International School (Residential Area No.5, Thanh My Loi, D2)

About: Join Saigon Star International School for a fun, family day out that'll feature rollerskates, bicycles, tricycles, scooters, skateboards, strollers, hoverboards—any wheels will do! Races start from 4:30pm with long, medium and short courses for different age groups. Fun, fancy dress encouraged. Children's entertainment will include: Wacky Races, Vina Racing, Bouncy Castles, Face-Painting, Hoverboards and the infamous Dunk Tank! Food, refreshments and other stalls will be available, including Chuck's Burgers and craft beer from Phat Rooster, Saigon Cycles, Viet Bamboo Bike and FFSC Handicrafts. Cool prizes for race winners, best costume and lucky draw, and live music from The Lost Art.

All proceeds go to Friends for Street Children (FFSC)

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



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All the best in the year of the Monkey!

For more information please visit
www.pacificcross.com.vn

APRIL 22

What: Clean Up Vietnam

Where: Vietnam

About: Clean Up Vietnam is an organization that wants to engage and inspire youth, families, businesses and communities to take action in changing the way we dispose of our waste and the way we look at our local community spaces. It also provides education and cultural change through education and the recognition of the importance of our local environment. In 2016, Clean Up Day attracted over 5,000 people in 37 different locations around Vietnam. This year they expect this to double.

The Clean Up Vietnam Day concept is based on a similar event that takes place in Australia, which has proven a great success (over half a million participants annually). They are establishing a local charity and, with sponsorship and promotion, can turn it into a significant annual event and achieve the type of impact, education and cultural shift that has occurred in Australia.

Contact: Visit www.cleanupvietnam.org for more info



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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

ISHCMC Unveils Renovated Collaboration Centers

International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC, www.ishcmc.com) has unveiled extensive plans and insights for the new ISHCMC School Campuses. As the secondary students transition to the new Secondary Campus, there are also plans in place to refurbish the existing campus to extend its offering for the primary students.

The new 2016/17 academic year welcomed an insight into what the ISHCMC community can expect from these developments. In line with ISHCMC's vision to redefine the educational experience, these classrooms look forward in developing skills that are relevant and essential for the 21st century work place. The interlinked classrooms, with moveable glass walls allow a flow of learning between spaces, visible sharing of thinking, connectivity and collaboration both in and outside the classroom. The spaces empower students to take responsibility for their own learning by allowing them to work independently from their teachers in spaces that they can adapt to their learning styles.

These purpose-built modern and innovative learning environments, paired with trained IB educators specialized in inquiry teaching, ensure that students are equipped for their future at university, workplace and life.



East West Brewing Co is Now Open for Lunch

East West Brewing Co. (181-185 Ly Tu Trong, D1) is now serving lunch at 11am every day and their new opening hours are from 11am-11pm daily. Now you can enjoy their Classic Beef Burger Sliders on house made burger bun, Fresh Baked Soft Pretzels, and East West favorites like BBQ Pork Belly Bites and their Chicken Wings for lunch seven days a week. East West Brewing Co. offers artfully crafted quality beer along with a premier menu of Asian and Western-style comfort food.



JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay Heralds New Luxury Experiences in Vietnam

JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay (www.marriott.com/pgc/vn) opened its door to the public in January 2017. The resort offers a selection of 244 lavish rooms, suites, apartments and villas. At a 54 square-meter minimum, the resort's guestrooms provide generous space for indulgence.

Experience culinary wonders at the resort's five restaurants and contemporary bars. Tempus Fugit (meaning "Time Flies" in English) offers three distinctive dining experiences where chefs showcase their culinary craftsmanship through authentic Vietnamese cuisine, a contemporary Japanese kitchen and classic French delights. French & Co is where the talented Pastry Chef resides. Red Rum, the beach side seafood grill, will fire up some fresh local produce in a casual setting. The crown jewel is Pink Pearl, serving Cantonese cuisine in a splendid beachfront mansion. Last but not least is Department of Chemistry Bar, where their "chemists" are mixing up some delicious elixirs. Meetings are redefined in this imaginative 1,100sqm meeting space, 715sqm Grand ballroom and spacious breakout rooms. Opening rate starts from VND9 million including breakfast for two persons and VND1.1 million daily resort credit.

Saturday Brunch at Hotel Equatorial HCMC

Indulge in extravagance with the freshest seafood, roasted meats, international dishes, desserts as well as an all-day breakfast. Children will love the hotel's kids' favorites buffet which includes a chocolate buffet and fountain, ice cream trolley and floats, waffles and pancakes—a family brunch your kids will love.

Available every Saturday from 11:30am–2:30pm, and priced at VND790,000 ++ per adult, VND395,000 ++ per child (12 years and under), VND990,000++ includes house wine and beer, VND1,390,000++ includes champagne, craft cocktails, wine and beer. Complimentary for children under six years old. Call (08) 3839 7777 ext. 8000 or visit hochiminhcity.equatorial.com/dining-entertainment to reserve.



Time For Wellbeing

Indulge your senses with Pullman Danang Beach Resort's Time for Wellbeing package, which is designed to relax your body and replenish your mind. Enjoy daily accommodation with breakfast buffet, plus a 30 percent discount on any spa treatment (one hour or more) per room per stay, a healthy snack and complimentary access to the hotel's health and wellness facilities. The package is priced at USD255 net per room per night. Email info@pullman-danang.com for more details.





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The country in numbers



370,000

CASES OF TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS were reported in January, according to online newspaper Vietnamplus. Fines relating to the violations amounted to a total of VND227.2

billion while 2,300 cars, more than 47,000 motorbikes and hundreds of other vehicles were seized. The police also confiscated 32,500 driver licenses. Violations included speeding, driving on the wrong lane, illegal parking, driving under the influence of alcohol, and carrying overloaded and oversized goods. Traffic officers also discovered 290 cases that involved the transportation of illegally-imported goods, more than three tons of foodstuff without original and safety certificates and nearly 1,200 cigarette packs.

100-year-old

TANGERINE TREE

OWNER turns down a USD7,000 bid from an interested buyer believing he can fetch a higher price.

Owner Tuan said he purchased

the mushroom-shaped tree from an ethnic Thai person in Quy Hop District. "I had to hire local men to take the tree from the remote village to the highway using a carrying pole. It took them two days," he said. The tree then traveled another 100km from Quy Hop to Vinh by truck. The tangerine tree measures 25cm in diameter and stands nearly four meters high. Hundreds of ready-to-eat fruits hang from the tree's 3.5-meter-long branches. Bonsai experts say there are very few natural tangerine trees with such a large diameter.



3

HANOI CAB DRIVERS were fined VND2 million each for urinating in public. Undercover officers filmed them in the act on the sidewalk of Tran Thu Do Street in Hoang Mai District. Police in the Vietnamese capital have carried out regular inspections to deal with those who litter and urinate in public areas as part of the municipal Party Committee's effort to polish the city's public image this year. Repeat offenders will face a sterner fine and be forced to do community work to preserve public hygiene.

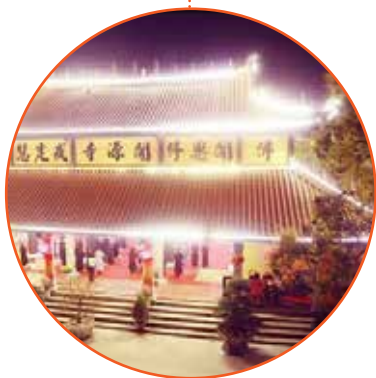
~2,200

PEOPLE ACROSS VIETNAM

were hospitalized following physical confrontations during the first three days of Tet. The number of victims who died in escalating conflicts and scuffles during that period alone was recorded at 14, compared to 13 during last year's eight-

day Tet holiday. The number of people admitted to hospitals for food and alcohol poisoning was recorded at nearly 1,200, with one third being alcohol poisoning cases, while 130 people fell victim to firecrackers and explosives. Staff at hospitals have also had their hands full tending to over 5,000 road accident victims during the holiday.





10,000

BUDDHISTS SET A VIETNAMESE record by laughing together at the opening ceremony of the An Lac Spring Festival at Khai Nguyen Pagoda in Hanoi last month. On stage,

Vietnam Laughter Yoga chairman Le Anh Son shared funny folktales to encourage people to laugh and guided them on how to breathe and burst into cheerful laughter. Laughter yoga is part of a three-day festival organized jointly by Happy Entrepreneur Community, the Hanoi Martial Arts Association and Vietnam Laughter Yoga.



29-year-old

DUONG ANH VU from the central province of Binh

Thuan currently holds four memory world records. He can memorize over 300,000 statistical tables of chemicals, political, historical, economics and geography facts (the content of which can be noted down on 500,000 A4-sized papers), 20,000 digits of pi, all large world maps in English (which he can redraw from memory), 10,000 historical, scientific and arts events (including time and content, of both Vietnamese and the world), information of over 1,000 classic Vietnamese and international literary works and their author, and more. These records have been recognized by the Research Foundation Assist World Records, the High Range Book of World Records and the Incredible Book of Records.

AN INCREDIBLE VIETNAMESE FOOD JOURNEY



For the month of March and April, the Viet Kitchen will take you on an incredible Vietnamese Food Journey with sensational dishes from all corners of Viet Nam. Partnering with **Celebrity Chef Phan Ton Vinh Hai**, Judge of Master Chef and **Iron Chef Vietnam Dinh Cong Dan**, we will take you on an culinary journey from the fragrant herbs of the mountainous North through the incredible beaches, Royal cuisine and spice of Central Vietnam to the sweet lavors and succulent seafood of the South.



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Sexual Healing

An important message from Dr. Gradstein about sexually transmitted infections

THERE'S NO POINT IN SCARING people about Sexually Transmitted Infections, or STIs. Quite honestly, sometimes I tell people who come to my clinic for an HIV test that they don't need one, because after listening to their story, I find there is no real exposure. Some people get too anxious about certain topics such as HIV, and they just want to be certain that they don't have it. As a rule, when somebody really wants to undergo an HIV test, I won't oppose it—it's good to test for HIV whenever people think they need it—but sometimes I think they should be more aware of other diseases.

I see a lot of patients who have engaged in risky behavior here under the influence of alcohol or drugs—some of them are on holiday, it's an exotic country, and suddenly all their defenses and inhibitions disappear, and they only realize the day after that they've been exposed. It's also the case that local people are very fatalistic, so they don't always get tested even when they're at risk, perhaps for fear of the social consequences. The problem is that under these conditions, STIs can spread like wildfire—like Australia in the summer. This is what I see in my clinic.

First of all, I think—depending on the lifestyle—people should undergo routine STI testing. The frequency depends on the risk. The key thing is that if their lifestyle puts them at a high risk of exposure to diseases, they should do frequent screenings. There's no benchmark on exactly how frequently, but I would recommend that people who lead a high-risk lifestyle in terms of exposure to STIs should get tested at least every six months.

I generally see two categories of patients consulting at my clinic. There are people who come in after a specific exposure, or if they think that they may have been exposed, and then they come to check if they have contracted anything. In these cases, the issue is how soon after exposure can you really make a diagnosis. These are asymptomatic people, but they know that they have been exposed (because of a condom breakage, for example) and they want to have a test, either because they're scared they contracted something, or they're worried about bringing home a “souvenir” from overseas. When it comes to certain

diseases we can offer a preventive treatment, if it's early enough. HIV, for example, can be effectively prevented if you start the treatment within 72 hours after the exposure. Later than 72 hours, and it becomes less effective. But if it's within 72 hours it's almost 100 percent. It's a bit heavy, because you have to take medication for a month, and there are side effects and costs—but it is effective.

The other category is people who suddenly realize that they have a symptom consistent with an STI. Mainly we're talking about bacterial infections: All STIs can be asymptomatic, but bacterial infections more frequently give rise to symptoms that people can understand, like discomfort, discharge and skin lesions. In some cases, these people were not even aware that they had

been exposed, and they didn't realize, for example, that oral sex can expose you to bacterial infection, because they'd always heard that when you have oral sex, you cannot get HIV. It's true, HIV is extremely unlikely after oral contact, having a very poor infectivity compared to bacteria. Other diseases can still be contracted in this way.

People with symptoms can show up in the clinic ten days later, one month later. It depends on what they actually have. If they have gonorrhea, they may come three days later. Every disease has a different incubation period. There are also some people who have the symptoms just because they used some new lube or new condom, and they have a local reaction to it which is almost immediate—but they don't know what it is, and so



Dr. Gradstein

Text by **Dr. Serge Gradstein** (Infectious Diseases
and Sexual Health, Family Medical Practice)
Image by **Ngoc Tran**

they get anxious. It's important to try to get the whole story, even though some people don't necessarily tell their doctor all the facts out of embarrassment. But when you do know the facts, it's easier to inform them of what is suspected, and what they should do about it. Many people come with what is actually fungal thrush in the groin, convinced that they have AIDS. When you are not anxious and when you have the knowledge, you can think better!

HIV is really a different kind of problem. While the infectivity is low, the average time between exposure and developing identifiable symptoms is very long-on average, around seven years. This is compared to acute infections or infections with a high probability of symptoms that would usually prevent



you from sexual contact. With HIV, you have a very long time during which you may not know you have it.

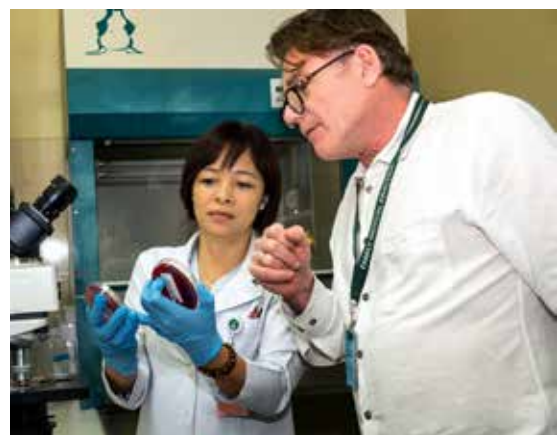
With bacterial infections, generally I will prescribe an antibiotic. It's a single dose, it's easy, it's not cumbersome. Some people are scared to take medication for several days, not wanting their family to discover a stockpile of antibiotics, or visiting the bathroom in a suspicious way. A single dose given at the clinic on the first consultation, and that's it, that's the treatment, and there is no risk of disclosure.

It Can Happen to Anyone

I'm often asked how family members can be protected. After taking preventive treatment and the antibiotics, they ask, when will they be safe? This I cannot guarantee 100 percent, never. It's quite a personal decision, but generally with regards to HIV, if you've taken the preventive treatment, which takes one month, and then tested yourself after one more month and that test comes back negative, then your chance of passing on an HIV infection is equivalent to winning the lottery. Some people, however, still cannot deal with that level of risk.

I am not a provider of excuses, but in general, you can never prove anything based on an STI-you cannot draw any conclusions or take any steps based on STIs to solve emotional problems. You should never mix the two. If you have problems and you're a couple, you should solve those problems. The STI sometimes comes as a revelator, revealing the problem. It should not in itself be the reason for breaking up a couple.

Children, by and large, are safe even if a parent has an STI. STIs by definition are transmitted by sexual contact. They can only be transmitted to children from mother to the fetus or to the neonate during birth. The placenta is quite a good filter; very few infections are transmitted across it. However, a baby can be exposed



to an STI during labor, during birth. Other than that, if a child is ever diagnosed with an STI, you should always suspect abuse. In normal circumstances, parents with an STI can rest assured that their infection cannot be passed on to their children.

There isn't any clear profile of an STI carrier, it can happen to anyone. For example, people in high society tend to be more aware of the risks than people in more straitened circumstances, but they also have more money to engage in risky behavior, so sometimes they are at a lower risk in one parameter and a higher risk in another. I think the best advice is that nobody is immune or safe if they are not actively protecting themselves. STI carriers may look like criminals, or they may look like angels. You cannot say.

Self-medication in Vietnam is not an advisable option because people may get one antibiotic for the wrong reason and for the wrong amount of time, and the result can be that your infection will become resistant to conventional treatment.

If you have any cause to believe you may have been exposed to an STI, my best advice is to get tested, even if you have not had any symptoms. Regular testing can prevent transmission and provide reassurance. ■



Behind the Music

The ups & downs and personal & professional life of local celebrity Kyo York

Text by Michael Arnold

Image by Ngoc Tran

IT'S PRETTY EASY to prise open a locked scooter compartment if you know what you're doing—just force the seat up at the right angle, and there's a distinct *clack*; everything inside is yours, and you're gone well before the bike's owner returns. On this particular occasion, the target is easily spotted—one of *Dai Hoc Bach Khoa's* white American teachers, swarthy and unkempt, a touch overweight, nobody to think twice about. Perhaps just another rich foreigner careless with his money.

Some hours later, Kyle Cochran emerges from the classroom block, relieved to be finishing what is supposed to be one of his last-ever English teaching sessions. Vietnam has been a frustrating gig: he's only recently completed a lonely year's posting in a very, very small Mekong town as a volunteer for Princeton University. Once that assignment was finally over, Kyle pocketed his last 500,000 dong and took the bus up to Ho Chi Minh City with just one wish—to make a thousand bucks, buy a plane ticket home, and get the hell out of here. When he'd finally scraped those earnings together, he got the cash ready, stored it securely under his bike seat, and headed out to class.

Standing in the parking lot, the loss of that money is beyond painful, and there will be consequences. Kyle will spend months sleeping on the floor of his classroom without a home to speak of, and he will not be leaving Vietnam. Instead, he will become one of the most insanely famous foreign entertainers this country has ever known: 2 million followers on Facebook, appearances on numerous television game shows, and a standing on par with Vietnam's A-list celebrities. He'll have an army of haters too, bemoaning how easy it must have been for him to play the foreigner card and smarm his way into the industry. It may come as something of a surprise to those critics that the path between this crushing moment in the parking lot and standing in front of vast audiences under the national spotlight had very little to do with white privilege.

"The Vietnamese have a sentence like, *cay ngay khong so chet dung*, it means that if you're not intentionally doing something wrong, then there's nothing you have to worry about," says Kyo York, a shadow of the downtrodden foreign

teacher named Kyle Cochran he once was—well-styled, slender to the point of being buff, eminently confident and self-assured. "I think any sort of negative feedback that you get comes from some kind of misunderstanding... maybe they just don't fully understand who you are, what you're doing, what your purpose is. I've never intentionally done something to create any sort of negative attention. Everything I've done has just been like any other person fulfilling their job duties: *How can I go out and give a quality performance, sing well, and leave the audience happy?* That's been my whole goal from the very beginning. I decided well, if it's going to be this way, I'm going to do it the right way. I'm not going to just sing for the sake of singing in Vietnamese. I'm going to sing in Vietnamese and make people *cry*. I'm going to sing in Vietnamese like a Vietnamese person sings in Vietnamese."

It can be said that the genesis of entertainer Kyo York has its roots in Kyle's constant opposition to stereotyping, and that's something that stretches back to those early days in the Mekong. The town had nothing going for it that passed as entertainment outside of class; no shopping malls, nothing at all beyond eating, drinking and karaoke. Singing was no problem—Kyle had been something of a theater club geek back home and had a solid voice—but with the range of English ballads on the KTV menu leaving much to be desired, he figured he may as well try to learn a Vietnamese song or two instead. His eerily fluent rendition of Tuan Ngoc's *Rieng Mot Goc Troi* raised some applause, but after a while, the feedback started getting surprisingly negative: "*Don't bother learning our language*," his students would say, "*you're not going to be able to do it*." Of course, Kyle's progress in Vietnamese came fairly quickly—partly because he had almost nobody to talk to in English, but mostly because he was determined to disprove those who assured him it was impossible.

It was during one of his attempts to shake up his students on just this issue—that nothing is impossible as long as you have the will and perseverance—that his students issued a dare: "That isn't true," they said, "maybe you can sing in Vietnamese, but you couldn't just stroll up to a celebrity, someone like [then

Vietnam Idol judge] Siu Black, and ask her to do a duet with you." To prove his point, that's exactly what Kyle did—at the time, Siu had a café performance venue here in Saigon, and so Kyle made the journey up to the big city and sought her out.

That was a meeting he remembers well. "It was in the evening," he recalls, "and I said, 'you know, I want to sing a song with you, is that OK?' And she said, I mean it, I've never sung with a foreigner before, and I really don't know how that's going to be, but I guess so, if you really want to.' So she dragged me up on stage and we sang a couple of her songs, *Ly Ca Phe Ban Me* and *Doi Mat Pleiku*. This was right when she was judging *Idol*, and so she was like, 'you know, you've got a great voice, your Vietnamese pronunciation is very good.' At the time I couldn't speak Vietnamese very fluently, but I could sing very fluently. She said, 'if you focus on your pronunciation more and try a little harder, you could potentially become something big here.'"

Kyle From New York

Born to a lower-middle-class American family, Kyle's childhood was complicated and difficult. "I was teased a lot in high school," he admits, "I mean I guess everybody was, but I was... much more than others, I think. My parents got divorced when I was 13, I lived with my father, and I had two older brothers. The whole family sort of fell apart, everybody was really upset, and my father was depressed. So I had to hold things together even though I was the youngest in the family, because everyone was kind of a mess except for me, maybe because I was so young that it didn't really penetrate deep enough. So I had to do things to take care of my older brothers; pack their lunches, help my dad out with the housework and stuff like that."

