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VIETNAM

JULY 2015

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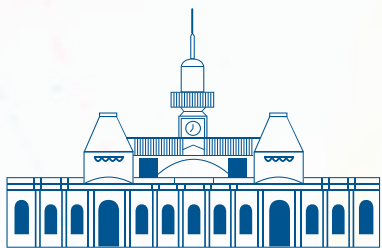
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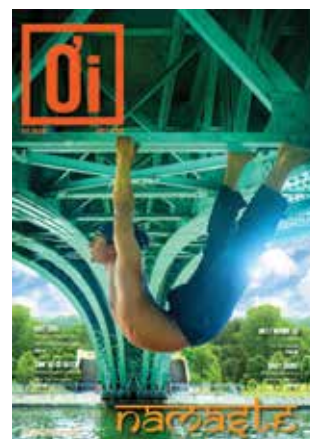
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SECONDARY



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Datebook

What's on this month...

JULY 12

What: Ultra Speed Music Show

Where: Phu Tho Stadium (1 Lu Gia, D11); Tickets start at VND149,000

About: The music and motorbike stunt show features DJ Myno, DJ Melo, multi-talented DJ Tio from Vietnam and DJ "Angel" Faahssai from Thailand. The main act is a stunt show combined with music and laser lights by the world-renowned The Nuclear Cowboy Show.

Contact: Call or text 090 883 7734 for more info

JUL 11

What: Future Now Rave in Color

Where: SECC (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7); Tickets start at VND450,000

About: An EDM painting event with DJs, international dance music along with multi-color UV paint blasting the audience and stage. Everything and everyone will be soaked in color shot through paint cannons, high-pressure pump machines, water guns and more.

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JUL 16

What: Braids

Where: Cargo Back Stage (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, Q4); 8pm; VND250,000 in advance, VND300,000 at the door

About: Loud Minority presents experimental pop outfit Braids, who are touring Asia on the back of their acclaimed album *Deep In The Iris*. Now three albums in, Braids' latest release deals with subject matters such as abuse, pornography and isolation. While this may be a little too much for some, there is still an ethereal beauty about the record that enchants while depicting a reality that resonates in equal measure. Cargo's new Back Stage venue provides the perfect intimate setting to bring these songs to life. This will be the group's first show in Vietnam.

Contact: For more info, email dkilroy7@yahoo.co.uk, buy tickets at www.ticketbox.vn



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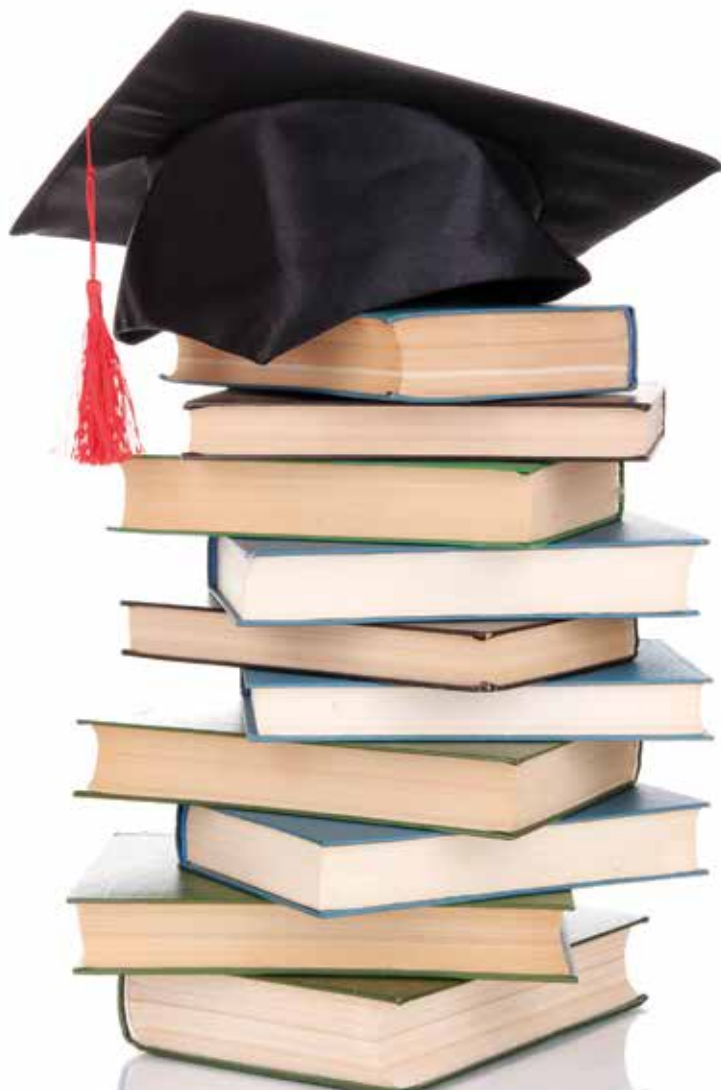
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JULY 17

What: Pulse #9 with Ed Davenport

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 9pm (free before 11pm, VND150,000 after)

About: Supported by Chris Wolter (HeartBeat), BAX (Feel of Life Recs) and live visuals by Erol, local techno specialists host their Pulse night featuring a name straight out of the electronic aristocracy - Ed Davenport. British producer, DJ and label operator Davenport has slowly yet surely built a career in electronic music. He runs his own label, Counterchange Recordings, co-runs the historic Infrastructure New York imprint with Function, and releases music under his Inland guise. In May 2014 Davenport unveiled a new chapter in his artistic development as he teamed up with Function as Function/Inland for the first release on the newly re-launched Infrastructure label. Their *Odeon/Rhyl* EP met critical acclaim and he now co-runs the label with the respected American techno-mainstay.

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

JUL 18

What: Manifesto

Where: Cargo Back Stage (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, Q4); 9pm; VND250,000 advance, VND350,000 at the door

About: One of world's most in-demand DJs and producers, Alex Metric, will make his Vietnam

debut at Manifesto on the night. Having produced tracks with Charli XCX, Steve Angello and Ian Brown as well as remixes for Ellie Goulding, N.E.R.D. and Depeche Mode, Alex's reputation has grown globally over the last five years. With a diverse style that incorporates house, disco, electronic, rock, hip-hop and pop music, Alex is known for his ability to get dance floors rocking, whether in front of 40,000 people at Exit festival or in the confines of an intimate club. Joining Alex on the night will be Manifesto residents, Soul Central (Defected UK) and Rufus Miller (Tropical Velvet). As Vietnam's first warehouse party, Manifesto promises to be a special night in the intimate setting of Cargo's Back Stage.

Contact: For more info, email dkilroy7@yahoo.co.uk, buy tickets at www.ticketbox.vn

JULY 19

What: Rork

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

About: DJ, remix master and label manager, DJ Rork is a pioneer in bringing house music to the French scene. Even after 15 years, he still influences the electronic music scene in France. In 1992 he worked in a Parisian record shop, which allowed him to listen to imports from Detroit, Chicago and New York, the perfect way to gain multiple influences and narrow his musical style as a DJ. Two years later he joined Radio FG, the first radio station in France dedicated to underground house music, and still hosts his own weekly residency mixing live from the FG studio. DJ Rork will be packing his deep understanding of what makes people move right into the soul of this night.

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



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JULY 31

What: Dave Aju

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

About: San Francisco (US) native Marc Barrite created the DJ/production alias Dave Aju as a vehicle for his unique take on electronic music. Working at his own pace, Dave Aju has come to be known as a reliable source for fresh and expressive sounds, combining knowledge and passion for the roots of dance music culture with a natural fascination with sound and an adventurous approach, unafraid to try new things. A broad palette of outside musical influences can be found in Aju's work, though his jazz upbringing and hip-hop foundation are clearly at the core, with an overall warm, laid back, unmistakably west coast vibe. His debut full-length album *Open Wide* is still causing a stir in the electronic music community after being nominated for the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik (German Record Critics' Award).

Contact: Visit

www.theobservatory-hcmc.com for more info

AUGUST 7

What: Zedd True Colors Tour Live

Where: Rach Chiec Golf Driving Range, D2. Tickets start from VND550,000

About: Event promoter BrandIn,

in conjunction with Pulse Active, will bring in multi-platinum, Grammy award winning artist, DJ and producer Zedd. The chart topping Russian-German musician will perform a single show in Ho Chi Minh City.

