



VIETNAM

DECEMBER 2014

**THE WHITE-COLLAR
DEBT COLLECTOR**

Time to Pay Up or Else...

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YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

Eccentric Celebrity Chef
Jack Lee's Comeback

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BEST OF THE BEST

Palawan is
Paradise On Earth

PAGE 74

THE *Gift* GUIDE

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Director **XUAN TRAN**

Managing Director **JIMMY VAN DER KLOET**
jimmy@oivietnam.com

Managing Editor **CHRISTINE VAN**
christine@oivietnam.com

Deputy Editor **JAMES PHAM**
jpham@oivietnam.com

Associate Publisher **KHANH NGUYEN**
khanh@oivietnam.com

Creative Director **PAOLO MALING**
paolo@oivietnam.com

Graphic Artists **KEVIN NGUYEN**
kevin@oivietnam.com
NGUYEN PHAM
nguyen@oivietnam.com

Staff Photographer **NGOC TRAN**
ngoc@oivietnam.com

For advertising please contact:

NGAN NGUYEN 
ngan@oivietnam.com
090 279 7951

CHAU NGUYEN 
chau@oivietnam.com
091 440 0302

HANH (JESSIE) LE 
jessie@oivietnam.com
098 747 4183

LA TIEU PHUONG (HEIDI) 
heidi@oivietnam.com
094 455 6677

PHUONG TRAN 
phuong@oivietnam.com
091 869 3680

General **advertising@oivietnam.com**

Inquiries **info@oivietnam.com**



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Image: Quinn Ryan Mattingly

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IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN



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Datebook

What's on this month...

DEC 4 -
JAN 17, 2015



What: The Cosmos and The Sea

Where: Galerie Quynh (Downtown Gallery - Level 2, 151/3 Dong Khoi, D1; Until January 10 at the Main Gallery - 65 De Tham, D1)

About: A solo exhibition by Los Angeles-based artist Christine Nguyen. A noted artist known for works that draw upon the imageries of science and nature, Christine will present a collection of new and recent photo-based work ranging from intimate c-prints to ambitious mural-size work. Combining drawing with photographic techniques, she has developed a pioneering practice centered on the manipulation and layering of negatives. Her work revolves around the imaginings of an organic prism, a dream-like world where oceans merge with outer space. Her works depict ferocious ocean currents, meandering creatures, iridescent flora, spiny strata of rocks and other fantastical imagery, each performing a distinctive act in the collective formulation of a mysterious ecosphere.

Contact: Visit www.galeriequynh.com for more details

DECEMBER 6

What: German band Stabil Elite

Where: Ben Thanh Theatre (6 Mac Dinh Chi, D1); 8pm

About: The Goethe-Institut Vietnam in cooperation with the Meta-House in Phnom Penh and the Goethe-Institut Manila are bringing German band Stabil Elite to Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines. The group from Düsseldorf will present an electrifying combination of bass, guitars, drums, synthesizer, sitar, wood and metal. The instruments will be accompanied by collages of their German lyrics. The band celebrated their first big success with the hit single *Gold* in 2011 and then released their breakthrough album *Douze Pouze* in 2013.

Contact: Visit www.goethe.de/vietnam for more details

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DECEMBER 6

What: Spirit of Christmas Fair

Where: Villa Song Saigon (197/2 Nguyen Van Huong, D2); VND400,000

About: Stalls selling gifts and a fashion show by designers Pierre Alexandre Dang and Thanh Hoa Vu are scheduled while French magician Thomas Rembault will be on hand to entertain guests. Children can also participate in an art workshop organized by Toa Tau. Highlights also include a culinary contest arranged by Vietnam Cookery Centre, a silent auction and lucky draw. All proceeds with go to charity.

Contact: Visit Facebook: "Spirit of Christmas Fair 2nd edition" for more info



What: Piano Recital with Célimène Daudet

Where: IDECAF (28 Le Thanh Ton, D1); 8pm; VND160,000

About: French pianist Célimène Daudet was born in the south of France to a Haitian mother and a French father. She began her music studies with Michel Bourdoncle at the Conservatory of Aix-en-Provence. She is the winner of several competitions such as the Jean Françaix International piano Competition in Paris, the Val d'Isère Competition, the FNAPEC Europe Competition in Paris, and the Pro Musicis International Prize. She has performed as a soloist in France and abroad: Carnegie Hall in New York, Philharmonic halls of Rostov and Nijni-novgorod in Moscow, and Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

Contact: Email trang.thu.ngan@institutfrancais-vietnam.com for more info

DECEMBER 11

DECEMBER 12

What: Loreto Christmas Market

Where: Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 4pm – 9pm

About: The market is a fundraising awareness event that will have vendors selling food, drinks and handicrafts. Musical performances from Loreto's ambassador Thanh Bui & the Soul Club will be present, along with raffles prizes and auctions.

The Loreto Program is a charity dedicated to the reduction of poverty through educational opportunities for underprivileged and disabled students. Since 1997, Loreto has supported over 28,000 children in six provinces in Vietnam.

Contact: Visit www.loretovietnam.org for more info



DECEMBER 12

What: I AM YOU Festival

Where: SECC (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7); Tickets start at VND699,000; Starts at 4:30pm

About: The concert will star Dash Berlin - one of the leading names in trance music. In 2014, Dash Berlin was ranked 14th out of 100 of the world's top DJs by *DJ Mag*. Dash won the International Dance Music Awards with the best song of 2009. Shortly thereafter he was named best European DJ 2010. Besides Dash Berlin, Swedes Ryan Fieret and Jesse Draak of the Syzz DJ group will also perform.

Contact: Visit www.ticketbox.vn for tickets

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**DECEMBER
12, 13 & 16**

What: International Dance Festival

Where: Saigon Opera House and GEM (8 Nguyen Binh Khiem, D1)

About: A contemporary dance performance showcasing for the second time in Ho Chi Minh City. This year, the event will have choreographers and dancers from Italy, France, Japan, Korea, Israel, Sweden, Vietnam and the Philippines. The festival will present three main shows at the Opera House (16th) and GEM (12th and 13th), with performances by all the international guest artists and two representatives from Vietnam, Arabesque and the Ho Chi Minh Ballet, Symphony, Orchestra and Opera company. To promote the festival, a series of public contemporary dance workshops will be organized from December 7th - 16th at various locations.

Contact: Visit www.idf-hcmc.org for more info



DECEMBER 13

What: Noise to the World

Where: Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); VND100,000 – VND150,000

About: Organized by Converse, Noise to The World promises to bring a genuine rock and roll Christmas party to Saigon. Five Vietnamese rock bands - Black Infinity, White Noiz, Hạc San, 9th Dimension and Seismic Origin – are expected to perform.

Contact: Visit www.converse.com.vn for more details

DECEMBER 13

What: Trus'me

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); VND150,000

About: Owner of record label Prime Numbers and creator of soul edged house and techno choice cuts, Mancunian music head Trus'me has seen tremendous success both for his debut LPs, *Working Nights* and *In The Red* as well as his hypnotic, eclectic sets around the globe.

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

DECEMBER 13 & 14

What: 3A Christmas Bazaar

Where: 3A Station (3A Ton Duc Thang, D1); 9am – 8pm

About: In addition to kiosks selling handicrafts, live music, gifts for visitors, free henna drawing and free tarot card reading are expected. From 11am – 12pm and 4:30pm – 5:30pm everything will be discounted 10 percent. Mai's Gallery, popular for their paintings and caricatures, will be open for viewing during the bazaar.

Contact: Visit Facebook: "3A Station Bazaar" for more info



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**DECEMBER
13 & 14**

What: Snow White and the Seven Nguyens

Where: Vista Walk (P2 level, Shop 7, 628C Xa Lo Ha Noi, D2); VND200,000 for tickets purchased in advance or VND300,000 at the door

About: This is an original British-style pantomime written by Emily Huckson and Heather Robinson. It's their take on the famous story of Snow White but with a Vietnamese twist. Join Snow White as she tries to elude her evil stepmother's plans and meets the quirky yet lovable seven Nguyens who help her each step of the way. Proceeds will go to Kiva Microfunds and Viet Hearts Scholarship Fund.

Contact: Email saigonplayers@gmail.com for details on show times and tickets

DECEMBER 19

What: John Morales and Alton Miller

Where: The Observatory
(5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4);
VND200,000

About: Detroit veteran Alton Miller is returning to The Observatory with legendary New York disco producer John Morales. The two are considered pioneers of dance culture. Their combined energy is going to make for a night that is nothing short of epic.

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

DECEMBER 20

What: La Royale

Where: The Observatory
(5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4);
VND150,000

About: A key agent of the vibrant and emerging electronic scene in Mexico and owner of the Electrique Music label, La Royale's productions are unique forays into the heavy possibilities of disco, and you can expect his set on this night to do the same.

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



What: Escape Countdown Party 2014: Age of Tomorrow

Where: Phu My Hung, Lot 13, Tan Trao, D7; VND249,000 – VND2 million; 3pm

About: Based on an intergalactic theme, the organizers have created a UFO stage, special lighting effects and robotic dance performers to count down to 2015. Headlining the party is Swedish DJ duo Icona Pop.

Contact: Visit www.ticketbox.vn for tickets

DECEMBER
31



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UNTIL
JAN 9, 2015



What: Small Things Exhibition

Where: VinGallery (6 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2)

About: The exhibition presents the small works of over 15 local and international artists for sale. In Vietnam it can be difficult to know what is authentic so buying from a reputable gallery guarantees you are getting an original piece of art with good provenance. Also check out their new range of books, poster, calendars and canvas prints.

Contact: Visit www.vingallery.com for more details

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JANUARY
9 - 11



ILLUSTRATION BY HOANG TRUNG

What: Standpoint Theories - Vietnam Edition

Where: Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4)

About: A collaborative project focused on building a graphic novel of six Vietnamese legendary myths (Au Co, Son Tinh, Ong Dong, Chu Dong Tu, Princess Lieu Hanh and Ba Chua Xu) by using the means of dance, Vietnamese text, live visual art, 3D mapping and live electronic music fused with traditional Vietnamese music.

Contact: Visit gemdartiste32.wix.com/standpointtheoriesvn for more info



EVERY SAT
UNTIL MAY 9,
2015

What: Saigon Soul Party

Where: Splash Bar (Second Floor, New World Saigon Hotel); VND150,000; 10am - 10pm

About: The weekly event is a water fueled festival with international DJs spinning house music and a fully operational bar with drinks priced from VND50,000 as well as local restaurants setting up food stations, artisans selling their creations, hotel promotions, swimwear retailers, drink specials, prizes and more.

Contact: Email dallas.waines@saigonsoul.com for more details

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1 1966 steam locomotive in Vietnam has been restored. A team of engineers and workers spent eight months painstakingly restoring the train, which will soon be used for tourism. The Tu Luc 141-190 steam train was produced in China. Nguyen Van Hien, 68, the restoration project's chief engineer, recalled: "The trains were removed from long routes starting in 1996, and were occasionally used to carry tourists when demanded and ran within the station, before service was suspended altogether in 2003." In 2009 when the government proposed a plan to restore unused steam trains as part of their tourism strategy, the train and two others were purchased by Indochina Rail Co, a local railway tourism company based in Ho Chi Minh City. The company initially inked a deal with state-run Gia Lam Rail Firm in Hanoi. However, after the Tu Luc 141-190 locomotive was dismantled, the restoration project ground to a halt. The project resumed in late 2010, with the locomotive's components being transported to Di An Train Co in Binh Duong for reconstruction.

78%

of Vietnamese children under six use digital devices. A survey conducted in Hanoi, Danang, HCMC and Can Tho by the Research Center of Culture, Education and Social Life under the HCMC Ethnology and Anthropology Association collected responses from 1,051 parents of 1,802 kids from three to 12 years old. According to the results, 19 percent of those under three have access to a digital device while 59 percent of children from three to five play with digital devices. Many parents admitted that they've used smartphones and tablets as babysitters, considering the limited amount of time they can spend with their children.

1,000

Vietnamese websites were hacked in the first half of September - 30 had "gov.vn" as their domain name while 69 were run by education agencies with the suffix "edu.vn." "Hackers took control of 30 government websites for nearly 20 days in August - an alarming figure," said SecurityDaily. Nearly 4,800 Vietnamese websites were victims of cyber-attacks during the first nine months of this year.

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15%

will be added to the national monthly minimum wage, effective January 2015. Under a government decree, Vietnam will raise the wage to VND2.15 million – VND3.1 million, depending on cities: Region 1: Urban Hanoi, Hai Phong, HCMC, the minimum wage will be VND3.1 million, or VND400,000 higher than the current threshold. Region 2: Rural Ha Noi, HCMC, Hai Phong, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Bac Ninh, Thai Nguyen, Nha

Trang, Can Tho and Rach Gia, the minimum wage increases to VND2.75 million. Region 3: Hai Duong, Vinh Phuc, Phu Tho, Bac Ninh, Nam Dinh, Phu Yen, Dong Nai and Tien Giang, Ben Tre, the monthly salary will go up to VND2.4 million. Region 4: The least developed areas in Vietnam, the base salary will start at VND2.15 million.

The variance was determined by the cost of living in a given worker's location. Vietnam's per capita GDP climbed to USD1,890 last year, up eight percent from 2012, according to the World Bank. However, the salary only covers 69 - 77 percent of a Vietnamese person's basic living costs, according to the survey, which polled 1,500 workers in 12 cities and provinces during the first half of this year. Both foreign and local companies often lament that minimum wage increases will hurt their operations. They warn any further wage hikes will cause grave consequences on Vietnam's competitiveness in the near term, adding it needs to be considered "very carefully."

10,000

signatures were collected to protest against a USD220 million cable car from being installed in portions of Son Doong Cave. Many believed that the plan, meant to lure tourists, would likely lead to the degradation of the natural wonder.

"The government of Vietnam needs to act immediately to stop a proposed cable car construction project which could lead to cave collapses and will threaten the pristine cave with further development. This project must be stopped before it has a huge and damaging impact on the Son Doong Cave and the ecosystem of the entire Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park," said one protester.

USD1 BILLION

is spent on cigarettes annually in Vietnam. Tobacco prices in Vietnam are the lowest in the world, but Vietnam is one of 15 countries with the highest number of smokers globally. According to a study by Health Bridge of Canada and the Hanoi Public Health University conducted between 2010 - 2011, Vietnam spends VND23 trillion every year treating five of the 25 tobacco-related diseases. This figure was equal to 1.17 percent of the country's GDP in 2010. The five common tobacco-related diseases are lung cancer, respiratory and upper GI cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, ischemic heart disease and stroke.

Dr. Pham Thi Hoang Anh, Director of Health Bridge Canada in Vietnam, said: "It's like a vicious circle, the poorer people are, the more they smoke. They buy cheap cigarettes, which are usually more toxic, which means a higher risk of illness. Also, because of economic difficulties, they often delay examinations, resulting in high cost of treatment." She adds that tobacco tax increases could reduce consumption of tobacco and increase tax revenues. However, the tobacco tax rates in the draft amendments to the Law on Special Consumption Tax, which will be discussed at the ongoing National Assembly session, are too low, 70 percent in 2016 - 2018 and 75 percent from 2019.



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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



DRINK YOUR VEGGIES

The average person usually doesn't get the recommended two to three cups of vegetables every day, and what we do eat are cooked, which can destroy the enzymes and vitamins. At Guanabana, owner Luke Nguyen created a fresh and fast way to get your daily required dose of vegetables with his new vegetable smoothies. "Many of our health conscious regulars have been asking us for vegetable smoothies, because they wanted an easy way to get their daily consumption of veggies and fruits. So our team started with a list of healthy ingredients, and then experimented for several weeks to figure out ingredient combinations that satisfied our picky health conscious customers in terms of both nutritional quality and taste," says Luke. The experiments resulted in their three bestsellers: Coconut Kale (organic kale from Dalat, bananas and cinnamon), Mint Cacao (spinach, mint and natural

cacao powder. Cacao powder is rich in antioxidants, and tastes great with fresh mint). To help boost your immune system is Ginger Green (spinach, celery and ginger). All smoothies (VND65,000 for a small size, VND85,000 for a large) are non-dairy, with no sugar added and their coconut milk is made fresh every morning. The veggie smoothies can be customized to suit individual preferences, but Luke suggests using the tried and tested original recipes that they've spent weeks perfecting. Customers can also add several different health boosters, such as Whey Protein, Immunity Blend, Weightloss Blend, Collagen, Green Superfood or even Pure Spirulina. The veggie smoothies are perfect meal replacements or snacks, leaving you feeling fuller and more satisfied.

Visit Guanabana at 23 Ly Tu Trong, DI, Facebook: *GuanabanaSmoothies* or order for delivery at 0909 824 830.

SPA AND SALON HOLIDAY PROMOTIONS

During the holiday season give the gift of beauty and glam with Maison Mikio gift certificates available now. And to celebrate their first anniversary, Maison Mikio is offering 30 percent off on all hair services, manicures, pedicures, skincare treatments, foot massages and waxing. In December, guests will also receive a special gift when visiting the spa. The salon and spa offers clients a spacious yet intimate setting for salon and beauty services such as hair styling, coloring, manicures, pedicures, skincare and waxing. Call 5412 4773 or visit Facebook: *maisonmikio* for more info.

NEW VERY NGON HOMEWARES

This season, Very Ngon Homewares (Facebook: *VeryNgonHomewares*) launched a new quilted bed cover based on modern street maps of central Saigon, An Phu and Hanoi. Unlike their classic Indochine-inspired homewares which feature French images of early 1900s Vietnam, the bed covers are unprinted, relying on the beauty and simplicity of the quilted lines which represent the streets and boulevards of the cityscapes featured.

They didn't stop at quilts for the approaching Christmas season. Inspired by vintage bags from the 60s and 70s, Very Ngon Homewares classic Indochine images have teamed up with retro-style cane handles to create a stylish new handbag. The bags come with three different images to choose from, a zip for security, an internal pocket for phone safety and a claw-hook for securing house and bike/car keys.

Very Ngon are also launching new images on their ever popular tea towels and cushion covers. The new cushion cover design features a wealthy woman in a pousse-pousse, the predecessor of modern-day cyclos which were used around Asia and parts of Africa.



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BELLUNI CONTEST RESULTS

Last month Belluni's "Wear Belluni - Drive Vespa" lucky draw contest saw 30 lucky customers receive prizes that included a Vespa, an Electrolux washing machine, and two Nokia Lumina smartphones. Over 8,518 people had entered the contest.

CARAVELLE SAIGON HOLIDAY PROMOTIONS

(www.caravellehotel.com)

- *Traditional Christmas Teas at Café de l'Opera* - December 15 to 23: Holiday-themed delights such as Christmas cookies and traditional fruitcake make an appearance on the lounge's classic three-tiered tea trays, while a choir sweetens the air with much-loved Christmas carols. Served with a flute of Veuve Clicquot Champagne and a choice of loose-leaf Ronnefeldt teas. VND380,000++ per person.

- *Christmas Feasting at Restaurant Nineteen* - December 24 to 25: Nineteen's Christmas Eve Gala Dinner, Christmas Day Luncheon and Christmas Day Dinner Buffet will showcase traditional holiday dishes, such as whole-roasted turkey, honey-glazed ham and Christmas pudding together with delicacies from all corners of the globe. Children can look forward to gifts and fun time taking photos with Santa Claus at Nineteen's Christmas Eve and Day Luncheon; while grown-ups can toast with a flute of sparkling Veuve Clicquot Champagne, as well as a free flow of fine wines and signature cocktails.

Early diners on Christmas Eve will be treated to a performance from the Children Choirs as well as the hotel's in-house carolers; and a live jazz quartet will play from 8pm on December 24. Nineteen's Christmas Eve Gala Buffet Dinner is priced at VND1,980,000++ or VND 1,390,000++ for early dining. Christmas Day buffets are priced at VND1,680,000++.

- *Nineteen Lays Out Lavish Year-End Buffet* - December 31: Enjoy unlimited fresh seafood, sushi and sashimi. Sample signature bites such as baked oysters in Bechamel cream. Or fill up on specialties such as seared duck liver in Port wine sauce, grilled sea bass with roast fennel and suckling pig with Chinese buns. Priced at VND1,390,000++ for early dining, and VND2,380,000++ from 8pm until late.

- *Culinary Celebrations at Reflections* - December 24 and 31: On Christmas Eve, Reflections will offer a four-course prix fixe Gala Dinner as a live jazz band plays classic Christmas melodies. Priced at VND1,680,000++.

On New Year's Eve, the menus runs through five courses, and linger over your last meal of 2014 with a free flow of champagne and puff pastry cornet with Chantilly cream. Priced at VND1,980,000++.

- *Dance into 2015 at Saigon Saigon Bar* - December 24 and 31: The music never ends at Saigon Saigon Bar's "Baïla Saigon!" extravaganza, with show-stopping performances from Q'vans Band. Routines by some of Vietnam's hottest dance troupes will heat up the dance floor, keeping the party moving until late. Cover charges will apply on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, priced at VND280,000 nett and VND1,400,000 nett respectively, including one standard drink.

PURPLE JADE

Be a part of the countdown party to enter their lucky draw and receive great prizes from InterContinental Asiana Saigon. Priced at VND380,000++/ adult with a free welcome drink.

SILK 99

Silk 99 (99 Nguyen Du, D1) is the latest fine dining Cantonese restaurant to open in Saigon. Boasting a 2,000 sqm space with five luxury dining areas and five VIP rooms, the restaurant serves a wide selection of Chinese royal dishes such as bird's nest, abalone, shark's fin, dim sum, lobster and more.



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NAINGIRL OPENS

Korean clothing brand NAINGIRL has entered the fashion market with an outlet at Parkson (1st Floor, 45 Le Thanh Ton, D1). The label caters to women in their 20s and 30s who know how to balance work and play while still looking trendy and elegant. Designs combine luxurious fabric like silk jersey with complementary colors to create modern wearable pieces.

BASILICO

Italian Style Set Dinner - December 24: VND1,488,000++/ person including free flow Prosecco, selected good wines, Tiger beer and soft drinks. New Year's Eve Set Dinner - December 31: VND1,488,000++/ person including free flow Prosecco, selected good wines, Tiger beer, soft drinks and complimentary a welcome entry to the Purple Jade's countdown party. Located in InterContinental Asiana Saigon.

INTERCONTINENTAL NHA TRANG PROMOTIONS

(www.ihg.com) New Year's Eve will be a night to remember with an amazing array of events. From an extravagant set dinner in the Cookbook Café to New Year's Eve Countdown Party at the grand ballroom and an outdoor New Year's Day Buffet Lunch on January 1, 2015. There will also be music performances from soothing jazz to groovy flamenco at each dining event, kid's playground at Ballroom, and a vibrant display of fireworks. The New Year's Eve will climax with a countdown party for guests at the light-filled ballroom followed by a buffet, live music performance, a DJ show and exclusive entertainment when the midnight bell rings.

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LA BETTOLA CHRISTMAS SPECIALS

To celebrate their first Christmas in Saigon, La Bettola (84 Ho Tung Mau, D1) is serving homemade traditional Italian dishes such as *zampone* (stuffed pig trotter with a mixture of lean meats, belly and back skin and neck fat boiled and served with lentils) and *panettone* (sweet bread).

AU LAC DO BRAZIL PROMOTION

Jingle bells, jingle bells. Jingle all the way. Au Lac do Brazil (238 Pasteur, D3) wishes you a Merry Christmas with a special offer on December 24 and 25. From VND900,000++, along with a Churrascaria dinner, customers will receive a cup of Swedish Glogg (hot wine mix) accompanied by a live musical performance.

YU CHU

Family Festive Buffet Dinner - December 24: VND1,588,000++/ person including free flow of selected wines, selection cocktails, soft drinks and Tiger beer. Champagne package supplement of VND199,000++

Family Festive Brunch - December 25: VND1,588,000++/ person including free flow of wines, selected cocktails, soft drinks and Tiger beer. Champagne package supplement of VND199,000++/ person

East Meets West Buffet Dinner - December 31: VND1,888,000++/ person including free flow of selected wines, selected cocktails, soft drinks, Tiger beer and complimentary entry to the Purple Jade countdown party. Add VND199,000++/ person to include free flow Veuve Clicquot. (InterContinental Asiana Saigon.)