Shouldering the family burden was perhaps what engendered Kyle's passionate force of character. "One thing I will say for myself is that I have a very strong will," he says, "and that comes from a lot of failure in my early life as a child and a young adult. I've fallen down so many times. I've actually been, you know, suicidal. There have been moments in my life when I've just



wanted to end it all. They say that failure is the mother of success; the more times you fall down, the stronger you stand in life. So I have a very strong will, and I persevere in a lot of odd environments.”

This inherent willpower is what put Kyle back on his feet after the theft, while his determination to master vocal performances in Vietnamese eventually gave rise to a career as a singer. After moving to Saigon from the Mekong and working intense hours to make his plane fare home, Kyle balanced his teaching jobs with regular appearances on the *phong tra* (tea room) circuit, shuttling between his live music sets on a barely-running Honda Wave while dressed in full traditional Vietnamese costume. He soon became a phenomenon—frequently requested by his stage name (which he adopted from Siu Black’s endearing mispronunciation of *Kyle from New York*), his sets became a lucrative draw for the venues he performed at—which in turn brought on criticism from envious local musicians with whom he shared the stage. It was a time when he was constantly reminded that he was a foreigner; he was told he was fat, that he was faking it, and that as an expat, he couldn’t be taking things seriously.

“At the time I could only sing like four or five songs,” remembers Kyle. “It wasn’t a lot, so I would sing on repeat at a couple of coffee shops, until Siu Black invited me to do a live show. That just took the nation by storm. It gave me more energy to continue in that direction, and so I did. Then a lot of people said to me, ‘you know, when you sing in Vietnamese it sounds almost exactly like a Vietnamese person, but then when you speak in Vietnamese, nobody understands what you’re saying! So I decided to start polishing my Vietnamese skills, written and spoken.”

“In that process, I became somewhat of a comedian as well,” he continues. “During every set in a coffee shop, there are three songs, and for the first song no one was listening to what I was singing, because quite honestly they were just shocked that a foreigner was actually on stage singing in Vietnamese. So I would make the first one my worst song, and then I would tell a couple of jokes in broken Vietnamese just to win over the audience, and then I would go on to my second song—and then my third song would be like this aria, this anthem, that would move people to tears, some sort of crescendo in my performance.”

The transformation from phenomenon to national icon was cemented the moment Kyle decided to take a career in entertainment at face value. “One thing led to another,” he says, “and then one evening I did a [legendary balladeer] Trinh Cong Son performance at a small coffee shop. I met this gentleman my age who was

the MC, and he said to me, ‘you’ve got a great voice. You’ve got a lot of character and charisma, and you’re great on stage, but you’re not so good looking, and you’re kind of fat. If you said smarter things on stage and were a little bit more polished and you dressed nicer, you could potentially be something more than you already are. If you want to, I can guide you in that direction.’ So I decided to partner up with him—he became my official manager, and he still is to this day.”

Stepping Up

“Then in 2013, I got invited to do a major game show on TV,” he continues. “That was more or less an historic event for Vietnam, to invite a foreigner on national TV to be a contestant on a game show that would be a series of ten episodes. And I knew the reason that they originally invited me was to get ratings, right? And I knew that their plan for me was to be an absolute failure, a laughing stock. That’s why they invited me to do the show. So I knew that going into it, that it would just be impossible for them to invite an American to do a game show and be serious about it. My manager and I decided that we would go into the show and take it very seriously. That’s where I got my initial claim to fame, and I actually became the draw for that game show. Even to this day, people know me through that show. Then right directly after that, I got invited to do a 25-episode sitcom with a bunch of very famous actors, and then another gig to be an MC for the show *Do Re Mi* on VTV3. So the year 2013 was an epic pivotal moment for me in my career. It was also a year full of failure—you have to imagine my Vietnamese at that time was nowhere near as good as it is now, and I still had the hot temper of a foreigner in a developing country. I had a big head, and all of this work. It was so much all at once for me, and then a bunch of people would shoot at me from all directions, because you know... ‘go back to your country foreigner, you’re horrible, you speak Vietnamese like sh*t, you sing like sh*t... the whole nine yards.”

Despite Kyo’s rise to fame, the backlash hurt. “At the time I was very sensitive, because I didn’t know anything about being famous,” he remembers. “I didn’t know what that was. So my manager sat down with me and said, ‘OK. What you’ve done has been very good, above and beyond what I would have expected. You’ve gotten a lot of positive attention. If you’re going to be affected by what people say, you may want to think about this, because it’s only going to get worse from here on in. So you either ignore it and be confident with who you are, or take a step back and choose a different career.’ So I decided that I would listen to his guidance.”

As Kyo York’s reputation as a unique entertainer grew, deeply sensitive Kyle Cochran became better at letting things go. “When you’re dealing with thousands of people,” he muses, “you read and you hear so much on such an intense scale that you actually become desensitized. It becomes just like anything else, like any other job, and it becomes OK, *heard that one before*. I mean, give me something new.”

Just as he promised his students, persistence paid off. In spite of his status as an outsider, Kyo York is now one of the most consistently booked and successful all-round performers in Vietnamese entertainment today. “The people who tell me that ‘you’re very lucky,’ or that ‘everything comes from a stroke of luck,’ they’re completely wrong,” he insists, “and they know nothing about me. They know nothing about the hardship. I’m not even exaggerating when I say that there were times when I had 100,000 dong to last me for a week. So the very thought that I come from a rich family, or that I came to Vietnam to become a singer, or any of that, it’s just not true. None of that, none of the implications that people make about me are right at all. If I have a message, it’s that every single person in this life has it hard. So the best thing to do is not to judge people and accept them for who they are, and understand that *everybody* is worthy of your respect. *Everybody*. I think a lot of people are defeated by themselves, especially in a society like this, and so I want to show people that you can do what you want to do, and you can be successful at it if you have the power, the willpower, the creativity and the gall to step up and be who you are.”

As for whether or not the character of Kyo York has overtaken that of the weary English teacher he used to be, Kyle couldn’t be more clear: “When I’m working, I’m Kyo York, and when I’m not working, I’m Kyle Cochran. Simple! It’s like Jekyll and Hyde. But honestly, there’s nothing like singing a song and living with people in a moment where everyone is so wrapped up in what you’re doing. It’s electric, and it’s awesome. I get to live in moments with people, and it makes me think, he’s a cool person, Kyo York. Cool guy.”

“From the very beginning it’s been about quality,” says Kyle Cochran, “and it’s been about magic and creating moments for people and changing the thought process behind an entire nation. Showing people that skin color, place of birth, native language, it’s all superfluous in life. Nothing is the ‘property’ of anybody. A lot of people say to me, ‘how can you speak Vietnamese the way that you do? That’s impossible.’ No! Because language is a free commodity, *anybody* can learn language to any extent, there’s no limitation, right?” ■



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.

I Now Pronounce You

Marriage, gender recognition and the transgender spouse

Dear Caroline and Antoine,

I am both French and Vietnamese. I was born a boy but as I always considered myself a girl, I had several sex reassignment surgeries to make my physical appearance and sexual characteristics match my identified gender. In France I managed to legally change my registered gender from male to female and I wonder if this is also possible to do in Vietnam? If so, would it then be possible for me to marry my male partner?

THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT movement on this topic since January 1, 2017. In November 2015, the National Assembly passed a new law on this issue, which came into force the beginning of the year. This new law modifies the Civil Code and legalizes sex reassignment surgeries on Vietnamese soil for transgender people. It has also allowed transgender people to legally change their registered gender accordingly. Additionally, transgender people can now legally change their names to match their change in gender.

The former version of the Civil Code and a 2008 decree on sex reassignment, limited sex reassignment surgery to cases of congenital sex defects or of unidentifiable sex (for example, persons born with both male and female sex organs). The 2008 decree prohibited conducting sex reassignment on persons who had “become perfect in their gender.” Only very few hospitals were allowed to conduct this type of intervention and performing sex reassignment on individuals “without gender identity disorder” was (and are, up-to-date, still) punished by a fine that can amount to VND40 million. Therefore, many travel abroad (mainly to Thailand) to undergo surgery but, even then, it was still impossible for them to legally change their registered gender. This situation generated obvious paperwork and identification difficulties: How could a transgender person disclose his/her identity to a police officer when his/her ID card states that he/she is the opposite gender and the ID picture is far different from his/her current appearance?

After an active campaign mainly

led by the Institute for Studies of Society, Economics and Environment (iSEE) and the ICS, the National Assembly decided to reform the Civil Code in 2015 to answer the concerns of the estimated 270,000 to 450,000 transgender people living in Vietnam.

The current Article 37 of the new Civil Code states: “Gender transformation is carried out in accordance with law. An individual whose gender has been transformed has the right and obligation to register civil status changes in accordance with the law on civil status; and has personal rights suitable to the transformed gender pursuant to provisions of this Code and other relevant laws.” It is important to underline that the right of transgender people to legally change their registered gender is strictly conditional upon completing sex reassignment surgery. Vietnamese law does not yet grant any right to transgender people who have not undergone sex-reassignment surgery.

If the right for transgender people to have surgery in Vietnam and to legally change their registered gender is clearly granted, many practical questions still remain unresolved and the regulations on these matters need to be harmonized. An additional decree is imperative to handle the practical issues linked to the application of this new right. For instance, it is still unknown whether there are any restrictions on an individual’s right to have sex reassignment surgery in Vietnam. Moreover, there are no details concerning the procedure to be followed to undergo sex reassignment surgery first and then to legally change your

registered gender. It is likely, but not certain, that the procedure to legally change gender would be the same as the one to legally change your name. In this case, you will have to address your request to the District-level People’s Committees if you live in Vietnam or to the Representative Missions of your place of residence if you are a Vietnamese citizen living abroad.

To answer your specific question regarding your right to legally change your registered gender as you already did in France: theoretically, you are entitled to register to legally change your registered name and gender as of today. But in practice, you will certainly have to be patient and wait for an implementing decree to be issued to replace the 2008 decree mentioned above (this new decree is scheduled to be introduced before 2018). Before the issuance of such decree, we cannot tell you with certainty which procedure to follow and if there are any restrictions to your right.

Besides, as it is worded in the brand new Article 37, transgender people who have been allowed to change their gender have all the rights consistent with their new gender. Thus, if you change your gender, you and your partner would be regarded as two people of the opposite sex and allowed to marry. It remains to be seen if the government will confirm this point in the implementing decree to be issued this year. ■

*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.*

Keeping Vietnam Cool

Architect Charles Gallavardin speaks about bioclimatic architecture and the decline of air conditioning

ON A TYPICALLY SWELTERING SAIGON DAY, the type that makes you thankful for air conditioning, the office of T3 Architecture Asia is cool and comfortable, located down a lush alley in the Thao Dien neighborhood. Not surprisingly for a firm that has designed myriad cutting-edge projects across Southeast Asia, including the recently opened Belgo brewery in District 1 and the redesign of Le Beaulieu Restaurant at the Sofitel Metropole in Hanoi, their headquarters has a sleek, rustic-meets-urban aesthetic with wood plank walls and polished concrete floors. What is surprising, however, is that the air conditioner is not on.

It's a testament to a growing movement known as bioclimatic architecture, and at the forefront here in Vietnam is Charles Gallavardin, founder of T3 Architecture Asia. Piqued by the prospect of dramatically reducing the need for air conditioning, we met with Charles to learn more about this emerging design form and its potential to change the future of Vietnam's energy consumption.

"You just have to go back to basics," shares Charles. "A large, overhanging roof can protect your façade from direct sun. You want to avoid having too many windows. The more windows you have, the more heat will come into your building."

A layout that allows air to flow freely through the structure is another major component, as he explains pointing out Kokois, a warehouse they helped convert into a café and concept store just down the street from their office.

"We used the existing structure as much as possible and opened both sides of the building to allow the air to pass through," he notes. "We opened the roof in the central part so that hot air can rise out of the building. Then on top of the existing roof we put another structure social housing projects in Vietnam, if the building is 15 stories, for example, then you're going to have an elevator with lots of maintenance and operational costs that with palm leaves above to have what we call a double ventilated roof that protects the building from direct sun. It

keeps it quite cool. Of course, there is still a small air conditioned room in case you want that during the hot season."

Equally important is building orientation. "If you are facing east or west with a low sun coming through your apartment, you will have to push the air conditioning at full power to be comfortable."

While the architect admits it's difficult to give an exact number on just how much energy a bioclimatic building can save—that depends on the location—it's safe to say that it uses at least half the amount of energy as a "non-bioclimatic" building. "Air conditioning accounts for around 60-70 percent of a regular building's energy consumption. It's a huge portion of the electricity bill," he says. That's not to say the air conditioner is completely obsolete just yet, as he goes on, "When you are located in District 1 in Saigon, for example, you will still need to close your office building because of noise and air pollution."

Bioclimatic Building

His project with perhaps the biggest implications for the developing nation is the Tân Hoa Lo Gom Low Cost Housing Pilot Project. In 2005, Charles teamed up with the World Bank to design the four-story building, which is located in District 6 of Ho Chi Minh City. "It was built for people resettled from a slum area. We did it with an NGO more than 10 years ago and it was a real success because it's one of the only social housing projects really well designed for the people living there. Almost all of the families who were resettled in that building are still living there 10 years later."

Employing the steadfast techniques of solar protection, natural ventilation, and a double ventilated roof, the project managed to lower the inhabitants cost of living while also meeting their lifestyle needs. "If you compare it with official social housing projects in Vietnam, if the building is 15 stories, for example, then you're going to have an elevator with lots of maintenance and operational costs that are really too high. Also, these are usually people who work on the street

and need to be connected to the street. If they live on the 10th floor, it's really not adaptable for them."

By using local materials on their projects, they are able to keep the cost of construction competitive as well. "Ventilated bricks are very suitable for the climate because they allow air to pass through. It's a very simple way of doing a bioclimatic building. But they require a lot of energy to make, so now we are moving more toward light concrete blocks. Cement has also become more popular in the last five years." All of which are readily available and cost effective in Vietnam.

Adding to the appeal is that the energy saving techniques are not limited to the tropics, as T3 Architecture Asia has also completed a few projects in northern Vietnam, including the Mai Chau Eco Lodge in Hoa Binh Province, where cooler temperatures are the norm in the winter. "There," he explains, "we used bigger walls and insulated ceilings, but still kept the double ventilated roof to keep the air stream flowing between the ceiling of the room and the main roof of the building to keep it cool during the summer time... Of course, you might still need air conditioning or heating in the bedrooms, but with proper insulation to conserve energy."

Another reason for optimism, Charles acknowledges, is that local talent is embracing the fundamentals of bioclimatic design and producing their own noteworthy work. "Many Vietnamese architects are studying abroad and they have a great influence here now, such as A21 Studio, Atelier Mo Dat, and a few others. They are doing very interesting projects everywhere."

"In the past three years we have seen an increase in bioclimatic buildings everywhere in Vietnam, from north to south," he concedes. "There's more awareness in the big cities. Sometimes it's a client from the city, who wants to build an eco-lodge or private house somewhere else. Of course, the demand is always higher in hospitality because they have international clients who ask for this sort of thing. Hospitality tends to be a step ahead of residential."

When asked about what challenges there are facing bioclimatic architecture, Charles suggests there are, in fact, very few. "It's mainly a matter of educating developers and architects. It doesn't cost much more to put more thought into the façade and the materials. Now we're starting to see developers who are more educated and are hiring architects who are concerned with these things. There's a small, growing market here now, the same as with organic food."

Charles takes a moment to further consider the future of bioclimatic architecture in Vietnam and what's being done in other parts of the world. "If you really want to change things, the idea would be to increase the price of electricity. In countries that want to push green architecture, that's how they get people to think about it differently." ■

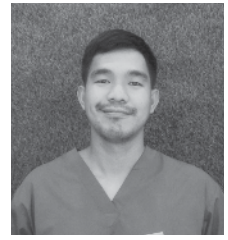


Text by **Wes Grover**

Images by **Ngoc Tran** and **T3**

*(Clockwise from right: Charles,
Mai Chau Eco Lodge, Tan Hoa
Lo Gom, Kokois)*





Dr. Eugene has worked as a veterinarian around Southeast Asia for the last four years, from the Philippines and Thailand to Malaysia and now Vietnam. He is driven by a desire to provide the best care for his patients and has a wide range of experience in all aspects of veterinary medicine, and a special interest in surgery and intensive care. **Dr. Eugene** provides both first and second opinions on all manners of companion animal cases while also overseeing the provision of clinical care for Animal Doctors International in Ho Chi Minh City.

my PET SNAKE

Learn about keeping pets such as snakes, turtles and lizards

SURPRISING TO SOME, our cold-blooded friends can make wonderful companions. To get you started these are some of the most frequently asked questions we receive from potential reptile guardian.

What are some common reptilian pets?

There are a huge range of reptiles that people keep as pets, from the more common turtles, tortoises, lizards, iguana and snakes to lesser common (and worryingly large) crocodiles and alligators.

Are reptilian pets common in Vietnam?

You may be surprised to know that reptiles are not uncommon pets here in Vietnam. We see many owners who are completely fascinated by reptiles and their habits, and love to keep them as pets. We come across snakes of all shapes and sizes at the clinic. People definitely fall in love with keeping them as pets and they even act as a lucky charm. There is even a reptile café in Saigon and Hanoi that allows customers to pet and play with iguanas, snakes and salamanders while sipping coffee!

How much do they cost?

Reptiles are found for sale throughout Vietnam and prices vary depending on the species, rarity and size. Most turtles and tortoises can be bought in the market, roadside and in specialty exotic pet stores and range from less than VND60,000 to over VND20 million. Always ensure that the pet you are purchasing comes from a sustainable source and isn't an endangered or protected species-if in doubt, don't buy!

How to care for my pet snake?

Caring for snakes is not as complicated as a dog, however, they still need attention and a knowledgeable owner to keep them healthy and happy. Snakes should be kept in a large glass aquarium that is clean and dry-with plenty of vegetation



to hide in. The humidity and temperature of their home is one of the most important things to monitor and varies widely depending on species. All snakes are carnivores and are usually fed baby mice or rats (these should be dead already as feeding live prey can cause stress and aggression). Depending on the snake, the amount to feed varies, but as a rule snakes eat only once every one to two weeks.

Is a tortoise a good choice?

These are the most common group of reptiles that we see, and they range from the water loving to the land bound. Local species are abundant, inexpensive and are easy to care for-and are supposed to bring good luck to the homes they live in! While some tortoises are placid, others can have a nasty bite so care must be taken when handling them. They also lead very long lives and frequently outlive their owners, which needs to be taken into account.

What are the most common diseases?

Consulting your veterinarian is the best thing to do whenever you observe something strange with your pet. Snakes mostly suffer from skin parasites like mites and intestinal worms. Disease prevention with snakes starts with keeping their surroundings clean and in good condition. Most importantly, humidity in the cage also dictates the health of your pet snake. Turtles have their own range of common problems, such as 'egg-bound' where they cannot lay an egg and need medical help. Identifying sickness and obtaining early treatment



in reptiles is key to a good outcome. They often hide signs of disease if not carefully monitored and tend to get better very slowly.

How should we handle our reptiles?

Approaching these exotic animals and handling them safely (for pet and owner) requires some knowledge and understanding of the species. When handling snakes it is important not to surprise them, and do not grab them by the tail. Slow, gentle handling and moving with the animal will let them relax and they will quickly learn to associate this with a positive experience. Snakes are highly intelligent and can differentiate their owner from other people after a short period of time.

Lizards are much more intuitive to handle and many varieties seem to enjoy their owners' affection, often following them around the house. Good knowledge of the species you are dealing with is important as some lizards can be very aggressive-and have sharp claws and teeth.

Can I bring my pet with me when I move to a new country?

Where many people now travel with their cat or dog, moving with a reptile can be a more difficult process. Depending on the species of reptile, some countries may not allow entry and there can be lengthy quarantine periods, however, that's not to say that it's not possible, but is an important consideration when taking on the care of an exotic pet.

While they are certainly not for everyone, reptiles can make caring and loving pets. They are fascinating to watch and interact with and provide owners with deep satisfaction. Many of you may wonder why on earth anyone would like to keep a reptile as a pet rather than something fluffy and soft. For those who are reptile lovers they may find it difficult to understand the attraction of a smelly dog, a demanding cat or a pesky parrot. ■



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.

All or Nothing

Before investing in binary options, read this

Dear Sven,
I've been reading about a few investment platforms where I can register for online that allow me to manage my investments with relative ease. Some of the platforms advertised seem to offer products producing very high annual returns, some of which I am not familiar with, such as Binary Options and Contracts for Difference (CFDs). Can you explain these types of products and let me know if they are suitable for retail investors?

IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET

more and more individuals are signing up for investment, securities and trading accounts online. This has unleashed a new "DIY" age when it comes to personal investing, which is fantastic in that it gives individuals direct access to capital markets and ultimately leads to the improvement of the global economy.