Zedd, born Anton Zaslavski, has separated himself in a crowded field by drawing from a diverse musical training and a background spanning from classical to post-hardcore and metal, creates his signature electro house sound noted for its detailed, carefully produced compositions that also appeal to audiences outside of the EDM realm. He signed with Interscope Records in 2012 and released his debut album *Clarity* to much critical acclaim with world's top pop culture magazine *Rolling Stone* deeming him an "Artist to Watch." He's produced songs for artists including Lady Gaga, Matthew



Koma, Black Eyed Peas and Fatboy Slim and Selena Gomez. Zedd kept his own creative work flourishing in a second studio album *True Colors* that was released in May 2015. Zedd's appearance in Saigon is a part of his True Colors tour in Asia and is the first stop on a whirlwind visit to the region that sees him also visiting the Philippines, Thailand and Japan, all within the space of nine days.

The purpose built stage at Rach Chiec Golf Driving Range will span over 400sqm, with the natural green grass auditorium expected to hold up to 7,000 guests for the event. This will be the first large scale live music event for the BrandIn team, but its partner Pulse Active has rapidly established its reputation as one of the pre-eminent entertainment companies in the country, having hosted an array of fun run and music events that have featured crowds over 12,000 people in the past few years. The Pulse Active team has previously brought other world famous artists to Vietnam including singer Kelly Rowland and rapper T-Pain.

Contact: Visit www.zeddhcmc.com for more info and www.ticketbox.vn/zeddhcmc for tickets



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Troi Oi

The country in numbers

160

Wooden benches are being added to Nguyen Hue Pedestrian Street. The century-old trees that were cut down last July during construction of the metro station in front of the Saigon Opera House are making a comeback in the form of benches.

50



messages per day from a single number may be the latest restriction imposed by the government in a bid to fight SMS spamming. The government's new attempt to stop spam messages has received strong opposition from telecom companies. The Ministry of Information and Communication said under the newly proposed rule phone users are only allowed to send out 20 messages per hour and five messages every five minutes. Those exceeding these limits will have their numbers blocked by mobile carriers. The ministry introduced a rule last year which says that a phone number can send up to 30 messages a minute, but it said rampant advertising spam messages have prompted it to be stricter. According to the ministry, Vietnam accounts for five percent of all spam messages in the world, ranking only after the US, China and Russia. It said any phone user who needs to send more messages than the new limits will have to go through some registration with their telecom firm. Telecom firms have protested the plan, saying that many of their young, student customers love texting and they can send 200 to 300 messages a day.



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QUỸ HƯƠNG DÀ PHÍ CHÁU

684

pinetrees in Lam Dong were poisoned by Pham Van Hai. His arrest was made following an investigation from the Bao Loc City Forestry Protection Office. The trees, planted in 1984, were injected with chemicals into the trunks through holes or slashes that could have been made with axes. Police are still searching for Hai's accomplices and the motive is still unknown at this time.

15,000

illegal Chinese chicks were seized by customs officers in Quang Ninh Province last month. Be Van Quy, a resident of Quang Dien Commune in Hai Ha District, who was transporting the chickens, said he bought them from several individuals in Mong Cai City and was planning to sell them at various markets in Thai Binh Province.

VND250 MILLION

was how much the "Napalm Girl" photo was sold for at an auction in Saigon last month. It was among Nick Ut's five photos which were purchased at an auction to raise funds for underprivileged children and to help fund heart surgeries. "Napalm Girl" features a naked 9-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc, running towards the camera after a napalm attack in Tay Ninh Province on June 8, 1972. It's considered one of the most powerful photos that depict the brutality of the war in Vietnam. In 1973, the photo won the Pulitzer

Prize for Spot News Photography. The picture was sold to a Vietnamese businessman and includes Phuc's signature, who now lives in Canada with her husband and children. Nick Ut, also known as Huynh Cong Ut, was born in Vietnam in 1951 and started working for the Associated Press at the age of 18 to replace his brother Huynh Thanh My, who died while working for the news agency as a war correspondent.

30 MILLION

monthly active Facebook users in Vietnam now. One in every three people in Vietnam – with a population of 90 million – logs onto Facebook at least once a month, the latest data released by the world's largest social network shows. The latest Facebook statistics show that 20 million Vietnamese access the social network on a daily basis, 17 million of whom do so with their smartphones or tablets. Each Vietnamese user spends an average of two hours and 30 minutes on Facebook every day, mostly connecting with friends and visiting Facebook pages run by brands and shops. The Vietnamese spend twice as much time on Facebook as the amount they use to watch TV, according to the data. The Facebook pages that are most visited by Vietnamese users are those of the fashion and beauty, dining, and travel promotion categories.



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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

HAMLEYS OPENS

Hamleys (www.hamleys.com.vn), a famous British toy shop established in 1760, is announcing the opening of its first store in Ho Chi Minh City. Situated in District 7 at SC VivoCity, this will be the largest toy shop in Vietnam, at 800 square meters and on two levels. The toy shop will include thousands of toys and all Hamleys iconic features including opportunities for children to play, expertise in service and toy demonstration. Hamleys rich history began with William Hamley, a Cornishman from Bodmin, England. William Hamley dreamed of the best toy shop in the world when opening his toy shop at Holborn, London in 1760. In 2015, Hamleys, as a global brand, extends significantly further than the famous London toy shop in 17 countries with 11 stores in the UK & Ireland and 44 international stores.

AIS AND LORETO

The Friendly Library for Rural Children was inaugurated in Tra Vinh. The project was undertaken in partnership between Loreto Kids Charity (www.loretovietnam.org) and Australian International School (AIS). It is among 16 such libraries that the Australia-based Loreto foundation has set up in five remote provinces around Vietnam. It is also an inspiring pilot and exemplary "literature" project funded by AIS.

Terry Storer, AIS's deputy executive principal, approached Loreto Kids Charity to initiate a concept of setting up an empty room at his school as a model "Friendly Library." The school community began to gradually stock up library resources in the room through fundraising activities and additionally to raise awareness of the significance of supporting rural and underprivileged students. All books and furniture acquired thus were then delivered to the sponsored school. Prior to the final delivery, the room renovation work had been completed and covered through counterpart funding from the Education Office of Chau Thanh District. Loreto Kids Charity and AIS look forward to the success of this first joint project to have a ripple effect and to cooperate in future projects.

MEETINGS IMAGINED

The Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon (www.marriott.com/sgnbnr) has rolled out Meetings Imagined. Meetings Imagined is an online creative meetings platform by Marriott. Marriott analyzed over 40,000 meetings that took place in their hotels around the world and found that there are basically seven key purposes that drive the need for a meeting: celebrate, decide, educate, ideate, network, produce and promote. Featuring an online platform, MeetingsImagined.com provides expert tips, the latest meeting trends, and hundreds of inspirational images to spark creativity – all curated by the objective of the meeting. Using the website, customers can collaborate with hotels to design custom experiences or view signature experiences featured at the participating test hotels, as well as post favorite images on social media sites, such as Pinterest and Facebook.



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ESCAPE THE SUMMER HEAT

The Ho Tram Resort Casino Vietnam (www.thegrandhottram.com) is gearing itself up for a season of hot nights out and cool waterside days, as it announces its new Summer Escape packages. The new Summer Escape package is valid till September 30, 2015 with rates starting from VND2,888,000++/night on weekdays and VND3,888,000++/night Fridays and Saturdays, including: daily international buffet breakfast for two people at Ginger, complimentary resort-wide wifi access, complimentary mini-bar with select beverages, access to summer fun including multiple resort pools, a swim up bar, fitness center, spa, wet areas and more. Boasting the largest world class casino in Vietnam, Ho Tram Strip's current gaming facilities include 585 slot machines, 90 table games and multiple VIP table rooms for the finest in full-service gaming. All packages at The Ho Tram Resort Casino include complimentary round-trip shuttle bus between Ho Chi Minh City, Vung Tau and the resort.



WANDERLUST PAPERIE DEBUTS

"My challenge is to make people dream and give them the desire to write again, to reconnect with themselves by writing on paper about their journey and experiences when traveling. Also my mission is to reconnect them with their loved ones by writing cards," explains Paulette Chheav, creator of Wanderlust Paperie (Facebook: *Wanderlust Paperie*), a new range of eco-friendly stationery that includes notebooks, note cards and postcards.