SKINCARE PROMOTION

S'hekin Beauty Skincare (5 Tran Quoc Thao, D3; www.shekin.vn) is having a promotion for December where customers who use the acne scar or enlarged pores treatment service will get up to 30 percent off. In addition, customers who spend between VND2 million and VND5 million will get an eyelash connection package along with other gifts. The clinic specializes in treating acne scars.

INTERCONTINENTAL ASIANA SAIGON PROMOTIONS

(corner of Hai Ba Trung and Le Duan, D1) Market 39

- *Gourmet Christmas Buffet Dinner* - December 24: VND1,988,000++/ person including free flow of Champagne Veuve Clicquot, wines, selected cocktails, soft drinks and Tiger beer.

- *Lavish Brunch* - December 25: VND2,100,000++/ person including free flow of Champagne Veuve Clicquot, wines, selected cocktails, soft drinks and Tiger beer.

- *Buffet Dinner* - December 25: VND1,090,000++/ person including free flow of house wines, selected cocktails, soft drinks and Tiger beer.

- *Exclusive Buffet Dinner* - December 31: VND2,388,000++/ person including free flow of Champagne Veuve Clicquot, wines, selected cocktails, soft drinks, Tiger beer, and complimentary entry to the Purple Jade's countdown party

- *Happy New Year Brunch* - January 1, 2015: VND1,498,000++/ person including free flow of Champagne Veuve Clicquot, wines, selected cocktails, soft drinks and Tiger beer.

- *Celebrate New Year Dinner* - January 1, 2015: VND1,090,000++/ person including free flow of house wines, selected cocktails, soft drinks and Tiger beer.

NEW DOG WALKING SERVICE

A dog walking, training and running service has recently opening in District 2. Walk My Dog Saigon (walkmydoghcm@gmail.com or 01658 723799) provides canine care, personalized exercise routines and mental training sessions to any breed. Pickup and drop off options are also available. Ten percent of their revenue will be donated to No to Dog Meat, a registered charity that's trying to end the dog meat industry.



FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS AT CARAVELLE SAIGON

Christmas Goodies at Café de l'Opera
5th – 26th December

Christmas Teas at Café de l'Opera
15th – 23rd December; noon – 5:30pm: VND 380,000

Christmas Eve Celebration
Wednesday, 24th December

Early Dinner Buffet at Nineteen: 5:00pm – 7:30pm: VND 1,390,000

Gala Dinner Buffet at Nineteen: 8:00pm till late: VND 1,980,000

Culinary Celebrations at Reflections Fine Dining
6:00pm – 11:00pm: VND 1,680,000

Baila Saigon at Saigon Saigon Bar
7:00pm till late. Cover charge: VND 280,000 nett including one standard drink

Christmas Day Celebration at Nineteen
Thursday, 25th December

Christmas Day Lunch Buffet: 11:30am – 3:00pm: VND 1,680,000

Christmas Day Dinner Buffet: 5:45pm – 10:30pm: VND 1,680,000

New Year's Eve Celebration
Wednesday, 31st December

Nineteen Lays Out Lavish Year-End Buffet

New Year's Eve Dinner Buffet: 5:00pm – 7:30pm: VND 1,390,000

New Year's Eve Gala Dinner Buffet: 8:00pm till late: VND 2,380,000

Culinary Celebrations at Reflections Fine Dining
Re-live the delicious anticipation of the holidays
6:00pm – 11:00pm: VND 1,980,000

Dance Into 2015 at Saigon Saigon Bar
Baila Saigon! Send 2014 off in style
7:00pm till late. Cover charge: VND 1,400,000 nett including one standard drink

New Year's Day Celebration at Nineteen
Thursday, 1st January

New Year's Day Lunch Buffet: 11:30am – 3:00pm: VND 1,280,000

New Year's Day Dinner Buffet: 5:45pm – 10:30pm: VND 1,280,000

Enjoy our Caravelle Choir and have fun with pictures and gifts from Santa Claus at Nineteen's Christmas Eve and Day Luncheon

Tickets are available at Caravelle's Festive Desk in the Lobby, 9:00am – 9:00pm

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My Life as... a bonsai enthusiast

INTERVIEWED BY **NGUYEN THI THAO, NGUYEN THUY LINH, LAN
NGO AND JEREMY DE NIEVA** IMAGE BY **NGOC TRAN**

YOU SEE THIS tree here? I bought it for VND8 million. If I sell it now I can get VND600 million. If I wait another three years, I should get at least VND7 trillion. See that other tree? It's almost 50 years old. I brought it home and transferred it onto that rock. It'll take three years until it's finished.

Basically, I find a beautiful old tree and hire someone to bring it back to my place. I go all over the country looking for trees I can work with - Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Phu Tho - all over the north and the center. Once I get it home, I take time to really understand the aesthetics of it. Friends and colleagues come around and look at it. The more perspectives I can get, the better. There's a saying, "If you've got nine people you'll have 10 opinions." We're really open around here. We're not afraid of competition and everyone wants each other to do a good job. That's why I'm happy to talk to anyone who's interested in my trees. I can literally sit here and talk about trees for hours.

When you're growing bonsai, there are different seasons for doing different things. From January to August is when you shape the tree by pruning and bending. From September to November, you promote growth by covering the tree with fabric or wrapping it in plastic. And in December, it's too cold to do anything.

This bonsai industry started to develop in this village about five years ago. Nowadays, many families are in the business. I don't know exactly how it happened. I guess the younger people got together and decided it was a good job to have, not too dirty or physically demanding. At 47 years old, I'm actually the oldest person growing bonsai in the village. My master, Ngo Xuan Giang, is only 37. He's really skilled, and I've learned a lot from him.

So anyway, I grew up in the village, and after I got out of high school I went to work on the Red River for 16 or 17 years. It was hard work and I had to be away from the house a lot. Six or seven years ago, I started growing bonsai trees as a hobby, and gradually it turned into my profession.

I love this job. It's an art form and a kind of meditation at the same time. It teaches you patience and understanding and helps

you become a more complete, civilized person. Sometimes I'm out here all night with one tree, trying to understand how I should work with it. Then other days when I'm not feeling inspired, I just sit here, drink some tea, smoke some *thuoc lao* (Vietnamese tobacco smoked through a water pipe) and let my mind wander. Sometimes in my previous job I'd get frustrated or angry when something went wrong or I had to deal with jerks. But this job brings a clarity and lightness to my life. It's wonderful.

I don't need to advertise. Some people in the village have started advertising their trees online, and I'll probably do it too some day. But for now, people just hear about my trees by word of mouth. Pretty much anyone who's into bonsai will know about my trees and come for a visit. Sometimes they compliment and sometimes they criticize, but this job has taught me to be patient and accepting. Life is like that, I think. You have to be able to let things roll off your back and be at peace with yourself.

I'm old now, and I have to admit I've been very lucky in my life. If you added up the value of all these trees here it would be somewhere around VND100 billion. So I'm more than happy to make this my career. Not only do I get to work surrounded by all these beautiful trees, but also I can develop the business so my kids can take over when they grow up. As the country develops and people become more cultured, demand for bonsai will only increase.

These trees are like my children. I love them all. You see that little bonsai over there? I raised it from a seedling and now it's eight years old. It's almost perfect now. If someone appreciates it, I'll be happy to sell it to them. But if not, I'm just as happy to watch it grow for the next 30 or 40 years. The more time and attention I invest in a bonsai, the more special it is to me. ■

Additional editing by **Gerard Sasges**.
Excerpted from *It's a Living: Work and Life in Vietnam Today*, available on Amazon and iTunes. Or look for the Vietnamese version, *Việt Nam ngày nay: Chuyện mưu sinh* in local bookstores.





"Things will change, for the better." - Giang, co-founder and sole owner of Ailu

Hello Kitty

One woman's mission to rescue, shelter and protect cats

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

IT'S DIFFICULT TO say whether the decision to set up a coffee shop in a claustrophobic animal home overrun with cats is more desperation or determination – but somehow Ailu Café, for all its peeling paint, spartan furnishings and the sheer impossibility of cleaning up after 30 cats 24 hours per day has gained enormous popularity. It may not be much to look at, but the venue's 20,000-plus Facebook likes translates to a lot of popular affection for an animal charity that's essentially struggling to survive.

"It is not clear in the name, but we're actually more of a cat shelter than a cafe business," explains Ailu co-founder Giang, perhaps stating the obvious. "We're trying our best just to keep going. But we don't have

huge profit margins, so we don't have the strength to improve things yet."

Giang started the café in 2010 with a childhood friend. "We used to collect stray cats and dogs and care for them in our houses when we were young, and when they were strong enough or old enough, we'd try finding new homes for them. At times, we'd have 10 to 15 cats between us," Giang shares. "When we grew up, it became pretty clear that we would keep doing this for the rest of our lives. Our parents protested, but we figured we might as well make it work somehow, make it sustainable. Providing a place for cat lovers was the easiest thing to start with. Since then, it's been a tough road."

When asked why they didn't open an animal shelter instead, Giang replies. "You

can't survive as a nonprofit cat shelter in a country where people prefer their cats on a plate. It just doesn't work. To be able to change things and make it better, you have to be able to provide people something of value."

The Cost of Caring

The majority of the cats (and sometimes dogs) in Ailu Café are either strays or abandoned by their owners. "People can pay VND10 to 20 million to have a pretty pet to play around with, but then just as easily discard it. They're not things but actual living, breathing creatures that need feeding, cleaning and attention, and when their owners realize this, I guess some of them just hadn't prepared themselves for the responsibility."

The cost of caring for the animals, many of which did not arrive at the cafe in good health, is high. "When we opened we started having problems we never planned for," says Giang. The neighbors were the first to protest about the smell and noise. Then officials started turning up regularly to check on the café. The worst, however, were the many health issues that arose from keeping so many animals together in a small, confined space. "When one gets sick, there's a high



"My college doesn't allow pets so I come here. It's not so bad here. I mean, my room is dirtier... and has no fluffy cats to hug."



"I can't get enough of these guys. Their fur is just so soft... even if they shed like crazy. But hey, I wear jeans."

chance they'll all contract the virus too. Usually we try to catch the spread – if we spot a cat or dog not doing well or not eating as much as they're supposed to, we take them to the vet and quarantine them."

Even with these preemptive measures, things sometimes get ugly. A couple of months ago, the whole clowder at Ailu suffered a seasonal disease that saw the death of 15 cats and kittens. Giang and the staff managed to save the 30 remaining, but it was a bitter and sobering lesson for the young team.

That wasn't the only loss the café suffered this year. Giang's partner left, claiming the burden was too much for her. The original two-friend team is now down to one.

"I have no intention of giving up. We've come a long way since the start. We've managed to pay off our initial investment and the animals are loved and cared for here. We also have plans for the future. We managed to save up some money. Next year, we'll open a pet store downstairs and try to get more money to come in. If we're well funded, then we can do more. You'll see. Things will change for the better."

Ailu Café / 284C Nguyen Trong Tuyen, Phu Nhuan ■



"I like to work while surrounded by these guys. They help me focus. Yes, despite the smell."



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Tech startups to keep an eye on



Anh Minh-Do is the editor at **TechInAsia.com** for Vietnam, focusing on technology startups, trends and companies. Minh is on the board of **Starthub.vn** - a database and forum for startups dedicated to the growth of Vietnam's business industry.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the Ministry of Science and Technology launched the Vietnam Silicon Valley project (www.siliconvalley.com.vn) - a four-month program that offers funding and mentorship to tech startups. It is still unclear how independent and strong these startups will be once they hit the market, although many of Vietnam's top startups have been able to grow in part because of their relationships with the government. These are the nine that graduated from the Vietnam Silicon Valley project in October:

1) **Astro Telligent or HR.com.vn** - A recruitment service that works directly with businesses to source possible candidates through social media. It's not clear yet if this will be similar to LinkedIn or to a more traditional recruitment site.

2) **Chomp** - It provides an end-to-end solution for users to create, activate and track cross social marketing and commerce hashtag campaigns. It's also looking into social commerce.

3) **CSK** - A cloud service that allows retail businesses to manage their customers and increase sales.

4) **Olymsearch** - It wants to index all SKUs online.

5) **BigTime.vn** - An online event ticketing website that will be competing with MuaTicket.vn, SuKien360 and SuKien.net. More are entering a space where Ticketbox.vn and VNTIC.vn were the first movers.

6) **Lozi.vn** - Lozi.vn is similar to Yelp but its design is similar to Pinterest. Lozi faces strong competition from Foody.vn.

7) **VnPlay** - Television is still the main medium for Vietnamese consumers, so there are new platforms popping up everywhere from companies both large and small. Pops VN has its own channel for Smart TV while VNG has Zing TV, however VnPlay wants to allow anyone to create a channel and stream content. In other words, it's heading into YouTube

territory. Most of the other dominant television services simply broadcast what's already on television to mobile devices.

8) **VietCreative** - A platform for educational games for children. The team allows developers to use this engine and then publishes games on VietCreative.

9) **MyMoney.vn and LoanVi.com** - These are the two main products from Finsom, a financial tech startup. MyMoney.vn is a personal finance portal and LoanVi.com is a comparison and personal loan financing platform.

Following in the footsteps of the Ministry of Science and Technology, Hanoi-based Topica Founder Institute announces 12 startups it will help mentor:

1) **NextTopEvent** - An event ticketing service.

2) **9mix** - A mobile app for women to share their favorite fashion items.

3) **KlassJoy** - Still unreleased, it allows students, teachers and parents to interact with each other over education through the mobile app.

4) **vLance** - A platform for freelancers to connect with potential employers.

5) **TinyGuu** - It's a tool for parents to manage and track online content their kids are viewing.

6) **ZinMed** - Although the main site is already up, this startup is also working specifically on mobile apps for people to keep track of their health.

7) **UpLevo** - A branding consultancy firm for small businesses. Customers buy a full branding kit from the company for USD29 and can create their own branded and marketing materials.

8) **Morbling** - A mobile and games studio that focuses on making 3D games for mobile. Sorry iOS folks, all their games are on Android.

9) **HiSella** - This established company is already an expert at building custom CMSes and is now pushing into working on building custom eCommerce sites for clients.

10) **iMap** - Focuses exclusively on location data and builds custom location solutions for both consumers and businesses.

11) **Antoree** - This is another education startup that has built a platform to bring tutors and students together online.

12) **Beeketing** - A marketing automation tool for online sellers. It basically tracks buyer behavior and upsells or resells to them based on the Beeketing system.

All we have to do now is wait and see who's left standing in 2015. ■



Egg Them On

Just in time for the Christmas holidays, eggnog coffee

INTERVIEW BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGES BY **NEIL FEATHERSTONE**

JUST WHEN WE think the locals can't get any more creative with their coffee, they prove us wrong. Ever since Vietnamese egg coffee landed as number one on BuzzFeed's list of *17 Ways To Drink Coffee Around The World* a couple of months ago, the drink has inspired new cafes dedicated to this specialty. As the name implies, the hot beverage is made of egg, coffee, condensed milk and some furious whisking. While the hot beverage may be new over in the West, *ca phe trung*, as it's called in Vietnam, has been a Hanoian staple for several decades.

"Nguyen Van Giang was the person who created the egg coffee," says Thuan, barista at Lu Gia, a café that recently added the drink to their menu. "He was the chief barista at the Sofitel Legend Metropole in Hanoi during the French colonial era. The story is he invented the egg coffee because he missed drinking hot Western lattes after he left his job." After leaving the Sofitel, Giang opened up two cafes on Nguyen Huu Huan and Yen Phu streets where he mostly served traditional Vietnamese coffee to the locals.

"At the time, he couldn't recreate his favorite lattes because he didn't have milk and cream. That may sound silly to some people but in those days, Vietnam was a difficult place, milk and cream were luxury food items. So he made do with what he had - coffee and eggs - and that was how egg coffee was invented. Back then his egg drinks weren't very popular with the local folks who liked their traditional style coffee. But with time it eventually caught on and is now on almost every café menu in Hanoi."

The drink starts with fresh chicken eggs, with the yolks and white separated, then the yolks are stirred in a mixer with drops of honey (or condensed milk). Hot coffee brewed from ground beans becomes the bottom layer of the cup. The beaten yolk mixture makes the middle and on top is the beaten egg white. The result is layers of flavor that contrast and complement each other in interesting ways: the rich, bitter tang of coffee, the buttery egg yolk, the sweetness of the honey, and on top of that, egg white that tastes like whipped cream, only finer.

"It tastes like tiramisu cake," says Thuan.

Cafes in Saigon are starting to catch up with this originally Hanoian trend. Many have even put their own spin on *ca phe trung* with egg cacao and egg matcha. For those who can't journey all the way to Hanoi to enjoy egg coffee from Giang's shops, here are a couple of cafes in Saigon where the drinks are just as good as the original. ■



LUU GIA CAFE
8 Hoa Cuc,
Phu Nhuan
093 416 2508

GHE GO CAFE
61/13 Luu Nhan
Chu, Tan Binh
0168 997 4978

KHONG GIAN CAFE
23 Nguyen
Thien Thuat, D3
3839 4966

LANG CAFE
573/12 Su Van
Hanh, D10
3868 0999



Nerd Alert

Dig out that costume hidden in your closet, Saigon's first comic convention is happening this month

INTERVIEW BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**



FOR FANS OF DC and Marvel comics, video games and Japanese manga, Comic Con needs no introduction; it's an international

phenomenon. The first comics convention was an event called "Comiccon '64" held in New York City in July of 1964. Science fiction conventions started gaining popularity in the 1980s. The first San Diego Comic-Con, the most-attended comic convention in the country, was in 1970. This month, it lands in Ho Chi Minh City for the first time.

Oi speaks to Anna Thu Nguyenova and Kyle Farr, the people behind Saigon Comic Con (www.saigoncomiccon.com), on geek culture, how they did it and what visitors can look forward to.

Why is Comic Con so popular?

Anna: Describing it as a pop culture event in no way captures the excitement of Comic Con. To its fans, it's not just a comic convention. It's Comic Con! As to why it's so popular, we think a large part of it has to do with cosplay. It's the same reason why Halloween is so popular. People like to dress up... sometimes crazily. The difference with fans of pop culture is the stigma, especially in Vietnam because you can't go around dressed up as a fictional character without people thinking you are crazy. And comic books, manga and video games in Vietnam

are treated as children's territory and not something adults should waste time on but a lot of fans are adults who want to celebrate their passion without being judged. Comic Con takes the stigma out of the equation. At a Con, you can go as crazy as you want and be saluted by like-minded people.

Kyle: In short, Comic Con is a celebration of geek culture. It's where you show your geek pride.

When did the idea of holding Comic Con in Vietnam start?

K: Basically we arrived in Vietnam a couple of months ago. We were looking around for interesting things to do. We thought perhaps we should do a Color or Prisma run, but there are already so many people doing the exact same thing in Saigon. Then we found out that there was no Comic Con in Vietnam.

A: In August, we did a test to see if there was a demand, a simple online pre-registration. It was just a random website hosting an info sheet. We posted the link on a Vietnamese *League of Legends* fan site. Within the first week, we got 1,000 pre-registrations. And all that traffic was from a single forum post saying: 'Hey, guys! Comic Con!' and a link. We did no marketing.

K: It was then that we knew this was a validated concept.

Did you face any difficulties organizing it?

K: It's a lot of work but surprisingly we received help from a lot of people. Since we set up the company, people started finding us and asking to partner up. Upbeat ticket channel was the first one to get on board. Marvel and DC themselves sent word to keep them up-to-date with future Cons. It turns out they want to enter the Vietnamese market themselves in a couple of years.

How are Comic Con fans here different from the ones in the US?

A: In America, the people who go to Comic Con are adults. Eighteen is the minimum. Here, we are looking at a lot of young adults, teenagers and little kids accompanied by parents.

VND180,000 a ticket isn't cheap for a convention here. Vietnam has many manga conventions that are cheaply priced or free. Do you think that price tag will lower your turnout?

A: The thing about free or very cheap conventions is that they tend to be of low quality with unremarkable products, little to no content, or at an inconvenient location. We, on the other hand, want to bring really good content to our people and good content costs. San Diego Comic



Anna Thu Nguyenova and Kyle Farr

Con for example costs USD70 for entry, and if you want a signature from someone from the set of *Game of Thrones* that's going to be another USD40. You can't get Angelina Jolie or Robert Downey Jr. to come sit in your Con panel for VND50,000 per ticket. What we want to do is establish ourselves as a legitimate Comic Con and not your cookie cutter manga convention for teenagers. This year, we hope to set a standard that people will eventually get used to. Luckily, a couple of other conventions in Vietnam are starting to charge upward too so we are not alone.

What can visitors look forward to at Saigon Comic Con?

A: We will have a one-day League of Legends tournament, played by Saigon Jokers and Fantastic Five. We have lots of booths selling really cool products. We also have a panel showcasing Vietnamese voice over artists and how they do their work.

We have several artist shops that are the only one of their kind in Vietnam. We've got the only shop that sells DC and Marvel comics in Vietnam. A couple of our partners and sponsors, such as VinaGame, will also be giving away free limited products and limited discounts. Esport fans can't miss the League of Legend tournament. And if you forget your cosplay or don't know where to start, Zombie Home Shop will be renting out cosplay outfits all day long.

Tell us more about the Comic Con Junior section.

A: We have an entire section for very young children in the Con, a playground, a place where they can read free comic books, and they are going to show the voicing for Doraemon.

Our sponsor absolutely insisted upon it [Comic Con Junior]. Children are a huge market for comic publishing houses here so it's no surprise. Another reason is that the market here is vastly different compared to the market in San Diego. In other countries, it is the adults who want to go to the Con and relive their dreams; here it's the children. We had to adjust a lot of things, this included, to cater to the market. This is a Vietnamese Comic Con after all.

Do you think now is a good time for the first Vietnamese Comic Con to debut?

A: Absolutely. Geek culture in Vietnam is in a very interesting phase right now. There are a lot of changes happening in between the generations. Take gaming, for example. Before it was kids' territory and something most parents don't want them to focus on. Now we have esports as a legitimate career and industry in Vietnam. It's really pulling in a lot of money and where there is money then people will start paying attention and perhaps change their bias about things.

K: Young people in Vietnam are more aware and more immersed in the global pop culture. Take *The Avengers*, for example. People really love the movie and now they want to see the comic books too. DC and Marvel aren't widely sold in Vietnam yet but it's a matter of time.

Once the Con is done, what will you do next?

K: We will be looking at Hanoi Comic Con. ■

Phu Tho Stadium, D10
December 7, 10am – 8pm



The White-Collar Debt Collector

Time to pay up

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGE BY **NGOC TRAN**

“MY HUNTING SEASON starts now,” declares Tu Phu. “Nobody likes to hear that but me and maybe my clients.” However, Phu doesn’t go into the woods or forest to hunt because his prey is people. He’s loathed and feared; people hide from him when they know he’s coming. See, Phu isn’t a game hunter; he’s a debt collector. And while the profession may conjure images of loan sharks and gangsters breaking fingers and legs to get people to pay, his job is anything but violent.

An average workday has him in the office at 9am and leaving at 5pm. Phu’s intimidation tactics involve a laptop, a good internet connection, a phone line and a whole lot of documents. His uniform is a pair of trousers, a dress shirt and a tie. He doesn’t own black suits or dark shades and he definitely has no tattoos, though one of his colleagues does have one on her bicep - a pink unicorn with her daughter’s name on it. If that sounds nothing at all like how you imagined a debt collector to be, that’s because Phu is nothing at all like those portrayed in mafia movies. He’s a new breed of debt collectors. He is what they call a “white-collar debt collector”.

Having been on the job 15 years, his clients have included companies such as VinGroup (which owns the Vincom shopping malls and office complexes), international corporations such as HSBC and even some departments of the government. Phu has collected overdue payments from individuals to local and multinational companies and even state-owned corporations and prison houses.

“Think of us as doctors or lawyers,” says Phu. “We are claim specialists whose job revolves around solving particular problems our clients can’t handle either because they

have no expertise or no time. We are not outlaws who make our bread by squeezing money from decent folk. The difference between a gangster type repo-man and a white-collar collector is that the white-collar collector does everything by the law and still gets results. That means no threats, no home invasions, no stalking, no illegal possession of weapons.”