The internet also creates a platform for opportunistic service providers to create products and services which are designed to dupe customers explicitly, or are marketed as being relatively low-risk and suitable for individuals to purchase directly, when they are in fact extremely complex and not suitable for the general public.

Binary options are the proverbial new-kid-on-the-block when it comes to investment products. Platforms offering binary options are marketed aggressively on the internet, and often contain testimonials from customers who claim to make USD5,000 per week from trading while sitting on the sofa. The truth is that the outcome from investing in these products is, by definition, binary. For example, you place a bet and you will experience two outcomes: win some money or lose the entire amount you have invested. The outcome is much like betting on the winner of a football match, which is

why binary options are regulated as gambling products and not as financial instruments in many countries.

The mechanics of a binary option are fairly simple: an investor buys a contract with the provider that states, for example: you pay USD100 for a contract that states that if there is a positive move in the price of Apple shares between 11:00am-11:10am, you will receive USD1,000. If the share price has no movement, or is negative during that time, you will receive nothing and lose the amount of your initial investment. There are many different return outcomes available for trading on many different underlying securities. I would recommend doing extensive research before doing this type of trading, specifically on the platform itself, as many are blatant scams.

Contracts for Difference (or CFDs) are more conventional instruments and have been around for longer than binary options. They are far more regulated than binary options and give investors the option to profit from moves in a company's share price without having to physically own the shares. These contracts are bought directly from a broker, and allow investors to profit from indirectly owning a specific amount of company shares by only contributing a fraction

of the cost of what the shares would cost collectively. For example, you believe that Amazon is the best, most innovative company in the world and you would like to own Amazon shares. The problem is that you only have USD100 in life savings and one share of Amazon costs around USD900. You could use a CFD where you are only required to deposit as low as 2% of the total value of the transaction you desire. Therefore, with your USD100 you would be given indirect exposure to USD5,000 worth of Amazon shares. If Amazon shares increase by 1% in value during that specific trading day, your "indirect" investment value will grow from USD5,000 to USD5,050 and you will pocket USD50 which is the difference. So, on a small USD100 investment you have made USD50 profit on your favorite company, which is an equivalent to a 50% return for you. The main pitfall is that this type of investing has a high risk of permanent capital loss, and the trading fees are very high.

Signing up for any type of exotic investment online might seem easy and convenient, but the pitfalls are prevalent and perilous. Try not to use your life savings and pension cash on exotic trading, but rather your casino or golf money. ■



**BE
YOURSELF**





AVANT GARDE DESIGNER HA NHAT TIEN cuts his own path when it comes to fashion. “Currently you may not like my design, it is your right, but for me, I like it—this is what makes sense to me as a young designer. You will have to choose a separate path to development, otherwise you will lose your soul and others will step on you,” says Tien. “I think that, at each stage, cultural and fashion trends will be different, but they all have one thing in common, beauty.”

The 29-year-old Vung Tau native is already making headways on runways with shows at Hong Kong Fashion Week in 2011 and last year at the International Fashion Week in Hanoi where he debuted his “Be Yourself” collection. The collection combines his unusual perspective on fashion with strong colors to create unique shapes. More interestingly, on the jackets are slogans such as “if you like it, just wear it,” which is consistent with the spirit of the collection and the designer himself. ■





MAGICAL MYANMAR

Myanmar is the last of the truly magical destinations of the Orient, a Technicolor glimpse of Old Asia perfumed with sandalwood and spiced with ginger. It is one of the most devoutly Buddhist nations on earth, a land of glistening gilded pagodas and hand-carved sandstone temples tended by hushed, saffron-robed monks. The gentle hospitality of the Burmese people knows few limits. And for all this, and more, the world's adventurous travelers should be grateful. Journey with James Pham as he spends three Burmese weeks in the Golden Land.

Text and Images by **James Pham**

12 BURMESE DAYS

Cruising the Ayeyarwady River into Myanmar's past



MYANMAR IS A LAND of fascinating contradictions. Known also as Burma, the country has seen periods of aggressive expansionism and extreme isolationism. It's been the richest country in Southeast Asia and one of the poorest. It's seen flourishing kingdoms under great rulers as well as humiliating losses brought on by despotic tyrants.

To better understand Myanmar's complicated past, I board Heritage Line's *Anawrahta*, an ultraluxe river vessel resembling a British colonial paddle steamer, on a 12-day cruise heading upriver on the Ayeyarwady between Yangon and Mandalay. Originating in the Eastern Himalayas and emptying out into the Indian Ocean, the banks of the Ayeyarwady have been home to practically all of Myanmar's great kingdoms and royal capitals.

One of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, Myanmar's 135 officially recognized ethnic groups are the result of three mass migrations from

Central Asia and Tibet. Just outside of Pyay, I find myself standing on a mound of earthy-colored bricks, barely visible in the dry grass, the remains of the walls of the ancient Pyu city of Sri Ksetra. Flourishing for over 1,000 years between 200 BC and 900 AD, the Pyu were the earliest recorded inhabitants of Myanmar, establishing some of the largest and longest-lived urbanized settlements in the region. Once the largest walled city in Southeast Asia, UNESCO-listed Sri Ksetra must've been breathtaking in its time, nicknamed "the One-Day City" for how long it took to walk around its massive gated walls surrounded by moats, an extensive network of roads and canals, and towering religious structures. I gaze at the Phayagyi Pagoda, an unadorned mound with little tufts of grass sprouting from between the bricks, "rising from the plain like the breast of a supine giantess," as George Orwell put it. Together, the Pyu city-states would leave a lasting

footprint on modern-day Myanmar, influencing its calendar, script and religion as the first permanent footholds of Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

We continue north, days of blissful ennui spent cruising past lazy pastoral scenes of beautifully monotonous fields of green occasionally broken up by streaks of white from flowering feather reeds, flashes of gold from gilded stupas partially hidden among the palm trees or bursts of firecracker red from mounds of chilies drying on the sandy banks. The soundtrack of the cruise is provided by the gentle hum of the boat, the buzzing of longboats and the occasional furious smack of laundry being beaten against the water.

Along a bend in the Ayeyarwady, just before it meets the Chindwin, we explore the fabled city of Bagan, home to one of Myanmar's greatest rulers, Anawrahta, our boat's namesake. Ruler of the kingdom of Pagan in the 11th century, Anawrahta conducted military



campaigns over 33 years in every direction, finally succeeding in unifying the Ayeyarwady Valley under a single sovereign with borders that closely resemble today's Myanmar.

One late afternoon, we climb the Shwesandaw Temple, built by Anawrahta in 1057, to watch an unforgettable sunset over the plains of Bagan with its thousands of religious monuments, testifying to the might and riches of the Pagan Kingdom. After Pagan fell to the Mongols towards the end of the 13th century, the former capital city slowly diminished to a small village and its many royal artisans and craftsmen left for the area around Mandalay, with only the craft of lacquerware returning. We observe with admiration the skill and patience of the Bagan artisans working at this time- and labor-intensive process involving up to 12 layers of lacquer followed by intricate designs engraved completely freehand with a metal stylus and colored with fine stone powder.

Beat Them Like a Pot

Myanmar's next expansionist leader was King Bodawpaya, ruler of the Konbaung Dynasty in the late 18th century. His ambitious armies invaded Siam to the east and conquered the kingdoms of Arakan and Assam in the west, extending his borders all the way to British India. We visit Mingun and the gigantic 170-foot base of the Pa Hto Taw Gyi Temple built using thousands of Bodawpaya's prisoners of war. Had it been completed, the temple would've been almost 500 feet, as high as the Great Pyramid of Giza. To go with his massive temple, Bodawpaya also had a giant 90-ton bell cast, and we watch with humor as people give themselves a bout of self-induced tinnitus by standing under the Mingun Bell while friends give it a mighty whack with a big stick.

Bodawpaya's grandson, King Bagyidaw, shared his grandfather's grand ambitions, sending his army to defend the western lands his grandfather



conquered, bringing war perilously close to British India. What followed was the first of three Anglo-Burmese wars. At Danuphyu, the sound of a thousand angry bees turns out to be young monks reciting scripture at the Pali University. On the grounds, we visit the memorial to General Maha Bandula, the commander-in-chief of the Royal Burmese Armed Forces. A beloved national hero for standing up to the British during the First Anglo-Burmese War, Bandula's courage would prove no match against British technology—Congreve rockets and the first steamship ever to be deployed in wartime.

We head ashore at Yandabo, a single-craft village known all over the country for its water pots made from porous local clay which allows for slow condensation, keeping the water naturally cool. Throughout the village, the men work the clay with their feet while the women use a variety of wooden paddles to shape the pots and then imprint them with a trademark starburst pattern. The rhythmic sound of their paddles reverberates in the still air, recalling the Burmese proverb: If you want a well-behaved child, you should beat them like a pot.

Just 50 miles south of the then capital of Ava, British troops amassed in humble Yandabo in 1826, forcing King Bagyidaw to sign the Treaty of Yandabo. The first Anglo-Burmese War ended with Burma having to pay a large indemnity of one million pounds sterling and ceding Assam (now in northeastern India) to the British along with other western lands.

A second, briefer Anglo-Burmese War would follow in 1852, started by a trade dispute and ending with Britain annexing all of Lower Burma. Just outside of Pyay, we sail past the historical border between Upper and Lower Burma and the “tax mountain” of Akauk Taung where boats had to stop and pay tolls between the two territories. When stuck waiting for favorable weather, the sailors whiled away their time carving hundreds of Buddha images into the rock face. No

divine help, though, was able to prevent Burma from being swept up by the age of colonialism, which would see a fifth of the world's landmass subject to colonial rule. For the first time in a thousand years, the long line of Burmese kings was about to end.

Cinderella Province

By the late 19th century, France had already occupied Vietnam and was controlling Laos and Cambodia. Britain responded by annexing all of Burma after the Third Anglo-Burmese War, thereby limiting France's expansion while gaining an overland route to China and access to all the rich, natural resources of Burma. In his book *Burmese Days*, based on five years spent as a police officer in the Indian Imperial Police force in Burma, George Orwell exposed the dark side of colonialism. While admittedly bringing a certain sense of order and technological improvements, Orwell's tortured protagonist admits to living a lie, “the lie that we're here to uplift our poor black brothers instead of to rob them,” unleashing the scourge of “Pox Britannica” instead of Pax Britannica.

While Britain gained control over Burma's oil, precious metals, gems, teak and world-leading rice production, the “pox” thankfully left Burmese society largely alone, treating the country much like a “Cinderella Province”—beautiful but ignored.

Throughout the country, we see faint vestiges of the British Raj—in the cups of tea mixed with condensed milk and dusty colonial-era buildings, oddly out of place with their ornate, dilapidated facades sprinkled amongst plain, tin-roofed, wooden homes. After independence, Myanmar would wipe out most traces of British rule, changing over 600 place names back to the original Myanmar, resulting in Yangon instead of Rangoon, Myanmar instead of Burma, and a reversion to right-hand driving. Any remaining links are tenuous at best, romantic notions made rosier by time.

In the dusty town of Thayet Myo, we

ride horse carts to the Thayet Golf Course proudly “affiliated to St. Andrew's golf course of Scotland.” Founded in 1887, the country's oldest golf course is mainly used by government officials, much like it was under the Raj, and a 9-hole round costs less than a dollar. Over champagne and nibbles, the manager tells me that only one person has taken advantage of the USD300 lifetime membership so far which promises member privileges at lofty St. Andrew's, seemingly an empire away from these local fairways where stray cows graze.

Our last stop is Mandalay, home to Myanmar's last king, Thibaw. The city is known for its many craft workshops



including weaving, wood and stone carving and gold-leaf beating, producing the incredibly thin gold leaf used to apply to religious images. At the Mahamuni Temple, we see the revered Mahamuni Buddha image, purportedly one of only five images made in the likeness of the Buddha during his lifetime. Only men are allowed to approach the image, which is now bubbly with thick layers of gold leaf applied by the faithful.

We travel up to Mandalay Hill for panoramic views of Myanmar's second largest city and notice a large green square of forest where the royal palace once stood, almost completely razed by allied bombing in WWII against Japanese occupation. On the last afternoon of the cruise, we make

our way to the nearby U Bein Bridge. With 1,086 pillars, it's the oldest and longest teakwood bridge in the world. Champagne glasses in hand, we drink to what has been an unforgettable cruise into the fascinating history of Myanmar. With the bridge beautifully silhouetted against the dying orange sun, I think about the final Burmese days under "the empire on which the sun never sets". After more than a century of British rule, Myanmar would finally regain independence in 1948. However, those happy days would be short-lived with the country trading a foreign oppressive ruler for a homegrown one. The true fight for freedom was just beginning.

RIVER CRUISING CAN BE a leisurely, luxurious yet surprisingly efficient means to travel, especially in a country like Myanmar, where road infrastructure is lacking and where many of the sights are conveniently located close to the riverbanks. It also means unpacking just once, and paying one price up front for almost everything on the cruise: food, accommodation and tours.

Heritage Line's *Anawrahta* is an elegant 214-foot-long vessel featuring three spacious decks and 23 luxurious cabins with the highest staff-to-passenger ratio on the Ayeyarwady. In contrast to most larger ocean-going vessels, river boats typically feel much more spacious, especially the cabins. My Deluxe cabin measured a very generous 344 square feet with a spacious bathroom, giant picture window with banquette where I spent many an afternoon with a good book, and a balcony to enjoy the early morning cool, coffee in hand. Three larger suite-type rooms are also available, ranging from the 517-square-foot Junior Suite to the colossal Royal Suite with 926 square feet of space including a 312-square-foot balcony with private Jacuzzi. Finishings throughout the ship were stunning, including polished lacquer, intricately carved woodwork, shining brass and original artwork.

The days generally followed a similar pattern, starting with a buffet breakfast with live egg station, pastries, fresh fruit, yogurt, smoked salmon and hot items. Most days saw us taking morning shore excursions, with all logistics meticulously pre-arranged, including various forms of transport, from private coach to horse



Life Aboard The Anawrahta

carts to tuk-tuks. Many of the small towns we visited were blissfully untouched by mass tourism, meaning the locals were almost as excited to see us as we them, always with winsome smiles and friendly waves. After every excursion, we were welcomed back on board with a cool towel, chilled juice and shoe-cleaning service.

In addition to religious monuments and historical sites, we had many opportunities to observe the simple, unembellished country life of the majority of the Myanmar people—farming, trading in the local markets, washing clothes in the river and hand-making everything from Burmese cigars wrapped in corn husks and paintings from stone powder to pounding razor-thin gold leaf and hand-grinding peanut oil. The Myanmar people are exceptionally warm and open, making portrait photography a real treat. In addition, having the two able guides permanently stationed on the ship was a blessing, as we could always ask more questions on what we saw on the excursions.

While the cruise is not billed as a gastronomic cruise, the food certainly rivaled 5-star hotel cuisine. Buffet lunches offered a beautiful mix of Myanmar and international dishes making use of fresh, local products as well as premium imported ones. One curry meal was particularly memorable, featuring all sorts of Myanmar curries, gritty with fragrant spices, highlighted by river shrimp the size of my fist. Fresh salads were also phenomenal, often showcasing Thai, Chinese and European flavors. Four-course dinners were served a la carte, with gourmet offerings like

Seared Scallops with Avocado Salsa and Soft Shell Crab Curry as well as Rack of Lamb, Imported Steak and Seared Atlantic Salmon. Meals were taken in the Hintha Hall Restaurant featuring white tablecloths, gleaming glassware and the most attentive of wait staff who greeted everyone by name and quickly learned our preferences, all in a beautiful setting of floor-to-ceiling picture windows, polished wood and intricately-carved floor and ceiling panels.

Afternoons were often spent relaxing on the pool deck or participating in interesting lectures and demonstrations on everything from religion and culture to local customs and practices like how to tie the ubiquitous *longyi* (sarong), apply *thanakha* paste (a natural cosmetic preferred by women and children) or prepare tea leaf salad. Kipling's Bar, open on both sides to the river breezes, proved the ideal place to while away the afternoon hours with daily tea or happy hour cocktails. This and the pool deck above with loungers under canopied tents were the best places on the ship to easily see and photograph both riverbanks.

Many evenings were spent in the lovely Mandalay Lounge with its polished wood floors and cozy rattan chairs, watching after-dinner performances by local artisans brought on board to showcase traditional puppetry, music and dancing. The evening's final touch was a thoughtful gift waiting in the room—a brass bell, a lacquer box, a woven scarf—often related to a destination we visited that day or would visit the next.

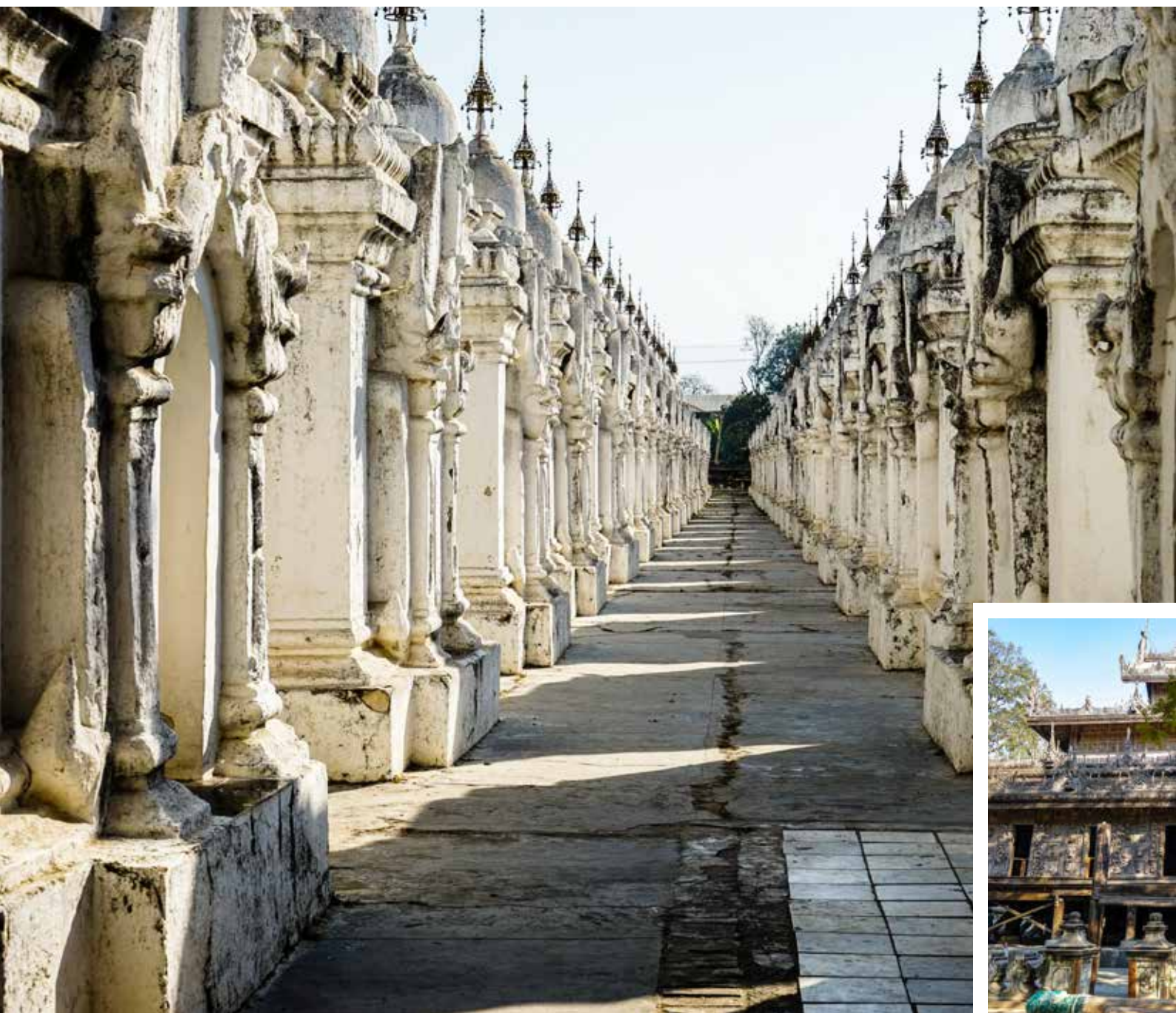
Sailing days were exercises in the brilliant art of doing nothing. My initial

panic at seeing no TV in the cabin (there's Wi-fi on board, but spotty especially away from larger towns) was replaced by hours of languid reading and the dreamless sleep of an exhausting life of leisure, the kind Orwell called “the deep mid-day sleep of chloroform rather than a lullaby.” With hardly anything taller than a palm tree, the Myanmar sky felt enormous and I often sat watching it turn from rosy pink in the early morning to burnt orange in the late afternoon. That, or watching the river widen and narrow while sparkling like diamonds in the sun. By the end of the day, I always wondered where the hours had gone, in between reading, sleeping, watching the ever-changing scenery and trying unsuccessfully to be hungry again by the next meal. Other facilities on board include a pool deck with 360 degree views, a small gym and the Thazin Spa with three massage beds, mani-pedi stations and a steambath.