Wanderlust was inspired by her desire to reconnect with her Cambodian roots and her search for identity. The images in the first collection are taken by Paulette. She hopes to bring in contributors for her next line, and depict her journey through Southeast Asia, witnessing the intermingling between East and West and a convergence with people around the world beyond familiar culture and customs. "While traveling I usually like to have a notebook to write down all the places I'd like to visit, where to eat, main attractions, directions and phone numbers. I draw maps as my sense of direction is terrible," she says.

All the pages in the notebooks are made with 100 percent recycled Kraft paper, giving it a brown, vintage texture, while the covers are made with Shiro Echo recycled paper produced from 100 percent post-consumer recycled waste. Postcards and notecards are made with Crush, a new range of eco-friendly paper with a distinctive flecked texture and appearance made with fruits and nuts residues.

Wanderlust Paperie can be found at Ginkgo Concept Store (254, De Tham, D1), Kokoi's Cafe (24 Thao Dien, D2), The Mach House (75 Pasteur, D1) and Work Saigon (267/2 Dien Bien Phu, D3).

AVANI QUY NHON PROMOTION

Book four nights and fill your holiday with food and fun with daily breakfast, two dinners, an island kayak tour and roundtrip airport transfers. The promotion includes: a four-night stay in AVANI Deluxe Studio Room or AVANI Junior Ocean Suite, an a la carte dinner at Tre restaurant, a mountain biking excursion with a picnic lunch for two persons per stay, and more. Rates start from VND4.1 million, valid until May 31, 2016. Visit www.avanihotels.com/quynhon for more info.

NGU HANH BUFFET

Ngu Hanh Buffet (Central Restaurant, Level 1, Liberty Saigon Central Hotel, 179 Le Thanh Ton, D1) will offer a lunchtime buffet from Monday to Friday with a wide selection of dishes for VND259,000++/person. In addition to Ngu Hanh Buffet, Central restaurant is diversifying its menu with new services: a brunch hotpot buffet at VND299,000++/person and an a la carte dinner option.



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CAFFEBENE

The café (58 Dong Khoi, D1; 76A Le Lai, D1) is rolling out a summer menu focusing on snowflake with a variety of flavors such as: Fresh Mango, Strawberry, Cheese, Tiramisu, Injeolmi, Choco and Milk. All the ingredients that make up snowflake *bingsu* at Caffebene in Vietnam are imported from Korea to ensure freshness and quality.

VIP BEAN CARD

The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf launched their new VIP Bean Card. Card holders can enjoy a 10 percent discount at all outlets, with benefits extending to Forbes Vietnam, California Fitness & Yoga Centers, Star BHD Cineplex, Hotel Quickly, Accessorize, Havaianas and Bebe.

AMERICAN FOOD & WINE

The US is home to world-class produce and delectable wines so throughout the month of July, Corso Steakhouse & Bar (Ground Floor - Norfolk Hotel, 117 Le Thanh Ton, D1) is showcasing a selection of US specialties including flame-grilled Santa Ana T-Bone Steak, Chicago Style Bone in Rib-eye, US Koroputa Pork and for seafood lovers, Pan-seared Jumbo Sea Scallops. With a wide range of US wines and tempting desserts to complement your meal, Corso Steakhouse & Bar is an ideal rendezvous for any dining occasion.



WORLD OF WEDDINGS

Plan your dream wedding at the first annual World of Weddings fair at InterContinental Nha Trang (www.ihg.com). View the latest bridal designs at a catwalk fashion show. Be inspired as you learn wedding essentials at the one-stop-shop for all kinds of wedding requirements, and enjoy exclusive privileges from our special offers. Free admission on July 25 from 9:30am to 5:30pm at the Grand Ballroom. For a limited time, to make the most out of your stay at InterContinental Hotels & Resorts, until August 31, 2015 enjoy double IHG Rewards Club points on restaurant dining, drinks and in-room services charged to your room including room service, telephone and laundry services.

ANANTARA MUI NE PROMOTION

Choose either a two-bedroom suite with a lagoon and pool view or hide away in a spacious private villa, relishing the pure indulgence of a personal pool and an outdoor dining pavilion with the resort's latest package that includes: 30 percent discount for two nights' accommodation or more in a pool villa or suite, daily buffet breakfast for two persons staying in a one bedroom pool villa and for four persons staying in a two bedroom suite or two bedroom pool villa, and more. Rates start from VND4,401,884. Visit www.mui-ne.anantara.com for more info.



20 Mac Thi Buoi, Ben Nghe ward, D1
Tel: (08)38224868 - 0901 360368



THE ISLAND LODGE PROMOTION

The Island Lodge (www.theislandlodge.com.vn) is a 12-room Indochine-themed lodge set on Unicorn Island (Thoi Son). Mekong River view rooms and bungalows are scattered around the grounds, but the jewel is the open air restaurant/lounge fronting 50 meters of riverfront along with a French restaurant, an infinity swimming pool and Jacuzzi. A special package is available where guests who stay two nights get the second night half off, while those who stay three nights pay for only two nights. The promo is valid until October 31, 2015.

SUSHI HAPPY HOUR

Ichiba Sushi (204 Le Lai, D1) is having a summer offering of happy hour (2pm to 5pm every Saturday and Sunday) where sushi and kitchen dishes from their happy hour menu are 20 percent off, along with a buy 1 drink get 1 drink free promotion. Ichiba Sushi is a combination of a modern sushi bar in a multi-level space. Van, together with his brother Daniel Phan, bring with them over 20 years of food and beverage experience in the US and aims to redefine sushi dining complete with a live DJ station on the ground floor and a lounge area on the second.

Role Call

Sometimes there's a lot more to a new haircut than meets the eye

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD



WITH A STRONG, angled jawline and a rock-steady bearing that has been captivating her fan base for over a decade, Kathy Uyen is one handsome actress. That's not to deny her femininity, however – she may be touched by a man's beauty, but she has always managed to wear it like a woman. Her elegant, gently androgynous look has been turning heads since her earliest appearances, helping her to win leading roles that have increasingly diverged from passive, feminine stereotypes. In a sense, though, her recent decision to embrace the strong contours of her own face with a fresh cut is a liberating move that's long overdue.

It may come as a surprise, then, to discover that Kathy Uyen has spent most of her career trying to hide her signature look behind a long, girly hair-do. Ironically, while consciously gravitating towards fiercely independent parts (and despite her own driven, tomboyish personality), she's been

too afraid to abandon her classic hairstyle – the kind that only tends to score bookings from directors seeking a submissive look for exoticized Asian female roles. All along, the thing that Kathy has feared most was being told that she looks like a boy.

"I've always been shy about it," she admits, cupping her chin and flashing a quick profile. "I do get comments. When I photograph, it's always 'chin down, turn this way, make it less square.' I got self-conscious. Even in the pictures I took myself, I would try not to expose too much jaw. At the end of the day, I go through the same psychological curve as any girl does. Everyone goes through those similar arcs. For people in the public eye, it's just amplified."

Frankly, Kathy seems to have taken a long time to see something that's been obvious to everyone else since the beginning. If there's anything consistent about her acting work as a whole, it's that she has repeatedly

performed empowering female roles. Most of her audience first laid eyes on her back in 2008, when she had a bit part on the popular American TV series *How I Met Your Mother* – in which her character has the singular pleasure of reeling off a couple of lines and then slapping actor Neil Patrick Harris in the face. In her most recent film *Triple Trouble* (*Bộ ba rắc rối*), she joins an all-girl lead cast in a movie which pleasingly flips the playing field – it's the male characters who are objectified and sexualized, while the ladies primarily focus on having a good time.

"Perhaps the audience saw it, yes," she concedes, "but while I was playing these characters who were strong, it was almost as if I was projecting my need for what I wanted to become in them. When you seek to do something so much, it's because you feel you're lacking that thing yourself, and you want to embody that. Then, role by role, you're able to do it more naturally and it



becomes you.”

“I wasn’t even good at acting when I started,” she adds. “That’s why I wanted to be an actress, because I sucked at it and I was so scared of being in front of other people.”