Instead of violence, the collector uses his extensive knowledge of the law and a collection of “soft tools” to sway the debtor into paying. “We send emails to ask people to pay... but not in the way that you think,” Phu shares. “Imagine opening your email and finding that you have an inbox of 1,000 plus unread emails overnight, all of them bearing requests for payment. Now imagine those 1,000 unread emails being sent over and over again for days, weeks and months, piling monstrosity on top of your normal work correspondence. Imagine having to dig through them all to get to the important ones because normal spam filters are helpless against dedicated software that take just a click of the mouse to activate. That is what we call the email bomb.”

And if the email bomb does not work... “Then we use the phone bomb,” says Phu. The phone bomb works on the same principle as the email one though on a more public scale. “Most mid-size companies have around five to 10 phones in their office. Imagine having all of these phones ringing, blaring at top volume, all at once, all day. And when you pick up, it’s the same message every time: ‘You have a debt to settle. When will you do it?’”

While the methods are simple, they’re incredibly effective, he says. “It’s not the



pressure that they fear. It’s the shame.” Most people, when faced with the mortification of having their bad financial status exposed in front of their coworkers, friends or family, cave quickly.

Like many businesses, debt collecting has its high and low seasons. The hunting season for white-collar collectors is from November to March. “Christmas, New Year, Tet, Songkran. They last from November to around the end of March. The time before that is when people are least prepared to deal with debt collectors. The Westerners don’t want problems during these holidays, some of which may hold deep meaning to them, and so they cave. The Asians don’t want to



bring bad luck to the new year and so they cave. In the end, debts are paid. Our clients are happy. The debtors don't have to see or hear from us again. And we get a cut of the cash. Everyone wins." Special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, the birth of a new child and anniversaries are also good times to collect.

Phu rarely uses social sites such as Facebook or Twitter for his personal life. He does not share what he does with most people and he definitely does not give his full name while on the job. Despite the legal status of what he does, in a country where many of his fellow collectors are criminals - and viewed as such - doing any of the above

may lead to problems at home.

"People typically do not view debt collectors in a positive light and they have their reasons. But bad debt is a fact of life," he says. "On average, two out of 10 Vietnamese companies carry unhealthy debts. Out of those two, one and a half has a very high chance of going *malfoy* (slang for a bad-faith debt). These numbers may not mean much to you but in this economy, they can kill. A collector's job then is very important because we work directly on the problem itself. Think about it like this. You owe somebody money. They have the right to collect what you owe them. That, too, is a fact of life. Nothing wrong there." ■

"People typically do not view debt collectors in a positive light and they have their reasons. But bad debt is a fact of life"

Your Money is No Good Here

Don't get turned away at the register, know what notes are "fit" for use

Is it true that shops are allowed to reject "damaged" bills? If so, what do they consider "damaged" and what are they supposed to do with them now?

Yes, it's true. The National Bank of Vietnam has a set of standards for notes in active circulation. If a bill falls short of these standards, it is termed "unfit for circulation" and any business in Vietnam has the right to reject it for payment.

Bills unfit for circulation are:

1) Bills that are torn (in part or completely), perforated, crushed, rotted or

burnt in any way.

2) Bills that are faded (unclear numbers and details) over time, warped due to heat, or doodled/drawn/written on. Bills whose details and numbers are erased or show signs of chemical tampering.

3) Bills that show printing errors such as print crease, ink blots, blurry details, missing or unclear pictures and numbers. Bills that have been deformed during production and transporting.

You can exchange them for "fit" bills at any Vietnamese banks (National Bank of Vietnam and all commercial banks) and State Stock Exchanges. According to Regulation # 25/2013/

TT-NHNN, anyone can exchange unfit for circulation bills at any of the above locations under these terms.

1) Bills under Category 3 (termed Unfit for Objective Reasons) are exchanged with no fee. The exchange requires no documentation and there is no limit on the quantity.

2) Bills under Category 1 and 2 (termed Unfit for Subjective Reasons) can be reviewed for exchange. They can be exchanged with no fee and no documentation provided that:
- Torn, burned, perforated, crushed and rotted bills retain at least 60 percent of their original form

- Patched up bills retain at least 90 percent of their original form

- Polymer bills that have been burnt or shrunk due to extreme heat or chemical tampering retain at least 30 percent of their original form

All of the above must also retain at least two security features on the bill.

(Source: Public Statement issued by State Bank of Vietnam on 03/12/2013)

- **NPD Khanh** ■

CAO BANG HANDICRAFT BAZAAR AT RENAISSANCE RIVERSIDE HOTEL SAIGON



Traditional Handicraft Bazaar 2014 which is organized on the 8th and 9th November 2014 at Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon has been ended with success. Having visited the event, visitors really enjoyed the culture, songs, dance, and handicraft products of ethnic minority artisans from Cao Bang. There were about 600-700 visitors came to the event. The Traditional Handicraft Bazaar 2014 has been created a friendly atmosphere between the visitors and the ethnic minority artisans. They had chances to talk to the ethnic minorities and see them perform different techniques in making handicraft such as embroidering and weaving. This year, many visitors felt that the time was too short for such an event though it was organized in one night and one whole day. From selling products during the event, the ethnic artisans earned some extra money. They are very happy and said that with this money, they can use for different meaningful purposes such as buying books for their children, buying pigs and chicken or buying handicraft materials to continue the production. The event was closed with a huge success of filling the gap between demand from foreign visitors and supply from ethnic artisans of handicraft products.

Renaissance Saigon is honored to bring this opportunity to our guests to discover culture and people from hill tribes of northern mountain from Cao Bang.

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Money & Marriage

A combination you can't disparage



A member of the Paris Bar, **Hadrien Wolff** has been practicing law in Vietnam for more than eight years, currently as a partner of Audier & Partners based at its HCMC office. With extensive legal experience obtained in the Netherlands and in Cambodia, **Marijn Sprokkereef** is now an associate at the Hanoi office of the same firm. 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.

Dear Hadrien and Marijn,

I've heard there's a new law on marriage and family in Vietnam. I'm Australian and plan to marry my Vietnamese girlfriend next year. I already own a house in Australia and I want to make sure that my two sons from my first marriage will be the beneficiaries of the house in case anything happens to me, while all assets accrued during my new marriage will be shared property between me and my future wife. In Australia, they have prenuptial agreements. Can I create a similar agreement in Vietnam?

YOU HEARD RIGHT. On June 19, 2014, the National Assembly passed a new Law on Marriage and Family, effective January 1, 2015, but before addressing your queries, we want to discuss a few features of the new law.

You may have heard in the media that there has been a debate on whether or not the new family law would allow a civil partnership for same-sex couples. Even though this idea may have come a bit too early for Vietnam, the new law does bring some interesting and important changes to the current law, which has been in effect for over 13 years.

Firstly, the minimum age to get married in Vietnam has been increased by one year, meaning that as of January 1, 2015 women must be at least 19 while men must be at least 20 to legally get married. Another noteworthy change that did make it under the new family law is that for the first time surrogacy will - with conditions - be allowed in Vietnam. This so-called "altruistic surrogacy" is only open to couples who can medically prove that they cannot have a child on their own. In addition, the surrogate mother must have a blood link with either the husband or the wife and she cannot economically benefit from carrying the baby.

What is most relevant for your situation is that the new family law specifically

deals with prenuptial agreements, allowing spouses to opt out of the default provisions of the law and to agree among themselves on how to share their assets. A prenuptial agreement in Vietnam may stipulate which assets shall be common assets, personal assets and assets to satisfy the essential needs of the family. Furthermore, it may provide for the rights and duties over the different kinds of assets; and it may detail the allowed transactions related to those assets. All matters that are not covered by the prenuptial agreement shall be governed by the default provisions of the new family law regarding matrimonial property.

The fact that your prenuptial agreement would cover assets located outside of Vietnam is something that you need to take into account. In order for an agreement such as this one to be enforceable in both Vietnam and in Australia, it is advisable to make sure that it meets the formal requirements of both jurisdictions.

With regard to Vietnamese law, the prenuptial agreement must be concluded prior to the marriage, it must be made in writing and it must be either certified or notarized in order for it to become enforceable as from the date of registration of the marriage. If you are not sufficiently fluent in Vietnamese, you must bring an interpreter with you

in order to conduct the notarization or certification procedure.

We are not experts in Australian family law, but from quick research we understand that for a prenuptial agreement to be enforceable in Australia, one of the most noticeable requirements is that the agreement must contain a statement that both parties have obtained independent legal advice prior to signing. A certificate to that effect, preferably drafted by a lawyer qualified to practice in Australia, must be attached to the agreement.

If it ever comes to a dispute before a Vietnamese court about the ownership title of your house 'Down Under,' you may find it useful to know that, in principle, Australian law should apply. According to the Civil Code of Vietnam, the establishment, implementation, alteration and termination of rights relating to an immovable property shall be determined according to the law of the country where the immovable property is located.

Best of luck and much happiness to you and your future wife!

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

Big Man, Big Desk

Know the elements of scale and proportion when decorating your home



As an interior and furniture designer for Austin Home Interiors, **McNeill Shiner** is always looking for new ways to mix styles and influences to create spaces that are uplifting, comfortable and very personal.



J. Randall Powers



Todhunter Earle

IF YOU KNOW someone with a good eye who seems to effortlessly put things together, they probably have an innate sense of scale and proportion; they seem to have all the luck. Although there are measurable factors in play, remember learning about the Golden Ratio in math class? There's definitely a bit of black magic involved in making a whole space work.

Scale refers to the overall size of something and in interior design most often correlates to the human body. It has to do with how appropriate the size of something is for the function it serves and the mood it conveys. The size of a standard desk, for example, is determined by the length of an average adult's arm; in most cases, you'd want to be able to reach everything on the surface without moving your chair or standing up. A larger scale, however, declares a certain sense of power and importance - big man, big office, big desk. Big office, little desk? Lost at sea. Little office, big desk? Claustrophobic, perhaps trying too hard. Proportion, on the other hand, is all about the relationship of parts to the whole, and includes shape as well as size. This is where there's a lot more art than science as adjustments to proportion can completely change the feel of a room. Don't worry too much about keeping these terms separate as many use them

interchangeably anyway. But do make a point to observe how size and shape affect the way you feel about a space.

Scale & Proportion in Action

Let's start with the perfectly scaled living room by J. Randall Powers. The seating arrangement here follows the rectangular proportion of the room, anchored by the rug and coffee table. Note that Powers placed the sofas slightly away from the walls; this puts them at the right distance for conversation, and actually makes the space feel larger. Other decisions to note: The abstract painting above the mantle mirrors the scale of the fireplace exactly. And although there's a lot of furniture here, it works because none of the chairs are particularly large. Overall, it's a beautiful space, but also cozy and comfortable. You can imagine curling up on the sofa with a book or enjoying after dinner drinks with guests.

The elegant space by Todhunter Earle is a different story. The designers have made choices in proportion and scale that impart drama and elegance rather than warmth and comfort. Imagine yourself seated on that sofa. Everything about the design will make you feel small - a low sofa, the oversized abstract hung a bit higher than eye level, even the table lamps will tower over you. If you're looking for that place to curl up with a book, this is probably not

it. However, to impress (and even subtly intimidate) your guests? Absolutely. But it isn't all serious, which is what makes the space such a success. The funky loops of the lamps and curvy armless chair are a playful wink in a highly refined room.

Making it Fit

In your own home, the first place to look for proportion and scale is in the living room. How do your existing pieces relate to one another? A very common mistake in small spaces is filling it up with very small pieces. Although you shouldn't be squeezing in the largest furniture you can fit, using only accent items feels cheap and wimpy. A great trick to deciphering the proper size of those main pieces is starting with a rug. Even very small spaces should accommodate no less than a 1.5m x 2.4m rug - most will allow something larger. A quick Google search will come up with lots of free floor planning tools, and you can play around to figure out what works for you.

The most important takeaway from this? It's always easiest and most comfortable on the eye to follow the proportions of a space - a long and low wall is best suited to a long and low cabinet and a large sofa requires a coffee table that can hold its own. Where you differ from that guideline, do so intentionally and for emphasis. ■

Models: **Van Thanh & Quang Hung**

Photographer: **Alex Cui**

Costumes: **HULOS**

Makeup: **Hung Kim Hien**

Producer: **Tra My Next Top**



THE *Gift* GUIDE

WE'VE PUT TOGETHER A HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE AND WRAPPED IT ALL UP IN A PRETTY BOW, BECAUSE THIS SEASON (WHETHER YOU'VE BEEN NAUGHTY OR NICE) YOU DESERVE A STRESS-FREE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE.

IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN** AND **NEIL FEATHERSTONE**

Good TO BE OLD

A GOOD GIFT giver tends to give the newest thing around. A *great* gift giver knows the value of giving the oldest. Enter Villa Royale, a collectibles boutique that started out a year ago as an antique shop but has since also turned into one of the city's top 10 cafes.

A walk around the District 2 villa is like a curated tour of the world's best bazaars and antique markets courtesy of owner David Campbell. A 200-year-old religious European painting shares space with a stunning embroidered Mongolian saddle and a gorgeous hanging Moroccan glass lamp. The inventory for the shop marries two of David's passions: travel and shopping. Before coming to Vietnam, David traveled extensively as Global Director of Sales for the Raffles hotel group, furnishing two homes with things acquired on his journeys. Instead of leaving these finds in storage, David decided to bring them over, keeping some for his own home and opening Villa Royale with the rest.

"These are pieces I know intimately because I bought them myself," he says as he fingers a pair of vintage paper mache

rhinos from Cambodia. "I can explain where it was bought, its provenance, how old it is..." It also contributes to the sensible pricing for these fine collectibles. "I try and price everything reasonably so the stock moves. I just need enough to be able to pay staff and the rent and for me to travel again to buy more," he says with a smile. This year alone, David has made shopping trips to Istanbul, Paris, London and Morocco, bringing the best finds back to Saigon.

Popular with interior designers searching for truly one-of-a-kind pieces and furniture stores looking for props with wow factor for photo shoots, Villa Royale has something for everyone. "Tourists want to buy things reminiscent of Asia like temple baskets, gongs, Cambodian dancer statues and antique dressing mirrors. Locals get something unique, not from the markets, but something a bit more thoughtful as gifts and for themselves."

For the woman in your life, David says that trios (tea sets comprised of an individual cup, saucer and plate) are trendy items for hen parties and high teas instead of complete matching sets, as





are perennial favorites like silver tea pots, crystal sugar bowls, chandeliers and candelabras.

Gifts for him also abound in the form of vintage typewriters, antique humidors, old trunks that are amazing stacked into a side table, antique Vietnamese ceremonial drums and impossible-to-find decanters.

"When you go to a shopping center, just about everything is made in China," notes David. "Coming here, you have things from Italy, France, Germany, England... and in lots of different styles as far as shapes and designs go. You can tell which era it's from: art deco, nouveau, retro, from the Empire period. Even if you say you like everything, we're all drawn towards one era in particular."

Those drawn to European antiques will be thrilled to learn David recently received a container from Spain, the contents of a huge 300-year-old villa which was previously a candle making factory where goods were paid for in church antiquities. David is planning a January auction of at least 500 pieces, the first of its kind in Vietnam, complete with an auctioneer from a well-known auction house in Australia, in collaboration with Sofitel Saigon Plaza.

When everyone else is striving after the latest version of the same cookie cutter product, a unique gift that may literally be the only one of its kind in Saigon or even in Vietnam, speaks of thoughtfulness and care. "Even hand-painted vintage Vietnamese teapots with chips and showing signs of wear are fascinating because they've been used. They're not brand new but have been in people's families for decades. If every piece could talk, they'd have a hundred stories to tell," says David.

Part of the shop's charm is sitting down with David to talk about the pieces over a slice of the shop's delectable homemade cakes (in a past career, David was also a chef along with having an art background) or over high tea with a gourmet selection of 24 TWG flavors. – **James Pham**

Villa Royale

8 Dang Huu Pho, D2

www.villaroyletreasures.com

For the latest on new acquisitions and the upcoming Spanish estate sale, follow David on Facebook: **VillaRoyaleAntiques**



OI PICK

This colorful three-footed teapot with dragon spout and a heavy drip glaze with tan and turquoise hues is from Bien Hoa c. 1940. Ever since Bien Hoa pottery products were received with acclaim at an international exhibition in Paris towards the beginning of the 20th century, early Bien Hoa pottery has become very collectible.

Lather AND RINSE



FROM A YOUNG age, Giang Huynh encountered discomfort using supermarket-bought soap. Plagued with skin irritation that caused itching and flaking, climbing into bed after a shower was an unpleasant experience. Late last year she decided, quite literally, to take matters into her own hands. After spending time researching websites and tutorials dedicated to making soap, she took the plunge and began to experiment with her own recipes.

Giang cast her first soap using simple plastic containers for molds and scented it with pomelo essential oil. That first foray into soap making quickly developed into a passion. Eager to share, she gave some bars to friends and, encouraged by the positive feedback, decided to launch Pomelo Soap - named after her first bright pink batch.

Taking lessons from her first experiment, she realized she needed better equipment, ingredients and process. "I must have called hundreds of companies to find wholesalers for the base oils and ingredients and visited perhaps just as many shops to source the essential oils. Because it was only me doing the legwork, it took a lot of time, but eventually it paid off," Giang explains. But sourcing the ingredients was only one hurdle; getting the molds made to her specifications was more difficult because most potential vendors weren't interested in making only a few molds, telling her to come back when she was ready to order in larger numbers. A bit of good fortune led a friend to introduce her to a wood shop willing to produce the molds, and Giang's brother stepped in to make the soap cutter, which would have proved a daunting task to acquire otherwise.

Now fully equipped, Giang began to experiment with scents and colors, turning out soap made with essential oils and ingredients including lavender, Shea butter, mangosteen, aloe, lemongrass, freesia and cinnamon. Giang plans to add lip balm, liquid soap, lotions, sugar scrub and massage candles to her line next year. — **Patrick Lok**

Pomelo Soap

Visit Facebook: [PomeloSoap](#), while their website is under construction, or email info@pomelosoap.com

OI PICK

Pomelo Soap's LAVENDER SOAP (VND70,000/bar) is a combination of healthy ingredients and playful colors, perfect for those who like some aesthetics with their bath and beauty products.

Baggage CLAIM



WHAT BEGAN AS a T-shirt enterprise that celebrated the character and spirit of the Vietnamese as well as promoting local culture became a stage for local and foreign artists in Vietnam to display their unique creations.

The Ginkgo Concept Store lends some of its space to non-profit organizations such as Maison Chance with their soft toys for children; Mekong Creations with its bamboo bikes; Hanoi-based Tohe which puts artwork of disadvantaged children into useful and colorful products; Viet Artisans' meticulously designed Vietnam-inspired paper, bags, and wallets; and handicrafts by Friends for Street Children Association that help support the education of some 1,200 children in Ho Chi Minh City.

If you're looking to accessorize, Bohemian Luxe, by Australian Jude Pratt and Dane Louise Bach Mogensen, offers vintage and trendy necklaces. Pair one with a vintage handbag from Hanoi-based French designer Valerie Cordier's collection while wearing a handmade dress from Vietnamese designer Linda Mai Phuong.

A few more labels in the concept store are Mekong Belle's colorful paper products and home accessories, Very Ngon Homewares' useful home items with Asian inspired handprints, and Dame-Clemence's fragrances. — **Lyra Dacio**

Ginkgo Concept Store

254 De Tham, D1

Ginkgo T-Shirts

56 Bui Vien, D1

www.ginkgo-vietnam.com

OI PICK

CANVAS BAG (VND1 million) and TARPULIN BAG (VND1,200,000).

With the unpredictability of the weather in this country, a Ginkgo must-have is its latest canvas or tarpaulin bag. It's both waterproof and reinforced with a tarpaulin bottom, so it'll keep your belongings safe from the scorching sun or the sudden unforgiving downpours.

Bottoms UP

BOARD GAMES DON'T have to be bored games, and are usually more fun when they are turned into drinking games. So, Darren Power and Curtis Norris, the creators behind Saigon Pub Crawl, have spiced up boring board games by combining the two things they know best: drinking and the city. "We wanted to create something 'low-tech' that took people away from their iPhones and got them interacting socially face to face. We wanted to create something original and yet simple to play, a game that doesn't really pit people against each other, but allows them to drop their inhibitions and act silly for a while," says Curtis Norris.

Curtis and Darren, who both work in the video gaming industry, went from design to finished product within a space of three months, considerably less time than it would take for them to develop an app or video game.

"The Pub Crawl idea seemed a natural one for Saigon," he adds. "Many expats, tourists and even Vietnamese do their socializing around the city's bars. Many of Saigon's most amusing experiences are centered on these places. We wanted to create a humorous 'simulation' of these experiences in game form. Darren and I have both lived here for 14 years, so a lot of our own experiences went into the design of the game."

Darren and Curtis have certainly done their best to recreate real life situations with Event Cards that have players "trapped in Roundabout, Lose 1 turn" and "Sucked into Vietnamese Wedding Party, Have 1 drink with everyone at table." While the main goal of Saigon Pub

Crawl is simple - to be the first to check off all 12 pubs on the list to win - the game serves another purpose.

"We also wanted to create a game that provided a service to people. That's why we feature real pubs on the board with a handy city guide in the box. Anyone coming to Saigon for the first time can use the game to find their way around to some of the best places in town. Plus we include free drink vouchers to most of the bars in the game, so it is a service to our sponsors as well," says Curtis.

With thousands of bars littering the city, how did the two manage to narrow it down to just 12? "We chose the bars based on their iconic status and/or popular bars with obvious staying power. We also created a good mix of experiences from sports bars, to romantic bars, stylish bars, to music/dance bars and backpacker haunts. We included bars from District 2 and District 7 as well, to give players exposure to other parts of the city. Various countries are also represented: French, Spanish, German, Australian bars. The common thread is the Vietnam experience, specifically, Saigon." And with instructions and playing cards in both English and Vietnamese, the Saigon Pub Crawl is another good reason for locals and expats to get together and have a drink, whether at home or taking the game to an actual pub to play. - **Christine Van**

Saigon Pub Crawl Board Game, VND700,000

Visit Facebook: [SaigonPubCrawlBoardGame](https://www.facebook.com/SaigonPubCrawlBoardGame) or email saigonboardgames@gmail.com



Sharing

"WE'RE VERY PROUD of all our products. We never say: 'Please buy because it's charity.' We say: 'Buy because you like what we're doing, what we're designing.'" So says Lily Pham of her stylish Vietnam-inspired notebooks, bags and travel accessories. Immigrating to the US at the age of 11, Lily founded Viet Artisans as a way to give something back to the country of her birth. "I've seen my parents' generation – very talented, creative people – but because of the war, they couldn't make anything of themselves. I don't know if it's a blessing or a curse, but I feel I owe Vietnam something. Until I do something, build something that can contribute towards its growth, I feel my life is incomplete."

So began Viet Artisans, a social enterprise employing rural and disadvantaged women in Vinh Long where the craft center was built on Lily's grandmother's land. Armed with a double degree in Statistics and Legal Studies, Lily came back to Vietnam first working for an anti-trafficking NGO and then as a consultant for the UN. But her goal was always job creation, giving people a way out, instead of merely providing charity. "In the Mekong Delta, typical jobs might be construction worker, fruit picker, doing odd jobs," explains Lily. "The worse thing about that is they are unable

to plan for the future. Everything is a dream, not a plan. People might say things like: 'I wish my kid could finish school,' but that's still not a plan. If something unfortunate happens, people just have to accept it. With us, they earn a decent salary, we pay for health insurance, some of their children receive scholarships, and they receive training," Lily says of the 11 people employed by Viet Artisans who spend their days sewing, silk screening, making tote bags and binding notebooks.

"Books are a great platform," she says. "The covers are blank so there's room for unlimited creativity." The books themselves are saddle or stab stitched, a time-consuming but traditional way of binding books by sewing the paper signatures together. Lily and her team of designers draw inspiration for the covers from traditional Vietnamese elements: lotus flowers, bronze drums, vintage maps, and gives them a clean, updated look. The Viet Artisans line also includes greeting cards, travel gear, purses and eco-friendly fabric bags.