River cruising usually does not come cheap, especially aboard a ship that is likely one of the newest, most luxurious in Myanmar, but the trade-off is a holiday that's relaxing, educational and completely worry-free, where every whim is looked after by some of the warmest and most professional staff you'll ever meet.

In addition to the *Anawrahta*, which plies the incredibly scenic Chindwin River in northern Myanmar as well as shorter cruises on the Ayeyarwady between Bagan and Mandalay, Heritage Line also operates luxury cruises in Halong Bay and in the Mekong, between Saigon and Siem Reap, Cambodia. For more, including seasonal specials, see www.heritage-line.com. ■





Taking the Back Roads to *Mandalay*

Cycling Kipling's Burma

FEW PLACE NAMES have the power to conjure up notions of exotic romanticism like "Mandalay." Among others, it's inspired a Hollywood film company, a Heinz sauce, and a hit children's song where Nellie the Elephant runs away from the circus and meets up with her herd one night in the silver light on the way to Mandalay. But above all, a 24-year-old Rudyard Kipling

propelled Mandalay into the realm of magical dreams through his poem "Mandalay" about a British soldier's nostalgia for the exoticism of the Raj.

With so much fanfare, it's nearly impossible for the reality to live up to the expectations, as Somerset Maugham observed after visiting Mandalay in the 1920s: "First of all Mandalay is a name. For there are places whose names from

some accident of history or happy association have an independent magic and perhaps the wise man would never visit them, for the expectations they arouse can hardly be realized... Mandalay has its name; the falling cadence of the lovely word has gathered about itself the chiaroscuro of romance." Surprisingly, Kipling never actually got as far as Mandalay on his short three-day



trip through Burma aboard a paddle steamer. What he saw, though, mesmerized him to the extent that he declared: “This is Burma, and it is quite unlike any land you know about.”

Today, Mandalay is Myanmar’s second largest city and the economic hub of Upper Myanmar, a sprawling mass of buildings laid out in a precise grid filled with monasteries, pagodas, teahouses and workshops. Possibly derived from the Sanskrit word *mandala* for its circular plains, I take advantage of Mandalay’s flat terrain and cycle the surrounds to see what, if any of Kipling’s exotic Burma still remained.

I catch my first glimpse of Mandalay’s allure at the Kuthodaw Pagoda where a smiling couple in soft shades of pink and white take wedding photos amongst the 729 gleaming white shrines, recalling Kipling’s description of a colorful land of leisure where ‘bountiful Providence clothed you in a purple, green, amber or

puce petticoat, threw a rose-pink scarf-turban over your head, and put you in a pleasant damp country where rice grew of itself and fish came up to be caught.’ At the market, I experience his “spicy garlic smells” amidst mounds of chillies and spices, and a landscape “ablaze with pagodas—from a gorgeous golden and vermilion beauty to a delicate grey stone one just completed” as we ride past gleaming stupas and teak monasteries.

We head into the countryside and hear “a talking of the breezes in the tops of the toddy palms”, recalling the local brew known as “sky beer” made with a bit of yeast and the sap of the toddy palm. Down a dusty, country road, we follow the “sunshine an’ the palm-trees an’ the tinkly temple-bells” which serendipitously lead us to a novitiation ceremony, a coming-of-age rite where young boys become temporary novices in the monastery for a week, a month or forever and girls choose between having

their ears pierced or shaving their heads and becoming a nun. As we ride by, the locals literally take our hands in a heartwarming display of hospitality and pull us into a tent where a feast is being served. People come by to shake our hands and take photos as we share space at long tables and are urged to eat, eat and then eat some more—strangers in a strange land, yet welcomed like family. Smiles and laughter come easy to the Myanmar people, and my interactions are much like Kipling’s where “a brown baby came by in its mother’s arms and laughed, wherefore I much desired to shake hands with it, and grinned to that effect. The mother held out the tiny soft pud and laughed, and the baby laughed, and we all laughed together, because that seemed to be the custom of the country.”

A beautiful young woman with beguiling liquid brown eyes and fresh orchids tucked in her hair invites us into the main tent where raucous music adds to the festivities in honor of the 30 or so village children decked out in ornate sequined costumes. Even the boys sport heavy makeup, a throwback to the Buddha’s life as an extravagant young prince before enlightenment. Kipling fell under the same spell of the gentle people of Myanmar, wishing: “When I die I will be a Burman, with twenty yards of real King’s Silk, that has been made in Mandalay, about my body... I will always walk about with a pretty almond-colored girl who shall laugh and jest... as a young maiden ought.”

I had set out to discover Kipling’s exotic Burma and find that Mandalay has more than lived up to its exotic appeal with gorgeous monuments and even more beautiful people. “For the wind is in the palm trees, and the temple bells they say, ‘Come you back, you British soldier, come you back to Mandalay!’” ■

Walking the Middle Way in Bagan

Uncovering Myanmar's unique brand of Buddhism

**"To be Burmese
is to be
Buddhist."
- Myanmar saying**

WITH ALMOST 90 PERCENT of the population identifying as Buddhist, Myanmar is one of the most devoutly Buddhist countries in the world. The "Land of Pagodas" has more than 56,000 monasteries, home to up to half a million monks and 50,000 nuns to go with an uncountable number of pagodas and temples. Myanmar Buddhism follows the more conservative Theravada branch practiced in Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Thailand, said to be closer to the original Indian form of Buddhism than the Mahayana Buddhism of China, Vietnam and Japan.

To find out more about the fascinating yet confounding brand of Myanmar Buddhism and the role it plays in the lives of everyday people, I head to the plains of Bagan, famously home to over 3,000 pagodas and temples, and where Buddhism became the national religion.

While records indicate that Buddhism was present in Myanmar as early as the third century before Christ, along with Hinduism, and animist beliefs, it wasn't until the 11th century AD that Buddhism found a true champion in King Anawrahta, founder of the Pagan Empire.

Chronicles relate that Shin Arahan, a monk from Thaton in southern Myanmar, came to Anawrahta and converted him to Theravada Buddhism. To give legitimacy to his newfound faith, Anawrahta wanted to have the Tipitaka, or Buddhist Scriptures. When the Mon-speaking King Manuha of the Thaton Kingdom refused to hand them over, Anawrahta took them by force, conquering the kingdom and bringing back thirty sets of Tipitaka as well as King Manuha, his court, monks, artisans and craftsmen.

While in captivity, Manuha would also build a temple. I wander the structure and immediately notice that where other temples are grand, spacious affairs, Manuha's features giant Buddha statues crammed in rooms barely large enough to hold them, linked by narrow passages where only one person can squeeze through at a time, a palpable expression of his own suffocating feelings towards life in captivity.

In addition to the Mon kingdoms in the Irrawaddy valley down to the Andaman Sea to the south, Anawrahta's conquests included Arakan by the Bay of Bengal to the east, Nanzhao (present-day Yunnan in China) to the north and northern and central Thailand to the west, becoming the first to unify all the kingdoms into one country. Thanks to his economic reforms and engineering feats of irrigation, turning the otherwise arid plains of central Burma into a rice granary, the Kingdom of Pagan flourished, ushering in an era of frenzied construction of temples and pagodas that lasted nearly 250 years. It's said that during the golden era of Pagan, even widows could afford to build religious monuments.

Anawrahta's own contribution included the Shwezigon Pagoda, the first major monument built in Burmese style following the country's conversion to Theravada Buddhism. He was able to finish three terraces before his death, each adorned with gorgeous green tiles depicting legends from the previous births of the Buddha.

3, 5 and 8

The number three reminded me of the three main practices in the life of a Myanmar Buddhist: merit, morality and meditation. In George Orwell's *Burmese Days*, he says of his antagonist: "In his eyes his pile of merit was a kind of bank-deposit, everlastingly growing. Every fish set free in the river, every gift to a priest, was a step nearer Nirvana." Everywhere I go in the country, I see acts of merit, ranging from the smallest—leaving out a water jug for thirsty travelers, hanging up a spray of millet for hungry birds, buying a bundle of flowering myrtle as a temple offering, adding a razor thin square of

gold leaf to an image—to the epic—entering children into monastic life, making religious pilgrimages, or the most worthy of all, building a pagoda.

Anawrahta's son completed Shwezigon with two more terraces, bringing the number to five. Every good Buddhist keeps the Five Precepts, exhortations not to kill, steal, lie, drink alcohol or commit adultery. Keeping them, though, involves certain, often humorous, contradictions. Advertising slogans try and convince people that beer isn't really alcohol. "Buddha preached the Middle Way, somewhere in between indulgence and denial," a man tells me with a shrug and a smile when I ask whether he imbibes. In markets, fish and other types of seafood are never sold alive so that the buyer doesn't have to point to one and be complicit in its killing. The sin of butchering is left to non-Buddhist groups when possible or to unfortunate believers who were born to bad karma. Fishermen joke that they're not killing the fish, but rather saving them from drowning.

Shwezigon's terraces lead to an octagonal platform and a gilded stupa. The number 8 also has significance in Myanmar Buddhism. The Noble Eightfold Path teaches eight practices leading to Nirvana and instead of having 12 zodiac signs based on birth year like the Chinese, the Myanmar people recognize the eight days of the week when one is born (with two for those born on Wednesdays—morning and afternoon), each with its own planet, animal and direction, a concept borrowed from Hindi Brahman astrologers. One's day of birth affects everything from what letter his name starts with and who he might be compatible with to where he worships, with each temple offering eight planetary posts where devotees pray and pour water over a Buddha image.

More uniquely, though, Myanmar Buddhism incorporates the reverence of *nats*, or spirits, often powerful people who died tragic or violent deaths in the belief that if they were powerful in this life then they will be powerful in the next. Anawrahta tried to replace this ancient animist belief system which in many



ways is incompatible with Theravada Buddhism, some requiring offerings of animals or alcohol. In the end, the mighty king failed, so with the “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” mentality, he folded the worship of 37 “official” *nats* into the national religion, allowing them a place in the lower terraces of Shwezigon.

In a non-descript building tucked away in the corner of the temple, I find the statues of the *nats* adorned with gold bangles, neatly folded bills and other offerings. *Nats* are believed to be protectors of homes, villages, mountains, and forests, each with a different personality. For some Myanmar people, Buddhism is for the future life whereas the *nats* govern the present. There’s Shwe Saga, a *nat* who was always on time, therefore a favorite of office workers looking to curry favor with the boss. The young and young-at-heart gravitate towards Ko Gyi Kyaw, reputedly a carefree man in life who enjoyed women, gambling and cockfighting and whose festivals are celebrated with copious amounts of alcohol, dancing and all manner of vice.

Ever Standing

I spend the rest of my time cycling the arid Bagan plain, wandering in a dreamscape of spires and stupas, what Somerset Maugham described as ‘looming huge, remote and mysterious, like the vague recollections of a fantastic dream.’ Originally built of wood and brick, only the brick monuments now remain, some with beautifully preserved murals and colorful ceramics. I visit the huge Dhammayangyi Temple, built by wicked King Narathu to atone for smothering his father, brother and one of





his wives. It's said that the king demanded the brickwork fit so tightly together using no visible mortar that if he could stick a pin between the bricks, he would cut off the hands of the unfortunate mason. I find a place where a doorway to the inner corridor looks to be sealed off, some say to trap his evil spirit inside. I also wander through Ananda Temple, often viewed as Bagan's most beautiful, with its corridors filled with hundreds of tiny images housed in niches, and a giant Buddha statue with an expression that can be seen as serious or smiling, depending on whether you're walking the inner corridor for monks or the outer corridor reserved for laymen.

In the courtyard of the graceful Sulamani Temple, I talk to Min who remembers playing hide-and-seek in the cool corridors and dark niches of the 1,000-year-old temples as a child. He also recalls finishing an evening game of football when a 6.5 magnitude earthquake struck in 1975, the worst in 900 years, and being enveloped in a cloud of dust as Thatbyinnyu, Bagan's tallest temple crumbled not far from where he was playing. In August 2016, another earthquake struck, this time a 6.8 magnitude quake causing extensive damage to more than 400 monuments and pagodas.

Min leads me to the back of Sulamani Temple to see where the rubble has been cleared into three piles—original bricks, new bricks and a tangled pile of metal rebar. "See here? They used reinforced concrete to rebuild the pagoda!" he says with disbelief. He's talking of the decade of frenzied renovation between 1995 and 2005 where new pagodas were built on top of old foundations or damaged pagodas were repaired using inauthentic materials and techniques. The pagodas are active sites of worship which mean the people of Myanmar often did what they thought was right—repainting, whitewashing over dingy but original murals, and beautifying exteriors as a form of merit-making without necessarily considering the importance of historically accurate preservation. Unsurprisingly, UNESCO cited poor management strategies as one of the



reasons Bagan was rejected as a World Heritage Site in 1996. Even today, only a paltry two percent of the USD20 entrance fee goes towards temple conservation and maintenance.

The 1990s also saw Myanmar's generals building hotels, roads, a golf course and a viewing tower too close to the temples. Min remembers all the families in what is now Old Bagan, the archaeological zone, being given just two weeks to move to a designated area, ostensibly so the government could conduct excavation work. "They moved us to a place that was just fields filled with snakes with no water or electricity," remembers Min of what is now New Bagan. "People were supposed to get comparable locations, but many families didn't have the money to rebuild according to the high standards the government required, so whole neighborhoods were broken up. They later gave land use in Old Bagan to their cronies who owned hotels and restaurants but the people got nothing. My grandparents are still bitter," he says.

Later, I find myself under a tamarind tree, the tinkling of temple bells in the wind, a guest at a feast of 30 dishes in

honor of King Narathihapate, the last king of the Pagan Empire. Known as a glutton who regularly enjoyed meals of 300 dishes, Narathihapate is also known in Burmese history as "Taruk Pyay Min", or "the King Who Fled from the Mongols." It was under his rule that the Pagan Empire fell before advancing Mongol invasions in the time of Kublai Khan, ending nearly 250 years of building one of the greatest Buddhist sites in the world.

I begin to wonder how Myanmar Buddhist beliefs have influenced how the people dealt with decades of mistreatment under the military junta. I think of the reclining Buddha at the Manuha Temple, the only Buddha with a look of peace, pictured in the last moments of life on earth prior to entering Nirvana. His outstretched palm is empty, signifying that you can't take anything with you, that materialism and greed don't bring happiness. To Myanmar Buddhists, change is inevitable and this lifetime is but one among millions of rebirths until finally escaping earthly suffering and reaching Nirvana. If salvation can only be achieved from within, how important are outside influences? I ask Min what he thinks and he says simply, "Not hungry, not angry," meaning that as long as people have enough to eat, it's the Buddhist way to avoid stress and conflict.

I think about the people I've met throughout the country—humble farmers, sellers and students—people with very little in a material way, but who have welcomed me with ready smiles and a warmth I've never seen anywhere else. The Myanmar people are likened to *pyit taing htaung*, a traditional toy sold on temple steps—oval balls made of papier mâché and covered in gold foil with a painted smiley face. Meaning "ever-standing," there's a small dab of mud on the inside making them bottom-heavy. No matter how hard they're thrown, they always manage to right themselves. I realize that it's a beautiful comparison to the people of Myanmar whose beliefs have made them all *pyit taing htaung*, rising again and again in the face of hardship, ever standing, ever smiling. ■



The End of Strife

Looking for answers to Myanmar's future in Yangon

KNOWN AS “QUEEN OF THE EAST” in the 1880s, Yangon, Myanmar’s largest city, has always held promise. Seeing its potential, 19th century colonist and writer Sir George Scott predicted that Yangon’s trade would outstrip that of Calcutta and rival the most celebrated American cities.

On a muggy afternoon, I find myself at the Bogyoke Aung San Market, a sprawling indoor bazaar built in 1926 with cobblestone streets and pretty colonial architecture. Like so many parks, museums, and other city attractions, the market was renamed after Major General Aung San, one of the country’s most beloved heroes for his role in engineering Myanmar’s independence from British rule. Sadly, he would be assassinated six months before realizing his dream of an independent Myanmar.

I walk past mounds of sour plum chutney and reams of gorgeous silks, but it’s the cases full of colorful rubies and emeralds and the displays of intricately carved teak that catch my eye. Emerging from British rule, Myanmar looked destined to become one of Southeast Asia’s powerhouses—once the world’s top rice exporter as well as being blessed with copious amounts of natural resources including rubies, sapphires, jade, natural gas and dense teak forests, and active in international politics, even home to the UN’s third secretary-general, U Thant.

Within 40 years, though, Myanmar would find itself ignominiously saddled with Least Developed Country status and

is still one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia, barely beating out last-place Cambodia with a per capita gross national income of just USD1,160. I explore the pretty yet dilapidated streets of Yangon searching for answers on how a country with so much promise had fallen so low, so fast.

The many hundreds of colonial buildings left in Yangon are testaments that Myanmar’s independence from Britain came at a heavy price. In the decade following, the government began to crumble under competing interests, ambitions and loyalties, secessionist ethnic states were involved in civil conflict and the country’s economy was in shambles, providing a perfect storm for General Ne Win, commander of Burma’s armed forces, to step in and take power in 1962.

Tired of decades of foreign intervention and economic exploitation by the British, Indian, and Chinese among others, Ne Win introduced the “Burmese Way to Socialism,” a generation of xenophobia and extreme socialist economics that many liken to present-day North Korea. Turning to a policy of isolationism, the military government expelled Western foreign aid agencies, closed down foreign businesses and issued tourist visas of only 24 hours.

I find myself walking through Yangon’s historic downtown, down the tree-lined street of Pansodan to the Yangon River. Seen from above, the area looks like a chessboard, rebuilt on a grid plan in the 1850s under the British. The

streets are lined with colonial-era apartment buildings with pretty balconies and peeling paint, known colloquially as “Indian apartments” after the Indian officials brought in by the British Raj to govern Myanmar. By the 1930s, Yangon was more than two-thirds Indian, but beginning in 1964, General Ne Win began expelling them, even those who had been in Myanmar for generations.

Later, I visit the Chin Tsong Palace, a lavish residence built in 1918 by a Chinese business tycoon and merchant. The palace is now State-owned property, repurposed as Yangon’s State High School for Fine Arts. In the 1960s, Ne Win would also persecute ethnic Chinese, banning Chinese-language education, encouraging anti-Chinese sentiment and nationalizing all major businesses and industries in an effort to coerce foreigners, including non-citizen Burmese-Chinese, to leave the country. At the palace, I walk through the grand entrance hall and look up to find gorgeous moldings, intricate wood carvings and dainty half-moon skylights. Most of its rooms are padlocked, so we make our way upstairs where a single high-ceilinged room with blotchy pale blue paint serves as a classroom. Various buildings around the grounds house painting, sculpting and music workshops. I watch as 20-year-old Aung Zaw Win plays a complicated piece on the *pattala*, a boat-shaped Burmese xylophone, in preparation for final exams. His mallets dance over the





instrument, exposing a tattoo on his forearm of a music clef blooming into a flower. Elsewhere, half-finished sculptures with missing limbs add to the peculiar vibe of the school, a contrast of young, passionate artists preparing for their future in the setting of an eerie, decaying mansion.

In the decades of military rule, Myanmar's precious natural resources lined the pockets of the ruling elite, with very little finding its way back to the people. One afternoon, I hop on the circular train, a 3-hour, 28-mile, 39-station loop that chugs its way around metropolitan Yangon. Hawkers transit through the carriages selling corn-on-the-cob and green bananas to sleepy commuters. I alight at the busy market town of Insein, a waypoint for goods from up north headed into Yangon. The Burmese have a joke that long before Google pioneered them, driverless cars were invented in Myanmar, referring to trucks carrying illegal goods of corrupt officials that suddenly became ownerless when stopped by the police.

Their Time Will Come

Back in Yangon, I jump on the ferry to Dala, just 15 minutes from downtown Yangon but a world away. Gateway to the Ayeyarwady Delta, the township enjoys few of the conveniences available just across the river. Dusty lanes lead to bamboo homes with tin roofs where families run small businesses like making candles for pagoda offerings and crafts from recycled materials. People fill jerry cans with water from a town well or from lotus-filled ponds when the wells run dry.

At one home, I talk to 68-year-old Daw Thin Htay, a woman with handsome features and calloused hands as she oversees some nephews and neighborhood boys making rice paper in a carefully choreographed display involving 16 griddles and some very gloopy dough. I find out that her family

moved to Dala 30 years ago when the military government took her farmland up-country, ostensibly for some "project" that never went through. I ask if there's any way she can get her land back and she laughs the laugh of the impossible. "I'm still bitter, but I believe in karma. Their time will come," she says. I begin to understand why a Burmese proverb lists government among the five evils, together with fire, flood, thieves and enemies.

The world's attention would focus once more on the plight of the Myanmar people under an isolationist regime when Cyclone Nargis struck in May 2008, devastating the densely populated, low-lying Ayeyarwady Delta, including Dala, in the worst natural disaster in the country's recorded history. Upwards of 138,000 people were killed and damage was estimated at USD10 billion. Initially, the military junta blocked entry for large-scale international relief efforts allegedly out of fear of foreign invasion, only later bowing to international condemnation. It would signal the beginning of the end of a flawed regime. Just two years later, the military junta handed over power to a nominally civilian government after the first elections in 20 years, and released Nobel Peace Prize winner and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi after almost 15 years of house arrest.