The Big Break

Growing up in San Jose, Kathy’s move to Vietnam came out of a growing involvement in American-Vietnamese media and the opportunities that grew out of that. Her first big break – a major role in Victor Vu’s *Passport to Love* that scored her a coveted Golden Kite award for Best Supporting Actress – cemented the obvious advantages of pursuing her career here. The transition, however, wasn’t easy.

“I was trying to assimilate with what being a celebrity in Vietnam is,” Kathy explains. “I came here in the first two years because I wasn’t one of them, I was still an outsider. I got by because I landed roles that were for Vietnamese-Americans. But after that, I realized that there weren’t going to be that many of them. I wasn’t getting any offers because they were looking for local girls, not girls with a slight American accent.”

Faced with limited acting prospects, Kathy decided on a risky move – there were no scripts out there casting for her type, so she decided to write her own. It was an unlikely gamble, but the resulting feature film *How to Fight in Six Inch Heels* (Âm mưu giày gót

nhon) topped the local box office for three weeks, firmly securing her a place among local screenwriters and producers. In the process, Kathy literally transformed herself into the kind of self-confident, inwardly balanced woman she’s been playing all along.

“I tried to get over my flaws by just putting them in the character and working them out,” she says, commenting on the similarities between her role in *Six Inch Heels* and her own personality. “My friendships with women here changed my definition of what it means to be a strong woman. In America, being a strong woman means you’re very aggressive, opinionated, and you speak your mind. A strong woman in Vietnam is different. She can hold back that emotion, and save it for a time when it’s more effective. They do hold back, but it doesn’t mean that they’re weak. It’s a different strength.”

In many ways, *Six Inch Heels* is a sisterhood film, an ode to the differing strengths embodied by different women – and a reaction, perhaps, to movies in which female character progression is only defined in relation to male lead roles. In the context of Vietnamese cinema, that’s a bold play, and the film was welcomed abroad on festival circuits as a fresh look at the modern face of this country, dubbed “a Vietnam War in couture.”

Kathy’s been back to promote the film, but an immediate return home to pursue her Hollywood career is unlikely for now. A

shot at lead roles in America would pit her against the likes of Maggie Q, Lucy Liu, and Grace Park – whereas here, opportunities to write for the big screen continue to present themselves.

“I am developing projects now,” she says, “developing scripts that I want to write. Do I want to go back to Hollywood one day? Yes, I do. But I want to be able to do co-productions. In the future, besides doing projects in Vietnam, I want to write great projects and collaborate with producers in Asia and collaborate with actors in Hollywood. Maybe they’ll be American actors who happen to be shooting in Vietnam, or we’ll take Vietnamese actors back to America. I want to keep growing as an artist, without the end focus being Hollywood. I want the focus to be the work, as an artist.”

Reaching a satisfying point in her career has also brought opportunities to inspire others. Just last month, Kathy participated in Toto 2015 (a filmmaking class for young adults) in which she mentored an enthusiastic young team working on a short movie in which she took a cameo part. She was also a guest judge on the local reality TV show *Tôi là diễn viên* (*I am an Actor*). This experience, as well as that of coaching and supporting fellow actors on set, has inspired her to open an acting class for newcomers to the entertainment industry here.

“It’s a big change,” she admits. “I do feel a new energy. I feel like something new is coming. My life has for the longest time been all about acting. I was so passionate about it – call it obsessed, call it hypnotized, call it drawn to acting. But I didn’t realize how much I really enjoyed sharing my acting. Before, I was very hesitant to teach it, because I was afraid, what if I stop doing it? But actually teaching it really inspires me to keep going. All these kids, I got such good feedback, and it made me think – wow, I feel really useful.”

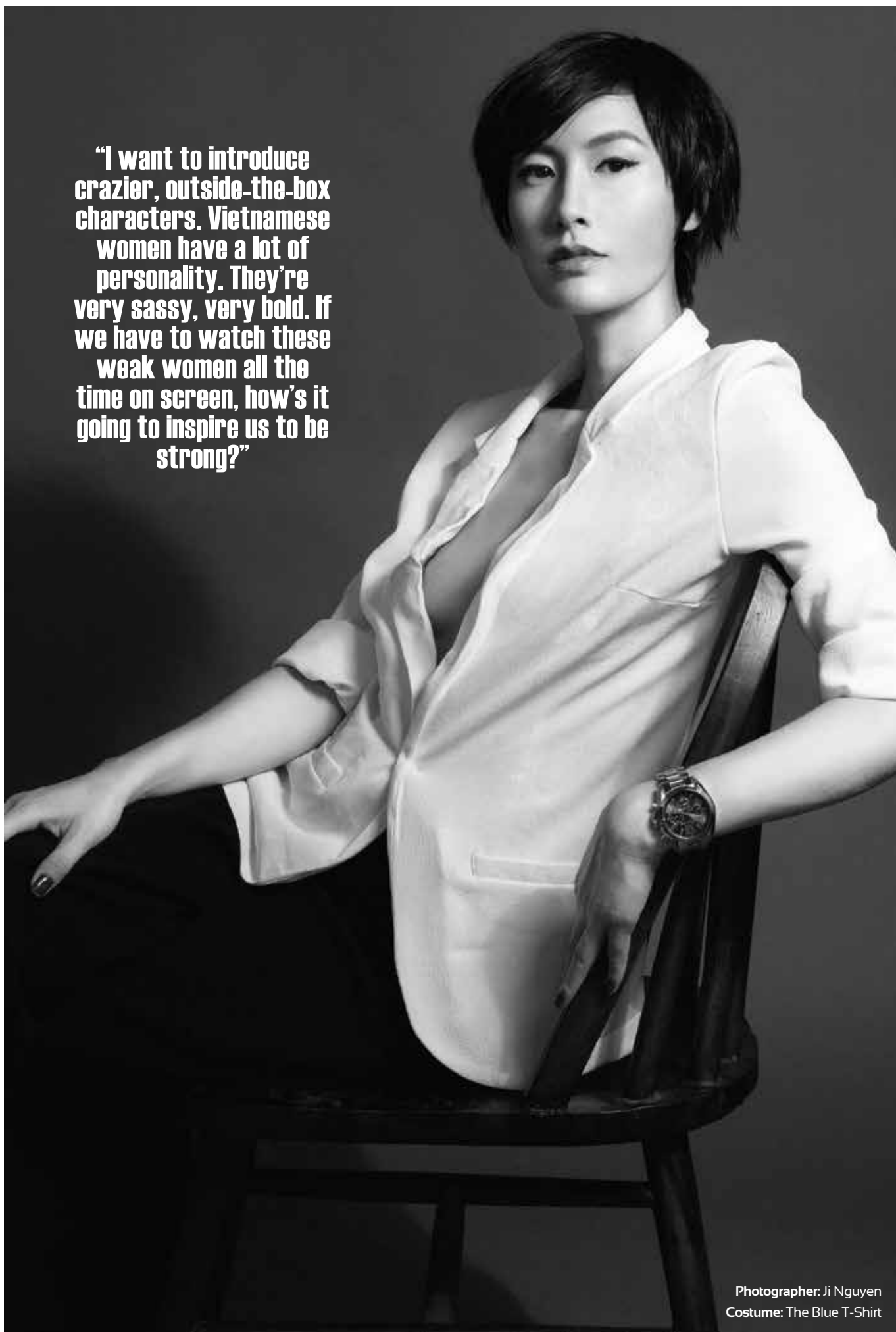
While she expects to begin her classes within the next couple of months, she’s already writing her next screenplay.

“I didn’t like writing before,” she laughs, “but then, I didn’t realize the power of it until the last movie. Then I realized that as an actor, no matter how good you are, you can only be as good as your words. So if you want to take it to the next level, you’ve got to know more about the characters you play. Now I know that power, I’ve learned to embrace it. To get better at it. So that’s why now I feel really balanced.”

If her new look is any indication, it’s a given that whatever we see from Kathy Uyen’s next film, it’s going to be the women who remain on top.

“For the scripts I’m developing, the stories, I want to break stereotypes of women,” she declares. “I want to introduce crazier, outside-the-box characters. Vietnamese women have a lot of personality. They’re very sassy, very bold. If we have to watch these weak women all the time on screen, how’s it going to inspire us to be strong? I feel if I’m going to be a writer, I’m going to write some strong women. Because why not? Wait for someone else to write it? I know women more than I know men, because I’m not a man. You’ve got to write from what you know, right?” ■

“I want to introduce crazier, outside-the-box characters. Vietnamese women have a lot of personality. They’re very sassy, very bold. If we have to watch these weak women all the time on screen, how’s it going to inspire us to be strong?”