The bulk of their sales, though, come from corporate gifts, some featuring custom designs. For example, for the 20th anniversary of The Landmark, Lily designed an image of the Saigon River, starting





GIFTS & SMILES

out as rural and gradually building up with The Landmark highlighted on the Saigon skyline. "If customers like a gift, they're going to use it all the time and that's very subtle brand building, a priceless endorsement, really."

In addition to being unique gifts, Lily wants Viet Artisan products to bring a smile to the face of the receiver, whether it's the joy of receiving a hand-written card in the mail or unwrapping the customized packaging with names like "Cool and Crazy", "Happy Go Lucky" or the "Thinker." "There's a message of 'you're so awesome. I've learned so much from you. You mean so much to me,'" says Lily with a smile as broad as the Mekong itself.

Select Viet Artisan products are carried at Gingko, Artbook and the A O Show. Its full range of products is available at www.vietartisans.org with free delivery to the Nikko, Novotel and other hotels in D1. "Like" **VietArtisans** on Facebook for notification on full day tours to the crafts center which include workshops on silk screening, calligraphy and embroidery, boat rides and lunch. Visitors also keep the gifts they make as a memento. – **James Pham**



OI PICK

LINEN-COVERED HAND-STITCHED NOTEBOOK
SILKSCREENED WITH A TRADITIONAL BRONZE DRUM
(USD11.43). Used in battles to inspire warriors to fight to the very end, the bronze drum speaks of a sense of community where people work together to achieve greatness.



Rainforest IN A JAR



OI PICK

GEOMETRIC AIR PLANT TERRARIUM (VND500,000 - VND700,000). This terrarium bears a unique design that is a cross between a tear and square shape that features a simple layout of a single air plant, some moss and fine grain pebbles.

AIR PLANTS, ALSO known as tillandsias, are having their moment. Known for their spiky shape and extremely low maintenance, they are growing increasingly popular for crafting, design and décor. Because they don't need soil, you can dangle and perch them almost anywhere in your home. Mount them on shells, rocks, slate or driftwood to display in your favorite nook.

"Since the trend started last year, we have seen many freelancers and part timers jumping in the market. Mostly these guys import supplies from China and assemble more or less run-of-the-mill models. There's little to no designing or creating in the process. We aim to do things a little differently," says Tran Minh Huy, chief designer at Vuon Thuy Tinh (Crystal Garden), the only company in Ho Chi Minh City that specializes in designing and creating air plants. "We are very aware that we are one of the two pioneers of this industry in Vietnam so we want to set the bar a little higher. We want to put art into air plant terrarium art decor."

Vuon Thuy Tinh was initially an interior decorating firm but an opportunity last year saw the company shifting and re-focusing on this latest trend in home decoration.

"But creating an air plant terrarium is not like crafting a pretty block of wood or stone. It is a process of trial and error," says Huy, "especially when we want to add in unique design components, like certain types of rare woods or stone quarries. People don't realize that we are working with living organisms. Sometimes the plants don't take to the new stone framework, and they die, and we go back to the drawing board." – **NPD Khanh**

Vuon Thuy Tinh

Order online at www.shopcaykhongkhi.com. This month they plan to unveil a new showroom in Saigon as well as exhibiting their creations at various cafes around the city.

Eat DRINK AND BE MERRY



THE HOLIDAYS ARE some of the most joyous but stressful times of the year. Not only is it a gathering of family from far and near with the inevitable personality clashes and idiosyncrasies, it's the strains of putting together the Norman Rockwell-perfect dinner. To that end, it's either an exhausting day spent in the kitchen or the potluck surprise route with its accompanying "Battle of the Stuffings" from competing aunts or the forgetful uncle who can never seem to remember to bring the only thing he's entrusted with, a simple can of cranberry sauce.

This holiday season why not give the gift of time and family harmony with a complete turkey dinner with all the trimmings? Let the Riverside Cafe at the Renaissance Riverside Saigon Hotel take all the work out of the holidays with a 6-7 kg turkey (or honey-glazed ham) that serves 10-12.

Notoriously a difficult meat to keep moist due to its low fat content, Renaissance Riverside Saigon Hotel roasts its turkeys to perfection, a delicate balance of temperature, time and basting, carefully packaged to ensure it reaches your dinner table in all its right-out-of-the-oven glory.

The honey-glazed ham receives its festive flavor from pineapple puree, honey and cloves and spends three hours in the oven, bathed in a vegetable stock with cubes of carrots, celery and onions.

In addition to a bottle of wine and any two sauces (cranberry, ginger cranberry, mustard or red wine), holiday diners can choose three sides: roasted potato, braised red cabbage, honey glazed carrots, roasted pumpkin, green beans, broccoli and a quartet of stuffings (traditional, smoked sausage, nut bread and oyster bread), ensuring that even the pickiest eaters will be rendered immobile in that blissful tryptophan-induced state of lethargy that comes only after a festive holiday meal. – **James Pham**

Available from November 27 to December 31, the turkey/honey ham set is priced at VND 2,250,000 net. Order 24 hours in advance by phoning 3822 0033, ext 2309.

Think INSIDE THE BOX



TUCKED AWAY ON the first floor of an old apartment block on Ly Tu Trong is an eclectic shopping destination in Saigon where hundreds of products vied for attention. Corner Boutique has a little of everything, from the expected fashion items like designer clothes, shoes and accessories to the unexpected objet d'arts such as paintings, books and collectible ceramics. Even little knickknacks like hair clips, bars of soap and stone figurines are for sale.

It's easy for first comers to be overwhelmed by the breadth of options the shop offers. If you find yourself among them, let owner Le Quyen show you around. "My concept for the Corner Boutique is twofold. The first one is art in everyday life. Some people might think art as something up there, detached from life, not easily accessible, but that's not true at all. There is art in everyday objects, from things that you wear to things that you use. And the Corner Boutique is the exhibition house where I showcase my collection," explains the 26-year-old, who uses the same instinct passed down from her art collector father. "Many artists and artisans in Vietnam are not recognized yet, I want to change that by introducing the public to all these artists."

The second layer to her concept is form and function. "I believe that an item must have both aesthetical as well as practical values. Customers want high-quality items and knowing that demand, I was looking for the suppliers that can fulfill their wishes. I love to provide items that are both pretty and practical. I carefully chose the items to be relevant to everyday life and I hope many people can enjoy the products." – **NPD Khanh**

Corner Boutique
1st Floor, 23 Ly Tu Trong, D1
6299 0911
Facebook: **cornervn**



OI PICK

THE BOX (small, VND347,000). The Box is one that exemplifies the nature and concept of the boutique. It marries elements of Western and Eastern beauty. It can be gifted to men and women, young and old alike, and its uses are limited only by its owner's imagination. It can be a vase for flowers, compartment for jewelry or chopsticks holder, this piece will force you to think outside the box.

Wishlist

VIETNAMESE MODEL AND ACTRESS TRACY NGUYEN'S
LIST OF MUST-HAVES FOR CHRISTMAS



EMBROIDERED
SILK DRESS

USD250
**Thuy Designer
House** (First Floor, 26
Ly Tu Trong, D1 / 132
- 134 Dong Khoi, D1)

WHITE
COTTON SHIRT

USD120
Lam Boutique (98
Mac Thi Buoi, D1)



SILK
PILLOWCASE

USD22
Sadec District (3A
Station, 3A Ton Duc
Thang, D1)



CHRISTMAS KEYCHAIN

USD2
Mekong Quilt
(68 Le Loi, D1)



LEATHER BAG FOR MEN

USD300
Cincinnati (78A
Dong Khoi, D1)



FLORAL EMBROIDERED DRESS

USD600
Phuong My
(81 Le Thanh Ton, D1)



BLACK LINEN DRESS

USD60
The House of Saigon
(16-18-20 Thu Khoa
Huan, D1)



Tracy is available for private customized shopping tours of Saigon's best boutiques and galleries.
Email her at info@saigondelicious.com or visit www.saigondelicious.com for details.

Wine & Dine

IMAGE PROVIDED BY INTERCONTINENTAL NHA TRANG





Sand, Surf, Scrumptious

Exploring Nha Trang's foodie scene

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM



IMAGE PROVIDED BY INTERCONTINENTAL NHA TRANG

InterContinental Nha Trang

FINDING OUT THAT Nha Trang also has a foodie scene is like realizing the prettiest girl in the class is also really smart. Some people just have it all. From beautiful beaches to a cool, laid-back vibe, Nha Trang also delivers big when it comes to good eats.

Nem nuong Ninh Hoa is a delicious twist on the grilled pork kebab. Made from ground pork with an assortment of spices, skewered and grilled, this region's variation on grilled meat is served still sizzling along with a bevy of condiments all meant to be wrapped up in rice paper. Vietnamese food is all about texture and flavors and this dish hits all the right spots, with crunchy green mango and pickled vegetables, crispy deep-fried rice paper and the tangy sweet dipping sauce which gets its bright orange color from carrots, tomato and pineapple. Portions start at VND30,000 at the communal tables of Nem Nuong Dang Van Quyen (16A Lan Ong Street near Dam Market).

When the afternoon munchies hit, Nha Trang residents know to search out their favorite *banh can* stand for a quick snack. The beauty is in its simplicity – a

batter made from uncooked rice that has been soaked in water before being ground into a paste with a bit of sun-dried then powdered cooked rice. The mixture is poured into tiny clay molds over a brazier and then topped with a filling before being covered until the bottom turns crispy. The cakes are then topped with a bit of scallion oil before getting dunked into a fish sauce-based dipping sauce with a side of matchstick green mango for tartness. *Banh can* (not to be confused with *banh canh*, a noodle soup) can be found all over the city, but the little stand at 51 To Hien Thanh boasts eight different fillings including squid, shrimp, baby clams and quail eggs. Pull up a stool and get one of each for VND55,000.

When most people think of Nha Trang, they tend to think of bountiful seafood. Tourists and locals alike head to a row of seafood restaurants beyond the Dam Market and over the Tran Phu bridge, across from the beach. Anchored by the popular Muoi Do at 6 Pham Van Dong (literally “Ten Dollars” which is what an average meal will set you back, not including drinks), these joints cook up

your live seafood just the way you want, whether stir-fried with tamarind sauce or simply steamed in beer. While there are cheaper areas for seafood, locals say these restaurants have good quality seafood.

For the ultimate seafood meal, those in

UNDERSTATED LUXURY

The InterContinental Nha Trang makes the ideal base for your foodie adventures. Located in the heart of bustling Nha Trang City with amazing views of the East Sea, the resort features 279 ultramodern rooms and three tony restaurants and bars. When you want to work off the calories, three distinctive pools, an enriching spa, and a complimentary on-site fitness center for all in-house guests await. A variety of meeting rooms and an expansive ballroom stand ready to host meetings, incentives and special events. Visit www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com for special offers including weekend, golf, family and long-stay packages.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Nem nuong Ninh Hoa, Banh can, Tamarind crab, Crab cake from InterContinental Nha Trang

the know head to the **InterContinental Nha Trang** (32-34 Tran Phu) on Saturday nights for the seafood BBQ buffet (VND599,000++ per person). "Our prawns and our crabs are live. You normally don't see that on a buffet," says Executive Chef Dennis Barton. "The prawns are jumping. The crabs scurry along the ice display. The sea bass comes to us fresh that very morning."

Australian Chef Barton spent 10 years indulging his passion for Asian cuisine in Thailand, the Philippines and the Maldives before joining the InterContinental Nha Trang for its opening this past March. While the Cookbook Café, the hotel's main restaurant, includes upscale comfort food like Wagyu beef burgers, Chef Barton's menu highlights the bounty of the sea which is literally across the street - and the fine produce of Dalat less than 100 miles away (sourcing from the same farm that supplies the beloved Veggy's). This is one place where you won't find tinned or frozen crab in the Nha Trang Crab Cakes (VND180,000). Instead, it's local crab, cooked and handpicked, then mixed with classic ingredients like Tabasco and 24-month aged Parmesan. A balsamic mango salsa introduces an Asian element, and also helps cut through the richness of the dish.

They say breakfast is the most important part of the meal, but at the InterContinental Nha Trang, it very may well be the day's best meal, featuring 27

hot items, eight European cheeses and 11 individual stations including made-to-order smoothies and juices. "Everything here is made in-house," says Chef Barton as he surveys the home-cured bacon, the papaya compote with star anise and the six different honeys taken from hives right on site before stopping at the French Pastry station with a delectable assortment of freshly baked danishes, croissants and muffins (including a tasty gluten-free blueberry version). "I've never eaten anything in Vietnam that even comes close to these pastries. It's because we don't use regular butter, but a special, super dry butter from France with 92 percent fat content. It costs a fortune, but there's no comparison between eating one of these and a product made using normal butter." The size and quality of Chef Barton's breakfast spread has helped it shoot to the very top of the list of all the 76 InterContinental Hotels in the region. Two other venues serve up Chef Barton's creations: a daily High Tea in the chic Lobby Bar (notice the subtle "under the sea" design elements in the fish net-inspired metal sculptures and the coracle-shaped seating) and a casual Asian Hawker's Grill at the poolside Aqualine, with a third à la carte menu available in the Club Lounge on the 18th floor.

With so many culinary choices, from humble to haute, beautiful Nha Trang is sure to feed your stomach as well as your soul. ■



HOLIDAY FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Why not go on holiday for the holidays and join in on the festivities?

CHRISTMAS EVE SET DINNER

Initiate Christmas Eve in style with a lavish six-course set menu at Cookbook Café. The dinner features Nha Trang's favorite ingredients and meticulous preparation with a complimentary glass of sparkling wine. (VND1,900,000 ++ per person)

CHRISTMAS EVE BUFFET DINNER

Celebrate Christmas Eve with family and friends over a decadent and festive dinner buffet under the light-filled Grand Ballroom of InterContinental Nha Trang. Dine on special Christmas favorites, including freshly prepared salads, cold cuts and cheeses, mouth-watering seafood, BBQs and Christmas desserts with a special appearance from Santa Claus and a live music performance. (VND1,900,000 ++ per person; VND950,000 ++ per child from 3-12 years old, inclusive of: free flow of beers and soft drinks, and Kids Corner with nanny)

CHRISTMAS DAY BUFFET BRUNCH

On Christmas Day, enjoy a holiday menu featuring classic cold cuts, artisan carving station, Japanese Kushi Katsu, Peking duck, chef's grilled favorites, and more. Served buffet-style, the afternoon's family-friendly selection also includes breakfast options and unique Vodkha and Bloody Mary cocktails and decadent crepes. (VND1,375,000 ++ per person; VND688,000 ++ per child from 3-12 years old, inclusive of: free flow of beers and soft drinks, Bloody Mary cocktails and live music performance).

NEW YEAR'S EVE COUNTDOWN PARTY

Kick off this New Year with InterContinental. At midnight, the Grand Ballroom will be transformed into a glittering venue. Its gourmet dinner buffet specially curates blends of international and local cuisine full of iconic dishes. Party the night away with a live band, electrifying DJ show and unlimited beverages. (VND2,540,000 ++ per person including the gala buffet and free flow of beers and soft drinks)

For more, visit www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com/festiveseason

Twist Thai

Updated Thai cuisine
at The Racha Room

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

AN ENGLISHMAN, an Irishman and an Australian walk into a bar...

In what could have easily turned into a tired fusion/confusion cliché, **The Racha Room** (12-14 Mac Thi Buoi, D1), one of Saigon's newest restaurants cum lounges, manages to shine in its debut serving updated Thai cuisine. The first restaurant by chef/co-owner Chris Donnellan (who's actually English-Irish by way of Australia), isn't so much fusion as Thai-inspired. Instead of blending various cuisines together, the menu offers up surprising twists on one of the world's most popular cuisines.

Truth be told, the unexpected is a bit of a theme for this tony space. Heavy wooden doors at street level hint at classical Thai food, but a walk up the stairs leads into a high-ceilinged, exposed brick, open space dominated by a large backlit and very well-stocked bar (courtesy of one of the other owners who also owns a liquor company). There's limited seating on the main floor and in the small loft above for diners, as well as around the bar for those wanting to enjoy a early evening cocktail to lounge music in the background.

While the signature cocktails like the sassy Racha, an entrancingly red concoction involving Bénédictine, crème de mure, aperol, triple sec and vodka balanced with the sweetness of raspberry tempered with orange bitters (VND140,000) and the rest of the cocktails with names like Hot & Stormy and the Concubine (vodka, St. Germain elderflower liqueur, lychees, lime juice and fresh cucumber) lean towards the frilly, the one-page food menu is starkly simple in comparison.

The entire left column is devoted to dishes inspired by Thailand's street foods which makes sense considering how incredibly popular they have become. Here again, surprises abound. The coconut marinated salmon with peanut and tamarind dressing (VND125,000) is an example of how Donnellan has married Thai flavors with unexpected ingredients. The salmon is marinated in a mild bath of coconut cream with hints of Thai



FROM TOP: Wall mural, The Racha Room signature cocktails, Chef/co-owner Chris Donnellan



lime leaf, lemongrass and fish sauce. The acidity of the tamarind cuts through the fattiness of the raw fish, but wisely, the sauce on the plate is off to the side so it doesn't overpower the delicate flavor of the salmon. The salt and pepper school prawns (VND95,000) are crispy bursts of flavor accompanied by the pleasing heat of the red *nam jim*, a chili sauce that gets its intensity from coriander root, palm sugar and bird's eye and banana chilies.

With the pork *nam prik ong* (VND85,000), Donnellan stays with the traditional, allowing the sweet/salty/sour/bitter/spicy tones of Thai cuisine to shine. The simple dip of palm sugar, shrimp paste, coriander root, chilies and galangal is meant to be scooped up in baby lettuce cups. Refreshingly, most of the appetizers are around or under the VND100,000 mark, bucking the lamentable trend of appetizers costing almost as much as mains.

Playful Combinations

While main courses only occupy half a column on the menu, the options aim to please both traditionalists and the more adventurous. The fried baby snapper (VND270,000) was meaty and nicely paired with a coriander and mint relish atop a slaw of green papaya, mango dices, pomelo and slivers of young coconut, but the star of the evening for me was the red duck leg curry (VND310,000) with shallots and Thai basil. Here Donnellan slow cooks the duck before giving it a quick deep-fry, creating an unexpected combination of crispiness enveloping a falling-off-the-bone tenderness. The duck is placed on top of the curry, more of a thick, earthy sauce than a stew, flavored with star anise, cinnamon, orange peel and Shaoxing wine.

The last half column is reserved for desserts and surprisingly (or maybe not, considering how much Racha Room is aiming to be anything but conventional), mango with sticky rice isn't on the menu. Instead, diners will find playful combinations like Thai red tea panna cotta with poached pear and coconut sorbet or caramelized mango with chili rock sugar and young rice ice cream. For those who hate to choose, all five desserts are available on a share plate (VND290,000) including an exquisite steamed ginger pudding with poached apples.

With the opening of Racha Room, young Chef Donnellan draws on years of kitchen experience that belie his age, including stints at notable Melbourne establishments like the Asian-influenced Ezard and as Head Chef of Gingerboy, an upscale Australian take on Southeast Asian hawker food. The simple, clean presentation of his dishes and the focus on the freshest of products are possibly the influence of two years spent at Nobu London. If the buzz surrounding the barely two-month old restaurant and the hip, smartly-dressed crowd occupying every seat in the house at 8pm on a Tuesday evening are any indication, Donnellan is out to show that The Racha Room is no joke. ■

FROM TOP: Red duck leg curry, Fried baby snapper, The Racha Room desserts

You Don't Know Jack

Celebrity chef Jack Lee opens up about his rough childhood, a USD100 eggroll and his planned comeback

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

IF YOU GO nowhere else this month, don't miss out on the chance to take a meal at Compass Parkview's **Acacia Veranda Dining** (149-151 Nguyen Du, D1, which reopens after remodeling on December 15) and shake the hand of the head chef – it's about the closest you're ever going to get to the likes of Angelina Jolie, William Shatner, Oprah Winfrey and Quincy Jones. Acacia's cheeky cuisinier Jack Lee – an honest-to-goodness celebrity in his own right back in Hollywood – has cooked for them all, and with his extensive experience as a TV personality, culinary artist, and caterer to the stars, you might be justified in wondering if he's not perhaps a little big for this town – it's a bit like finding Mark Zuckerberg teaching English at VUS. Under normal circumstances you'd be right – this is hardly the place for a Hollywood high roller – were it not for the fact that this is

the city where Jack Lee was born.

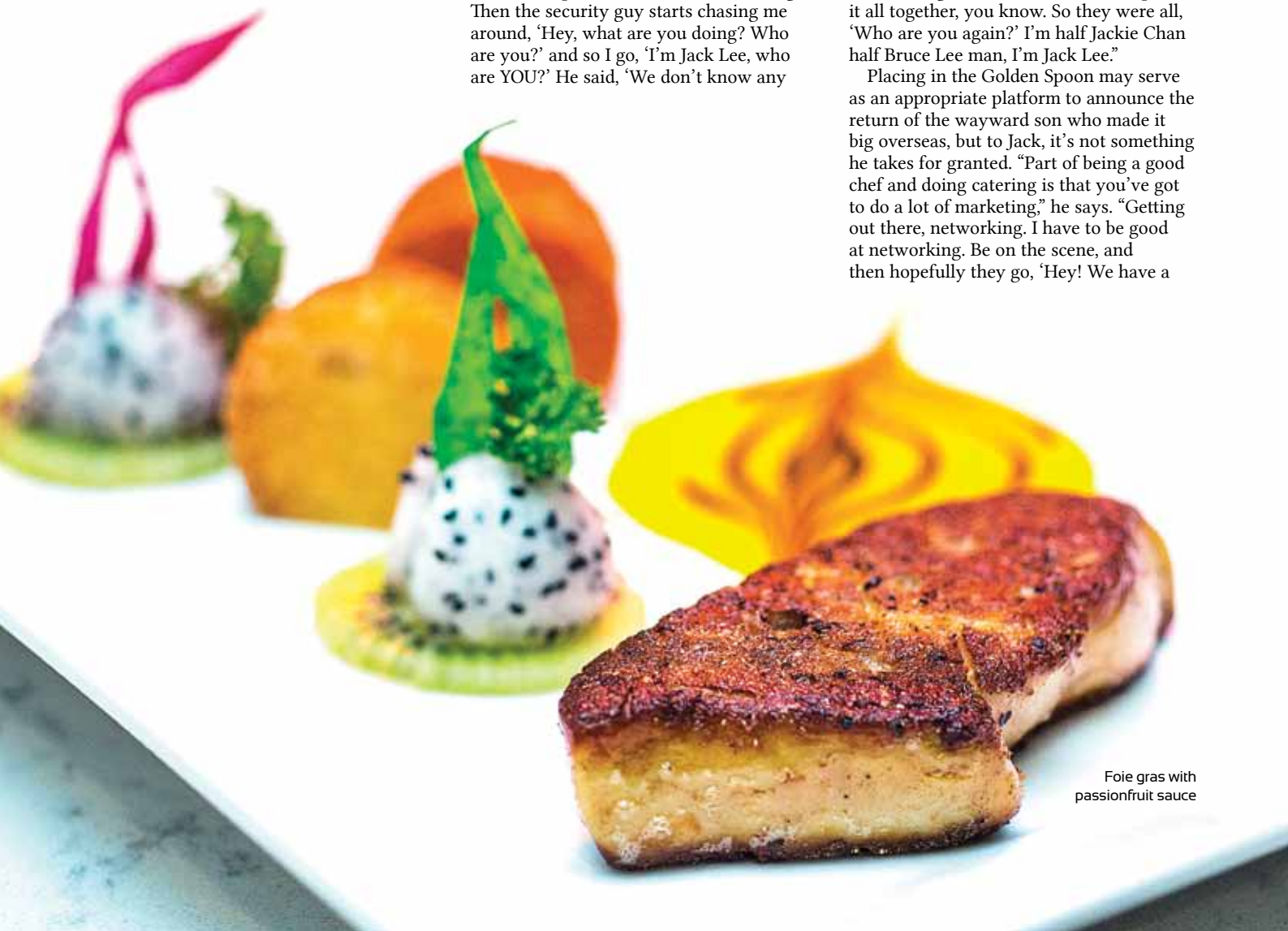
Originally known in these parts as Lý Vĩnh Viễn, Jack is back – and he's already making a splash in a city where he has the curious distinction of being its most famous unheard-of son. Until his surprising performance in the local Golden Spoon awards in August, he was relatively (if not entirely) unknown in Vietnam – and this is a situation he intends to remedy with his own distinctive flair.