One baking afternoon, I walk past the street bazaars and up the 118 steps of the eastern entrance to Shwedagon Pagoda, one of the holiest Buddhist sites in the world. Built around 588 BC to house eight strands of hair from Gautama Buddha along with other sacred relics, the pagoda now stands 326 feet tall and can be seen from almost anywhere in the city. The stupa alone is said to be made from 8,688 solid gold blocks, topped by an umbrella of 500 kgs of gold with a diamond orb at the top made up of 4,351 diamonds totaling 1,800 carats which

is in turn crowned by a single 76-carat diamond. Even for non-believers, the sheer beauty of the pagoda together with its multi-billion-dollar bling is staggering. Rudyard Kipling called it 'a beautiful winking wonder that blazed in the sun, and as it stood overlooking everything it seemed to explain all about Burma.'

Shwedagon has indeed witnessed some of the country's most momentous occasions. It was there when Yangon was but a small fishing village (then known as Dagon) built around the pagoda over 2,000 years ago. It was there when the British took advantage of its commanding elevated terraces and used it as a military post. It was also there that in January 1946, General Aung San demanded independence from the British. Forty-two years later, his daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, would give her first public speech in front of Shwedagon to half a million people calling for democracy from the military regime through non-violent resistance.

Known affectionately as "The Lady," Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy, were finally voted in to power in 2015, although she was barred from becoming president by clauses the military government had inserted into the 2008 constitution especially for her. It took an eagle-eyed constitutional specialist, Ko Ni, to find a loophole allowing parliament to create a new position for her, even higher than president.

Since the transition to democracy, the people of Myanmar have seen positive changes. In the final years of military rule, a paltry USD1.60 per person was spent on public health and only 1.5% of the GDP on education, compared to 40% on defense. Nowadays, primary school is free as are some services at state hospitals. The people also enjoy more access to information. I talk to Thwe, a 31-old-year Yangonite, who remembers

when SIM cards cost USD1,000 to buy under military rule and then only if you first won a lottery. The lucky ones would then turn around and sell them for USD3,000 on the black market. Now, SIM cards are just a dollar each, opening the country to a free flow of information. “People cannot be so corrupt anymore,” she says, “because we can post it to Facebook and everyone will know.”

Other improvements are in the works, although at a glacial pace, limited by budgetary and other constraints. Gorgeous colonial-era buildings lay abandoned or taken over by squatters with no state money for maintenance or restoration. The day before I arrive, a new bus system had been put into place consolidating some 300 bus routes from four companies into just one system with 70 routes, vital in a city where motorbikes have been banned since 2003. Smiling volunteers were handing out maps of the new routes to long lines of people waiting for delayed, dilapidated buses yet to be upgraded.

On a ferry ride, I strike up a conversation with a woman in a crisp white blouse and jewel-toned longyi, hair pulled back in a neat bun. Talk soon turns to politics and I wonder whether news of The Orange One had made it all

the way to Myanmar. “We were so sad Hillary didn’t win,” she says while sharing a little bag of fried samosas with me. “She and Aung San Suu Kyi were best friends!” She’s referring to Hillary Clinton’s historic 2011 visit, the first from a high-ranking US official in nearly 50 years. For Clinton, improving relations with Myanmar would be regarded by many as the highlight from her time as secretary of state. For the Myanmar people, a Clinton presidency held out hope of desperately needed foreign investment that has been slow in coming in a country where frequent power cuts and a business culture based on facilitation payments and a lack of transparency still persists.

The new government is focused on slowly unraveling 50 years of mismanagement and corruption, tackling the larger obstacles first like the on-going armed conflicts amongst some of the country’s 135 ethnic groups, especially along the western border with Bangladesh and the northern border with China in what has been described as one of the world’s longest running civil wars. Aung San Suu Kyi’s government is further hampered by a provision in the constitution guaranteeing 25 percent of the seats in parliament for unelected

military representatives able to veto any changes to the constitution.

The road to peace for Myanmar continues to be a long one. Just days before I leave, the country is rocked by news that Ko Ni, the legal adviser who helped Aung San Suu Kyi become State Counsellor and de facto head of government, was gunned down at Yangon Airport, supposedly by a former lieutenant-colonel in the army. It’s said that he was working on a new draft of the constitution that would once and for all strip the military of its extraordinary political powers.

Despite the setbacks, the people of Yangon seem ready to wait just a little bit longer for a unified and peaceful Myanmar. On my way to the famed hole-in-the-wall eatery, 999 Shan Noodle Shop, I come across a peaceful anti-war demonstration with people holding up colorful “Stop War” signs with pictures of white doves and olive branches. When I ask Thwe if changes are coming quickly enough for her, she says: “We trust The Lady. She loves our country. We just don’t want to fight anymore.”

Perhaps it’s finally time for the city to live up to its name, not as the Queen of the East or as British Rangoon, but as proud Yangon, meaning “End of Strife”. ■



Inle 360

Exploring Inle Lake by air,
land and water



LOCATED IN THE EASTERN Shan State, Inle Lake is truly ethereal, marrying Nature's kaleidoscope of pristine mountain-fed waters ringed by rolling hills with spectacularly colorful ethnic groups living both on and around the lake. Myanmar's first designated entry into the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, Inle is home to some 90 species of wetland birds including herons, warblers, cormorants, and egrets and today, I'm determined to see what they see from a hot air balloon high over Inle Lake.

It's an ungodly hour when I find myself zipping in the chilly darkness over the lake to the unremarkable town of Nyaungshwe, gateway to Inle. Hazy, pre-dawn images emerge of a deserted school courtyard, and we rub the last vestiges of sleep from our eyes while shoveling down croissants and a blessed cup of coffee. In no time at all, the ground team readies

the hot air balloon, and we silently rise into the morning stillness. The nature of hot air balloons puts us at the mercy of the winds, but it's a favorable morning and we're soon over colorful stilted houses that resemble a jumble of Legos. For now, the longboats that ply the waters are blissfully quiet, lined up like so many crayons at the jetty. Soon, the first settlements that surround the lake come into view, illuminated in a rosy glow by the sunlight peeking over the hills. Green ribbons of floating gardens inchworm their way across the waterscape, dotted by ramshackle little huts providing shade for the farmers.

We stall somewhere over the edge of the floating gardens and Nic, our British pilot, asks if we're comfortable gaining altitude in an attempt to change our fortunes. Part art, part science, piloting a hot air balloon requires managing a situational awareness puzzle aided by

an app with real-time data on wind conditions and current location to ascend or descend to catch the air currents in just the right direction. While most balloon rides coast somewhere between the treetops and max out at three thousand feet, flying in Inle Lake is spectacularly unique in that balloons are able to ascend to around 10,000 feet, thanks to being in a sparsely populated area with the nearest airport two mountain ranges away and with no early morning flights. The ride is surprisingly smooth because the balloon moves at the same speed as the wind and as we rise, the lake takes on the visage of a blue mirror, clouds reflected in the glassy water with the surrounding Shan hills reduced to chocolatey mounds of soft-serve ice cream. At one-third the altitude of commercial airplanes, I force myself to lean out of the basket and look straight down onto a watery world of blues,





greens and browns. The view is briefly lost in a haze of clouds, but then we pierce through and find ourselves literally on top of the world, the glassy water replaced by a sea of billowy white clouds. I tweet out a picture and immediately get responses ranging from disbelief (“Photoshopped!”) to amazement (“Looks like a scene from the movie Up!”).

During the 1.5-hour flight, we travel almost the entire length of the lake, 14 miles long and 7 miles wide, wider at the top end, but more populated towards the southern end, and too soon find ourselves descending back on the town, watched by folks with craned necks and mouths agape as the giant green balloon floats just feet above their homes. Nic heads for a helipad, now filled with kids playing soccer. He’s tried to land there for the last three years with no success, but as it has the whole morning, something in the air feels just right and we touch down, light as a feather, with glasses of champagne to celebrate the perfect flight over Inle.

Children of the Dragon

About 33 ethnic groups call the area around Inle home, including the Shan, Intha and Padaung, known for their long-necked women. During British rule, the highlands were blissfully left largely alone, away from the politics of the plains and thereby preserving much of their culture and traditions. The Shan chiefs enjoyed cordial relationships with the British and it’s said that the stunning glass mosaics at the Nga Hpe Chaung Monastery are made from Venetian glass, a gift from one of the colonial officials. Today, I head up the hills in search of the Highland Pa O, the second largest ethnic group in the state.

According to legend, the Pa O descended from an inter-species union

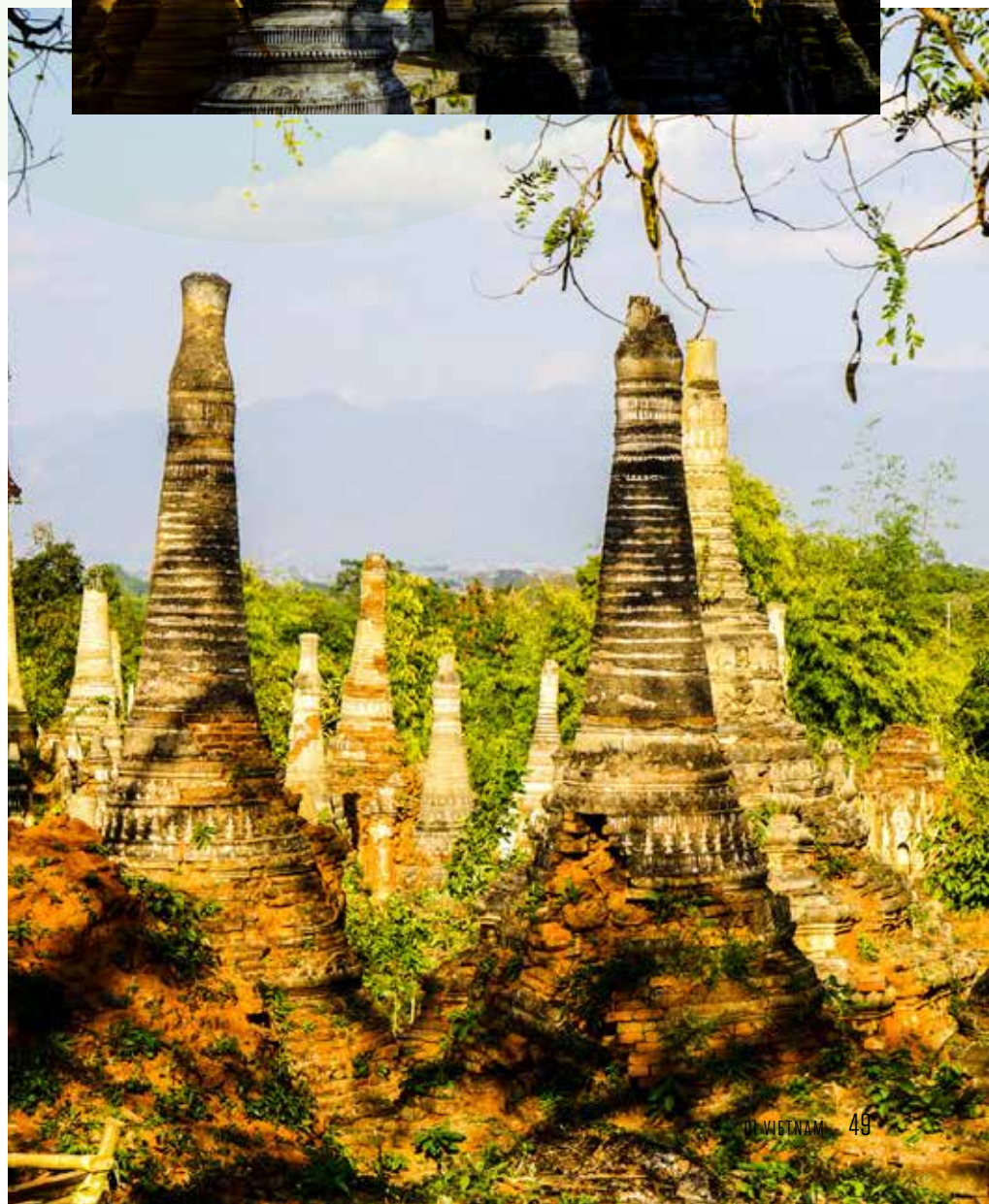
between a dragon who took the form of a woman and a shaman named Zawgyi. The woman could never sleep less she turn back to a dragon, but tired from laying eggs, she fell into a slumber. Zawgyi returned to find his wife in her real dragon form and fled. Abandoned, the eggs cracked open, revealing the first Pa O people inside (“Pa” the sound of a crack and “O” meaning “eggs”). Even today, the colorful turbans of the Pa O women are said to resemble the head of a dragon. I hear more of the colorful Pa O lore as we hike for almost three hours uphill, passing the odd woman washing clothes by a spring or a farmer working fields so intensely green, I don’t think an adequate adjective has been invented yet to describe it. A burst of scarlet signals a Flame of the Forest tree with its tiger claw-like flowers, and I hear the tale of the local nats, or guardian spirits—two brothers who had the ability to tame tigers. Wary of their powers, the king had them put to death, only for them to return as Lords of the Forest. We pass little rustic shrines in their honor, set under big trees which the nats are believed to inhabit, as we make our way to the tiny town of Loikaw, where homes of woven bamboo walls and tin roofs are neatly laid out next to gardens filled with butterflies and vegetables. Dark black chimneys adorn most of the houses, signaling the roasting of the heart-shaped cheroot leaves used to wrap Burmese cigars that only grow in Shan State. As a reward for our trek, a feast awaits of mostly vegetarian dishes—an avocado salad plucked from a tree in the yard, a potato and eggplant curry from the garden and various fresh leaves and herbs. The Pa O diet doesn’t include much meat on a daily basis, only when they’re able to head down the mountain to the five-day rotating market to trade ginger, garlic and tea for fish and other



proteins. Market days are also used for laundry and bathing in the lake water, and visiting the many holy sites around the lake, including Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda, with its five small Buddha images so caked with gold leaf that they now resemble featureless snowmen, and Inthein, a hilltop pagoda with more than 1,000 densely packed stupas from the 17th and 18th centuries. Market day over, the Pa O return to the idyllic peace of their villages high in the hills of Inle.

Children of the Lake

Inle Lake is home to about 150,000 people, many from the Intha ethnic group. Meaning “Children of the Lake”, the Intha are said to be descendants of the Mon people from southern Myanmar, one of the earliest to reside in Southeast Asia.



Now mainly fishermen and farmers, the Intha live a fascinating existence almost entirely on the water.

To navigate the clear, shallow waters of the lake with its tangles of lake weed, floating plants and reeds, the Intha fishermen long ago discovered that it would be easier to stand and row. Emulating the sacred egret, they tuck their oar under an arm, balance on the prow and row with one leg, leaving their hands free to fish. Watching for bubbles, they plunge the traditional conical net into the water and use a harpoon-like stick to herd the fish into the sides of the net which bunch up into pockets as the net is lifted up. Using conical nets requires more skill and patience, but in return, they yield bigger catches. More commonly, though, fishermen are



turning to long nets, meticulously strung out with little wooden floats. Then, breaking the silence of the lake, the oars make a loud *thwap* as they smack the surface of the water, scaring the fish into the nets.

I spend the day with Naung Sai who grew up on the lake, child to an Intha father and a Shan mother. Even though he now lives in town, he says he really only feels at peace on the water. “The lake is in our blood. Cars and traffic scare us,” he says, explaining why the Intha rarely venture on land, preferring life in their stilted houses, getting around by boat and tending to their floating gardens.

A massive hydroponic project, the floating gardens are made up of layers of lake weed and other plant material piled to a depth of about three feet. Silt and earth are added along with compost over a period of six months to create thick, spongy mats, strong enough to hold the weight of a man. The gardens are then arranged in neat rows, pegged to the lake bottom by long bamboo poles. Lasting 20-25 years, the floating gardens

supply 60 percent of all the tomatoes eaten in the country, as well as cucumbers and beans.

We cruise the lake, visiting villages made up of large, clapboard homes, housing multi-generational families with extensive gardens. Some communities specialize in crafts that make use of local products: silver from the surrounding hills, mulberry pulp for paper umbrellas made earthy orange with persimmon juice and even fibers from lotus stems spun into yarn for weaving. Local lore has it that this incredibly rare, time- and labor-intensive practice originated a century ago when a woman used a staggering 220,000 lotus stems to create a full set of monk’s robes, the ultimate gift of devotion. Throughout the villages, waterways replace roads, lake dwellers perched solidly on the most flimsy of canoes showing incredible balance and grip strength.

Life on the lake, however, is a delicate balancing act in more ways than one. Naung holds out the back of his hands to reveal tattoos common to most Intha men—a garuda, a mythical half-bird,

half-man and the eternal enemy of the Naga serpent on one hand, and a dragon, the king of the snakes, on the other. “I don’t really know if it works or not,” says Naung, “but my neighbor got bitten three times by cobras on his floating gardens and didn’t die.” The tattoos are done by the monks, the ink mixed with ash and black widow spider venom, believed to help ward off poisons.

Maintaining the healthy but fragile ecosystem of the lake is also a challenge. More tourists mean more boat traffic, along with the accompanying noise and pollution. More gardens lead to silting, with the 63 square miles of the lake now just half of what it once was. And global warming has led to increased drought and lower water levels in recent years. Nevertheless, with the government pledging USD40 million towards protecting beautiful Inle Lake, the residents are hopeful that the inevitable wave of tourism and development won’t change the delicate nature of life on Myanmar’s second largest lake. “This is our home,” says Naung. “We are the children of the lake.” ■

Stompin' at the Savoy

A stay at Yangon's colonial Savoy Hotel

WITH ONE OF THE MOST complete collections of colonial architecture in the world, it's doesn't take much effort to imagine Yangon of the late 19th century when it became the capital of British Burma. Its downtown boasts leafy roads lined with stylish buildings bursting with character, some repurposed as government offices, embassies or storefronts. A very select few have been turned into luxe hotels where guests are invited to step back in time to turn-of-the-century Yangon.

The Savoy Hotel was originally a residence built over 70 years ago, not long after the jazz classic "Stompin' at the Savoy" was penned. While named after Harlem's famed nightspot, I would find that the song equally captures the elegance and timelessness of The Savoy Hotel.

Savoy, it wins you with a glance. Pulling up to the hotel just a stone's throw from the Shwedagon Pagoda, I'm struck by the crisp white exterior, the pillared entranceway and the bellman armed with a warm smile. The two-story façade is part of the original building, first a residence then a tea house and since 1995, a 30-room, four-star boutique hotel rated the second-best in Yangon (the top hotel is twice the price at USD550 per night). I walk to Reception,

through a brightly lit hallway of marble floors, eclectic antiques and pretty wood moldings. The Savoy feels like a home. Or more precisely, it feels like home.

Your old form just like a clinging vine. After settling in, it's time for a dip on a hot Yangon afternoon. The pretty pool is the center of the hotel, located between the original building which houses the entrance, an elegant fine dining restaurant, a traditional European bistro and a cozy bar, and the newer addition where the rooms are located up appropriately creaky stairs. Vines dangle from balconies and flowering creepers send down their tendrils providing a natural respite from the sun.

How my heart is singing while the band is swinging. In the late afternoon, I find my way to the nautical-themed Captain's Bar with its framed vintage Irrawaddy Flotilla posters and black-and-white photos of British Burma. An appropriately mellow soundtrack plays as guests enjoy afternoon cocktails. Feeling peckish, I pull up a chair at Le Bistro instead. The gourmet burgers tantalize with names like Le Marcel (Angus Beef, caramelized onions, cheddar cheese, bacon and chives) and the Chookatoo (Chicken, lemongrass, green curry, eggplant, tomato, lettuce, cheddar), but I settle for a toasted ham

and cheese baguette and a cappuccino, followed by a scoop of wonderfully tart blood orange sorbet.

Just before dinner, I catch up with Florian Eberhardt, Chef de Cuisine of Kipling's Restaurant, the hotel's fine dining venue. Previously working the kitchen at Hoi An's The Nam Hai (now a Four Seasons), Chef Eberhardt adds his light touch to Kipling's "Green Pan Asian Cuisine" featuring lightly cooked dishes using less salt, sugar, butter, cream and alcohol. We talk about Yangon's burgeoning food scene which Chef Eberhardt describes as having everything from home eateries helmed by housewives and open until the food runs out to a small but growing handful of "price sensitive" international restaurants. Kipling's Restaurant utilizes some of Myanmar's best products like organic vegetables and fruits from the Shan highlands as well as local wild herbs and edible flowers in its menu featuring standout dishes like Golden Mountain rice noodles with coconut milk, shredded chicken, chili paste and cubes of duck blood or the Burmese lamb curry with potato, tomato and turmeric.