Photographer: Ji Nguyen
Costume: The Blue T-Shirt

Off the Quill

A silent, bi-cultural theatrical interpretation of Hamlet

TEXT BY NICHOLAS D. HEATH IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

THE OLD ADAGE that actions speak louder than words takes on a new meaning with The Hamlet Project (www.hamletprojectvietnam.com; July 23 - August 2). When we think of Shakespeare we think of the great literary master and one of the fathers of the English language. Shakespeare not only penned a much loved and lauded collection of prose and sonnets during his lifetime, he also introduced thousands of words and phrases that we still use today. Therefore, the decision by Daniel Croix Henderson (*third from left*), Artistic Director for The Hamlet Project, to create a production of *Hamlet* completely without dialogue, is a tremendously bold endeavor. It's set to be a unique take on a very traditional tale.

"I chose *Hamlet* as the skeleton of our adaption for a variety of reasons," explains Daniel. "In my

experience as a theater artist, I have yet to find a play that explores the human condition in a way that is so revealing and nuanced. I believe that every human being in the world can find their own story within the frame of *Hamlet*. I knew that the material was the right choice for a production that aims to facilitate communication between two cultures, but realized that the language barrier would be an issue. The truth that I have discovered in

my training as an actor is that the physical behavior and expression of the human body transcends spoken language. It is the body that crumbles with heartbreak, tightens with anxiety and quivers with tremendous joy."

If the idea of a 90-minute movement-based production of *Hamlet* wasn't enough, Daniel decided to create another small hurdle for the ambitious production - taking it to Saigon. "When I tell my colleagues in the US that I'm mounting work in Vietnam, it surprises people," he reveals. The decision didn't come out of nowhere though, the idea was inspired by Daniel's uncle who moved to Ho Chi Minh City and described to him, not a backward, war torn place of poverty, but a vibrant, exciting city full of life. These descriptions were at odds with Daniel's own preconceptions, piquing his interest and sowing the seed for the idea that became The Hamlet Project. If the bitter years of war have created an understandably complicated relationship between the US and Vietnam,

they have also helped shape this unique opportunity. Daniel hopes to help heal the wounds of war through interacting and learning from the artistic community in Ho Chi Minh City.

"I'd like this project to serve as a framework for Vietnamese and American people to explore our artistry together, and for a conversation to be started about the relationship between our countries. Artistic collaboration allows us to work with each other in a way that is deeply personal," explains Daniel. "The stories that connect to us can change our lives, alter our beliefs, and help us to grow as people. I believe that if anything can bring people together and create a more compassionate world, it is the power of story."

Daniel sees the project as a valuable chance

to foster artistic relationships between the two countries, and also an avenue to try and change the outdated views he believes many young people in the US today still have about Vietnam. "For a lot of people, that's all they know Vietnam to be. Many members of the production team have experienced the same reaction from their friends and families. At the core of this initial shock is the history of the

war. I believe that this project, particularly the documentary (being shot during the play's production and to be entered into film festivals back in the US), has the ability to expand that perspective and will encourage people in the States to learn about Vietnam in a new light that illustrates the beauty of the country and its people."

Part of the aim of the project isn't just to show something artistically unique to the Vietnamese people, but also to include them. Daniel is vehement about the importance of local involvement with one of the fundamental outcomes of the project being to include Vietnamese talent.

"The inclusion of Vietnamese dancers, actors, and artists in this project is absolutely essential," confirms Daniel. "We came to this country to learn from Vietnamese artists about their personal artistic process. What makes this work particularly exciting to me is that the Vietnamese artists involved in the production will completely bring themselves

"The stories that connect to us can change our lives, alter our beliefs, and help us to grow as people. I believe that if anything can bring people together and create a more compassionate world, it is the power of story."



to the work. Within the skeleton of *Hamlet* each actor will discover how to tell their own story. I am sure that we will benefit from working with each other because we come from such completely different cultures. I have very little knowledge of where methodologies in acting and dance stem from in Vietnam. I am thrilled that our team has the opportunity to go right to the source, to explore the process of creation, and to invent our own way to tell the story."

For countries that have such disparate world views and cultures, the goals of the project are commendable, but will no doubt prove challenging. "I believe that this project will serve as a celebration of the peace between us and offer a theatrical experience unlike anything that has ever existed," enthuses Daniel. ■





Bull's Eye

Saigon's first archery club

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGES BY **GLEN RILEY**

"PEOPLE ASK ME these questions a lot: Why archery? Why not some other modern sport?" says Hoang Anh, founder and president of the Saigon Archery Club (SAC), the first and largest archery club in Ho Chi Minh City. "To a lot of people, archery is kinda boring. Watching an archery tournament is a bit like watching paint dry. But to fans, the beauty of this ancient sport lies in its subtlety. It's like yoga, only more intense."

In a four-by-ten-square-meter-room on the third floor of the Youth Cultural Center (4 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3) are dozens of bows, from simple recurve ones costing as little as USD200 to complex, Olympic level compound bows costing USD2,500. This is the headquarters and storage room for the SAC. The club currently has 30 active archers who participate in club activities on a weekly basis and 50 members in their official roster. Its oldest member is an 84-year-old retiree while its youngest is a teenager still in secondary school. Every day the club is visited by 10 to 20 drop-ins and as high as 50 to 60 during the weekends.

SAC (Facebook: *Saigonarcheryteam*) was founded on June 2013 and the story that led to its formation is one of chance. Hoang Anh, a *Viet Kieu*, was a former coach for the American national archery team and on a trip back to Vietnam he brought with him a bow and went to the Youth Cultural Center to practice. "They have a big yard here that's perfect for practicing. My room at the time was too small even for a beginner's five

meter range practice. I couldn't exactly shoot in it," he explains. Because of Hoang Anh's many joint projects with the state-owned Youth Cultural House, which includes the first community skating rink in the city, he was able to easily obtain permission from the committee to borrow their yard for practices, during which he gathered a sizable group of spectators.

"A lot of kids and teenagers and a fair amount of adults watched," he says. A few weeks later the boldest among them approached him for lessons, and that was how the Saigon Archery Club started. Hoang Anh funded the club himself with his initial investment of ten practice bows ranging from VND3 to VND6 million each. The club inaugurated with ten core members including Hoang Anh as the president and his close friend and assistant Doan Thi Le, who also manages the skating rink, as vice president.

In the last two years, SAC has grown significantly in both membership and capacity. They now have over 30 bows in their stockroom. The club provides several services including skill developing classes from beginner to advanced levels, and bow and yard renting by the hour. Due to its community driven nature and support from the Youth Cultural Center, SAC services are charged on student rates and are easily affordable to most people. Every three weeks it also hosts its own archery competition, using the same standards with which Hoang Anh trained the American national

archery team.

"It could almost be said that archery is a lot like an amalgamation of yoga and golf. It is like yoga in that to perform a pose correctly the breathing must be perfectly relaxed and normal even though many of the muscles in the body will be under extension or contraction and you will be fighting against this tension to maintain a relaxed pose and let your body flow into it." As he speaks, he demonstrates with a practice bow, shifting into stance with the ease of one who has played the sport for decades. "The same occurs with archery. And as with golf, muscle memory is incredibly important in that the swing or the shot must be done exactly correct each time. In Olympic recurve target archery, medalists will be pulling and holding 40-50 pounds and must have extremely fluid and relaxed composure and technique to get the shot off accurately and consistently over a great number of arrows shot in each competition."

"There's something so nostalgic in archery, something elegant, and a little bit romantic too. Like Robin Hood, only in modern gears," he adds.

The Saigon Archery Club has a District 7-based skill class and archery range that is also under Hoang Anh's ownership. Though none of its members aside from Hoang Anh has participated in an international tournament, he hopes to eventually train the first generation of professional Vietnamese archers within his club. ■



Hidden Resistance

Discovering Saigon's secrets

TEXT BY LORCAN LOVETT IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



PHO BINH, OR Peace Soup, is a modest restaurant churning out *pho bo*, Vietnam's traditional beef noodle soup, just like hundreds of others in Ho Chi Minh City. However, hungry customers who venture to the second floor of the three-storey house will witness the room where men and women debated, planned and ordered an irreversible and unforgettable slice of history destined to cause ripples across the world. The Tet Offensive began here at 7 Ly Chinh Thang in District 3 and went on to change the course of the American War.