"It's a really funny story," he chuckles, taking a few minutes out from the kitchen where he's training his local sous chefs to emulate the signature Asian/California French fusion cuisine he regularly serves at celebrity events. "The owner's wife here took me out to see the ceramics at Van Thanh Park. It was my second day back, I was looking at all the plates, and I said, 'Wait a minute, why are there so many stoves set up here? What are we cooking?' Then the security guy starts chasing me around, 'Hey, what are you doing? Who are you?' and so I go, 'I'm Jack Lee, who are YOU?' He said, 'We don't know any

Jack Lee here.' So the owner, Cindy, the wife, she's like, 'Hey hey, he's a visitor.' He said, 'Visitors have to stand over there, because we have a competition.' So I went and I said, 'What competition? Can I join?' They said, 'Who are you anyway? Can you cook?' I said 'Well... I can cook a little...' Then they told me, 'It's too late. People have to take one month to prepare. We don't even know if you can cook, do you even have a menu?' So I wrote one down on a napkin and said, 'Here's my menu!'"

Jack's boldness got him a spot in the contest, and before long he found himself among the competitors. "I had fun in there," he grins. "In the States, we have 20 minutes to prepare, but here they have two hours. So I took a nap, I had a coffee break, cigarette break, they're like, this is insulting! Nah, I'm just kidding, we had a lot of fun. Short story is, I placed second. Considering I had five hours total to put it all together, you know. So they were all, 'Who are you again?' I'm half Jackie Chan half Bruce Lee man, I'm Jack Lee."

Placing in the Golden Spoon may serve as an appropriate platform to announce the return of the wayward son who made it big overseas, but to Jack, it's not something he takes for granted. "Part of being a good chef and doing catering is that you've got to do a lot of marketing," he says. "Getting out there, networking. I have to be good at networking. Be on the scene, and then hopefully they go, 'Hey! We have a



Foie gras with passionfruit sauce



Jack Lee

birthday coming up, why don't you cook for it?' The high-end niche is different. You constantly have to be there."

It's also not the first time Jack has had to start building his reputation again from scratch. Diagnosed with severe sleep apnea just a few years ago, Jack underwent intensive surgery on his jaw and tongue that significantly damaged his gustatory nerves. "I lost my taste for like 10 months," he says, "so I lost a lot of accounts – because in Hollywood, outta sight, outta mind. They nearly forget you. I had to climb my way back up. So doing this is to let the world know I'm back. I compete a lot on TV because I want to know for myself where I stand. Even in Vietnam I want to know. I've come back here and I want to be the number one restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City. So I go to eat everywhere and I'm trying to taste

everything, seeing what it's made of, and trying to make it better."

Food is Art

Developing the cuisine for Acacia has been a creative process that Jack has undertaken with the seriousness of a fine artiste. Known for taking Asian street food concepts and transforming them into haute cuisine by using superior ingredients and fine plating techniques (his most notorious creation was a USD100 egg roll made with Maine lobster tail, sevruga caviar, and Alaskan king crab garnished with a gold leaf), Jack regularly releases collections of dishes that are literally sequences of fine art. Focusing as much on color contrasts and symbolic representation as they do on matching tastes, Jack's oeuvres stretch traditional conceptions of the way art plays to our senses. Part of his mission in

Vietnam is to work on the next collection he'll be showing off in Tinsel Town, which will feature the exotic tastes of Vietnam – although while he's developing his creative work, he's also focusing on bringing classic Vietnamese ingredients to the standard of international dining for connoisseurs here.

"I do a lot of Asian fusion," he says. "I was trained in California French cuisine for about eight years. Then I created the 'Jack Cuisine' which basically was using all these street foods, and making it beautiful. I feel that Asian food, a lot of family styles, is just *splat* - you put it on a plate and everybody jumps in and shares. But I'd learned all that technique, the plating, the presentation – to me, presentation is everything. So I use Asian food and I make it beautiful."

"I was born in Cho Lon. Actually, my first taste of *foie gras*, pate, was in Cho Lon. A lot of kebabs, the skewers, that stuff. Now that I'm back, I'm trying to develop and explore Vietnam, and get the essence of it, the roots, the real Vietnamese ingredients, and make a good plate out of it. There are a lot of exotic ingredients here. For me, it's personal interest as well, trying to create and develop a new type of cuisine. In LA they always say 'from farmers to table,' you know? But here, it's really true! You go out there, you go to Ben Thanh [Market], you literally have all these vegetables, these plants, the freshest fish. For me, it's really a blessing to have that."

Acacia's menu is replete with examples of what Jack's doing with local ingredients, and we start with a particularly delicious case in point – the scallops with soursop sauce (VND208,000). Garnished with a shaped taro leaf, the contrast of flavors immediately reveals the benefits of an innovative use of local fruits. "I always want to be the first," says Jack. "That's why this has really become very interesting for me – I get addicted. I feel like soursop is the perfect blend for seafood. We do a similar thing with guava and salted ribs – braising them together so you get that taste."

Jack's *foie gras* with passionfruit sauce (VND188,000) is similarly exciting on the palate. "*Foie gras* is known to be really fatty," says Jack, "so I usually pair it up with fruits. I do a lot of *foie gras* in the States, where I do it with rhubarb and strawberry sauce. But here, the passionfruit really hit me. So I pair it with passionfruit, dragon fruit and kiwi. It all comes together. I have had customers come in and say that this is the best *foie gras* they've had in a while." I can vouch for that – with the *foie gras* gently cooked to form a delicate crispy shell, the passionfruit sauce flows into the creamy meat paste on the tongue at the first bite, immediately setting off fireworks, and making it easily the most extraordinary dish of the evening.

Hearing that I'm from New Zealand, Jack's quick to recommend his lamb chops (VND388,000). He's very focused on matching his food and presentation to the individual diner – he once even cooked a

'genie in a bottle' for Christina Aguilera. Again, the lamb embodies his signature flair and flavor matching. "We use the local herbs to marinate it, we use the cherry sauce to make it, and then we use a mint oil and a local black vinegar," he tells me. "Then you have a little mashed potato, but we mix it with lotus – which is actually good for curing insomnia. Helps you to sleep."

While we have a brief dalliance with Jack's quesadillas (VND98,000) – a very popular dish that uses imported tortillas rolled with chicken and local white eggplant and served with guacamole – for the main course we choose a US prime rib with wine sauce (at VND388,000 for 200 grams, VND488,000 for 300 grams). There's a little performance involved with this one. "When I take a bite of this," Jack demonstrates, "I usually put a dash of red wine on the meat to enhance it." He then takes the liberty of dousing our steak from my glass of Australian Shiraz. "It adds a little sweetness. We do that in the States – I teach the celebrities to do it, they're all like 'woo yeah!'" For the record, Jack's not wrong, and the effect is something like an instant marinade, standing comfortably tart against the richer wine sauce. "The sauce is a reduction of red wine and beef stock. We make everything from scratch. We don't do shortcuts here; I don't allow them to use MSG – so it's very clean. If you cook the beef, slow-roast it long enough, the meat

itself will release the *umami*, the natural MSG of the meat. So you really don't need to add anything else."

With all these fine dishes, perhaps the only thing missing is his USD100 egg roll – I ask him if he has any plans to introduce it to Acacia's menu, and he laughs. "Not really. Maybe we can do a VND100,000 egg roll here."

Point of Origin

For young Lý Vĩnh Viễn, the road to becoming Jack Lee was unforgiving. "I cooked because I could relate to my mom," he says. "We were always in the kitchen cooking. It was our bonding time. So that was good. Cooking would always bring me back to home." Their happiness was short-lived, however. "I left when I was nine," he says sadly. "My father passed a few days before I went. Mom was pregnant at that time. She wanted me to have a better opportunity, so she sent me off. It was very hard. Knowing he died. And my mom put me in a boat and she said it was a joy ride. A few days later I was in Singapore, you know, and I didn't know why my dad died and why Mom didn't want me."

Even after all these years, Jack's pain is still palpable, and he gets so choked up that it takes some time for him to compose himself before he can continue his story. "She wanted me to be something. Vietnam back then was really tough. Then I learned

to depend on myself, you know. I worked various jobs sending money home, because I have three brothers and one sister. I was working when I was 13 years old, packing food. I always got beat up because I was too slow. It was tough."

In those conditions, the only ray of light turned out to be American television sitcoms. "I struggled trying to learn English at that age by watching *Three's Company*," he says. "I named myself Jack after the character Jack Tripper. He became a chef, and I became a chef." It turned out to be a good move – before too long, he was studying with some of the biggest names in the industry, working at the prestigious Bel Air Hotel, and then moving on to create Chinoise Cuisine, the catering service that would see him rubbing shoulders with famous people.

With that said, Lý Vĩnh Viễn shakes himself and all the camp slapstick of the Jack Tripper persona returns. He motions to our photographer, "Hey, do you want a good fire shot?" And then they're in the kitchen, the flames leaping from his frying pan as he writhes and kicks for the camera, hoo-ing and ha-ing like Bruce Lee, laughing like he probably never could as a kid. Just a short cab ride away from the little kitchen in Cho Lon where he once stood next to his mother, grinning as the two of them cooked together for his family, yes – Jack is back. ■





Holy Water

A marriage of the sacred and urbane at Saigon's latest restobar

TEXT BY TAYNE EPHRAIM IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

ENTERING **Shrine** (64 Ton That Thiep, D1) is like walking into a neon Khmer temple, but one that serves cocktails and food. Soft, reverent lighting swims over walls of lava stone while primordial ferns rest in their volcanic potted houses and black-garbed staff brush silently across the polished floors like acolytes.

Australian owner Terry Gordon has been living in Indochina for some 10 years and took the inspiration for his new restaurant from his adventures as a film fixer, borrowing from the exoticness of Angkor Wat and the Cham culture. "We wanted to make a place that puts a touch of the sacred into the urbane," he explains. And the result is a fusion of the ultramodern and the archaic, where carved idols and lush greenery blend together with a pink neon lit bar, and music is heard softly in the background.

The bar stands as the altar (and most drinkers would likely agree with this comparison) with a giant carved head of Jayavarman VII - the ancient Khmer king and builder of Angkor Wat - as its centerpiece. The downstairs space is

designed to feel more like a bar than a restaurant, a place for after work drinks and snacks, with a large dining area being renovated upstairs and soon to be completed.

We opt for a seat by the windows, beneath the gaze of stone Cham figures.

Wanting to ease into our dinner, we start off with some bar snacks, choosing the crispy-fried calamari and grilled chicken *Mengagumkan* satay skewers with Indonesian peanut sauce. "*Mengagumkan*" means "to amaze" in Bahasa, and the dish lives up to its title. The sumptuous chunks of tender meat are bathed in a delicious thick sauce and comes with a small side of spicy *kim chi*. The calamari is crisp and buttery, and deserves a second order.

We wash down the appetizers with a couple of cocktails from their Asian-inspired signature and classic cocktails. The menu lists names like Retired Samurai and Mr. Miyagi. I choose the latter, while my dining partner goes for the Old Fashioned from their classics selection (all cocktails are priced at VND140,000). Both are crafted from quality bourbon and fresh local

ingredients. The Mr. Miyagi is bright and lemony, and includes maple syrup and Asian pear amongst its ingredients. It's like a sunny karate chop to the taste buds. The Old Fashioned, flavored with brown sugar and bitters, has a certain fruity quality to it - both drinks are excellent.

For the main we share the grilled sea bass with garlic ginger passion sauce (VND260,000). Chef Nino, formerly of the Park Hyatt Saigon, has taken his inspiration for the Pan-Asian menu from cuisines around the region and, as Terry puts it, "Saigonized it." The hearty fillets of tender white flesh come in a passionfruit sauce, sprinkled over with basil leaves with a side of steamed rice and sautéed vegetables. The fish is juicy and succulent, with the bright passionfruit tang to balance it off. It's a curious combination of flavors with mouthwatering results.

We finish off the meal with two more of Shrine's exquisitely crafted cocktails, The Nagger and the Basil Brush, which Terry himself implores we try. The Nagger, inspired by Terry's nagging to his wife during construction of the bar, adds another layer of passionfruit punch to the evening. Made from citron vodka and kumquats, it's a citrus circus in your mouth. The Basil Brush, made from vodka and everybody's favorite childhood drink, raspberry cordial, along with brushings of basil, manages the perfect balance of sweet and bitter. You get the fruity tang of the raspberry cordial with the fresh strawberries, and the permeating basil throughout.

While the food is delicious at Shrine, the cocktails are the real star, enough to make you want to chant in front of Khmer gods and goddesses. ■

Inside the Cellar

A place to wine and dine

TEXT BY **ALFREDO DE LA CASA** IMAGES BY **STUDIO DAG.VN**

RECENTLY, LA CAVE (La Cave, 19 Ngo Van Nam, D1) opened its doors on the north side of the Ngo Van Nam strip - a foodie enclave in District 1. Surrounded by ample glass windows, the door will take you directly to the first dining room and bar, all decorated with wine related imagery and where you can access part of the cellar that houses 35 plus different varieties of available wines.

La Cave has three floors, including two VIP rooms and two bars dedicated to helping wine lovers feel at home, all complemented by chill out ambient music so guests can enjoy a cozy atmosphere that's ideal for dates or business meetings alike.

Although La Cave is inspired and dedicated to wine, it also offers delicious fusion food created by Parisian Executive Chef Milan, who worked in a two Michelin star restaurant prior to arriving in Vietnam. Milan defines his food as French gastronomy with a Japanese twist, making it light while keeping the full flavor.

Milan also dedicates a good deal of time to making sure his food creations pair perfectly with the wines available. The entire wine list is supplied by his business partners Phu and Em, who have been importing and distributing delicious wines for many years and are now helping La Cave offer a wide selection of wine with affordable prices.

While some of the dishes have Italian names, don't let that flummox you. Using the freshest, high-quality ingredients, the food is a delicious combination of Italian home cooking with gourmet flair. The salmon cream tagliatelle (VND240,000), one of the day's specials, was absolutely fantastic: presentation was excellent, and the portion was generous. The pasta was cooked perfectly al dente, with the salmon moist and tender. This dish brings complex and delicate flavors of the salmon and the sauce together, making it elegant and moorish.

The spaghetti carbonara (VND230,000), another of the day's specials, marries tender pasta and a gorgeous and generous serving of sauce made of very light cream, garlic and bacon. The dish was surprisingly light, as the bacon had almost no fat.

As for wine, I highly recommend the Chateau Les Vergnes, a delicious white Bordeaux - delicate, bringing lots of honey and nuts to both nose and palate, an ideal complement to pasta dishes.

La Cave is open seven days a week from 11 am to 11pm. It offers two different menus - one with finger food (with most dishes priced under VND100,000), excellent for sharing with a bottle of wine - and an a la carte menu. For lunch they offer a set menu priced at VND250,000 for two dishes, which changes every few days. ■





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>>The List

Wine & Dine

BARS



Cavern Pub

Stylish venue in one of the classier inner-city locales, Cavern entertains locals and expats alike with a live band every night, sports channels on a large TV screen, and a great atmosphere. Happy hour is from 6pm to

9:30pm (buy 2 beers – get 1 free). Live music is from 9:30pm-1am.

**19 Dong Du, D1
090 826 5691**



Red Bar

RED offers one of the longest Happy Hours in Saigon, from 9am - 9pm, with live music available from Monday-Saturday. This multi-level bar has a non-smoking floor and a function room along with a top quality pool table and soft-tip dart machines. A menu of Eastern and Western dishes includes wood-fired pizzas.

**70-72 Ng Duc Ke, D1
2229 7017**



Chill Skybar

Offers the most stunning panoramic views of Saigon and a wide range of wines and cocktails personally prepared by Vietnam mixologist Le Thanh Tung.

**Rooftop, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai, D1
3827 2372
www.chillsaigon.com**



Ice Blue Bar

A small, atmospheric, emphatically English-style pub, Ice Blue is a popular meeting place for Ho Chi Minh City's expats with reasonably priced drinks, friendly staff and a cozy atmosphere. Great place to play darts.

54 Dong Khoi, D1



Blanchy's Tash

Undoubtedly the hippest, coolest nightspot in downtown Ho Chi Minh, renowned for its cool house music, live DJs at weekends and innovative range of cocktails. Downstairs is a trendy bar where the glitterazi like to be seen; rooftop an open bar with more chilled style music. In between a new Vietnamese dining concept.

**95 Hai Ba Trung, D1
090 902 82 93
www.blanchystash.com**



Last Call

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

**59 Dong Du, D1
3823 3122**

Also Try...

Cargo Bar

Cargo Bar is a dedicated music and arts venue designed and committed to delivering diverse entertainment, along with a good drink menu.

7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4

The Cube

Besides being a place for drinking and unwinding, The Cube Bar also offers unique, educational and exciting events like bartending, modern cuisine, arts & crafts and theme parties. Live music daily.

**31B Ly Tu Trong, D1
090 336 9798/01 2088 1964
info@thecube.vn**

Game On

Opened in July 2013, 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
6251 9898
gameonsaigon@gmail.com**

The Hideaway

A new 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. Serves a wide variety of liquors, including wines by the

glass or bottle.
**119 Bui Vien, D1
090 279 99 62**

The Observatory

In just a year, this funky, cosy bar and gallery set in a French villa has become the centre of the city's underground dance music culture. Downstairs is a cosy bar serving cocktails, beer and wines, upstairs a gallery space and a separate dance venue with regular guest appearances from DJs from Asia and beyond. Open daily from 6pm til late (5am close Saturday and Sunday mornings).

**4 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4
www.theobservatory-hcmc.com**

onTop Bar

Located on the 20th floor of Novotel Saigon Center, onTop Bar provides

views over Saigon from an expansive outdoor terrace. The venue offers a menu with over 20 cheeses, cured meats and both Vietnamese and international-inspired tapas.

**167 Hai Ba Trung, D3
3822 4866**

Purple Jade

Purple Jade is a stylish, chic venue with exceptional world class cocktails by one of the city's award-winning bartenders along with snacks to melt away the bustle of the city.

**First floor- InterContinental Asiana Saigon
Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan
3520 9099
www.intercontinental.com/saigon**

CAFÉS



AQ Coffee

Pleasing colonial-style café permanently filled with the aroma of fresh coffee roasted with traditional methods, with a shady courtyard and quiet, peaceful atmosphere. Situated in one of the city's oldest mansions.

32 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3
3829 8344



Hatvala

This teahouse, coffee shop and restaurant offers selected, quality Vietnamese tea and coffee to drink or buy as leaves and beans. They also have a delightful all-day casual dining area in a stylish bistro.

44 Nguyen Hue, D1
3824 1534
8am - 11pm
hatvalavietnam@gmail.com
www.hatvala.com
facebook.com/hatvala



Guanabana Smoothies

This Californian smoothie bar specializes in healthy all-natural smoothies using fresh fruits and vegetables from locally-sourced farms, with no condensed milk or artificial sweeteners added. Their smoothies can be enhanced with nutritional supplements such as green superfood, whey protein, and spirulina.

Best sellers include their Special Blends and veggie smoothies. Fresh roasted coffee, hot panini's and pastries are also available, along with speedy Wi-Fi.

23 Ly Tu Trong, Q1



L'Usine

L'Usine is a retail, café and gallery space occupying two locations in the center of D1. Its retail space is dedicated to Vietnamese designers and more established brands from abroad as well as stocking a wide range of stationery and homeware items. The café in both locations serves international fare and a range of pastries and the ever-popular sweet & sour cupcakes.

151/1 Dong Khoi, D1
70B Le Loi, D1
www.lusinespace.tumblr.com
9am - 9pm



Café RuNam

No disappointments from this earnest local café consistently serving exceptional international standard coffee. Beautifully-styled and focussed on an attention to quality, Café 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
3825 8883
www.caferrunam.com



The Library

The Library provides a welcoming atmosphere for those in search of tranquility, comfort and great drinks in the heart of Saigon.

Ground floor - InterContinental Asiana Saigon
Corner Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan
3520 9099
www.intercontinental.com/saigon

Also Try...

Cafe Terrace

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

Saigon Centre, 65 Le Loi, D1
3914 4958

Caffe Bene

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

58 Dong Khoi, D1

3822 4012
caffebenevietnam.com

Ciao Café

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

74-76 Nguyen Hue, D1
3823 1130

Du Mien Garden Coffee

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

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

LightBox Cafe

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

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

Masstige

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

125 Ho Tung Mau, D1 (behind Sunwah Tower).
www.facebook.com/masstigecoffee

Mojo Cafe

This modern, chic café, restaurant and

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

88 Dong Khoi, D1
08 3827 2828
www.mojosaigon.com

Vecchio Cafe

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

39/3 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3
6683 8618

The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1
3824 6801 / 3824 6802
7am-8pm

CHINESE



Dragon Court

The well-heeled Chinese certainly go for luxury and this venue has it in spades. Situated in a classy location just opposite the Opera House, Dragon Court features a broad selection of dishes from across the spectrum of mainland cuisines, making this an ideal a-la-carte venue as well as the perfect spot for Dim Sum.

**11-13 Lam Son Square, D1
3827 2566**



Dynasty

New World's own slice of Canton with a particularly fine Dim Sum selection, Dynasty is a traditional lavishly-styled Chinese venue with flawless design. Authenticity and a sense of old-world China make this one of Saigon's more refined options for the cuisine. A number of private rooms are available.

**New World Hotel
76 Le Lai, D1
3822 8888
www.saigon.newworldhotels.com**



Kabin

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

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



Li Bai

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

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



Ming Court

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

**3rd floor, Nikko Saigon Hotel
235 Nguyen Van Cu, D1
3925 7777**



Ming Dynasty

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

23 Nguyen Khac Vien, D7

Also Try...

Hung Ky Mi Gia

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

**20 Le Anh Xuan, D1
3822 2673**

Ocean Palace

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

**2 Le Duan Street, D1
3911 8822**

Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

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

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

Shang Palace

Designed very much after the fashion of modern upscale restaurants in China itself, Shang Palace specializes in Cantonese seafood dishes and excels in catering to large groups. A superb choice for dim sum brunches with authenticity guaranteed.

**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.

**First floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon
Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan
3520 9099
www.intercontinental.com/saigon**



SILK 99

SILK 99 is a new fine dining restaurant serving Cantonese cuisine, especially royal and unique dishes like Salanganes' Nest, Holothurian, Shark's fin, dim sum, lobster and more.

**99 Nguyen Du, D1
6256 7999/0927 209 209
www.silk99saigon.com
info@silk99saigon.com**



SPANISH



El Camino

El Camino has the lively spirit of a party on the Mediterranean with the fun and friendliness of a good family venue. Affordable selection of Spanish & French wines.

Nguyen Duc Canh, D7
www.facebook.com/elcaminovietnam



La Habana

Cuban venue with fine Spanish cuisine, Cuban cigars and German beer. A wide range of tapas and cocktails. Great bar atmosphere and late night entertainment.

6 Cao Ba Quat, D1
www.lahabana-saigon.com



Olé

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

129B Le Thanh Ton, D1
012 6529 1711



Tapas Saigon

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

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



VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill

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

90 Cao Trieu Phat, Phu My Hung, D7, HCMC
08 5410 6721
Facebook: "VIVATapasBar.PMH"



Pacharan

Ho Chi Minh City's original Spanish restaurant, Pacharan occupies a high profile corner spot on Hai Ba Trung. Spread over four floors, it offers a casual bar, two floors of dining (one which becomes a destination for live Spanish music late at night) and a rooftop terrace. Features an extensive menu of tapas, main courses, sangria and wines.

97 Hai Ba Trung Street, D1
090 399 2539

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FRENCH



Augustin

Augustin is a romantic and charming French restaurant located just steps away from the Rex Hotel. Serves lunches and dinners and offers 10 percent discount on a la carte menu items.

10D Nguyen Thiep, DI
www.augustinrestaurant.com



La Creperie

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

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



La Fourchette

Small and cozy, La Fourchette is a favorite among the French expat community. The vintage posters and wood paneling add to the charm of this French eatery located right in downtown, a stone's throw from the Saigon River.