I'm never tired of romping and stomping at the Savoy. What joy - a perfect holiday. After a long day traipsing around Yangon by train, trishaw and car, I sink into a blissfully dreamless sleep in my spacious room filled with Myanmar antiques and wooden furnishings. It truly has been "a perfect holiday," joy at the Savoy. ■

The Savoy Hotel features 24 deluxe rooms and six suites in the heart of Yangon, close to the Shwedagon Pagoda and the People's Park. Breakfast includes both buffet and a la carte items. Deluxe Doubles start at USD275 per night in high season. See www.savoy-myanmar.com for more, including summer specials.



If you Go

What to do:

While much of the country can be travelled independently and the logistics of travel (eg. booking transportation, accommodation, etc.) are improving, there's so much history and culture behind every monument, pagoda, monastery and village that much would be lost without a knowledgeable guide who can share the back stories and the ever-changing reality of Myanmar.

Trails of Indochina (www.trailsofindochina.com) specializes in completely customized, tailored and bespoke itineraries in Southeast Asia. I let them know that I was interested in seeing places from behind-the-scenes and connecting with locals, and they delivered with a memorable day tour of Yangon crammed with interesting activities like the Circular Train, visiting Shwedagon and seeing less visited sites like the State High School for Fine Arts. I also enjoyed seeing a slice of authentic Myanmar life on our afternoon ferry ride to Dala. In Inle Lake, most boat drivers speak no English and basically only offer transportation to the various sites. In contrast, the tour I took shed light on the history of the region and the guide was extremely flexible on what I wanted to see.

Khiri Travel (www.khiri.com) offers tours in Southeast Asia to meet any budget, with a focus on discovery and sustainability, including community-based tourism, tree planting and projects to help the disadvantaged. I saw both aspects in the signature tours I went on, including a tour of Bagan highlighted by an amazing banquet of 30 dishes showcasing the flavors of Myanmar and a day of hiking up the Shan hills to a Pa O village. Both guides were very knowledgeable and personable, happy to go into detail in response to my many, many questions. Khiri Travel has offices and specialist teams in Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos).

Oriental Ballooning (www.orientalballooning.com) offers unforgettable hot air balloon rides by UK commercially licensed pilots in Bagan, Mandalay, Inle, Pindaya and Ngapali.

This was my first ever balloon ride and I could not have felt safer. A quick breakfast was followed by a safety briefing and throughout the flight, our pilot kept up a running commentary on what we were seeing and frequently turned the balloon in different directions to enable everyone to enjoy spectacular views over Inle Lake. Back on the ground, we were feted with champagne and fresh fruit while the crew packed the balloon away. While not cheap (flights are between USD380-395 per person), balloon rides and the views they provide are simply magical. Book early to avoid disappointment as spaces sell out quickly. The ballooning season in Myanmar is typically between October and March/April.

Grasshopper Adventures (www.grasshopperadventures.com) offers scheduled, custom or on-demand bicycle tours ranging from half-day trips to two week expeditions in 16 Asian countries. Cycling is a great way to get off the tourist trail (literally!). My half-day trips in Mandalay and Bagan were excellent for chasing serendipitous moments, like being unexpectedly invited to a novitiation ceremony, something I'll never forget. The guides were extremely friendly and accommodating to everyone in the group (usually between 6-14 on scheduled tours), making sure everyone was comfortable. We had frequent rest stops, including at tea houses for some truly local snacks.

Where to stay

Bagan: Most hotels are in New Bagan close to shops and restaurants, with a few in the archeological zone of Old Bagan.

The Hotel @ Tharabar Gate (www.tharabargate.com) in Old Bagan is within a five-minute walk of Bagan's oldest and only remaining city gate as well as the graceful Ananda Temple. Set in beautifully landscaped grounds, my bungalow-style Deluxe Room was wonderfully spacious with gleaming wood floors. The picturesque pool was also welcome after a day exploring the temples. The hotel has a traditional feel, utilizing locally-sourced materials highlighted by wood carvings designed by local artists. Deluxe Doubles with breakfast start at USD245 per night.





Yangon: Taxis are plentiful and cheap, but even with no motorbikes allowed, narrow roads can lead to traffic. While the downtown and riverfront have the largest concentration of colonial-era buildings, the “Garden City of the East” boasts lots of beautiful lakes, shady parks and verdant tropical trees.

Rose Garden Hotel (www.theroseyangon.com) has “wow” factor in spades, evidenced when you first enter the grand lobby highlighted by four colossal pillars with the Reception area discreetly tucked away down a corridor lit by filigreed lamps. The three-year-old property offers five-star amenities with touches of Myanmar-inspired design elements, including beautiful paper umbrellas repurposed as lamps. My Superior Room was a generous 32sqm and featured wood floors and stone accents in the foyer and spacious bathroom. Located right on Upper Pansodan, the Rose Garden was an easy walk to the pretty Yangon Central Railway Station and the downtown/riverfront area. Set near scenic Kandawgyi Lake and the zoo, my room had views over thickly forested land with the unexpected bonus of hearing lions in the morning! Superior Doubles including breakfast start at USD210 per night.

Located less than 2km north of the Shwedagon Pagoda, the boutique **Savoy Hotel** (www.savoy-myanmar.com) offers guests a taste of what life might have been like in British Burma. The building housing what is now the entrance, an elegant fine dining restaurant, a traditional European bistro and a cozy bar were originally a colonial-era residence. The 30 rooms are in a newer addition overlooking a lovely swimming pool and spa. My generously-sized Deluxe Room came with traditional Myanmar antiques and wooden furnishings, including a comfortable sitting area by the floor-to-ceiling windows. The included breakfast featured both buffet and a la carte items like Eggs Benedict. Deluxe Doubles start at USD275 per night in high season. ■

My Bagan Residence by Amata (www.amatahotelgroup.com) in New Bagan is a beautiful mix of contemporary facilities and traditional décor. 25 spacious rooms offer King-sized or two twin beds and a large bathroom with walk-in rain shower. Located next to a handful of restored temples, the hotel also has a spa and pool. What I liked the most, though, was the outdoor terrace which hosted nightly shows featuring puppetry, dancing and singing, all backed by a live traditional band (complimentary for hotel guests). The restaurant serves beautifully presented, generously portioned meals including a salad or soup, a main and a drink for less than USD10. Doubles with breakfast start at USD99 per night.

Inle Lake: Most accommodation is bunched at the ramshackle town of Nyaungshwe towards the top of the lake. Only a few select properties are around the lake itself, providing a true Inle experience. One of the southernmost properties is the luxe **Amata Garden Resort Inle Lake** (www.amatahotelgroup.com). Accommodations are in the three-storey hotel or in 20 gorgeous villas comprised of a 63sqm room and 14sqm outdoor terrace, all set on 18 sprawling acres. An infinity pool overlooks the floating gardens and the lake beyond. I loved staying towards the southern end of the lake as it basically meant a free lake tour coming back from any activities. With how beautiful Inle is, you’ll want to seize any opportunity to be out on the water. Hotel doubles with breakfast start at USD135 per night.



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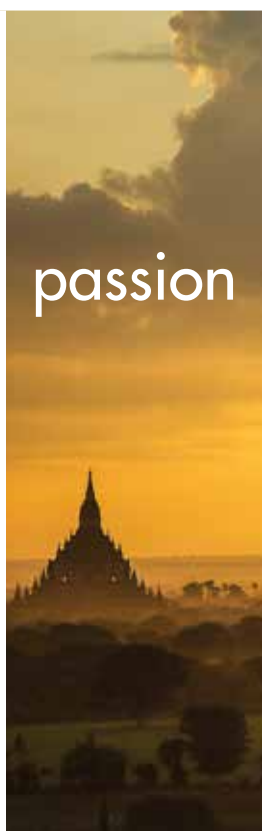
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Wine & Dine

SATURDAY BRUNCH @ HOTEL EQUATORIAL HCMC



IMAGE PROVIDED BY HOTEL EQUATORIAL HCMC



COUNTRYSIDE CLASSICS

From northern apricot wine to Hue shrimp cakes, discover delicious local favorites at Đền Lồng



IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR a casual spot for topnotch Vietnamese comfort food, take note of the newly opened **Đền Lồng Restaurant** (130 Nguyen Trai, D1). While the space appears small at first glance, it has a meandering layout across multiple floors that's deceptively large, though manages to maintain a cozy, intimate environment. Also quite extensive is the menu, boasting traditional favorites from across the country that forced us into a few tough decisions throughout the meal. However, based on our experience, it seems like you really can't go wrong.

What makes the aptly named Đền Lồng (Vietnamese for "lantern") stand out is the noticeable pride the friendly staff takes in sharing their high-quality cuisine. Smiling waitresses dressed in *áo bà ba*, a casual silk ensemble popular in southern Vietnam, were attentive and always ready to answer any questions with a smile while we navigated the menu.

The upbeat yellow walls and brightly colored, modern décor furthered this ambience. One wall, decorated with

mixed and matched reclaimed window shutters, gave off a rustic feel that hinted at the countryside classics available on menu. As we waited for our food to arrive, the manager explained the significance of the Hoi An-inspired lanterns hanging from the ceiling, the miniature fish trap replicas adorning the walls, and the historic moments depicted in the artwork, setting the stage for a feel-good meal. Refreshingly unpretentious, Đền Lồng serves up a home-style dining experience that celebrates Vietnamese heritage, and is equally suitable for date night or the whole family.

To start things out, we ordered a round of delicious *ruou* or Vietnamese wine. The northern Vietnamese apricot wine (VND85,000) was a pungent spirit with a honey-like taste that went down all too easily, while the sticky rice wine (VND85,000), originating from central Vietnam, was also sweet, but a bit stronger and perfect for sipping. It's worth mentioning that eliminating their third wine option, a southern Vietnamese coconut wine, was one of our first difficult

decisions. We'll just have to come back to try it!

Properly primed with a warm feeling in our chests, the appetizers soon arrived and set a high bar, the first of which was *banh loc gỏi lá don* or shrimp cakes (VND65,000) wrapped in don leaves. A favorite from the ancient capital, Hue, these tasty little cakes dipped in fish sauce packed a punch of flavor with a soft dumpling-like exterior and a pleasant crunch on the inside.

Next up, the *cua lot rang me*, or soft shell crabs sautéed with tamarind sauce, (VND125,000) was a revelation. A sweet and tangy treat, this was a dish of pure bliss with no pretense. Without taking anything away from the rest of the meal, these were the unanimous favorite for us. The plump crabs, expertly cooked and complemented with just the right amount of zesty sauce, had us contemplating a second round.

At the recommendation of the manager, we opted for the *tom rim ba chi co do*, or caramelized shrimp and pork Old Capital style (VND75,000), served



Text by **Wesley Grover**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**

Grilled ribs with lemongrass, shrimp cakes in don leaves, caramelized shrimp and pork, and soft shell crabs sautéed with tamarind sauce



in a clay pot with a side of steamed rice (VND15,000), which proved to be another dish that excited our palates. Prepared with a combination of sweet and savory spices with hints of garlic and pepper, the tender pork was bursting with flavor and left a hot kick at the end that could only be soothed with a sip of *ruou*.

Still fixing for some meaty fare, we ordered the *suon non nuong sa* (grilled baby ribs with lemongrass, VND115,000). These succulent little morsels, lightly

rubbed with spices and sesame seeds, came right off the bone and were dipped in a zinger of a sauce made from green chilies and lemon juice that we couldn't get enough of.

Finally, with sated bellies, we rounded out the meal with a seasonal mixed fruit plate (VND65,000). The fresh guava, Vietnamese cherries, pineapple and watermelon made for an ideal palate cleanser that left us feeling comfortably full without falling into a food coma. ■



Mixed fruit plate, northern Vietnamese apricot wine

THE STEAKS ARE HIGH

A soaring space for serious steak nestled in the heart of downtown Saigon



Text by **Nate Nivens** / Images by **Ngoc Tran**



SINCE THE OPENING IN MAY 2016, B3 Steakhouse and Craft Beer (Level 1, 90 Nguyen Hue, D1; 3pm-11pm) has been quietly gaining a loyal following with its juicy cuts of grass-fed New Zealand beef, served in a premise located inside a historic heritage building in downtown Saigon.

Being different from other steakhouses in town, the restaurant brings a friendly and cozy atmosphere by combining retro and contemporary street art in its decor. The name B3 Steakhouse stands for Beer, Beef and Buddies (in Vietnamese it's *Bia, Bò* and *Bạn*). They are unquestionably the ingredients for a good time, one that we embraced during our recent trip.





OP Rib



*Sauteed mushrooms,
cream spinach, gratin dauphinois*

When opening the menu, our first impression was that the owners are serious about their steaks here. There are 8 different cuts of beef alongside photos to illustrate, and all come in 3 sizes: 200, 300 or 500g. The cuts vary from the common Tenderloin and Rib Eye to the lesser-known Oyster Blade.

Diners can customize their meal from a complimentary selection of 11 sauces and 16 sides. From the drink list, there are no less than 15 local craft beers on tap, ranging from local favorites like Pasteur Street and Phat Rooster to quality imports such as Belgian favorites Duvel and Maredsous. For wine lovers, the wine list is a standout for variety, value and quality.

To start our dinner, we ordered a Burrata salad (VND195,000). The salad was a generous serving of three varieties of organic lettuce, mixing with parmesan cheese, ham and a Burrata Cheese bun in the center. When bursting the Burrata bun, the fresh cheese blended well with the ham while the greens and dressing sauce paired perfectly with it, freshening the mouth with parsley and garlic were both crisp and rich, respectively.

Moving on to the highlight of the dinner-the Beef, it is worthy to mention that B3 offers fresh beef from New Zealand. This is top quality fresh Prime Steer Beef with a standard of grass-fed, no GMO, no hormone and no antibiotic. As recommended by one of the staffs, we went for their specialty 900g OP Rib (VND995,000) and a 300g Tenderloin (VND665,000).

The OP Ribs came with 2 side dishes and 2 sauces, while the Tenderloin came with one side and one sauce. For the sauce, we chose Béarnaise, Blue Cheese and Chimichurri in pairing with the side dishes Gratin Dauphinois, Sautéed Mushrooms, Cream Spinach. Couldn't help the temptation, we added a side of warm goat cheese on bread to make sure we try all the best dishes of the restaurant.

The OP Rib arrived on a wooden platter with gorgeous sear marks. The meat was cooked to an ideal medium rare, just as we had requested. The chimichurri sauce paired perfectly with it, freshening the mouth with parsley and garlic nuances while the blue cheese embraced the beef flavor to its best.

The Tenderloin lived up to its reputation to the fullest: very tender and juicy, cooked to a perfect medium rare. Paired spectacularly well with the béarnaise sauce - a great combination of sour and buttery flavor that uplifted the natural flavors of the steaks. When it came to our side dishes we congratulated ourselves at having made excellent choices, although it would have been hard to go wrong. The Warm Goat Cheese on bread featured generous slices of aged French goat cheese on crispy bread. Not to be outdone, the Gratin Dauphinois arrived on the table piping hot, with a golden crisp and creamy core. Our dish of Sautéed Mushrooms was possibly my favorite, it had a well-chosen mix of Shimeji and Paddy Straw mushroom sautéed to perfection in butter and garlic.



Brownie with ice cream

Despite having nearly 1,2KG of meat on the table, we enjoyed the meat to the very last piece.

We wrapped up our night with a Brownie topped with vanilla ice cream (VND85,000). The brownie was rich in dark chocolate and warmed with a wonderfully molten consistency.

By the end of the night we could confirm our first impression, B3 Steakhouse can count two more among their rapidly growing fan base. This new steakhouse might just earn itself a fourth B, for Best. ■

B3 Steakhouse & Craft Beer

Address: Level 1, 90 Nguyen Hue, Dist.1, HCMC

Open 3pm - 11pm

Reservation: 0166 51 99 846

HOTEL EQUATORIAL

INTRODUCES TWO NEW CHEFS



Executive Chef Donald Pezar Brings Change to Hotel Equatorial Ho Chi Minh City

In the crowded hotel restaurant scene, **Hotel Equatorial** (242 Tran Binh Trong, D5) is carving out a niche with its ongoing culinary enhancements. To further expand the dining experience, Hotel Equatorial is pleased to announce the appointment of Donald Pezar as its new Executive Chef.

Executive Chef Donald brings to Hotel Equatorial a wealth of fine dining knowledge from over 20 years of experience. Pezar learned his art de cuisine at 5-star hotels including the Grand Hyatt and the Hyatt Regency, after notable appointments in his home country of America.

During his career, he has developed his flair for creativity cooking with international inspiration from the American Southwest, traditional Italian, Latin America, and Asian Fusion, each of which will have representation at Hotel Equatorial's new Saturday brunch menu launched on February 18 at Chit Chat at the Cafe.

Every Saturday starting at 11:30am, brunch lovers can savor dishes created by Chef Donald and his team prepared with the highest quality ingredients and the freshest local produce. Chef Donald brings his flair with exciting new concepts, including an all-day breakfast, exciting new preparations of the freshest seafood and grilling stations with the finest cuts of meat.

Chef Donald has injected excitement into the brunch with a special kids buffet corner that includes all their favorites. Kids can indulge in the pizza station, pancake and waffle counter, doughnut and chocolate stations, not to mention the ice-cream trolley with sundaes and floats! Making for the perfect weekend family treat, which will not be forgotten in a hurry!



Hotel Equatorial HCMC is Proud to Welcome Pongrat Prasitthimet as the Hotel's New Executive Pastry Chef

Pastry Chef Pongrat Prasitthimet's passion for sweets began more than 16 years ago with his first position with Hotel Royal Princess in his home country of Thailand. In 2006, Chef Pongrat made the impressive step of becoming the pastry sous chef at The Peninsula, Bangkok, considered to be one of the finest hotels in the world, here he revealed his incredible talent and passion for baking.

Chef Pongrat will be responsible for Etc., located at the main entrance to Chit Chat restaurant. Etc. offers a bountiful display of decadent cakes, chocolates and pastries. Guests can enjoy their dessert with a fine selection of coffees and teas, or take it home as a special treat for their loved ones.

Chef Pongrat has joined Hotel Equatorial (hochiminhcity.equatorial.com) as part of the hotel's ongoing culinary enhancements. Hotel Equatorial will launch an exciting new Saturday brunch, to be enjoyed by hotel guests and the city's residents alike. Chef Pongrat will bring the very best in artisanal chocolates, extravagantly crafted cakes and irresistible desserts to the brunch.

Hotel Equatorial's new Brunch will be available every Saturday from 11:30am-2:30pm. The all-you-can-eat brunch is available for just VND790,000++/adult and just VND398,000++ for kids. For just VND990,000++ enjoy free flow sparkling wine, house wine and beer. Free-flowing Champagne and craft cocktails (as well as wine and beer) can also be luxuriated in for just VND1,390,000++. ■

Images and text provided by Hotel Equatorial HCMC





Head to the Back

Panam brings the iconic French-style kebab to Saigon

Text by **Michael Arnold**

Images by **Ngoc Tran**

YOU'LL HAVE TO DO a little hunting to find **Panam – The Backroom** (91 Pasteur, D1; Tel: 0122 733 0235) since it moved from its tiny location on Le Thanh Ton into Cuba la Casa del Mojito's Backroom on Pasteur in District 1. With building management mysteriously reluctant even to let Panam throw up a sign, the discovery of this hybrid pub/kebab shop will be the small victory that may well mark your arrival at your new favorite hangout.

Panam, owned by Khiem and Remy, is cool, laid-back, and opens super late on weekends. It's still new, but it has the look of a bar that's remained unchanged for decades, and that sense of permanence is likely to be the drawcard for regulars seeking out a familiar watering hole—plenty of room on those shelves yet for the venue's blossoming collection of kitschy knick-knacks, postcards from former

patrons, and board games for whiling away the evenings in a culture bubble that feels a continent away from busy District 1 outside.

Panam—the name is suburbanite slang for “Paris” drawn from the outskirts of the French capital where Khiem spent his childhood—honors the modern French fast-food staple, the kebab.

“In France, going out to get a kebab is very common,” says Khiem. “Per year, you have maybe 300 million kebabs sold. People take it as a quick lunch—not only young people, but also working people, older people, it's like an addiction. In the United States you have McDonald's, in France you have the kebab. And it's totally part of the culture of France.” According to Khiem, kebabs are originally a Syrian dish that entered the world stage from out of Turkey, becoming adopted throughout Europe with each country

adding its own native characteristics. “In Vietnam, you don't have this kind of food,” observes Khiem, “but we are now becoming well-known for the kebab in the French style. In Germany, the kebab is different, in France, the kebab is different. Sometimes people show up from Turkey or Germany, and they don't assimilate the fact that we make it in the French way. Now they're starting to understand that, and actually they don't say it's bad, they say it's very good, but they don't recognize the style of their country.”