History buffs will use places like this to exemplify the city as a veritable goldmine weaved with secret tunnels and cellars hidden beneath commonplace buildings and used to launch guerrilla campaigns against the French and Americans.

What makes Pho Binh even more exceptional was its proximity to the enemy. The owner, Dong Chi Ngo Toai, who died nine years ago at the age of 96, would only have to walk 100 yards up the street to see the military police headquarters and simply nip downstairs to serve the American soldiers who frequented the restaurant during the war's peak.

Now former northern Vietnamese soldier Nguyen Thanh Minh, 65, takes curious guests above the kitchen to the long room spread with red and white tiles kept glossy in the glow of sunshine from the large front window and stark ceiling lights. It's easy to imagine the revolutionaries sprawling maps on these same 55-year-old wooden tables in the final days before launching the offensive on January 30, 1968, taking the forces of

South Vietnam, the US, and their allies by surprise and triggering a landslide of anti-war demonstrations in the US following images of American casualties portrayed in the world's media.

"This is the place they hid the plans," Minh discloses, grinning and pointing to a slot behind a Buddha portrait next to a shrine of the owner and his wife. "The police did not find it. Years ago an American soldier who was fluent in Vietnamese came back here," says Minh whose daughter married the owner's son. The soldier asked if Vietnamese hate the Americans or not. I said 'no'. The war has finished. No one wants pain and hurt anymore."

Minh, who says he remembers "a lot of death" during the war, was himself injured while hiding from bombs in a tunnel in his

home city of Hue. The lengthy scar on his left shin is a harsh reminder.

There are plenty of signs the restaurant attracts people interested in more than the soup. As well as Minh gesturing for each visitor who goes upstairs to have their pictures taken at the tables, one of the walls has about a dozen photographs and notes from tourists, while the business which has served people since 1953 has been mentioned in guidebooks.

The laminated notes pinned on the wall express gratitude for the “delicious” soup along with thanks to the owner for helping bring the war to an end, as if the guests were having an internal battle over which should take priority. The opposing wall is plastered with portraits of the very people who launched the offensive in this room, all of whom have likely died since. The owner’s son still works in the kitchen sometimes.

What Lies Beneath

Most of the resistance in the city during the First Indochina War and the American War was happening underground. It’s harder to gauge the impact of propaganda publishing sites compared to an overt campaign like the Tet Offensive but the sheer number of cellars dug out for printing material and stocking weapons that have been discovered shows their importance. One of them, known as Secret Cellar B, was dug in 1952 during the war against French colonialism and lies beneath a former family home at 122/351 Ngo Gia Tu, District 10. During its five years of service, the covert printing press published leaflets about the latest news transcribed from northern radio broadcasts.

Historian and author of *Exploring Ho Chi Minh City*, Tim Doling, says it was abandoned in December 1957 and stuffed with soil-filled containers when it was decommissioned in 1959. This preserved the structure intact until after reunification. Visitors access the cellar by walking to a wardrobe in the corner of the rear bedroom, opening the door and climbing down a ladder into an underground tunnel through a secret hatch in the floor.

“This tunnel leads a short way round a corner to a dead end,” says Tim. “The real entrance is right behind you. In the First Indochina War years it would have been concealed, and this, plus the dead end tunnel, were there to fool anyone who discovered it that there was nothing but a small storage cellar below the house.” The real entrance slopes down a narrow tube about 10 meters long to the cellar where there are displays and two mannequins, one of them on a typewriter. Visitors can see Secret Cellar B by arranging a viewing with the District 10 Office of Culture, Sports and Tourism at 474 3 Thang 2 Street in District 10.

A continuous flow of tourists explore the extensive network of tunnels in the Cu Chi district. The northern Vietnamese soldiers were aided by the Phu Thao Hoa tunnels dug beneath cassava fields in the city’s northwest suburb of Tan Phu in 1947. Tim says these tunnels, packed with weapons, food and medical supplies, acted as a prototype to future tunnels and played a crucial role in the



Nguyen Thanh Minh



Owner, Dong Chi Ngo Toai

First Indochina War. And in the American War there was a surge of claustrophobic weapon storage cellars. On the evening of January 30, 1968, a 19-strong team used weapons stored in District 3 in an attack against the palace where all members died. The cellar was not discovered at the time.

“We know that the one used for weapons storage in District 3 was crucial to the attack on the palace,” explains Tim. “We also know that the one in District 6 was a valuable safe house where many revolutionary activists were hidden. At one time there were many more cellars of this kind dotted around the city, which, like the tunnels at Phu Tho Hoa or Cu Chi, made it possible for the northern Vietnamese soldiers to carry on their activities covertly in the heart of the city,

right under the nose of the police and army.”

These intriguing cellars were originally restored by the authorities for school trips and aren’t yet prepared for the mass tourism market. Tim has introduced tourism companies to the administrator of two District 10 cellars in an effort to popularize these enigmatic sites and make use of the city’s rich history and heritage.

He adds: “I hope that this will help to get things moving, perhaps initially with the development of special-interest tours which take in a series of secret cellars and tunnels. In the longer term, I hope that it will be possible for anyone to call at one of these sites, pay an admission fee and visit without having to make special arrangements - but one step at a time!” ■



Abracadabra

Petey Majik is up to more tricks

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY GLEN RILEY

WHEN THE FIRST book on magic, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, was printed in 1584, its purpose was to argue against the persecution of witches and charlatans. For many, the unexplainable was simply the Devil's work.

In the centuries that followed, Harry Houdini and David Copperfield continued to beguile, leaving audiences pondering what was real and what was fake. While Hollywood movies like *The Prestige* and *Now You See Me* have aided in bringing magic into the mainstream, street magicians like David Blaine and Kris Angel have brought the art of prestidigitation into people's homes.

In a quiet café in District 2, Vietnamese-Australian Petey Majik (aka Peter Nguyen), 34, expertly shuffles a deck of cards. With each motion, there's a flash of card suits tattooed on his inner wrists. He asks me to pick a card, look at it and put it back in the deck. A bit of shuffling later, he reveals my card. Perhaps it's because he recognizes the tired look of indifference on my face that he asks me to pick another card. This time, I slip it in the middle of the deck, but there's no shuffling. He flips over the top card and it's mine. "The less the magician touches the props, the more magic there is," he says with

a smile.

In the four years since moving to Vietnam, Petey has a television series, regularly gets booked for gigs and has been in movies. He's currently shooting one right now, playing a pickpocket/con artist in what he calls a "Vietnamese version of *Ocean's Thirteen*." Despite being born in Australia, his Vietnamese is good which allows him to engage with his television audience, often random people on the street. "[Back in Australia], my parents told my younger sister and me that 'when you're home, you have to speak Vietnamese.' It was mainly normal conversations. Here [in Vietnam], I had to learn formal stuff for on stage. I didn't even know how to say 'ladies and gentlemen.' It was more like 'hello, *moi nguoi* (everyone)!"

Petey's interest in magic started in his early teens with seeing David Copperfield on television ("I still have his specials on VHS at home"), but it wasn't until seeing street magician David Blaine perform that he really began to get into it. "It just seemed more real, and a good way to pick up girls," he laughs. (Blaine has famously been romantically linked to celebrities, the likes of Madonna, Daryl Hannah and Fiona Apple.)

Street magic is intimate. Talk of a time something didn't go as planned.

There's *always* the problem of someone in the crowd, like a heckler or a skeptic. They're like scrutinizing the deck, asking to shuffle it. Over time, though, you're able to see and control the audience a bit more. With experience, the performer becomes a more believable, confident person.