9 Ngo Duc Ke, DI
3829 8143
www.lafourchette.com.vn



Le Rendez-vous de Saigon

A wine bistro offering a warm and friendly atmosphere. Unwind either in their stylish downstairs bar, or lounge on cozy leather seating in the upstairs section with a balcony overlooking a courtyard in an alley. The venue offers a tasty selection of wines from France to South Africa and a delectable menu of French cuisine.

9A Ngo Van Nam, DI
www.lerendezvousdesaigon.com
6291 0396



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

A gorgeous enclosed garden space that allows eaters to follow the example of the French colonists of a century ago and pretend they're actually in Paris. Whether dining outside under the shaded terrace or within the old, warmly-lit villa, the cuisine, decor, and general mood of the place is like a Stargate direct to France.

31D Thai Van Lung, DI
3825 8465

Also Try...

L'essentiel

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

98 Ho Tung Mau, DI
0948 415 646

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, DI
3821 3056

La Villa

Housed in a stunning white French villa that was originally built as a private house, La Villa features outdoor tables dotted around a swimming pool and a more formal dining room inside. Superb cuisine, with staff trained as they would be in France. Bookings are advised, especially on Friday and Saturday evenings.

14 Ngo Quang Huy, D2
3898 2082
www.lavilla-restaurant.com.vn

Le Bouchon de Saigon

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

40 Thai Van Lung, DI
www.lebouchondesaigon.com

Trois Gourmands

Opened in 2004 and regarded as one of the finest French restaurants in town. Owner Gils, a French native, makes his own cheeses as well.

18 Tong Huu Dinh, D2
3744 4585



INDIAN



Bollywood

Known for its complete North & South Indian cuisine, Bollywood's specialty is its special chaat & tandoori dishes. Parties, events & catering services are available, with daily lunch tiffin and set menus. Free delivery in Phu My Hung. Complete menu on Facebook.

2213 1481 | 2245 0096 | 093 806 9433

Hotline: 0906357442 (English)

bollywoodvietnam@gmail.com

Facebook: bollywoodvietnamindiancuisine



Baba's Kitchen

One of Saigon's best-loved Indian venues, Baba's is dedicated to authenticity in its cuisine and fair prices. Tell them exactly what spice level you want and they'll cater to your tastes – from the mildest of butter chickens to the most volcanic vindaloo. Always friendly.

164 Bui Vien, D1

49D Xa Lo Hanoi, D2

3838 6661



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

8223 0173

www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com



Ashoka

A small chain of slightly more upscale Indian restaurants serving both Northern and Southern Indian cuisine including curries, naan and tandooris.

Ashoka I

17/10 Le Thanh Ton, D1

08 3823 1372

Ashoka II

33 Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2

08 3744 4144



Saigon Indian

Saigon's original Indian eatery is still going strong, located in a bright, roomy upstairs venue in the heart of District 1. Authentic Indian cuisine at affordable prices; functions a specialty.

1st Floor, 73 Mac Thi Buoi, D1

Also Try...

Bombay Indian Restaurant

With its nice, central location and a very relaxed dining area and home-style atmosphere, Bombay is a superbly casual venue well-reputed for its authentic Indian cuisine and Halal cooking.

250 Bui Vien, D1,

9am - 10.30pm

Curry Leaf

A new restaurant in District 7, specialising in southern and northern Indian cuisine, which grew from the now closed Indus of D1. Fish, meat and vegetable dishes are cooked fresh in tandoor ovens with a commitment to authenticity. Boasts 20 different breads baked daily and six home made chutneys.

62 Hung Gia 5, D7

curryleafvietnam.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

3508 3777



ITALIAN



Ciao Bella 🍷 O's Pick

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.saigonrestaurantgroup.com/ciao



Ciao Bella



La Bettola

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

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

La Bettola
ITALIAN RESTAURANT



Da Vinci's

Da Vinci's is an Italian-American style pizzeria delivery offering pizzas, lasagna, spaghetti, calzones, salads and desserts. Their full menu is online at davincisvietnam.com. Free delivery to Districts 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and Phu My Hung. Open 11am - 10pm.

Call 083 943 4982 or
SMS your order to 093 328 4624



La Cucina

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

Block 07-08 CRI-07, 103 Ton Dat Tien, D7
5813 7932



La Hostaria

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

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



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.

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

Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1
3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

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

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

Pomodoro

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

79 Hai Ba Trung
3823 8998



JAPANESE



Blanchy Street 🍣 Oi's Pick

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



Achaya Café

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

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



Monde

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

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



Ebisu

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

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



Gyumaru

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

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



Ichiban Sushi

Ichiban Sushi Vietnam serves fine sushi and signature drinks/cocktails in a lounge setting. Featuring one of the most eclectic Japanese menus in the city. The current Japanese venue to see and be seen in – everyone who's anyone is there.

204 Le Lai, D1
www.ichibansushi.vn

Also Try...

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
38245355
www.yakatabune-saigon.com

Chiisana Nishi

Serves authentic Japanese cuisine including sashimi, sushi, tempura, sukiyaki and shabu shabu.

River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
6683 5308

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

Robata Dining An

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

15C Le Thanh Ton, D1
www.robata-an.com

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



KOREAN



Galbi Brothers

Superb casual BBQ venue focusing on every foreigner's favorite K-dish: galbi. Home of the only all-you-can-eat Korean BBQ in Saigon, GB is distinguished by its inexpensive lunch sets and unabashed enthusiasm for Korean spirits.

R1-25 Hung Phuoc 4, Pham Van Nghi – Bac, D7
5410 6210



Kang Nam Ga

An exceptionally refined style of Korean BBQ fit out with high-tech smokeless racks, Kang Nam Ga is fast becoming the Korean go-to venue for a wide-ranging and clean introduction to the cuisine. Delicious beef sets and the infamous and eminently popular ginseng chicken soup – all Kangnam style.

6B Le Quy Don, D3
3933 3589
kangnamga@gmail.com



Lee Cho

The venue may be upscale, but the service and feel of this local-style Korean restaurant is very much down-to-earth. Enjoy the pleasure of casual outdoor street-style Korean dining without worrying about the proper decorum for an international venue. Great Korean dishes at good rates.

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7
5410 1086



Seoul House

Long-standing venue serving Korean delicacies in this city for many years, Seoul House is simple on décor and strong on taste. Specializes mainly in Korean hotpot and grills.

33 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
3829 4297



Won's Cuisine

One of the city's most important Korean venues – not for reasons of authenticity, but rather for straying from the norms. The restaurant's proprietress has infused so much of her own quirky tastes into the menu she's completely ignored the conventions of the cuisine, making Won's a unique creation with an unforgettable taste.

49 Mac Thi Buoi
3820 4085



THAI

Baan Thai

Stylish modern restaurant with a superb bar, Baan Thai serves authentic Thai cuisine with additional local and European twists. Friendly venue with large screen TVs for casual entertainment.

55 Thao Dien, D2
3744 5453
www.baanthai-anphu.com

Koh Thai

Supremely chic Thai venue with all the authentic burn you need – or without if you prefer. An opulent, fashionable decor with the cuisine to match – often reported to serve dishes comparable with those of Thailand itself.

Kumho Link, Hai Ba Trung, D1
3823 4423

Lac Thai

Hidden away down a narrow alley in the heart of downtown this unique Thai restaurant boasts authentic flavours and surprising character. Eat downstairs at tables in a cosy, themed environment - or be brave and climb the narrow

spiral staircase to the attic and crouch on cushions in true Thai style while attentive staff serve plates to share.

71/2 Mac Thi Buoi St, D1
3823 7506

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

The Racha Room

Brand new fine & funky Thai venue with hokey styling and a great attitude – and some of the most finely-presented signature Thai cuisine you'll see in this city, much of it authentically spicy. Long Live the King! Reservations recommended.

12-14 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
090 879 14 12



STEAKHOUSE



Au Lac Do Brazil

Au Lac do Brazil is the very first authentic Brazilian Churrascaria in Vietnam, bringing a new dining concept - an "All you can eat" Brazilian style BBQ where meat is brought to your table on skewers by a passador and served to your heart's content.

238 Pasteur, D3
3820 7157 | 090 947 8698
www.aulacdobrazil.com



El Gaucho

High end steakhouse with fine American and Wagyu beef steaks along with traditional Argentinian specialties. Outlets in Hanoi and Bangkok too. Expect to pay for the quality. Reservations recommended.

74/1 Hai Ba Trung, Ben Nghe Ward, D1.
5D Nguyen Sieu, D1
Unit CRI-12, The Crescent, Phu My Hung, D7
www.elgaucho.asia



Indaba

Indaba Steakhouse combines German style steak and Italian coffee under one roof. Expect fusion dishes like Indaba Spring Rolls, Mexican BBQ Spare Ribs, and Grilled Duck Breast served with sesame sauce, steamed rice and salad.

35 Ly Tu Trong, D1
3824 8280
www.facebook.com/indabacafe



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



Samba Brazilian Steakhouse

Serving the popular Brazilian buffet style, where enormous skewers of meat are circulated around the tables for diners to enjoy as much of as they can.

10C Thai Van Lung, D1
3822 0079



MICE @ Equatorial - Good Venue, Great Value

Hotel Equatorial Ho Chi Minh City is an international five-star hotel located where the borders of the city's four main districts intersect, hence in the heart and true center of Ho Chi Minh City.

The hotel has 333 spacious rooms and suites beautifully and elegantly designed with attention to detail for the utmost comfort of leisure and business travelers alike. For meeting and events the hotel features some of the largest banqueting and conference facilities in the city. The grand ballroom is capable of accommodating 1,000 people for a cocktail reception. The impressive foyer area is suitable for major displays that can be used to welcome guests.

Our venue is the perfect choice to stay, to meet and to explore the vibrant Ho Chi Minh City!

Book now: (+84) 8 3839 7777, ext. 8071



242 Tran Binh Trong, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam | info@hcm.equatorial.com | www.equatorial.com



VIETNAMESE



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
commieusaigon27@yahoo.com
commieusaigon.com.vn



Frangipani Hoa Su

Frangipani Hoa Su offers Vietnamese cuisine with a variety of dishes from different parts of Vietnam ranging from pho, bun bo Hue to mi quang. It serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. It also has an open space and a VIP air-conditioned room together which can hold a maximum capacity of 500 people, making it an ideal venue for different types of events and functions.

26 Le Van Mien, D2
frangipani.restobar@gmail.com



Quan Bui

Leafy green roof garden, upmarket restaurant with reasonable prices and a wide menu of choices. Open style kitchen advertises its cleanliness. Designer interior with spotlighted artwork and beautiful cushions give an oriental luxurious feeling – augmented by dishes served on earthenware crockery.

17a Ngo Van Nam, D1
3829 1515



Propaganda Bistro

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

21 Han Thuyen, D1
3822 9048
www.facebook.com/Propaganda-Saigon



Hoa Tuc

Relaxing, airy indoor-outdoor venue serving gourmet-style local food. The ideal place to take visitors from abroad if you want to impress them with an authentic Vietnamese dining experience. Set in the refinery courtyard that formerly officially produced the region's opium.

74/7 Hai Ba Trung, D1
3825 1676



Papaya

Brightly-styled and perfectly lovely, this is a minimalist local venue with international appeal that features a menu designed by the former head chef of Hanoi's Sofitel Metropole. Refined and distinguished without a hint of being stuck-up about it and very affordable.

68 Pham Viet Chanh, Binh Thanh
6258 1508
papaya@chi-nghia.com
www.chi-nghia.com

Also Try...

3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1
3821 1631

Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Cuc Gach Quan

Deservedly one of the highest ranking Vietnamese restaurants in Saigon on

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

10 Dang Tat, D1
3848 0144

Highway 4

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

101 Vo Van Tan, D3
www.highway4.com

Hum

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

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

May

Fine Vietnamese fare served in a

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

3/5 Hoang Sa
3910 1277

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

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

Thanh Nien

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

11 Nguyen Van Chiem, D1
3822 5909
www.vnnavi.com/restaurants/thanhvien



INTERNATIONAL



Khoi Thom

Tucked away on the quiet café street of Ngo Thoi Nhiem in District 3, Khoi Thom has evolved into an authentic Mexican-style cantina serving home-style dishes, many from the Mexican chef's family. With bright colors, a large breezy outdoor deck with an open bar and a long street frontage, Khoi Thom has earned respect for its adventurous hues and style since opening.

29 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3
www.khoithom.com

MEXICAN RESTAURANT

KHOI THOM



XichLoBBQ

XichLoBBQ is located on Bui Vien - the heart of the backpacking area. The restaurant serves Vietnamese staples alongside Western dishes with a specialty in barbecued pork, beef, chicken and seafood. XichLoBBQ restaurant is themed on the classic Vietnamese transport, with an actual life size of the three-wheeled vehicle hanging on the wall. Food here is reasonably priced.

37 Bui Vien, D1

XÍCH LÒ BBQ



Au Parc

One of the city's more charming international bistros in a perfect tree-lined inner-city location. Au Parc serves Mediterranean cuisine with local flourishes in a venue lightly set off by plush seating and heady exotic styling. A beautiful dining area and extraordinary menu will see this becoming one of the mainstays in your restaurant cycle.

23 Han Thuyen, D1
3829 2772



The Crab Shack

The Crab Shack is a restaurant and bar with a warm and stylish atmosphere housing a seafood restaurant, and a carefree with a balcony patio. Signature dishes include Cajun Crawfish and Pepper Crab. In addition to their house dishes, check out their selection of wine and beers.

11B Le Quy Don, D3
08 3930 9542

Facebook: "thecrabshackvn"



Berru

Berru is a family-run Turkish restaurant offering a variety of Turkish specialties including kebabs, roftas, mezzes and soups. This is one of the few halal restaurants that imports all of their halal meat.

SC 3-1 Nguyen Luong Bang, Nam Khanh, D7



Boathouse

With a great view of the Saigon River, this restobar serves imported steak, healthy salads and much more in an alfresco environment.

40 Lily Road, An Phu Superior Compound, D2
3744 6790
www.boathouse.com.vn

Also Try...



Saffron

The first thing that will strike you when you enter Saffron is the terracotta pots mounted on the ceiling. Located on Dong Du, this restaurant offers Mediterranean food, some with a distinct Asian influence added for further uniqueness. Prepare to order plates to share and don't miss the signature Cheese Saganaki! Guests are welcomed with complimentary Prosecco, fresh baked bread served with garlic, olive tapenade and hummus.

51 Hai Ba Trung, D1
382 48358

Deutsches Eck / German Corner

The restaurant is fastbecoming known for its sausage, beers, and their Schweins Haxe or pork knuckles (served with white cabbage and mashed potatoes). A number of German beers to select from including Konig Pilsener, Bitburger, Koestritzer Black Beer, Benediktiner Weisse, HB-Hofbrau Weisse, Schwarzbrau Exquisit, and Schwarzbrau Weisse.

A001 Nguyen Van Linh St., Phu My Hung, D7
54106695

Boomarang Bistro

Located in The Crescent by the lake, the spacious Boomarang Bistro Saigon serves Australian and other Western food in the most pedestrian friendly, relaxed part of town.

107 Ton Dat Tien, D7
3841 3883
www.boomarang.com.vn

The Deck

Located on the banks of the Saigon River, this restaurant offers great international and Vietnamese fare along with some fine cocktails. Best way to arrive is by private speed boat managed by the venue.

38 Nguyen U Di, D2
www.thedecksaigon.com

Elbow Room

At The Elbow Room, a rustic homage to retro Americana with its exposed brick, black and white vintage photographs, and Nora Jones soundtrack, diners can order classic American breakfasts all day. Live music upstairs on Friday nights is the city's best kept secret.

52 Pasteur, D1
www.elbowroom.com.vn

Hog's Breath

An Australian family diner and bar concept. Renowned for steaks, seafood and other Western fare served in an informal environment. Smoke-free indoors.

Ground Floor, Bitexco Financial Tower
2 Hai Trieu, D1
www.hogsbreathcafe.com.vn

La Fenetre Soleil

Literally 'window to the sun', LFS showcases a fusion of old-world fittings (exposed bricks, antique furniture and chandeliers) with new-world elements (fur cushions, mosaic tiles and glass tables). Serves a range of cocktails, imported beer, coffee and smoothies together with a Japanese-Vietnamese fusion menu.

4 Ly Tu Trong, D1

La Fiesta

A new restaurant of Scott Marquis, of Scott & Binh's fame, La Fiesta offers mainly Mexican food like tacos and enchiladas. Also features liqueur coffees and cocktails.

33 Dang Thi Nhu, D1
www.facebook.com/lafiestavietnam

Refinery

A charming venue with a chequered history, the Refinery brings the best of European cuisine to the opium headquarters of the old colonial empire. Loving restoration work has brought out much of the building's architectural charm, and with a menu that delivers the finest in French dining as well as culinary flourishes from around the continent, you'll never be short of options. Stands up to multiple repeat visits.

74 Hai Ba Trung, D1
3825 7667
www.therefinerysaigon.com

Scott & Binh's

All-heart Western cuisine and family friendly venue in the D7 neighborhood. Scrupulous attention to good service and a commitment to great food that makes customers happy.

15-17 Cao Trieu Phat, D7

Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY JAMES PHAM





Miniloc Island
Palawan, Philippines



Pangulasian Island Resort

Best of the Best

Is Palawan truly the world's best island?

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JAMES PHAM

THE HAPPY SOUNDTRACK I hear in my head is Bob Marley's *Everything's Gonna Be Alright*, except the percussion is provided by dozens of parrot fish crunching up coral in search of algae. Giant clams with their raucous pink and purple mantles lie motionless in a Technicolor forest of coral that resembles giant roses. My fingers are an hour past "prune," but I can't seem to tear myself away from this brilliant watery kaleidoscope, a deep drop off next to a shallow reef creating ideal conditions for an abundant variety of fish and corals. With a few kicks of my fins, I find myself face to face with a school of silver jacks the size of my forearm. They're a common enough species and other than a yellow stripe running from eye to tail against a dull grey body, there's nothing special about them, per se. Except that this school is thousands strong, so dense that I cannot even make out the sandy bottom below. All I see is an undulating metallic wall in every direction, broken up every now and then by an individual breaking formation in a flash of silver to gulp at some unseen morsel. It's completely and utterly mesmerizing. *Mabuhay* ("Welcome")

to the Philippines.

Suddenly, as one, they change direction and with some powerful flicks of the tail are gone, leaving me uncomfortably all alone. I'm not sure if the crystal clear water is a blessing or a curse as I instinctively use my right hand to cover the glinty steel of my watch and slowly spin around just in time to see a meter-long Giant Trevally swim by, its oddly-shaped bulbous head swinging from side to side. This resplendent marine display doesn't take place in deep open water. I'm not even scuba diving. It's just another day on the house reef mere meters from the beach on Miniloc Island, one of the many surrounding the main island of Palawan, Philippines.

Less than two months ago, Palawan earned the coveted top spot as the world's favorite island in a poll of more than 76,000 readers of leading travel magazine *Condé Nast Traveler*, beating out the perennial favorites of Santorini, the Great Barrier Reef, the US and British Virgin Islands, all the Hawaiian Islands and sister island of Boracay (at number 12). When even the jaw-dropping Maldives struggles to pin down the 19th spot ahead of Bora Bora at 25th, you know

the competition is fierce. Within weeks of the results, I board a plane to see if the claims are true – that Palawan is the globe's most perfect balance of beaches, scenery, friendliness and activities.

The actual island of Palawan is the biggest of the 7,107 Philippine islands (giving the country a staggering 22,500 miles of coastline), and at 280 miles long by 31 miles wide, stretching from Mindoro in the northeast to Malaysian Borneo in the southwest, it's no surprise that locals refer to it as "the mainland." In 2011, the nearly five mile long subterranean river near the capital city of Puerto Princesa was named one of the new seven natural wonders of the world, the longest of its kind in Asia and only exceeded by the Rio Secreto in Yucatan, Mexico. Boats take visitors deep into the caves where audio tours ensure minimal impact on the avian and terrestrial population. Further adding to Palawan's allure, the Tubbataha Reef Marine Park with its 100 meter perpendicular wall and two coral islands is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Coupled with a wide range of accommodation options, cheap eats, even cheaper San Miguel beer, English

spoken everywhere and top notch customer service delivered by some of the friendliest people on earth, it's not hard to see why this diverse island is the world's favorite. There's even a Vietnamese connection on Palawan, with *chao long* a popular Palaweno dish (a misnomer, considering it's more like *bo kho* beef stew with *pho* noodles rather than rice porridge), introduced by Vietnamese refugees in the southern portion of the island. Puerto Princesa also has Viet Ville where streets are named "Tu Do" and "Hung Vuong," a Vietnamese enclave of asylum seekers established in the mid-1990s after the closure of the last Vietnamese refugee camp.

For this trip, though, I head to Palawan's north coast to the sparsely inhabited area of El Nido ("nido" meaning "nest" in Spanish, so named for the edible swiftlet nests in the area), located in Bacuit Bay, opting to fly

into a private airstrip to avoid the five hour drive from the commercial airport in Puerto Princesa. The remote cluster of islands just off El Nido's coast was virtually unknown to the outside world until 1979, when according to local lore, a group of divers experienced boat trouble at night only to wake up to a marine paradise – crystal clear water lapping untouched white sand beaches backed by soaring limestone cliffs fronting lush green forests. Within a few years, a divers' resort opened on Miniloc Island, followed by two more on nearby Lagen and Pangulasian Islands, now managed by El Nido Resorts.

Need to Protect

Since then, the world has been introduced to this tiny corner of pristine beauty through the big and small screens: the Swedish and French versions of *Survivor*, *The Amazing*



Bacuit Bay

IF YOU GO

The Philippines is one of the most Westernized countries in Asia, being a Spanish colony for 330 years followed by 45 years of American occupation, meaning English is spoken everywhere and travel is a breeze. With more than 22,000 miles of coastline, there's an island for every type of traveler.

El Nido Resorts operates three resorts in Bacuit Bay. Miniloc Island is rustic and nature-oriented with a stunning house reef. Its 50 beach, garden, water and cliff cottages are a great base for exploring El Nido's more than 20 dive sites. All-inclusive 3-day, 2-night packages start from USD999 per person covering the 55-minute charter flight from Manila to El Nido, 35-minute boat transfer, full board meals, island hopping and non-motorized water sports. The more modern resort on Lagen Island with its large conference room is ideal for incentive and corporate retreats. Doubles start at USD490 per night, inclusive of breakfast, boat transfers and use of resort facilities. The eco-luxury Pangulasian Island resort fronts a pristine beach and is known for its spectacular sunrise and sunset views. Doubles start at USD900 per night, inclusive of breakfast, boat transfers and use of resort facilities. Guests at all three resorts are free to play at the two nearby beach clubs located on their own islands, exclusively for resort guests. For overwater bungalows offering direct water access from your cottage, unspoiled Apulit Island in Taytay on the opposite side of Palawan is a popular destination. See www.elnidoresorts.com.

Philippine Airlines, Asia's first airline, has daily flights between Saigon and Manila, your jumping off point to an island holiday. Its fleet of 69 aircraft flies to 29 domestic and 39 international destinations, adding JFK (New York City) in March 2015, marking its 74th anniversary. Late flights allow connections from Saigon. www.philippineairlines.com

An island getaway will likely entail spending a night or two in Metro Manila, consisting of 17 cities and towns with a population of about 14 million occupying an area roughly equivalent to the whole of Singapore. To take advantage of its incredible shopping, stay at the 5-star Peninsula Manila, conveniently located across from three malls in the business district of Makati. Live classical music in the evenings lends a refined aura to the impressive lobby and travelers in the know make time for a swim in the hotel's lushly landscaped pool. Doubles start at USD 177. www.manila.peninsula.com

For those preferring to avoid the city's legendary traffic by staying closer to the airport, the Manila Marriott Hotel located in the casino entertainment complex of Resorts World across from Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3, provides superior business comfort. For non-gamblers, an attached mall with movie theater ensures travelers won't be bored waiting for their next flight. Doubles start at USD 196 including a sumptuous buffet breakfast. www.manilamarriott.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: El Nido town, Snake Island sand bar, Lagen Island Resort, Kayaking to the Small Lagoon

Race and scenes from *The Bourne Legacy* have all been filmed here. Fortunately, the Philippine government realized early on the need to protect this incredibly diverse ecosystem, home to five types of forest, endemic marine animals including dolphins, dugongs and turtles, not to mention migrating whale sharks, 100 species of coral and over 800 species of fish. In 1984, El Nido was designated a turtle sanctuary and by 1991, the rest of Bacuit Bay was proclaimed a marine reserve and then further elevated to a managed resource protected area in 1998.