Perhaps it's to be expected, but the essence of the Parisian kebab appears to be a good helping of mayonnaise and fresh salad, which gives it the taste of a Middle-Eastern Big Mac. We're served two classics, a chicken kebab (VND150,000) and a lamb kebab (VND200,000), each with 150g of grilled marinated meat filling and sides of fries,



(Counter clockwise from right: Chicken kebab, lamb kebab, vanilla oreo + salted duck egg ice cream)



semolina, bread and salad. The use of classic meats actually distinguishes Panam from kebab shops back home, which often swap them out for cheaper veal and turkey. The other fillings include salad, onion and tomato, as opposed to the cabbage and carrots you'll find in kebabs from elsewhere in Europe.

If you've tried Panam's kebabs before, either here or from the venue's former incarnation as a delivery service, you'll be pleased to note the adoption of a more authentic pita bread than was used previously. "I was looking for bread like this," says Khiem. "It's made by an Israeli guy, he just opened his company and sells pita bread. This one, it tastes just like in France. It matches perfectly."

Panam's kebabs and sides—they do a glorious mega-crispy Belgian fries (VND55,000) double-cooked in beef fat, and some innovative spring rolls with

kebab filling (VND50,000/VND65,000)—are straight-up Western comfort food. Khiem is emphatic that he doesn't serve fast food, as the fresh ingredients are healthy enough not to feel guilty about, and many of the ingredients are hand-made.

"We make our own sauces," says Khiem. "All the sauces that you can see are homemade, except the ketchup. One is a Moroccan recipe given to me by the mother of a friend, some others I researched online and then adapted. The Vietnamese really like the Oriental one, because it's a little sweet, with caramelized onion. The signature Panam sauce is basically a blend of mayonnaise, tomato paste, onion, cumin and paprika."

For dessert, Panam stocks some interesting flavors from Rico Rica (a local homemade ice cream that only sells out of a stand at the zoo) which includes one standout fear-factor item: salted

duck egg ice cream. This is worth trying, and it's actually exceptional, with a taste reminiscent of salty caramel. The kids will love it—children are welcome at the venue, although family visits earlier in the evening are advised, as the pub usually gets busy later, making it harder to encourage smokers to go outside. Drinkers too should appreciate Panam's trendy craft beer selection, with some Belgian beers available at favorable prices as well as some rather cheeky beer cocktails.

"What is cool is that it's a friendly place, nothing fancy. Some people come here and meet someone, and then a week later I see them coming back together. It's kind of a victory, that our place is not only a bar or pub, but a place where people can come alone and meet some people," says Khiem. ■

BANH XEO

It may surprise you to learn that the pale yellow, fluffy *banh xeo* typically contains no eggs at all, despite the fact that it looks unmistakably omelette-like. In fact, the Vietnamese rice flour pancakes get their vibrant color from warming turmeric. The name can be literally translated as "sizzling

pancake" and that's exactly what you'll get—a lacy-edged batter cooked in a work.

In certain regions, coconut milk is incorporated into the batter, which is typically pan-fried with pork, shrimp, and bean sprouts. It's served with fresh lettuce and herbs, which are meant to be used to pick

it up in bits—a sort of reverse-roti experience, if you will.

Even though *banh xeo* originated in the south it can be found throughout Vietnam and some regions have their own variation, such as in the *banh khoai*, which originated in Hue and are a fraction of the size of the much larger *banh xeo*.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

• Vietnamese pancake flour	400 g
• Grated coconut	250 g
• Coconut water	400 ml
• Prawns	300 g
• Pork belly	300 g
• Green onion	2 stems
• Onion	1
• Bean sprouts	200 g
• Cooking oil	100 ml
• Turmeric powder	1 tbsp
• Salt, seasoning	enough

DIPPING SAUCE

• Fish sauce	50 ml
• Lime juice	2 tbsp
• Garlic	3 cloves
• Chili	1
• Sugar	2 tbsp
• Seasoning	½ tbsp
• Water	50 ml
• Green papaya	200 g

SERVED WITH

• Mustard greens	200 g
• Herbs	200 g





With an eye for visual beauty as well as a discerning palate, Ngoc Tran has undertaken to collect and present *Easy To Cook: 40 Delicious Vietnamese Dishes As Listed By CNN*. Ngoc has personally traveled around her native Vietnam in search of the most outstanding variety of every recipe featured in her book. Find her book at all Phuong Nam bookstores (nhasachphuongnam.com) or on Kindle at Amazon



1. Boil the prawns with a pinch of salt. Wash pork belly, boil and slice into thin slices.

2. Wash bean sprouts carefully. Steam mung beans.

3. Slice green onion. Extract coconut milk from grated coconut. Mix the coconut milk and coconut water together. Add pancake flour and turmeric powder and mix thoroughly. Add green onions, salt, sugar and seasoning and stir.

4. Heat the frying pan, adding cooking oil. Put prawns, meat and minced onion in and stir-fry until done.

5. Pour a big ladle of flour mixture (around 200ml) into the frying pan. Roll the pan gently so that the flour mixture clings to the pan.

6. Add the meat mixture. When the pancake is cooked through, add bean sprouts and mung beans. Cover for 2 minutes, then fold the pancake in half and remove.

7. Wrap a piece of the pancake and Kerbs inside a mustard leaf and enjoy with the dipping sauce.

Dipping Sauce

Mix lime juice, fish sauce, garlic, chili, sugar and seasonings together. Add julienned green papaya.





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 Age of Vines

You've seen "Old Vine" written on a wine's label, but what does it actually mean, and should you be paying more for it?



IF YOU HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING wine trends, you may have notice that over the last few years a few wineries have been releasing wines under the term "Old Vines", "Vieilles Vignes" in French wines, "Vecchie Viti" for Italian or "Viñas Viejas" for Spanish. But what does this mean to you?

As it usually happens with almost anything wine related, there are too many, usually contradictory, opinions about whether old vines can produce better quality grapes, and hence better quality wines, or not.

The consensus is that if all other factors—like weather, terroir, etc.—are the same then old vines usually produce much better quality grapes. After planting, vines take three years to produce the first crop, and at least six to deliver good enough quality grapes.

As the vine gets older, and assuming it has been taken care of, the yield tends to reduce and as a result the quality of the grapes to increase, hence some wineries lucky enough to keep old vines are releasing wines produced from old vines.

But how old is old? There is no regulation to answer this. In general, vines over 25 or 30 years old are usually considered old vines, but some producers have plots with vines going back 50, 70 or even more than 100 years.

So if old vines produce better grapes and wines, why don't all producers let their vines age? It is simply a matter of money: while old vines need the same amount of maintenance work, sometimes even more, to produce grapes, the older they get the less amount of grapes they produce, hence

reducing the yield of the vineyard and increasing the cost of producing wine. Having said that, as they produce less, those grapes produced are usually of much higher quality, usually resulting in astonishing wines.

Old Zinfandel vines from California have gained a great reputation for great wines like those from Oak Ridge Winery or Bogle, producing dense jammy wines.

Some areas of Spain have also kept, almost secretly, small vineyards with solely very old vines, as it is the case of Bodegas Matsu in Toro, which produces amazing Tempranillo wines from 100-year-old vines.

However, perhaps the most common grape to be found from old vines is Grenache, very popular in both Spain and the Rhone in France, delivering great complex wines, ideal with roasts and game. ■



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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.

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9am - late, closed on Mondays



BiaCraft

Located in the heart of District 2, BiaCraft is renowned for its extensive selection of craft beers. The back to basics décor only serves to enhance the laidback ambience which BiaCraft prides itself on.

90 Xuan Thuy, D2
8374 46863
www.bicraft.com



Chu Bar

At this laid back venue, tourists and locals alike can sit around Chu's large oval bar or on luxurious padded benches. It has a full cocktail menu as well as a short menu of snacks and sandwiches.

158 Dong Khoi, D1



Malt

Hailed for its shuffleboard table and its smoke-free environment, this American-style bar has quickly established itself as a favorite amongst the expat community. The many local IPAs on tap are not to be missed, either.

46-48 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
9184 84763.



The Tavern

With its reasonably priced drinks and famously friendly staff, it is no wonder that expats refer to this British bar and restaurant as a 'home away from home.' You can even purchase a British-style Sunday roast to accompany your cold beer.

R2-24, Hung Gia 3, Bui Bang Doan, PMH, D7.
www.thetavernpmh.com

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 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.

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

Xu Bar

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

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

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: resident band Living Cuba from 9pm, Tuesday to Sunday, Carnival Party on every first Wednesday of the month.

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

Boathouse

With great riverside views and live music, this setting brings you a relaxing experience with a variety of drinks and cocktails. Happy hour from 4:30pm to 6:30pm on weekdays and Margarita Mondays from 4:30pm to 7:30pm.

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





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Show Café Hotline: +84 97 665 0606
 140 Versim, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Logos for various brands: Calio, MOVITO, NOSA, BUNO, PAVONI, Breville, Moka, CONTI, Viamma, and others.

CAFÉS



Bach Dang

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

26-28 Le Loi, D1



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, D1
www.caferunam.com



En Tea House & Restaurant

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

308 - 308C Dien Bien Phu, Ward 4, D3
3832 9797
Facebook: Enteahouse



K.Coffee

Accented with sleek furniture and dark wood, this cozy cafe serves fresh Italian-style coffee, cold fruit juices, homemade Vietnamese food and desserts. The friendly owner and staff make this a great spot to while away the afternoon with a good book or magazine.

Opening time: 7AM- 10PM.

Sunday closed.

86 Hoang Dieu, D4
8253316 / 090 142 3103



La Rotonde Saigon

Situated in an authentic French colonial structure, this relaxed café is the perfect haven to escape the hustle and bustle of District 1. The east meets west interior décor is reminiscent of Old Saigon, and is greatly complemented by the Vietnamese fusion cuisine on offer.

77B Ham Nghi, 1st Floor, D1



The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1

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



San Fu Lou – Cantonese Kitchen

San Fu Lou combines tradition with our Chinese kitchen and sophisticated contemporary Oriental ambience. San Fu Lou exudes colors and cozy feel of a traditional Chinese "house". Our open kitchen, which is a first in Vietnam for a Chinese restaurant, allows diners to take in a visual feast before the food is served.

SAN FU LOU 1
Ground floor, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai St., Dist 1, HCMC
(+848) 38239513
SAN FU LOU 2
195-197 Phan Xích Long St., Phu Nhuan Dist, HCMC
(+848) 35176168
SAN FU LOU 3
24 Ba Thang Hai St., Dist 10, HCMC
(+848) 38620920
24 Ba Thang Hai St., Dist 10, HCMC
(+848) 38620920



SHANG
SAN FU LOU
CANTONESE KITCHEN

Also Try...

Hung Ky Mi Gia

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

20 Le Anh Xuan, D1
3822 2673

Ocean Palace

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

2 Le Duan Street, D1
3911 8822

Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

The brainchild of an overseas Chinese/Vietnamese architect who wanted to build something extraordinary in his home town, this venue combines the architectural features of seven world heritage structures blended into one. The cuisine is just as eclectic with representative dishes from several major Chinese traditions.

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

Shang Palace

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

dishes to choose from, Shang Palace is an ideal rendezvous for any dining occasion.

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

Yu Chu

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

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

SPANISH



La Bodega

La Bodega is a quaint Spanish restaurant serving succulent tapas dishes in a setting infused with a Latin-American vibe. With a bar open till late serving reasonably priced cocktails, this is the perfect place for both foodies and mojito lovers alike.

11 Xuan Thuy, D2
0120 757 3288



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



WINE

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

Finewines

Vietnamese company specializes in providing imported wines, wine accessories and beers at reasonable price to luxury price.

50 Hai Ba Trung St., D1

Red Apron

As a part of Celliers d'Asie, one of the leading wine importers and distributors in Vietnam with more than 1000 international wines and spirits from over 200 producers in both old and new world.

102 Ham Nghi, D1

Saigon Wine Club

Saigon Wine Club is the first online wine club in Vietnam, offering free speedy delivery aiming for delivery in 30 minutes.

92 Nguyen Huu Canh street, Binh Thanh

Saigon Cellars

A shop specializing in premium-label and easy-drinking wines from Australia and New Zealand. Winner of multiple global awards and served in 5-star hotels worldwide, Saigon Cellars is part of business class service on Singapore Airlines.

6/7 Cach Mang Thang Tam

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

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



Le Terroir

Recently opened, Le Terroir serves dishes such as Bouchée à la Reine duo, Pan seared salmon along with pastas, risotto and decadent desserts. The wine list here is an oenophile's dream with over 200 labels in stock from Australia, California and Chile to Italy. The restaurant is on two levels with a small terrace in the ground floor.

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



Le Bacoulos

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

13 Tong Huu Dinh, D2

3519 4058

www.bacoulos.com



Le Jardin

This place is consistently popular with French expats seeking an escape from the busier boulevards. It has a wholesome bistro-style menu with a shaded terrace cafe in the outdoor garden of the French cultural centre, Idecaf.

31 Thai Van Lung, D1



Long Phi

French-owned, this longstanding restobar has been a favorite among late-night revelers because of its late opening hours - 4am. The menu is a combination of Vietnamese and French with pasta dishes thrown in to cater to everyone.

207 Bui Vien, D1



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1

www.tycozsaigon.com



Also Try...

La Cuisine

A cosy restaurant just outside the main eating strip on Le Thanh Ton, La Cuisine offers quality French food in an upmarket but not overly expensive setting. Suitable for special occasions or business dinners to impress. Regular diners recommend the filet of beef.

48 Le Thanh Ton
2229 8882

La 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



TÊ TÊ CÓ CÒN PHÊ?

Thousands of pangolins are killed every year although there is no scientific evidence that pangolins can cure diseases.
Help us stop the poaching!
#savethepangolin

Hàng ngàn con tê tê bị giết mỗi năm dù chưa có nghiên cứu khoa học nào cho thấy tê tê chữa được bệnh.
Hãy ngăn chặn sự tàn sát vô lý này!
#cuttete

WHEN THE BUYING STOPS - THE KILLING CAN TOO

CHANGE

CỨU TRỢ HOANG DÃ

WILDAID

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



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



Portofino

Great place for pizza's, pasta's and interesting main dishes in a cozy setting.

15 Dong Du, D1
+84 8 3823 3597
info@portofinovietnam.com
http://www.portofinovietnam.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

Carpaccio

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



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



SORAE Sushi Sake Lounge

"Sorae". Up in the sky, is one of the most spectacular Japanese restaurant and a "must go" destination at the heart of the bustling busy district of Saigon.

Located in the heart of District 1, on the 24th floor of AB Tower, it has a gorgeous 360 degree overview over the city. Sorae can accommodate up to 368 people in a spacious 1,000 sqm elegant setting including a bar with hundreds of varieties of beverages and the finest cigar club in town. Besides offering delicious Japanese cuisine, Sorae delights its guests with great entertainment and DJ.

Level 24, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai St., Dist 1, HCMC
08 3827 2372
<http://www.soraesushi.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/Soraesushi/>



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, D1
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, D1
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, D1
3824 5355
www.yakatabune-saigon.com

Osaka Ramen

This sleek, open-kitchen contemporary eatery serves up Japanese noodles starting from VND78,000. There are also set menus, individual dishes and a range of smaller, appetizing sides.

SD04, LO H29-2, My Phat Residential Complex, D7



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



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

Thai Street

Authentic Thai Food in a fun street-food setting. All the favorites of Thailand - Tom Yum Goong, Red and Green Curries, Som Tum - prepared by their Thai chef.

26 Thao Dien Road, Thao Dien, D2
0866549525

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



B3 STEAKHOUSE & CRAFT BEER

Large selection of fresh New Zealand Grass-fed Beef cuts and Local Craft Beers. Decoration style is a mix of retro and contemporary street art that results in a friendly and cozy atmosphere. The restaurant is conveniently located on Nguyen Hue street, making it very suitable for after-business dinner, group hangouts or romantic date night on the terrace.

3pm-11pm
Level 1, 90 Nguyen Hue, Dist 1, HCMC
Reservation: 0166 519 9846



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



El Gaucho Argentinian Steakhouse

The fine dining steakhouse boasts a modern yet rustic decor, giving it an inviting ambiance and genuine atmosphere. The authenticity of the Argentinian cuisine is strictly followed by the methods of preparation, hand-made charcoal grill serves as the focal point in the kitchen to maintain and accentuate the original flavor of the meat.

74/1 Hai Ba Trung, D1



Nossa Steakhouse

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

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



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



Wild Horse Steakhouse

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

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



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"



wok n'roll
American Chinese Food

Full Menu
www.woknroll.vn

we wok hard for you!

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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 R

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 VNexpres.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



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136 - 138 Le Thi Hong Gam St., Dist. 1, HCMC

08 3821 7786

nhahangdimai.com/

<https://www.facebook.com/nhahangdimai/>



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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 R

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

44 Nguyen Hue, Ben Nghe, D1

09 8910 4633

www.en.timebistro.vn

Time Bistro

Also Try...

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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 R

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

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

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, APSC, 36 Thao Dien, D2
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29 Le Anh Xuan, D1
08 38222605
Mail : info@elevencafe.com.vn
Facebook : ElevenCafeVN
Website : www.eleven.com.vn



Latest Recipe

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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" / www.ngon-asia.com
2nd - 4th Floors, Saigon Garden
99 Nguyen Hue, D1
08 3821 3821



Panam - The Backroom

Panam is a cozy restaurant and pub with a friendly and chilled ambience. If you're searching for a place to meet up for happy hours after work, Panam is the perfect choice. Come and enjoy great food like falafels and kebabs with homemade sauces, cold craft beers, cocktails and board games.

12pm-1am / Tel: 0122 733 0235
91 Pasteur, D1
(in a side alley behind Cuba la Casa del Mojito)



twenty21one

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21 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3



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Villa Royale Downtown is nestled in a charming French Colonial Villa on Ho Tung Mau Street. Whilst browsing the vast array of collectible pieces you can sample a delicious menu of freshly prepared meals and delectable desserts. Tea enthusiasts will delight in the 40+ flavours available from TWG. Opening Hours 10am - 10pm everyday
A Level 1, 25 Ho Tung Mau street, District 1, HCMC
Phone (84) 3821 0088
www.villaroyaledowntown.com



Travel & Leisure

INDONESIA





ISLAND LIVING

A small island in Indonesia that's too-perfect-to-be-real

Text by **Stephenie Harrison**

Images by **Tony Kuehn**

IN ALL HIS WISDOM, the Buddha once counseled, "It is better to travel well than to arrive."

Gazing out across the roiling waters of the Bali Sea where the tip of a slowly sinking ferry boat bobs beneath a tide of crashing waves, I am beginning to wonder whether I might not live long enough to experience either of those things.

A 60 kilometer swath of water known as the Bandung Strait separates Bali, Indonesia from a cluster of three islands known collectively as Pulau Penida. It is one of the most turbulent passages in the region, and the journey is made all the more perilous by the relatively dubious safety records of Indonesian ferries, which do little to inspire confidence in their passengers even in the most serene sailing conditions.

But boats are the only means of reaching this trio of islands, and perhaps it is this nautical gauntlet that every traveler must face to ensure that on the other side paradise still awaits. With no cars, no Western chains, spotty Wi-Fi, and sometimes even no electricity, a voyage across the strait is said to be like traveling back in time, to the glory days of Bali 20 years ago.

From largest to smallest, the islands that beckon across the water are Nusa Penida, Nusa Lembongan, and Nusa Ceningan. All have their charms, but I am like the fabled Goldilocks, fixated on the mid-sized Lembongan. It is the most developed and visited of the three—boasting everything from mangrove forests and fishing villages to Balinese temples and killer surf breaks, it seems

to have a little something for everyone. The consensus is that Lembongan is neither too big nor too small, not too busy or too quiet, but just right. It sounds like perfection, but watching as the boat offshore finally slips to a watery grave, it's hard to shake the sense that this is anything but a terrible omen.

The following day breaks with the sorbet hues of dawn punching through dollops of cloud as the sky swiftly shifts from warm to cool tones that match the surface of the sea. Rumor has it that the crossing is calmer earlier in the day, and I am first in line to buy tickets for the public boat that will ferry us across. I have heard horror stories of boats being dangerously overcrowded and overloaded, of passengers sharing the space with all manner of livestock for the 90-minute crossing, so I'm relieved to find that when we cast off, there are only a handful of other passengers and plenty of room to spare.

Although initially placid, about an hour into our journey the water turns choppy and hostile. Massive waves tear themselves from the sea and batter angrily against the sides of the boat. Our captain does his best to steer the doddering craft around the swells, but even still, we are tossed about like rag dolls on a rollercoaster. It never feels as though we are in danger—the crew is unflappably nonchalant, suggesting these conditions are nothing to worry about—but just the same, I'm glad I caught the early boat. I'd hate to be out here when the weather is actually a concern.

As Nusa Lembongan finally glides into view, all cares and worries disappear.





Watching as the frothing waves crash against the rocky southwestern coastline and families frolic on the soft powdered sand of pristine beaches, I know the journey has been worth it. Salty splashes of chilly seawater against my cheeks and forehead assure me this is not a mirage and, with shrieks of laughter ringing in the air as groups are zipped along on banana boats, I smile with happiness. When I tear my eyes from the island before me, I note that every single person on the boat shares my look of satisfaction.