I had one gig for a wedding where we did a trick called "Trust me." The groom sits on a chair with the bride standing in front. We have two cups and I pour water in each cup. The bride and I hold the cups above our heads and I say that we're going to do something together and then I'm going to do an extra action, which you have to copy. We rotate on the spot, but when we turn, I only pretend to turn and quickly drink my water. The audience sees it, but no one says anything. The secret to the trick is that it's a gag. Her cup has a particular powder in it called slush powder which turns the water into gel. The weight is still there, but nothing comes out. I mime throwing my glass onto his head, but she's like, "I can't do it!" The groom yells, "C'mon honey, I trust you!" But instead of pouring it over his head, she splashed him in the face! The slush broke up and fell into pieces. But people clapped and it worked out in the end.

How did your parents react to you becoming a performer?

Now? They're normal. But when I first got into it, I think Dad was more strict.

I graduated from marketing/advertising, and was working for a company but doing magic on the side for extra money. Dad was the one who said it wasn't easy to go into entertainment. He said, "1. No one knows who you are. 2. You're Asian." Not to be racist, but in Australia, the percentage of Asians in entertainment is very low. He said that if I pushed hard, it'd take at least two to three years. He was right. It took two and a half years to be known as a wedding magician in the Vietnamese community, and then I found myself here.

In 2011, a mate suggested that I come and do some shows here. A network owner came to a gig I did for Mercedes, and that show landed me a TV contract. It went to air, and I started getting invited to events and casting for movies.

What's the magic scene like in Vietnam?

Magic is very Old School here. They're still doing traditional stage magic with doves, a top hat, using really old props... They still do things like make flowers appear, but it's cheesy because they're plastic flowers. It's the younger generation that are doing all the modern stuff that they see on YouTube. It's school kids in [flip flops] but doing amazing things with their hands because they have time to do it. But there isn't really a local magician that does their own Vegas-style show. It's more at privately booked events, product launches or mini festivals.



How do Vietnamese react to your illusions?

The countryside Viets are scared of even simple card tricks. Or else, they'll go: "We have to make money off of this. I want to gamble!" [Laughs]. The younger generation are like: "Wow! How do you do that?" The older generation sometimes don't have any reaction at all. I know they're thinking something, though. It's funny, when we were shooting *Street Wizard*, no one knew who I was. Even if we were shooting in front of a lady selling stuff, she'd get angry. A lot of the locals thought I was busking or something. I had to tell them it was free.

What is it like to be Petey's friend?

I'm as normal as it gets. I still go and play basketball with local friends, ride my bike... I jam with some local magicians here and there. When you're hanging around with experienced magicians, they're really reserved on what they know. Maybe they'll say, "Hey, can you tell me what you think of this?" And if you don't see [how they did the trick], obviously, that means they've mastered it. Others will trade off with you, like "I'll show you mine if you show me yours."

When I see regular friends, though, they'll usually bring someone new and go, "Hey, can you show them some magic?" For me it's normal. It's just extra practice.

Breaking the Magician's Code caused a lot of controversy when it aired. As a magician, how did you feel about it?

I actually agree with the reasons behind *Breaking the Magician's Code*. The original masked magician wanted people to do new stuff, wanted to get magicians to start thinking outside the box again. I think magic has evolved into more than the trick; it's about the connection now. It's about the delivery.

There's a lot of politics with magicians. There are a lot of effects out there available to everyone. The thing that you cannot do is copy someone's act word for word, using this music and that joke. That's a no-no. Back in the '90s, Copperfield had a really strong marketing team, including contracted magic creators. He didn't think of all his illusions. He had ideas, and they'd think of the illusion. After a time, those illusions then go to conventions where people can pay to learn the secret.

Do you believe there really is a realm of magic, one that is unexplainable?

I had an experience the first time I came back to Vietnam when I was 15. Our family did a séance for my grandfather who had passed away. Before we called the lady, the spirit medium, or whatever, in, we were like: "No one tell her anything! No names, no ages, nothing!" Then she rocked up, lit some

incense, and it was like Granddad's spirit went into her. She looked at my first uncle and said his whole name aloud. Then she gets to my family (my mom is number eight out of 10), and said my parents' names. Then, "Where's Peter and Julie?" I was like, how does she know? I was there firsthand and I don't know if it was real or not. Today, I think if it's real, it's real. Or maybe someone in the family set it up so that we would feel some closure.

It's sort of like that with the person I'm doing an illusion for. It's like, how did it get there? A bit of misdirection. The closer you look, the less you see. One of the reasons I love doing it is to get people's minds all boggled ♦

Interview over, we sip cappuccinos in the late morning sun. But Petey has one trick left up his proverbial sleeve. He asks me to take out my phone and says he'll try and guess my passcode. He has me open up the calculator and input my birth date, followed by a string of numbers and seemingly random calculations. Finally, he asks me to shout out the passcode in my head. I know where this is going, but I can't seem to stop the inevitable conclusion, no matter how improbable. He looks me in the eye, takes my phone, and on the first try, unlocks my phone. He then tells me he's working on his next trick where he'll call someone at home, ask them to choose a card from their own deck, and over the phone, tell them which card they chose. It seems impossible, but I'm now a believer. ■

Mood Space

Combining forms and shapes to create the right atmosphere

WE'VE EXPLORED THE concept of line in a previous column, and the elements of form and shape are closely related: shape is a closed line, two-dimensional, while form is its 3-D equivalent. As you might expect, the emotional responses evoked by shape and form are related as well. Regular shapes such as squares and rectangles represent strength and convention, angular forms can be dynamic or aggressive, and asymmetric shapes produce movement and surprise. When combining these shapes, harmony and unity evoke stability and tradition, while variety and contrast create movement and excitement.

Living rooms are a prime example of how shape and form can affect the mood of a space. Matching sofas in the living room by Noelle Micek set the stage for a calm, unified room. Although the chairs feature a curve at the edge of their arm, the overall form feels quite similar to the sofas. We see more square and rectangular forms in the coffee table, ceiling millwork, and artwork. Micek incorporates a little bit of variety with a pair of round garden stools and triangle shapes in the coffee table base, but only enough to keep the room from being boring.

In addition to the mix of shapes, Micek's skirted upholstery connects directly to the floor, which promotes an additional sense of security. Billy Baldwin once remarked that too many naked chair legs caused him to feel "restless", as if they were about to get up and walk away. He had a point. Leggy furniture styles can create a feeling of airiness, which is particularly useful in smaller spaces, but they also lack the visual weight that leaves us feeling grounded and secure. A more contemporary alternative to Micek's skirted sofas would be a fully upholstered sofa base that reveals only a short block leg, if any.

Eugenia Soler Roig's living room shows a lot of exposed leg in the double coffee tables, chair, and side tables. She balances them with a strong sofa and folding screen, which serve to anchor the space. Still, you can see that the overall effect is very elegant and quite formal - probably not where you'd choose to curl up for a nap. We also see more curved shapes in Roig's space, including the coffee table bases and carved chair arms. The contrast of those rounded forms against rectangular elements of the room makes for a much more visually dynamic space.



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



Noelle Micek



Eugenia Soler Roig

As always, your first consideration should be the kind of mood you'd like to create in your home. While Roig's dynamic room makes for a better cocktail party setting, Micek's space is where you'd want to be for a weekend TV marathon. If you have a few favorite designers already, look back through their portfolios and observe how they combine form and

shape. Do they tend towards masculine or feminine forms, or a mix of both? Are there any combinations that appear over and over in their designs? Now take a look at your own home, and evaluate how the shapes you've selected relate to one another. Are they complementing or competing? Finally, do those forms create the appropriate mood for your space? ■

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Options for setting up a factory in the country



A member of the Paris Bar, **Hadrien Wolff** has been practicing law in Vietnam for more than seven years, currently as a partner of Audier & Partners based at its HCMC office. Having gained extensive legal experience in the Netherlands and Cambodia, **Marijn Sprokhereef** is 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,

My name is Julia and I am a fashion designer from Spain. I often travel to Vietnam to get inspiration for my new creations and recently realized that I want to take my visits to another level. I am now thinking of opening a small factory in Ho Chi Minh City to produce clothes and accessories for the European market. You can ask me anything about Lady Gaga's wardrobe and I can talk for hours about the fashion trends for this summer but, unfortunately, I know very little about local laws and the procedures to realize an investment project like this. Could you please advise me on my options?

THANK YOU FOR sharing your idea with us, Julia. The textile and garment industry is still one of the key sectors of Vietnam's economy. Partly because of the country's highly skilled, yet relatively cheap labor force, and a favorable investment climate, the sector seems to be ever-growing, contributing greatly to Vietnam's annual export figures.