Island hopping is the best way to explore, a blissful exercise in futility considering there are some 1,800 islands and islets that make up Palawan Province, most of them uninhabited limestone karsts eliciting valid comparisons with Ha Long Bay. Using Miniloc as my base, I first come across Lagen Island with its lush forests made possible by deep soil, and home to some of Palawan's 110 bird species including the Palawan Hornbill and the Philippines Cockatoo. A 10 minute boat ride takes me to Pangulasian Island with its 750 meter white sand beach where a 20 minute hike is rewarded by 360-degree views of Bacuit Bay, with its every-shade-of-blue waters and outstanding snorkeling and diving.

The afternoon is reserved for kayaking and my destination is a pair of lagoons. The Small Lagoon is accessible by a tiny opening in the limestone, just big enough

for a kayak to pass through. Go there early in the day and you just might be the only one to enter what looks to be a natural cathedral of towering marble walls enclosing glassy turquoise waters. Right next door is the popular Big Lagoon, another blue hole served by a long shallow corridor where the water only reaches your thighs at low tide, a surreal experience in the middle of the ocean. Another picturesque spot is Vigan Island, more commonly known as Snake Island thanks to the S-shaped sandbar that appears at low tide.

A trip to El Nido is all about getting back to nature, a stunningly gorgeous side of nature that only a few are blessed to witness. Don't come expecting raucous full moon parties or loud jet skis. Instead, expect your days to be filled on, in or by the water, with perhaps a lingering rocking sensation to lull you to sleep at night.

I've had the good fortune to have visited the A-Z of some of the world's most lauded islands – from Aruba to Zanzibar – but as I sit on this pier and stare up at the star-studded night sky without a single man-made light source for miles, I find myself completely humbled by the beauty of this tiny corner of the Philippines – the beauty found in its friendly, musical people, eclipsed only by the beauty of its diverse wildlife, bested by the beauty in its stunningly pristine scenery. *Mabuhay* to Number One, Palawan. ■



ECO EXAMPLE

With the tourism benefits of being designated a protected area comes responsibility. El Nido Resorts has been internationally recognized for its conservation efforts which include embracing nature-based guest activities (expect to find hobie cats and kayaks instead of jet skis and banana boats), offering sustainable menus (using produce from their own organic farms and eschewing unsustainable proteins like grouper and lobster), providing employment opportunities for the local community and organizing environmental education programs for staff and guests.

Each resort has its own environment officer and a sewage treatment plant and a materials recovery center on the Palawan mainland helps reduce and process waste. Small appliances run on solar power and rainwater is collected and used to water plants and to flush toilets. Visitors to El Nido and Taytay can also help efforts by paying a modest conservation fee equivalent to USD5 per visit to the local government of El Nido.

Big and Shiny

The neon lights of Hong Kong



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



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIDGET MARCH

I LAST VISITED Hong Kong at the very beginning of the Year of the Horse and here I am, 12 years later, in the same year but a different place. Back then, the city had been reunited with mainland China for only five years and it was struggling to find its new identity. Now, in 2014, the streets in the CBD are closed by student protests. The wheel of change is turning again.

To find out what Hong Kong thinks of itself, I made my way to the amazingly modern Museum of Art sitting on a new waterfront right beside the old Peninsula Hotel. The outside is decorated with posters of previous exhibitions, luring me inside to promised delights. Disappointingly, half of the building was closed for refurbishments so all I could look at was a visiting exhibition and the rooms dedicated to Hong Kong. I noted that I still had to pay the full entrance fee.

Some things never change or disappoint, however, and one is that

Hong Kong always gives us a spectacular show of neon lights. Walking the streets at night always feels glamorous, exciting - and a little dangerous. Regular street lighting creates strong, multi-directional shadows that conceal dark corners down alleyways and behind the bushes in the park, but neon lights everything equally and leaves few hiding places. Neon lighting was first invented in the mid 1800s but only took off when it was exhibited at the Paris Motor Show in 1910. Now, it is used all over the world, with mostly Americans and Chinese having exploited it for street advertising.

Here in Hong Kong, the gaudy signs advertise businesses old and new. I like the old fashioned graceful curves of long established restaurants and all the beautiful Chinese calligraphy that seem to dance in the sky. Spring Deer Restaurant, the cow of Sammy's Kitchen, Wah Fung Medicine Co and the Tai Phat Pawn Shop. Layer upon layer of sky signs recede into

the distance turning the skyscape into a patchwork of layered symbols, writing and pictures. It is dazzling.

If you look across the harbor from the Star Ferry landing, you can witness the entire downtown Hong Kong skyline lit up, each tower block competing with the next to put on the best light show. You would think the reflection of all these lights would be dazzling in the evening waters, however, because it is one of the busiest harbors in the world, it's rare for the waters to be still enough to perfectly reflect what's above. All that neon and plasma does a great job of lighting up the clouds above, which glow pink and yellow against the night sky. The Peak, too, is gently illuminated and outlined with the twinkling highlights of apartment windows lit up for the evening.

Now that I am living in Vietnam, I will not leave it another 12 years before returning to the mystery and glamour of Hong Kong's night lights. ■

Where the Journey Becomes the Destination

Inside the Mia Resort and Residences Nha Trang

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

CALIFORNIA'S PACIFIC COAST Highway from San Francisco to Los Angeles. The Amalfi Coast Drive that hugs Italy's Sorrentine Peninsula. Australia's Great Ocean Road that runs between Torquay and Allensford in Victoria. These great scenic drives all have one thing in common – stunning coastal views that make it hard to focus on the road. The joy of these passages is the journey, rather than the destination. But what if the journey and the destination were one in the same?

No matter how many times I make the drive from the Cam Ranh Airport into Nha Trang proper, I never fail to gasp the first time the ocean comes into view, the water below a glittering blue green, the white surf meeting golden sand, the

islands beckoning.

Today, though, my journey becomes my destination in the form of Mia Resort Nha Trang, a stunning property set on the cliffs of Cam Ranh Bay, just 25 minutes to Nha Trang's nightlife and dining, but tucked away in its own little corner of paradise, truly a world away.

Most striking looking down at the villas set in the private bay 40 meters below is how they merge into the landscape. Where buzz words like “eco-friendly” and “green” are more often than not synonymous with “rough” and “unsightly,” here the 50 luxury rooms and villas are designed to enhance their surroundings, appointing Mother Nature as lead designer. Each condo, villa and suite is

carpeted with a natural grass roof which is not only aesthetically pleasing but has cooling benefits. Excavated beach rocks find new life as feature walls and in the attractive breakwater recalling the scenic New England coast. Looking up from the private beach first onto blade-perfect lawns which would be welcome at Wimbledon or Augusta, then to lush coconut palms and frangipani plants all set against soaring jungle hillsides, the scene is more reminiscent of Maui or Kauai than Vietnam.

While complimentary shuttles head into Nha Trang three times a day, guests are hard pressed to find a reason to leave the resort. The serene environment of Xanh Spa offers a wide variety of



wraps, massages and treatments from the traditional to the innovative, like the mineral sea salt facial, caviar firming eye treatment and mango anti-oxidant wrap. Low impact activities in keeping with the nature theme along the lines of ocean kayaking and paddle boarding or scuba diving trials in the infinity pool lead guests to water while complimentary tai chi, yoga and Vietnamese lessons keep them on land. Generous happy hours at Mojito's Bar and Restaurant with its sweeping 180° degree views of the bay or down at the beachside, family-friendly Sandals Restaurant keeps everyone happy all of the time.

Manipulating Ingredients

A Vietnamese-only menu reminds guests that they are actually in Vietnam (and not Hawaii), serving up classics such as braised fish in clay pot and a tapas platter of deep fried spring rolls, fresh spring rolls, minced beef wrapped in vine leaves and marinated chicken with lemon leaf. A second menu featuring international classics accommodates discerning palates the world over, with offerings ranging from the signature starter of seared tuna sashimi accompanied by wasabi mayo to the pork burger which takes three days to prepare: a day spent marinating in a sugary brine, then oven roasted, then braised for three hours in a master stock

of soya sauce, orange peel, cinnamon and Chinese wine before being pressed to render out most of the fat, leaving soul-satisfying meaty BBQ flavors.

Under the watchful eye of Chef Emile Fortuin (Cape Town, South Africa), the kitchen turns out cutting-edge cuisine. "We're different. Way different," says Chef Emile. "What we're doing now is so much more intense that I'd bet my life no one else in Nha Trang is doing it. We're in a phase where we're manipulating ingredients. We experiment every day to get ourselves to the next level." Rotating Asian-Fusion menus supplement the regular offerings, but it's in the weekly Chef's Menu where Chef Emile lets his creative juices flow on a gourmet version of a Master Chef Mystery Box. This week, the secret ingredient is Vietnamese coffee and chocolate, incorporated into a starter of goat cheese mousse served with caramelized beet root with a coffee and pineapple dressing, followed by an entrée of sea bass with chorizo, olives and tomatoes served with bitter chocolate and coffee pasta. The meal ends sweetly with a triple chocolate Vietnamese coffee tart with candied orange, vanilla ice cream and a coffee and orange reduction. "The guests are paying attention," says Chef Emile with a smile.

Doubles start from USD200 and includes a gorgeous buffet breakfast including as

many smoothies and Lavazza cappuccinos and macchiatos as you can drink. See www.mianhatrang.com

For those not content to limit their holidays to a week in paradise, the stunning Residences at Mia Nha Trang are set to open in mid-2015. Twelve exclusive, fully furnished five-bedroom villas, each on 1,200 sqm of land with 36 meters of beach frontage, are being built adjacent to the resort with the same style of rooftop gardens, stone walls and open design concept promoting cool breezes, and naturally, sweeping views of the East Sea below. The resort community will be home to a brand new restaurant, swimming pool (in addition to each villa's private pool) and tennis court, as well as being able to enjoy all the facilities of Mia Resort.

With almost 40 projects in the works along the coastal road from the airport towards Nha Trang, Cam Ranh is primed to become one of the hottest luxury destinations in Vietnam in the next few years. The Residences at Mia Nha Trang will be one of the first of those to open, making it an ideal early investment opportunity to own one of Nha Trang's best addresses, your very own slice of paradise for a cool USD1.5 million. Visit www.miaresidencenhatrang.com for a full listing of the extensive privileges that come with ownership and to view the range of floor plan designs available. ■



Zip Code Envy

Inside one of Saigon's most coveted addresses

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES PROVIDED BY THE LANDMARK



I'VE OFTEN THOUGHT that Saigon reminds me of a miniature New York City, probably the greatest city in the world. Within its boroughs resides a cross section of humanity - the rich, the poor, the downtrodden and the enlightened - all looking to achieve the American dream, or at the very least be a spectator to its pursuit. While Saigon isn't quite as diverse, and the cabs may be green and white instead of yellow and *banh mi* carts replace hot dogs stands, there's still so much that is the same: the frenetic pace, the obsession with coffee, the colorful street "characters," a soon-to-be-subway and the river that runs through it all.

Saigon even has its NYC-like boroughs: the Brooklyn Heights of District 2 with its leafy suburbs and easy commute, the trendy SoHo-esque after work bars of Dong Du Street, the Chinatown/Cho Lon neighborhoods with their own shops, restaurants and culture. Dam Sen could even double as Coney Island and the green island of Thanh Da seems like a world away, much like a day trip to Staten Island. We even have our own Jersey in the form of family-friendly District 7 where everything is more spread out and you really don't go unless you live there. But

the most coveted residence in Saigon is still the Golden Rectangle that is Dong Khoi - Le Loi - Nguyen Hue - Nguyen Thiep, the Park Avenue of addresses. Where Park Avenue residents have the greenery of Central Park, the Bohemian vibe of SoHo and the luxury shopping of legendary Fifth Avenue all within a two mile radius, residents of The Landmark (5B Ton Duc Thang, D1) are equally spoiled for choice.

The first international serviced apartment and office complex in Ho Chi Minh City, The Landmark is set to celebrate its 20th anniversary this month. Managed by the luxury Peninsula Properties, the 16-storey complex set on prime waterfront real estate features 65 elegantly furnished and fully-equipped apartments and 10,000 sqm of high-end office space, making its residents some of the city's luckiest.

Ifs...

If I lived at The Landmark... I'd have more music in my life. I'd make the five minute walk to the steps of the Opera House every Saturday and Sunday mornings at 8 for the free concert series, one of the city's hidden gems. Ostensibly for tourists, the 45-minute

concerts draw an even larger share of Saigoneese. Musical acts change regularly and today's performance is by a group of talented students from the local music university and spans a few centuries of jazz, rock and classical. A couple of dozen plastic chairs have been set out, but most of the audience are happy simply perched on their motorbikes. Any day that starts out with a saxophone promises to be a good one. Other musical venues within walking distance are The Cavern Pub (19 Dong Du, live music most nights starting at 9:30pm) and MonPere (5H Ton Duc Thang, piano every Saturday from 7:30pm-10:00pm).

If I lived at The Landmark... I'd be fitter thanks to their exclusive Health Club that boasts a rooftop pool, saunas, a fitness center cum yoga studio overlooking the river and the crown jewel - the city's only regulation-sized squash court. "I really like the atmosphere: a quiet gym, nice, clean facilities, and being able to enjoy the sauna and swimming pool after exercising," says avid health club member Zacharie Blondeau. "I enjoy coming to The Landmark before heading home [after work]. I also like being able to grab dinner after late exercise, and



also going early before work from time to time." Nguyen Huong, a marketing manager in the entertainment industry agrees. "I also find the staff friendly and helpful," she says. "Plus, I can park my motorbike for free. It's a small thing but it's good customer service."

However, it's The Landmark's squash court that keeps these two loyal members coming back for more. It's surprising that the city doesn't have more of these considering that minimal space is required and they're totally protected from the unpredictable weather.

Today, I find myself taking a lesson with the club pro, Viet, who's been at the Landmark since it opened in 1994, one of 20/20 Club, 20 employees with 20 years of service. "Stay low and move diagonally. Focus!" he says as I struggle to translate my tennis skills into squash, trying to reconcile the low bounce with the added split second I have to return the ball as it careens off the wall. Despite being years my senior, Viet somehow manages to stay in one place, "occupying the T," as he calls it, while I bounce back and forth like a pinball on speed. "Squash is a great cardio workout. You really burn the calories!" he enthuses while I sweat. With a bit more guidance, I begin to get

the hang of the angles and manage to kiss a drop shot off the corner. I think the score is now one to about a bazillion, but who's counting? A look at the reservation board is an indication of how popular The Landmark's squash court is, as is the tournament held at the end of November. "This year, we had four divisions," says Health Club Manager Pamela Haake, "including a women's division. Two women are really good, though, so they played with the boys." Lesson over, I refuel with one of the club's bananas as I'm handed a cold towel that feels like bliss.

If I lived at The Landmark... I'd be better at gift-giving. Luxury shops line Dong Khoi just a five-minute walk away, but instead, I turn left and walk two minutes to the converted warehouses at 3A Ton Duc Thang which are now hipster central with street art, art galleries and unique gifts, anchored by the design collective that is 3A Station. In the space of 20 minutes, I pick up a hand-embroidered linen dress for a friend at Nau Corner, a few hand-drawn matchboxes with hidden messages inside for VND25,000 at WoodIsChic and a gorgeous plank cutting board as a housewarming gift at Sadec District. Done with shopping,

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Pool area, Squash court, Ribbon cutting ceremony, The Landmark in its early days

I settle for an iced coffee at Kujuz 3Son, a photogenic cafe made up entirely of windows and doors, and a mint chocolate cupcake from Pacey's, served out of an unbearably cute Volkswagen van.

If I lived at The Landmark... I'd be better fed. From comfort food from Vesper's right downstairs to the upscale vegetarian of Hum (2 Thi Sach) to the expert wine pairings of Wine Embassy (13 Ngo Duc Ke), I'd probably rarely use my fully-equipped yet compact kitchen, except for perhaps a healthy meal whipped up from groceries at Annam Gourmet (16 Hai Ba Trung). "I love going to Vietnamese cafes after work," says Japanese teacher and Landmark resident Atsuki Yoshida. "I'm single so I always eat out. It's exciting to discover unknown local restaurants all within a 10 minute walk of here. The location is great."

I agree. In fact, if I lived at The Landmark... I'd be home now, too. ■

Is Long-term Travel for You?

Achieving the right mindset



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



WHO HASN'T DREAMED of ditching the corporate job, stuffing whatever will fit into a backpack and heading off to explore the world, destination unknown? For every person who actually does it, there are probably dozens if not hundreds of armchair travelers who have dreamed about it and inevitably backburnered the idea because life — career, home, family — got in the way.

Personally, I've only done two semi-long trips: a three-month round-the-world (RTW) jaunt and almost three months of overlanding Africa from top to bottom. While I love reading travel blogs where headings are something like "Day 483: Kathmandu," I've often wondered what it takes to really travel long-term, something I would define as at least a year continuously on the road, without too many stops of a week

or more in one place. How would one go about arranging the logistics? What happens to your job? Your belongings? How difficult would the transition be to re-enter society when you come back? How would potential employers view a long gap in work history?

For this column, I tapped Jeremy Jones, author of *The Long-Term Traveler's Guide* (available in print or e-book from Amazon and iTunes). Jeremy has visited 66 countries so far (with Sri Lanka in the works), many of them on two long-term trips he did in the past six years.

In his book, Jeremy talks about the sensibility of long-term travel. "One year is a great milestone as it is the perfect timeframe to see a substantial amount of your must-see destinations list as well as ample time to really begin understanding several regions around the world." As

if I needed any encouragement, Jeremy also makes the case that in a year, you can see 91 cities (with a four-day average stay), 23 countries (four cities per country), eat 1,095 meals and amortize airfare down to dollars a day.

In the book, you talk about various hurdles (mental, physical, financial) in getting a RTW trip off the ground. What was most challenging for you and how did you overcome it?

Jeremy Jones: » On my first RTW trip it was definitely leaving Angie (my wife). We were dating at the time and I had started to plan the trip before we got together in 2009. After a lot of talking we decided I would do half, and we'd do the rest on a future RTW trip (the one we just finished), but dealing with the



emotional hurdle of leaving loved ones can be quite hard. I am thankful that by the time I took my second one she was with me and our families assumed it was business as usual with us and didn't worry! «

One of the first things to decide about long-term travel is who you're going to travel with. Jeremy makes a compelling case each for solo travel, traveling with close friends, spouses and what he calls "30 Minute Friends" — people you meet while on the road. Personally, I've had decent friendships not survive the crucible of travel which puts you in strange and often stressful situations where unlike home, it's not as easy for everyone to simply go their separate ways after a night of fun. On the other hand, it's nice to have someone to share expenses with and enjoy meals together.

Many people would find it daunting to be around their partner all day for days on end. Do you think travel has strengthened your marriage? In what ways?

JJ: » I love the Bill Murray quote that recently came out: 'If you're in love with someone, travel the world with them and if you still love them, marry them at the airport the second you get home.' There is a lot of stress associated with being on the road, and most of ours came when my backpack was stolen in Peru towards the end of the trip. I can't say we ever had many issues from being together so much, but whenever we were needing some free time we just went off and did our own thing without issue. I'm actually more worried about being apart now that we're home since it

was so much fun on the road! «

I would think one of the biggest challenges of long-term travel is simply arranging the logistics of leaving your life behind. It might be easier if you're living with family, but the thought of finding what to do with your car, apartment/house, belongings just seems daunting to me. Personally, the few days before a trip of even one or two weeks is a flurry of getting work done, making sure I've rescheduled things, etc. so it's hard to imagine sorting your life out for an entire year.

Have you experienced any negative backlash when telling people that you're long-term travelers?

JJ: » If I had a dollar for the number of people who asked "what will you do without a job?" I would have enough money to never need a job ever again. It is a really odd thing to hear because many people just don't understand that you can go without working 30 years straight. We also get a lot of people who assume we're trust fund babies who had their parents pay for it, which couldn't be further from the truth either, as we worked for several years to save up for it. «

In an upcoming column, I'll continue this discussion with Jeremy and we'll get into what type of planning is best for long-term travel (for example, how far in advance to arrange lodging, flights or maybe nothing at all!), ways to save up for a RTW trip and best practice for securing visas and avoiding scams. In the meantime, read more of Jeremy and Angie's adventures at www.livingthedreamrtw.com. ■

GEAR REVIEW



TRAVEL WALLETS BY BELLROY

A long-term traveler is space conscious. I remember getting advice in the 80s when I started traveling to saw off the handle to my toothbrush to save space! Especially these days, when electronics take up so much room, it's increasingly important to downsize everything else. For short trips, I love my large Tumi travel wallet, but I'd be the first to admit that if space was at a premium, it'd have to be one of the first things to go. Enter the Travel Wallet, by Australian-based Bellroy. Billed as "carry-on for your pocket," this sleek leather wallet is one of the slimmest I've ever seen and designed to hold just about everything you'd need to have on you as you navigate planes, trains, border crossings and whatever else travel throws your way.

The wallet achieves its extreme slimness by being about an inch longer than your average wallet (6" x 4"). That extra space allows you to tuck your passport into a sleeve. While I don't often carry my passport out and about, it was handy on a recent trip to Bangkok where even non-bank money changing kiosks required one. And having your passport in your wallet instead of a carry-on in the overhead somewhere makes filling in all those annoying forms (using the nifty micro pen that comes with the wallet, of course) that much easier. The extra size also means that credit cards can fit vertically side-by-side instead of being stacked on top of each other, and tickets, boarding passes, and oddly shaped currencies (I'm looking at you, yen!) fit without creasing. Thoughtful elements also include slots for a key and a SIM card (because savvy travelers know it's often much cheaper to use a local number than to roam). Made from responsibly sourced, non-toxic vegetable tanned leathers in muted colors (mine is cocoa), Bellroy's travel wallet is so incredibly slim that I'm even experimenting with using it as an everyday wallet.

A similar, but more versatile, product is the Elements Travel. It shares many of the same features (micro travel pen, slim credit card slots, space for your passport, etc.) but it's made of water-resistant leather and has an all-around zipper to keep the elements out. It's multi-use so once you get to your destination, you can swap out travel documents for your mobile phone and credit cards for when you're more active. While it's ever so slightly wider to accommodate the hidden zipper, I love that it stays super slim in your pocket.

The Travel Wallet (USD119.95) and Elements Travel (USD139.95) are available from www.bellroy.com (they ship to Vietnam). Also check out their site dedicated to all things carry-on at www.carryology.com.



A photograph of a tree with green leaves and red flowers, with a large, textured rock in the foreground. The text 'Plain and Simple' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Plain and Simple

The *áo bà ba*'s simplicity and versatility has contributed to its popularity, whether in rural or urban areas it can be worn while laboring or lounging. Modern versions incorporate countless different designs, colors and embroidery, which has allowed the costume to transition into high fashion.

Producer: **Tra My Next Top**

Setup: **Hoang Dao (0123 426 2153)**

Photographer: **Alex Cui**

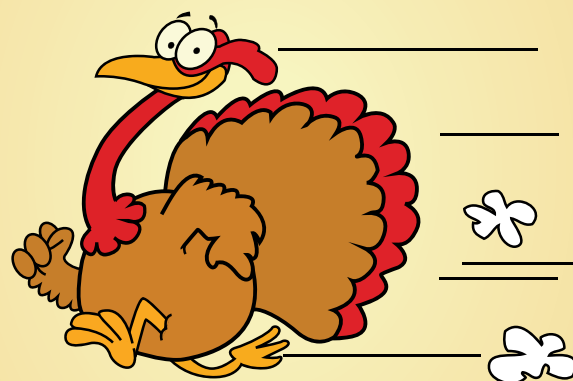
Model: **Movie Actress Van Thanh**

Make up/Hair: **Kelvin Le**

Hair: **Jimmy Nghia**

Costumes: **Van Thanh**





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242 Tran Binh Trong, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City
 (08) 3839 7777, ext. 8041 | dine@hcm.equatorial.com
 www.equatorial.com

>>The List Travel



An Lam Villas I Ninh Van Bay

Built amidst enormous granite boulders and natural fauna on the shores of Ninh Van Bay and inaccessible by road, An Lam Villas Resort is serenely beautiful, silent, relaxing and safe. With private pools, butler service, and superb modern facilities, the whole concept is based on respecting the ecological hinterland, celebrating Vietnam's food and culture - and service. There are 33 villas, and is an ideal location for honeymoons.