Feet First

Although Nusa Lembongan is far from undiscovered, it is still more untouched than not. Most of the boats lining the main beach are used for fishing or diving, and as there is no dock, visitors must splash knee deep in the water and make their way to shore on foot. From there, it's a quick walk across silky sand to the main road (effectively the island's only road), which circumscribes Lembongan like a crooked halo. Lining its length along the western side of the island are a handful of casual eateries (warungs) where locals and visitors dine side-by-side, charming homestays set within traditional Balinese courtyard complexes, and plenty of dive and surf shops. Noticeably absent? Any kind of bars or clubs — Lembongan is fiercely protective of its laidback, low-key island vibe and prides itself on its complete lack of nightlife. Evenings are spent on the beach (or beachside restaurants) watching the sun burn low in the sky, sipping a few cold beers and tucking into some fresh caught seafood; if you're lucky, you'll dine on grilled tuna dipped in a potent sambal made of chili, shallots and lime. Every morning, the

head of my host family sets out in his boat to catch the family's supper; every evening, I return from my adventures to find they have saved me my own massive fish, while the family of five shares one of comparable size. I protest their generosity, but they are resolute and I never go to bed hungry. Come 10pm, the last of the lights are out and the only sound is the crashing of the waves until morning is heralded by the crowing of the neighborhood roosters.

I spend my first days on Lembongan diving—apart from surfing, it's the island's primary tourist attraction. Ironically, the influx of cold water that makes the journey here so tempestuous is one of the main things that makes the voyage worthwhile: the confluence of warm and cool waters also brings brilliant marine life. Smack-dab in the middle of what is known as the Coral Triangle, Lembongan offers some of the best diving and the greatest biodiversity in the world. I am lucky enough to be here during prime mola mola season; also known as ocean sunfish, these creatures can weigh up to 1,000kg and can reach up to three meters in height. Despite their size, they are notoriously elusive and although I brave the chilly waters seven times and gaze upon the graceful glide of manta rays and the curious courtship of cuttlefish (not to mention the hundreds of other beautiful creatures that dwell beneath the waves), I never spot these beautiful behemoths. A disappointment, certainly, but I still count the diving here some of the best I have experienced in Asia.

Encouraged by the beauty found underwater, I am pleased to find that exploring Lembongan by land is rewarding in its own right as well. At eight



Most of my days on the island follow of the beach, I am hypnotized, my mind reeling as I attempt to categorize every shade of blue of the water before me. Azure, cerulean, aquamarine, sapphire... I run out of adjectives long before the bay runs out of chromatic shifts to dazzle me a similar pattern—there's not much else to do than to slowly explore the nooks and crannies of the island, inevitably returning to this spot as dusk settles in and afternoon slides into evening. I only intend to spend a handful of days here, but I find myself reluctant to leave and wind up extending my stay to a week and then again until 10 days have passed, much of them the same, but peaceful and happy nonetheless. Truthfully, Lembongan is the kind of place where it's easy to fall into a routine, to while away the days doing not much of anything but simply soaking in the surroundings and it's easy to understand how people get sucked in and stay far longer than intended. If time does not exactly stand still here, it at least seems to slow to a crawl, content to let the world pass it by.

A question hangs in the air as to just how long the island can preserve its sleepy ways, and there is some sense that travelers should enjoy it while they can before it follows in Bali's footsteps or is overrun like the better-known Gilli islands that float off the coast of Lombok. If that day should come, it will be a sad one indeed. For now, however, it's nice to know that on Lembongan, a paradise long thought lost can still be found. ■

square kilometers, the island is sufficiently compact that it doesn't take much time or effort to get around, but is just big enough that to fully explore, walking isn't really an option. The ring road is paved, and although riddled with potholes, it makes for an unchallenging ride on a motorbike, which can be easily rented from any guesthouse for about USD6 a day (helmet included).

Shades of Blue

One of the joys of Lembongan is that it's impossible to get lost, so there's no need for a map. Puttering down the main strip, I do a lazy clockwise loop of the island, a tour that shows me the many sides to life here that make Lembongan so special. Starting in Jugut Batu, the busiest section of the island, I zip past traditional homes with smoldering sticks of incense and colorful floral offerings for the gods laid on their doorsteps. Rounding a bend in the road, I leave the village behind me, faced instead with ramshackle huts on quiet beaches where locals wade out waist deep to harvest seaweed. Sarongs dripping and arms laden with hanks of algae, they lay their bounty out to dry. It may not be glamorous work, but this is the island's primary industry—these precious bundles are richly prized ingredients for the Asian cosmetics industry—and it is this humble commodity, rather than tourist dollars, that keeps the island afloat.

Pushing on down a sandy stretch, I reach the edges of a dense mangrove forest that can only be toured in a rickety little dinghy whose seaworthiness seems questionable. Instead, I return to the ring road and ride through dense woods passing a little yellow bridge that connects Lembongan to its tinier sibling, Ceningan. For those feeling a bit stir-crazy, Ceningan is a popular diversion, famed locally as it is for its surf spots, sunsets and—for the truly daring—some epic cliffs from which adrenaline junkies vault into the deep blue. Alas, the bridge is under much-needed construction and smartly closed to all traffic, so rather than testing my mortality, I continue down the road to Mushroom Bay and the spectacular Sunset Beach. As the surf crashes against the rocky cliffs and the icy

foth sluices across the pearly white sand. The beauty of this spot paralyzes me. I am so reluctant to leave it, that I splurge for lunch at one of Lembongan's few upscale resorts, The Beach Club at Sandy Bay, indulging in a duck and boudin noir sandwich perfectly complemented with soft slices of apple and sprigs of fresh thyme. This is about as far from the local fare as one can get, but one cannot live on grilled fish and rice alone. My meal is accompanied only by the susurrus of the waves, the soundtrack of paradise.

Afterwards, I work off my decadent meal by walking down the beach and scrabbling over the jagged rocks to visit the Devil's Tear, one of the island's most famous geographical attractions. Years of turbulent tides have worn away a small cauldron in the wall of rock, forming a dramatic outcropping where the water churns and swirls with violence. Occasionally a blast of spray bursts upwards, forcing a shimmering rainbow to briefly sparkle in the mist. It is the perfect place to sit for a few hours, marvel at the power and perfection of nature, while the sun dips in the sky. Even with a scattering clouds hanging low on the horizon, it's clear how Sunset Beach got its name.



>>The List

Travel



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



Cham Garden Restaurant

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www.chamvillas.com
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www.sheratonnhatrang.com



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

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Orient Skincare & Laser Center [®]

The center offers non-surgery aesthetic treatments by certified dermatologists as well as pampering services for any type of problem skin. A variety of treatments includes: wrinkle removal, acne & scar treatment, rejuvenation & pigment augmenting treatment, slimming treatments, permanent hair removal and massage therapy.

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

Mini Spa:

Authentic Thai Spa in Thao Dien. Mimi Spa is proud to offer true Thai treatment, an Ancient healing tradition that combines a floral foot bath, elements of yoga, acupressure and Energy work combined with gentle rocking. Your session is enjoyed in comfortable, loose fitting clothing and is performed with or without natural oils.

33/8 Quoc Huong, Thao Dien, D2.
9am - 11pm. Open 7 days p/week

Temple Leaf Spa

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

74 Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.templeleafspa.com

YCK Beauty Spa and Hair Studio

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

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



Kids & Education





Hollie Slater is a Grade 1 teacher with a Post Graduate Certificate in Education at the International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP).

Page Turner

Reading for pleasure, a door to our future

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ENJOY READING are five times as likely to read above the expected level compared with young people who do not enjoy reading at all. I found this particularly interesting because there are increasing stories in the media reporting there is a decline in reading frequency. As teachers, there is a growing concern that children are not reading enough, and parents are not reading to their children. But why does this matter?

There is substantial evidence linking reading for pleasure and educational outcomes; research repeatedly proves this. As a teacher, I always tell parents that one of the key things they can do at home to help their child achieve is to read, read, read! Reading has been shown to increase vocabulary, attainment, scores on academic tests, math, grammar... the list goes on. Essentially, reading is fundamental to learning and growth. This year I have focused the development of my own teaching in reading strategies.

But, in a world dominated by technology and social media, why is reading books so important? A few years ago I remember reading articles that suggested books would eventually be obsolete. However, it is clear that with technological advances, reading is even more critical. According to Eric Schmidt of Google, every two days there is more information created on the web as we did from the dawn of civilization until 2003. This means that words and

literacy are more important than ever. We navigate the world with words, we need to communicate and most importantly, comprehend what we are reading on the web. People who cannot communicate, cannot exchange ideas. Adolescents will need to read and write more than other time in history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to cope with the flood of information that will face them at every corner. The simplest way to ensure we raise literate children is to teach them to read and feed their imaginations.

Technology and internet usage has numerous advantages, however, extensive online engagement has also shown to have negative consequences, such as poor social skills, a need for instant gratification, addictive behaviors and emotional psychological distress such as depression, lack of empathy and anxiety. To combat this, there is a growing body of evidence to show that the benefits of reading for pleasure is far reaching. It increases sense of achievement, confidence, self-esteem, promotes empathy, positive relationships and inclusion. It is clear, reading is not something children should just do in school; it needs to be an everyday part of our lives. It is vital we show children that reading is a pleasurable activity.

It was found that with just 30 minutes of reading a week, two thirds of readers reported a reduction in stress, a stronger engagement with social issues and a higher level of self-

esteem and self-acceptance. Yet, the most common reason for giving up on books was lack of time. Perhaps, this is because people see reading as an indulgence. It may be this idea that we need to change in our children. Reading is a necessity in our lives.

While researching for this article, I discovered that the building of private prisons in America for future growth is being predicated on a simple algorithm: based on asking what percentage of 10 and 11-year-olds couldn't read. Furthermore, in 2007, Chinese delegates were sent to work with corporations that were changing the future, such as Google, Apple and Microsoft. A common thread was found amongst the inventors of the future—they all read science-fiction when they were younger. Therefore, it is evident that those changing our world are those that read for pleasure when they were younger. They opened their imaginations and created new worlds, and envisioned a new future. Fiction can show you a different world; a different way of life.

Reading is fundamental, it really is that simple. It changes our outlook on life and how we communicate with others. Not just in children, but in adults too. It is apparent that reading for pleasure is vital and impacts our future prospects. We can start by asking ourselves these questions: How often does my child read? How often do I read to my children? How often do I read? ■

The Arts:

The Crucial Puzzle Piece in Education

Although some may regard art education as a luxury, simple creative activities are some of the building blocks of child development



FOR ME, GROWING up in the Philippines meant that I was extremely fortunate to have been taught music and dance as early as pre-school. By the time I graduated from high school, I had performed in countless choir concerts and dance performances, acted in and directed full-length play productions, played the bass guitar and the drums in my high school rock band and participated in many other performance-related activities.

Clearly then, compared to other curriculums around the world, the arts is given greater importance and students are encouraged to pursue their artistic dreams-whether it is to become an opera singer, a trumpet player or a fashion designer.

Eight years ago, I moved to Vietnam and my friends here were able to quickly and easily recognize my passion for music, dance and theatre. Fast forward to now: It has become increasingly difficult in this day and age to justify funding art-based subjects in schools. Around the world, schools are implementing cost-cutting measures and if subjects must be prioritized, isn't it much more important to focus on those subjects that translate into workplace skills?

Of course, for me, and many like me, the skills I learned in the arts did translate-I studied English and Theatre Arts at Bachelor and Master's level and have taught these subjects over the last two decades.

And as a high school teacher here in Vietnam, it has, at times, saddened me to see promising-and occasionally even gifted students-give up on subjects that they have had the amazing luck to be both talented in and in love with because of family pressure to pursue higher education in business or banking.

But the world needs engineers, computer technicians, financial analysts and manufacturers; so how important can exposure to arts be to our future generations? The answer, of course, is very, and for fairly obvious reasons. Firstly, studying the arts is vital in the development of a young person's critical thinking skills. Now, more than ever, in this post-truth world, the ability to





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critically analyze the constant flow of information that is dumped in our social media, on our TVs and through our devices, is necessary if we are to have any hope of making informed opinions about the world around us. This skill is formed when we immerse ourselves in literature, attempt to divest meaning from music or strain to discover underlying themes to a play. And make no mistake, the ability to read nuance, understand implications and understand a person's motivation—all things that are taught in a literature or drama arts class—are life skills that any employer would welcome. This leads into the second major benefit of receiving an education with an artistic element: the ability to communicate. So much of our art, be it spoken, written, danced or played, is an attempt by the artist to communicate with the audience. Being able to understand this deep, emotion-based message strengthens a person's ability to communicate in so many different ways. And it is depth of communication, not sheer amount that counts. We live in a complex and, sometimes dangerous world, and being able to communicate important messages is vital if we are to navigate through this life causing only a minimum of grief and anger.

And, if we are to focus on a practical aspect of this argument, we live in an era of mass communication, much of it noise. How useful would a skilled communicator be? How much of an asset to any workplace? Anyone who has had to plod through a turgid report, suffer through an almost unintelligible presentation, or read an overly wordy essay would agree that this skill would place highly in many walks of life.

These skills all help to develop an essential characteristic needed for the world's future leaders—emotional intelligence. There are many admirable traits in a person, but none so important to being a successful manager of people than being able to relate to those people. Of course, I am not suggesting that empathy, sympathy or understanding of others is taught only by the arts, or even that it is taught at all, but subjects such as music, drama and literature certainly refine it, and can often provide useful shorthand to young people who may struggle to express their emotions as they grow and develop.

And if we were to look again at the practicalities of developing these traits, then numerous studies have shown that the most successful bosses are those that really take the time to

understand their employees, rather than simply seeing them as tools to be used in the service of the company.

And finally, simply, art is innovation. Without learning creativity and developing confidence through trying and failing—something that any grade school poet or university drama club actor goes through—we do not learn how to innovate through that process of trial and error. As Steve Jobs, in launching the iPad 2 put it: "It is in Apple's DNA that technology alone is not enough—it's technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that make our heart sing."

But perhaps I am being overly indulgent. Even I, as a dyed-in-the-wool, liberal, artsy-fartsy type, would have to admit that the ability to accurately measure, to observe, report and draw conclusions from outcomes, to build and direct others to build and to successfully manage a budget would have to rank higher than an ability to create, appreciate and critique art. Of course, the world cannot run without those core STEM skills, and, come the zombie apocalypse, the need for artists will not be high. But do you know what? There won't be a zombie apocalypse; it's just an entertaining story, made up by an artist. ■





Connecting With **Kids**

The right age to give kids their own phone has always been... up to the parents.

Text by **Emily Wong**



SHOULD I GIVE MY 11-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER a mobile phone? Giving one to her is a passport to technological freedom and opens the floodgates to problems like cyber game addiction and other social issues. Is there an appropriate age for mobile phone ownership?

My kids don't own a mobile phone, however, they have asked numerous times and have even presented arguments on why they should own one. They have cited:

- I can find them at all times when I give them a mobile phone.
- When I want to pick them up from school, all I need is to call and they will appear at the pickup spot.
- They need it to communicate with their friends.
- They need to follow what's going on in the class' WhatsApp chats.
- If there's a change of plans, they can contact us and vice versa.

As you can see, the arguments are well thought out and despite their persistent whines, we have not relented and my oldest child has survived the last 11 years without a mobile phone.

To prevent screen addiction in my home, tablets are only allowed on the weekends and even our television set is password protected. I think we can be called "Tiger Mom" and "Tiger Dad" in the area of "screen time."

Our carefully plotted strategy is based on the theory of limits. We want to limit their screen time with electronic gadgets and slowly give them more access as the kids grow older. However, we do realize that our days are limited and with our oldest becoming a tween, we will need to give her a mobile phone in due time. We anticipate that the floodgates will open when she hits high school because she will be going out with friends and also facing greater peer pressure. So, we have decided to give her one but with limitations because if we are to give her access without restrictions now it will be difficult to employ any form of restrictions later on.

These are some of our proposed guidelines with her:

Smartphone or a dumb Nokia?

Communication is mostly by smart messaging services and therefore giving her a dumb phone would be troublesome and too backward for our family. We have decided to give her a smartphone, and since Daddy has a spare one in his drawer there will be no additional cost for the family.

Limited Data Plan

There are too many stories of kids racking up the bill from excessive usage. A limited data plan will naturally restrict usage and teach them the value of being wise with the data. Additionally, this will also reduce the risk of screen time addiction. We will look for a plan where we can limit her to x amount of dollars of data a month, or we may get her to co-pay her phone bill as she gets older.

Smartphone Preloaded With Nanny Apps

I was recently introduced to an app called "Screen Time." It has the ability to lock down and open devices when a situation arises. A parent told me that when it was dinner time and her kids were not coming to the table when asked—because they were preoccupied with their devices—she locked down their phones and they immediately ran to the table. Quite a useful function I must say! And if the kids want to uninstall the "nanny device," notification is sent to my phone, thereby preventing them from making any "funny" modifications to the app.

Am I controlling? Well... like I said, I want to give them access slowly and in a controlled environment. If this app can help me in my strategy, why not? Total freedom will come when she grows older.

Design a Usage Contract

No, this one is not by the telephone service provider. This is a personal contract drawn up by parent and child upon handing over the mobile device. Basically, it is to give me some way of imposing limitations when my teenager behaves irresponsibly with her new device. In the contract, we will address issues like usage at dinner time and the amount of mobile usage per day. Further contractual highlights:

- I think it will be essential to highlight that the mobile is a loan and that, ultimately, it belongs to Mommy and Daddy (in view of future arguments along the rocky road of parenting).
- The phone is a privilege and not a right. And privileges may vary when inappropriate behavior is committed.
- Use common sense when taking pictures, as not all pictures are appropriate for circulation on social media.

I'm certain addendums will be added as she gets older, and to loosely quote Uncle Ben: With great mobile power comes great responsibility. ■



>>The List Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



ABC International School (ABCIS)

Inspected and judged an outstanding school by British Government Inspectors (October 2013), the ABCIS is one of the few schools worldwide awarded this Department for Education rating. Progress of students puts the ABCIS among the top 8% of schools in the world. Providing education for 2-18 year olds in a supportive and friendly environment, it delivers a culturally adapted version of the British National Curriculum supported by Cambridge & AQA IGCSE and AS/A levels. Students are prepared for Universities in the UK, USA, Australia, Korea and Canada.

Foundation & Early Primary Campus:

4, IE Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC

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2, IE Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC

5431 1833-34-35-36

office@theabcis.com

www.theabcis.com



EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City

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

730 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2
www.eishcmc.com



International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

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

92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh

+84 (8) 2222 7788/99

admissions@issp.edu.vn

www.issp.edu.vn



Saigon Star International School

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

Residential Area No.5,
Thanh My Loi Ward, D2
3742 STAR / 3742 7827

www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



The American School

The American School (TAS) is an international school that has been accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), representing 20 nationalities. TAS provides an American-based curriculum with rigorous performance standards and a variety of academic offerings including Advanced Placement courses, university credit courses through our partnership with Missouri State University, and an Intensive ESL Program for English Language Learners.

177A, 172-180 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2

3519 2223 / 0903 952 223

admissions@tas.edu.vn

www.tas.edu.vn



The International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)

ISHCMC is HCMC's most established international school and first IB World School authorized to teach all 3 International Baccalaureate programs for students 2 to 18 years old. ISHCMC is excited to launch a new secondary campus in 2017, featuring Vietnam's first Innovation Center, a 350-seat professional theater, NBA-sized basketball courts, 25m – 8 lane competitive swimming pool and sports field.

28 Vo Truong Toan, D2

+84 (8) 3898 9100

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The International School Ho Chi Minh City – American Academy

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

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Also...

Australian International School (AIS)

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

www.aisvietnam.com

British International School (BIS)

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

www.bisvietnam.com

Renaissance International School Saigon

Renaissance is an International British School offering the National Curriculum for England complemented by the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), Cambridge IGCSE and the International Baccalaureate. The school has made a conscious decision to limit numbers and keep class sizes small to ensure each pupil is offered an education tailored to meet their individual learning

needs. It's a family school providing first-class facilities including a 350- seats theater, swimming pools, mini-pool, drama rooms, gymnasium, IT labs, music and drama rooms, science labs and an all-weather pitch.

www.renaissance.edu.vn

Saigon South International School

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

www.ssis.edu.vn

The Montessori International School of Vietnam

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

www.montessori.edu.vn



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April 2017

Taste of Australia is the annual Vietnam-wide celebration of Australian food, beverages and cuisine, as well as innovative fashion and design. Running throughout April, and supported by the Australian Government, industry and business partners, Taste of Australia 2017 will encompass a month of exciting public, industry and consumer events, including:

- the Taste of Australia Wine Show (1 April, HCMC)
- the Taste of Australia NOSH Dinner (1 April, HCMC)
- the Taste of Australia culinary competitions (18 April, HCMC, Hanoi, Danang, Nha Trang & 20 April Danang)
- the Taste of Australia community barbecue (22 April, Danang)
- restaurant, retail and hotel partners' many events and promotions throughout April.

For information about all these delicious events and queries about becoming a sponsor/partner please see the Taste of Australia website and facebook page.

tasteofaustralia.com.vn

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