Tan Thanh Hamlet, Ninh Ich Commune, Ninh Hoa District, Nha Trang
(05) 8362 4964
reservation@anlamnvb.com
www.anlam.com

AN LAM
VILLAS
— NINH VAN BAY —



Ana Mandara Villas I Dalat

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

www.anamandara-resort.com



Princess d'Annam I Phan Thiet

The Princess is an exquisite resort with an almost celestial atmosphere that is hard to find anywhere else in Vietnam. The look of the resort is classical, bright and impeccably clean and private. The two Empress Suites are the very pinnacle of luxury accommodation in Vietnam – they are mini millionaire's mansions in themselves, fully-equipped, bright and spacious, and possessing of the same ethereal design quality that pervades this whole resort. Set in the remote Ke Ga Bay – wordlessly beautiful.

www.princessannam.com



Fusion Maia I Danang

A unique and exciting fusion of resort and spa where spa treatments are inclusive and a part of daily living in this beach resort. It's the first all pool villa style resort in the destination and offers 87 pool suites, spa villas and beach villas each with modern, open-plan living and private courtyard with swimming pool. 'Freedom' options such as spa treatments and breakfast available at multiple locations are a few of the surprising offers in store.

maidanang.fusion-resorts.com



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M Floor, 233 Dong Khoi St, D1
08.3939.0808(JPN)/08.3939.0804(VN)
sgn.objp@his-world.com

www.histravel.com.vn / www.facebook.com/histravel



Jasmine Court

Located on a peaceful and beautiful side street off Nguyen Van Troi Boulevard, only 5 minutes from the Tan Son Nhat International Airport and 15 minutes to the city centre, this boutique property with only 12 apartments is comprised of one and two-bedroom suites of various sizes. All apartments are designed in a fresh contemporary style and finished in a pleasing neutral colour scheme. With personalized service, our warm and attentive staff will make your stay with us a pleasant and enjoyable experience.

307/29 Nguyen Van Troi, Tan Binh
3844 6639 - 092 669 9033

www.jasminecourt.com.vn



InterContinental Nha Trang

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

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



La Veranda I Phu Quoc

The most distinguished of Phu Quoc Island's hotels and guesthouses, La Veranda sports paddle fans, butter-yellow exteriors, whitewashed louvers, and tropical gardens recalling a colonial plantation. Freestanding deluxe villas are notable for their sea-facing porches, spacious bathrooms, and cathedral-like ceilings. This is the resort of choice for guests taking advantage of this unspoiled remote tropical island destination.

www.laverandaresorts.com



Novela Muine Resort & Spa

A 150-meter beach resort that offers luxurious accommodations, countless modern facilities and amenities with attentive services. A private and unique space in the heart of resort, Novela restaurant serves a daily breakfast, lunch, dinner and any other banquet with Asian and European cuisine. With two floors, guests can enjoy wining and dining and view the beautiful beach and sand hill.

96A Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Ham Tien
Mui Ne, Phan Thiet
www.novelaresort.vn
(62) 374 3456



>>The List

Health & Beauty

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A centrally located dental center that uses the latest modern equipment with a team of skilled specialists. Services include cosmetic, implant, braces, prosthodontics, pedodontics and more. Expect high quality service at a reasonable price.

Building 244A Cong Quynh, D1
08 3925 7526
08 3925 7527
nhathoadrhung@gmail.com
www.drhung01.com



Also try ...

2000 Dental Clinic Trung Tam Implant

Established in 1999, 2000 Dental Clinic now has 65 dentists serving 3 locations offering the full range of dental care, including surgery, implants and extractions.

125 Le Thi Rieng, D1

Elite Dental Group

Elite Dental is an international and well-equipped clinic that provides a wide range of dental services including general dentistry, cosmetic dentistry, Implant, pediatric dentistry and orthodontics. Luxury design and their dental experts will bring you an extremely comfortable experience.

57A Tran Quoc Thao, D3

European Dental Clinic

Offering state of the art technology, competitive pricing,

and supreme quality, this dentistry is truly dedicated to their patients.

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

German International Dentistry

German International Dentistry offers excellent consultation services from experienced, international dentists so that you can make informed decisions about your dental care.

1489 Nguyen Van Linh, D7

Saigon Smile

With a group of experienced doctors and professional staff trained to do teeth cleaning, dental work and other teeth enhancing procedures.

96 Tran Nao, D2
6674 4255
8am to 8pm

Smile Dental Center

Quality dental care with whitening, cleaning, and orthodontic

services. Japanese equipment and techniques.

173 Ton Dat Tien, D7

Starlight Dental Clinic

Award-winning quality care and personal service in clean premises, offering general dentistry, whitening and cosmetic surgery, implants, orthodontics, pediatric, and preventive dentistry.

2 Bis Cong Truong Quoc Te, D3

Westcoast International Dental Clinic

Large, international team of dentists and support staff from Canada, Australia, Japan, France, Italy, Thailand, and Vietnam. The clinic regularly hosts visiting dentists from many other countries.

27 Nguyen Trung Truc, D1
3825 748

SPA



Maison Minko Boutique Salon

District 7's Premium Boutique Salon. Two floors providing full beauty services nestled in a quiet residential area in Phu My Hung's Garden Plaza 2 Complex. Equipped with a café, nail bar, 2 VIP rooms, and a spacious massage room - this boutique salon is like no other in Ho Chi Minh City.

Garden Plaza 2 Complex
8 Ton Dat Tien, Quận 7
5412 4773



Sweet Spa

The spa is intimate and beautifully decorated. The staff consists of both highly-skilled men and women. Sweetspa serving you from hand to toe to give real spiritual and physical relaxation. As well as sport injury therapies. After hours of meetings or full days of working, treat yourself to a relaxing massage or soothing reflexotherapy.

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



Moc Huong Spa

Moc Huong Spa is supported by top-ranking professional physiotherapists who combine Eastern with Western techniques resulting a full body wellness. Reasonably priced with a wide range of services that include manicure, pedicure, facial, both body and for your complete well being.

9C Ton Duc Thang, D1
3911 7118



Villa Aesthetica Cosmedi Spa & Laser Center

One of HCMC's finest newly-established spa and beauty centers, Villa Aesthetica is the only venue in Vietnam to offer premium-class LPG Endermologie treatments, erasing localized fat and imperfections. Also known for their unique Turkish Hammam massage.

54 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien, D2
6264 3388 / Hotline: 090 969 2901
www.villaaesthetica.com
info@villaaesthetica.com



Also try ...

Huong Sen Spa

Located in a charming old French villa, Huong Sen Spa is a natural green oasis with skin, face, and body treatment services.

21S Nguyen Van Troi, Ward 12, Phu Nhuan

Jasmine Spa

Experienced staff utilize exotic skincare products to comfort guests in this cozy urban sanctuary, which has a large, loyal following that swears by its friendly and professional service.

45 Ton That Thiep, D1

Kyoto Spa, Hair & Gel Nails Salon

Body massage
Foot massage

Hair cut women and men

32 Dong Du, Ben Nghe Ward, D1
(Spa & Hair Salon)
8A/4D1 Thai Van Lung, Ben Nghe Ward, D1 (Spa)
0902 983 089

loan_royal@gmail.com
www.spakytotohcmc.com.vn

L'Apothiquaire - Saigon South

This Japanese/French style spa is an exclusive distributor of organic French skin care products, and other exclusive products from

around the world.

1st floor, 103 Ton Dat Tien, Tan Phu, D7
5413 6638

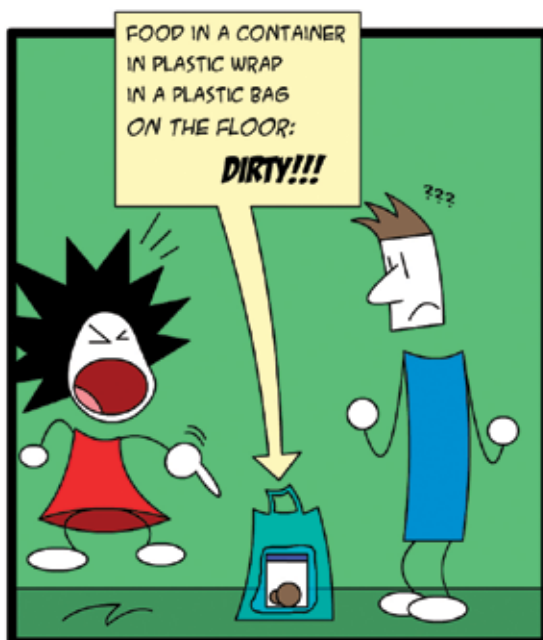
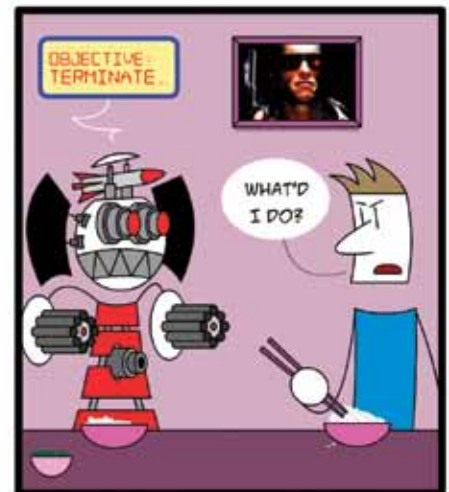
La Maison de L'Apothiquaire

This unique spa is situated in an artfully-designed villa and offers guests many therapeutic body and skin treatments. The luxurious villa also provides a yoga studio, enclosed garden, and many exclusive skin care products.

64A Truong Dinh, D3
100 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
1st floor, 103 Ton Dat Tien, Tan Phu, D7

THE VIETNAMESE WIFE, WESTERN HUSBAND CLUB

BY DAVID PERRY



Kids & Education



Fussy Eaters

Tips to turn picky eaters into foodies

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD**

FORGIVE MY NAIVETY, but I really thought I had this whole three-year-old's breakfast thing in the bag when I brought home a big box of Coco Pops for my little fussy eater. It was always a big hit in my house when I was a kid – easily my favorite cereal for the way it magically transformed ordinary milk into a chocolate shake – but watching my girl stir them around in her bowl with mild disinterest for their being “too cold and sweet” was for me the final confirmation that I’m the father of Southeast Asian children. This is a girl who’s happy to leap on her mother’s bike in the evening to go out for some snails and *balut*, and yet there’s barely anything on the menu she’s even remotely interested in at McDonald’s. True, I guess it’s good news that she’s not saturated in processed food like she would be if she were born in my country, but it’s still a sobering moment

when you look into the eyes of your own daughter and realize that to a significant degree, she’s a foreigner to you.

Those issues aside, being an expat parent in Vietnam can give rise to some unexpected complications – especially when it comes to dealing with the dreaded picky eating phase. Somewhere in between the ages of one and four, a significant percentage of children go through a period of sudden, uncharacteristic aversion to eating, sometimes driving their parents to despair that they don’t even seem to be consuming enough to keep them going throughout the day (which is, perhaps, part of why they do it – parents in despair can look pretty funny). Identifying the reasons why your kid’s not eating and remedying the problem is a whole lot harder, however, when you’re not even sure yourself about what they’re being

served. When my daughter tells me she doesn’t want to eat the pig’s bowel porridge she’s supposed to be having for lunch, it’s extremely difficult for me not to say, “Yeah... I wouldn’t touch that either.”

The trouble is that it wasn’t always like this. My one-year-old is an enormously enthusiastic eater and my eldest was the same at her age, whether it was French toast or *pho*. Somehow, at some point, things changed – and it was difficult to understand why. Was she too immersed in the Vietnamese culinary universe that Dad’s food suddenly seemed tasteless by comparison? Or was it that she just wanted to leave the dinner table as quickly as possible so that she could get back to her Play-Doh?

The first answer may not be intuitive, but it’s true: a three-year-old just doesn’t need to eat anywhere near as much as a toddler half her age, for the simple

reason that she's already undergone that miraculous growth spurt which changed her from a baby into a little girl, and her dietary needs have gone back to the normal level sufficient to sustain the body of a very little human being – which is a lot less than you might think. Most parents make the mistake of feeding a preschooler meals that are roughly half the size of an adult's – which, even if your child may have dealt with those proportions while they were learning to walk, is just too much by the time they've turned three.

Mood Food

While a young child's physical needs are changing at around that age, this rather inconveniently coincides with some fairly acute emotional and psychological developments that make it even less likely that he or she is likely to grace your carefully-prepared, highly-nutritious child-sized meal with anything more than a cursory sniff. You'll have noticed, for example, that a very short while after kids learn to walk they start running around like crazy things – that's just part of how children match the rate at which new experiences seem to launch themselves at them every day. By the time it comes to sitting down for dinner and quieting

down a little, they're spent. Many kids at that age develop a (temporary) syndrome called food neophobia – a natural tendency to reject anything unfamiliar they find on their plate. There's only so much new stuff a young thing can take and familiar meals at regular times of the day are part of what a child needs for comfort's sake. If you're parenting a kid of that age, probably the easiest way to introduce new tastes is to give them a sample while they're running around discovering things at play – that way, by the time it comes to a full meal, it won't seem quite so strange.

While there's no greater frustration than watching a child wiggle and fuss for an HOUR instead of eating something you know she loves, no amount of pushing and cajoling is likely to be of much use. Kids that age just don't have the reasoning and language skills to be able to explain why they're not interested in eating, and there are lots of things it could be – food fatigue (adults get sick of their favorites too), a stomach ache, attention seeking, asserting independence, not being in the mood, or my personal favorite – subconsciously trying to get a rise out of you. Kids (and actually, this holds true for children of pretty much any age) are easily impressed by their ability to affect your mood, especially when they discover that they can

make you angry – and while they may not be able to put it in so many words, your intense irritation at their mild misbehavior is a very interesting payoff, even if the experience isn't exactly positive. Put simply, the more drama, frustration and tears created, the more awesome it is.

The smoothest way to steer your child out of the fussy eating stage – whether they're a preschooler or a grumpy tween – is actually pretty easy here in Vietnam. Whether you eat out or you eat in, it doesn't take much effort to be close to food and the way it's prepared. It can be a delight to introduce your kid to the whole process of creating a meal – from buying food at the wet market and selecting ingredients through to preparation and cooking – and it can be done together in your own kitchen or by carefully watching the chefs at a curbside restaurant. The Vietnamese diet (for all its dubious choices of animal parts) is exotic and diverse and it's not all that difficult to draw your child in to the nuances of cooking. Generate a little enthusiasm for what you're putting on the plate, and they may just be interested enough to eat it.

That problem solved, I have only one thing left to do – go and finish that whole box of Coco Pops by myself. No complaints there. ■





Catherine Brown is a Grade 2 homeroom teacher. She has been working in the Primary Years Program at ISHCMC for three years.

Techie Students

How tablets have enhanced learning

DIGITAL LEARNING IS a key skill in the 21st century and using iPads in the classroom has been ideal for promoting new ways of learning. The iPad is a perfect digital tool for our young learners because it's small, portable, visual and hands-on, which makes it a more practical and versatile tool for students than laptops. So, how has it changed learning in my classroom?

The benefits go beyond engaging students. While there are a tremendous range of games developed for use on the iPad, I want my students to see the iPad as a way to create their own content rather than to be merely consumers. I

avoid using it as a form of entertainment, but rather as a way to empower my students to channel their interests. We use our iPads for discovery, creation and collaborative learning.

The tablets are excellent for developing research skills and have become an integral part of my guided reading circles at all levels. Less cumbersome and more effective than dictionaries, we often use Google Translate or Google images when coming across unknown words or concepts. My students are becoming increasingly independent in their learning, able to use the iPad as a source of reference, rather than asking adults.

Having iPads in the classroom has helped to nurture self-expression and creativity in the ways that we present writing, particularly with the apps iMovie and Comic Life. Because of the simple (yet powerful) interface of iMovie, my 8-year-old students have proved impressively capable and independent when creating their own collaborative films. Allowing children to make their own movies is a great activity to develop their creative, technical and cooperative skills. The students in my class have made several short films on the school campus, including a zombie movie.

The iPads have also enriched my approach to developing factual writing skills. Comic Life is another one of my favorite apps – it is a publishing program installed on all the iPads, which allows students to create posters or comic books. This app allows you to easily insert photos, text and speech into a range of template pages. The finished products look professional and give the students a real sense of achievement. We use this app throughout our Units of Inquiry, in Mathematics and in literacy to publish their thinking, discoveries and investigations. Some examples in our classroom include going on a 3D shape hunt, excursion recounts, interviews, writing up science investigations and many more. Using Comic Life has helped to enrich the unit being presented and enables my students to explain their answers in a unique and creative way.

For me, the iPad is a great way to integrate technology in the classroom and to energize and engage students. Technology is progressing at an astounding rate, so who knows what technology will look like by the time my current Grade 2 students leave school or which technological tools I will be using in five years' time to empower my students in their learning. But for now, I'm really excited about the potential of the iPad in my classroom and look forward to extending its use further. ■

>>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.

Enquiries and Admissions

Tel: 5431 1833/34/35/36

Email: office@theabcis.com

www.theabcis.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.

An Phu Primary Campus

225 Nguyen Van Huong, D2

3744 4551

apprimary@bisvietnam.com

An Phu Secondary Campus

246 Nguyen Van Huong, D2

3744 2335

apsecondary@bisvietnam.com

Tu Xuong Primary Campus

43-45 Tu Xuong Street, D3

3932 0210

txprimary@bisvietnam.com

www.bisvietnam.com



Deutsche Schule Ho Chi Minh City International German School

Deutsche Schule (IGS) offers a German curriculum from Early Years to Grade 12 which is approved and supported by the German government. IGS is staffed by native German, Vietnamese and English speakers who have many years of teaching experience.

We offer a link between Vietnamese and German culture, an international program with German standards and the immersion of German culture into everyday life.

12, Vo Truong Toan, An Phu

08 37 44 63 44

info@igs-hcmc.de

www.igs-hcmc.de



We leave no question unanswered

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, District 2, HCMC

www.eishcmc.com



The International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)

The most established school in Ho Chi Minh City is celebrating 20 years of success in 2013. ISHCMC is the only school in HCMC with full accreditation to teach all three IB programs to students from 2 to 18. ISHCMC is fully accredited by both the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of School and Colleges (NEASC), two of the most prestigious international accreditation organisations. ISHCMC has 975 students from over 50 different nationalities enjoying recently upgraded facilities.

28 Vo Truong Toan, D2

www.ishcmc.com



Renaissance International School Saigon

Renaissance is an International British school providing an inclusive curriculum based upon the British curriculum complemented by the International Primary Curriculum and International Baccalaureate. The school has made a conscious decision to limit numbers and keep class sizes small to ensure each student is offered an education tailored to meet his or her individual learning needs. It is a family school providing a stimulating and secure learning environment with first-class facilities including a 350-seat theatre, swimming pool, mini-pool, play-areas, gymnasium, IT labs, music and drama rooms, science labs and an all-weather pitch.

74 Nguyen Thi Thap, D7

3773 3171 ext 120/121/122

www.renaissance.edu.vn





Saigon Star International School

Saigon Star is a student focused international primary school offering high quality first class provision. Specializing in the British National Curriculum, all of the class teachers hold international teaching qualification. In the early years program, a Montessori specialist works closely with the main class teachers to ensure a high rate of progress.

The school also provides specialists for children requiring extra support with ESL.

**Residential Area No.5,
Thanh My Loi Ward, D2
3742 STAR / 3742 7827
www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn**



The American School of Vietnam

The American School of Vietnam (TAS) is a young school that has been granted candidacy 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 ward, D2, HCMC
www.theamericanschool.edu.vn
08 3519 2223 , 08 3519 2224
info@tasvietnam.edu.vn**



THE AMERICAN SCHOOL
OF VIETNAM



The French International School Saint Ange

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

**188A2, Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2, HCMC
0120 304 8875
saintange2.vn@gmail.com
www.sa-saigon.com**



Also...

American International School

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

**Elementary School (102C Nguyen Van Cu, D1)
Middle School (35 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh)
High School (781/C1-C2 Le Hong Phong, D10)**

APU International School

Operating since 2004, APU International School is a private coeducational international school enrolling students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Instruction is conducted in English, but there is an English Language Development (ELD) program available to students who require it. It is currently a member of the College Board, and is an official SAT testing site.

**Elementary (501 Lac Long Quan, D11)
Middle and High School (286 Lanh Binh Thang, D11)
www.apu.edu.vn**

Australian International School (AIS)

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

**Xi Campus (Kindergarten)
190 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
Thao Dien Campus (Kindergarten & Primary School)**

APSC Compound

**36 Thao Dien, D2
Thu Thiem Campus (Kindergarten, Primary, Middle & Senior School)
East-West Highway, D2
3742 4040
www.aivietnam.com**

Canadian International School

Now in its fifth year of operation with a student population of 700 students in grades K-12, CIS- VN has received approval from the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam and the Department of Education and Training in Ho Chi Minh City to accept both Vietnamese nationals and expat nationals. The school's language of instruction is English.

**No 86, Road 23, D7
www.cis.edu.vn**

Canada Vietnam Kindergarten

According to the average age of each class as well as the physiology and psychology of each age, CVK has deployed a curriculum that ensures the balance between study and playtime, Vietnamese and English learning.

**Street 23, Tan Phu, D7
5412 3028
www.cvr.edu.vn**

Horizon International Bilingual School

Offers curriculum for kindergarten, primary, secondary and high school. Classes are taught in English and Vietnamese. Offers scholarships for children who achieve excellence in school.

**6 - 6A - 8, Street 44, D2
5402 2482
www.hibs.vn**

International School Saigon Pearl

ISSP is an elementary school for children 2 to 11 years of age. Offers an academically rigorous American curriculum. The school has several smartboards, projectors and an

independent IT suite that allows students the opportunity to interact with technology to enhance learning.

**92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh
082227788
www.issp.edu.vn**

Schools of North America

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www.ssis.edu.vn**

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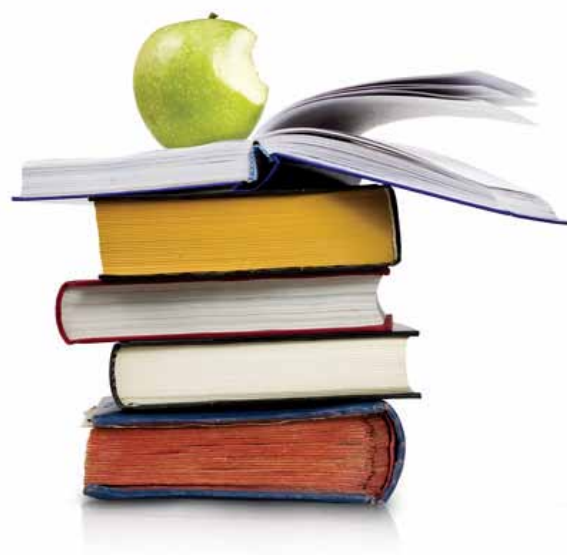
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www.saigonssouth.sis.edu.vn**



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Faces & Places



Stella Artois Now Available

Last month Stella Artois held their official launch party at 2 Lam Son bar at the Park Hyatt. The Belgium beer is still painstakingly brewed to perfection in a time-honored tradition dating back to 1366, using only the finest ingredients including the best traditional malted barley and European hops.

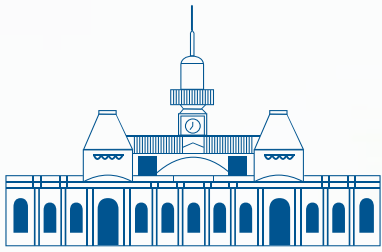
IMAGES PROVIDED BY **STELLA ARTOIS**



Prisma Night Run

Vietnam's first 5km night time fun run featured blasts of light and sound that transported runners into an electric wonderland. A concert was held afterwards at the finish line.

IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**



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