The opportunities for you as a foreign investor depend to a large extent on the scale of your project. It is true that the Vietnamese government offers favorable conditions to Vietnamese and foreign investors alike, but we know from practice that implementing a small-scale manufacturing project may not be that straightforward for a foreign investor.

One of the first things that you should think of is securing the location for your factory. Generally speaking, the Vietnamese authorities prefer manufacturing activities to take place outside of the cities and inside so-called "industrial zones," for example in Dong Nai or Binh Duong. The problem with the facilities over there is that they are probably (much) too big for the project that you have in mind.

Once you find the location, it is important to make sure that the land use purpose of that location is in accordance with your investment plans. For example, you are not allowed to operate a factory from

a location that is zoned for residential purposes. In theory, the land use purpose can be changed, but in practice this is often a burdensome endeavor not worth undertaking.

Besides ensuring that your project location has the correct land use purpose, you will need to comply with the applicable rules on fire safety and environment. If all of this is putting you off, you may want to think about the option of renting an existing factory, or a part thereof, that meets all your requirements. This can make life a little easier for you.

Secondly, as a first-time foreign investor in Vietnam, you will normally need to apply for an "investment registration certificate." During the application process for this certificate, the Vietnamese authorities will consider whether or not your intended project is feasible. Among other things, they will look at the project location as discussed above, but they will also scrutinize whether the capital that you are willing to commit is sufficient to cover your project. Foreign investors are usually required to commit quite a substantial amount of charter capital, so we would recommend you to carefully consider how much capital you will need in order to cover matters such as rental, machinery and labor costs. Investment certificates are often issued on a case-by-case basis, so it is important to have a solid

investment project that will convince the authorities in charge.

Since the Vietnamese authorities tend to be more interested in large-scale projects, foreign investors with a relatively small-scale project often choose to work together with a trustworthy Vietnamese business partner. Of course, the same rules regarding the project location, fire safety and environment apply, but in practice it is often easier for Vietnamese citizens to establish a company and to implement an investment project.

A final alternative for you to consider is to work with a Vietnamese manufacturer through a "processing contract." For this option, which is frequently used in the textile and garment sector, you can get in touch with a Vietnamese manufacturer, enter into an agreement detailing everything you have in mind, and export your final products to Europe. Working with a processing contract, you may achieve the same results without the need to establish your own company in Vietnam.

Buena suerte y feliz verano!

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. ■

Pets as Prey

The alarming rise of dognapping in Saigon



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



EVERY WEEK, ONLY a handful of dognapping cases are reported in Saigon, the actual numbers are more staggering. The speed, frequency and brazenness of the crime is widespread. Sometimes the outcome is favorable and the dog is returned, albeit a little traumatized, but safe in your arms. Other times, the outcome is dire and completely heart-wrenching.

Caution and vigilance is required to safeguard your dog, or any pet, from being stolen. Never assume anything, or think that owning a pet here is the same as in the West - there is a new 'normal' in Vietnam regarding pet ownership. Earnings gained from stealing dogs to ransom back to their owners, compared to selling them to restaurants for consumption, is lucratively high. Breeds with some degree of pedigree are traded and moved like commodities, upping the value of ransom. And with a fine of under VND2 million if caught, it's hardly a deterrent to the thieves and they know they will never be prosecuted. **Warning:** These people work for gangs and most are junkies, armed with knives or worse. Do not confront them directly, approach with extreme caution.

We don't want you to feel paranoid, but maybe you should. Dognappings are

organized and planned. They wait for the right scenario where you lose control of your dog for a split second, possibly distracted by a combination of noise, heat and chaos that is part of daily life in Saigon. Unaware, your dog has bolted from the house and out the front gate, off-leash, eventually running into a blind spot...

If this has happened get proactive ASAP. First, go online to the Facebook groups "Dog Owners of Saigon" and the new "Stolen Pet Support HCMC." Become a member, post a message with current photos of your dog, members will be alerted and will offer advice immediately. Some will begin their own search in areas that are known for harboring stolen dogs. You are not alone; there are others that share your grief. Second, create a poster with a contact number, post them around your neighborhood, chances are your dog has been taken out of your neighborhood, but the dog thieves will return looking for a contact number.

There is a direct link between dog thieves and the pet shops on Le Hong Phong Street in District 10. The 300-block area is the first place to begin your search, but do not go alone. If you are emotionally distraught, suppress your hurt or appoint someone to speak for you. If you do not speak Vietnamese, bring a translator, and ransom

money. You might be able to secure a deal in the first meeting, however these pet shop proprietors are sadistic and will play your grief and make you wait, so try to be calm and work with them. The rate of recovery is high if your dog is spotted in one of these shops: just don't give up.

Always be aware of where your dog is before opening your front gate or door. The few seconds it takes to secure your dog is worth the peace of mind. Never allow any roaming around the neighborhood or sleeping outside unsupervised, day or night. Always walk your dog on a leash. If you want your dog to get some exercise, buddy up with other dog owners to increase the number of eyes in public spaces. A gated, monitored dog park has opened at 582 Huynh Tan Phat Street in District 7.

Always walk your dog into the flow of traffic so you can see who is coming; looking backwards is healthy paranoia. Be alert when you take your dog or cat to a pet or grooming shop or vet clinic, thieves may be lurking. If possible arrange pet care professionals to come to your home. Consult a veterinarian about tagging your dog with a microchip. A microchip implant is an identifying integrated circuit placed under the skin of an animal. Some have GPS tracking and are supported by smartphones apps. ■



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ROMANCE, OF FABULOUS
WEALTH AND FABULOUS
POVERTY, OF SPLENDOR
AND RAGS, OF PALACES AND
HOVELS,... THE COUNTRY
OF A THOUSAND NATIONS
AND A HUNDRED TONGUES,
OF A THOUSAND RELIGIONS
AND TWO MILLION GODS,
CRADLE OF THE HUMAN RACE,
BIRTHPLACE OF HUMAN
SPEECH, MOTHER OF HISTORY,
GRANDMOTHER OF LEGEND,
GREAT-GRANDMOTHER OF
TRADITION.” -- MARK TWAIN**

**IN THIS ISSUE, WE TAKE A
LOOK AT THIS INCREDIBLE
COUNTRY THAT GAVE THE
WORLD THE DECIMAL SYSTEM,
CHESS, YOGA AND OF COURSE,
BOLLYWOOD. THROUGHOUT
ITS HISTORY, INDIA HAS
ALSO TOUCHED VIETNAM.
THE CHAM TEMPLE COMPLEX
IN MY SON (4TH TO 13TH
CENTURY AD), JUST OUTSIDE
OF HOI AN, IS DEDICATED
TO HINDU DIVINITIES. AND
MODERN-DAY INDIA HAS
BEEN A FRIEND TO VIETNAM,
FROM ITS SUPPORT OF
VIETNAM’S INDEPENDENCE
FROM FRANCE TO OPPOSING
AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT
IN THE WAR AND TO NOW
BEING A STRATEGIC TRADING
PARTNER. WHILE ENTIRE
LIBRARIES COULD BE
DEVOTED TO THIS “COUNTRY
OF A THOUSAND NATIONS,”
WE HOPE THESE FEW PAGES
ARE ENOUGH TO INSPIRE
YOU TO EXPLORE THIS
CIVILIZATION THAT HAS
HELPED SHAPE THE WORLD AS
WE KNOW IT.**

LOOK EAST

India discovers a strategic partner in Vietnam

TEXT BY LORCAN LOVETT IMAGE BY GLEN RILEY

WHEN INDIAN AND Vietnamese politicians sign agreements, listen carefully: you'll likely hear entrepreneurs rubbing their hands. Companies in Vietnam have been thriving since the economic reforms of *Doi Moi* swung open its doors to international trade in 1986. Nearly 25 years later the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India free trade agreement saw bilateral trade soar between India and Vietnam, reaching an all time high of USD8 billion dollars last year.

Some have even said the partnership could be worth USD20 billion annually by 2020, and there are traders in Vietnam's commercial capital Ho Chi Minh City who are pushing to make this a reality. Chairman of the Indian Business Chamber (INCHAM), Jay Prakash Shriram, 37, known as Mr. Prakash, sits in the meeting room of his group's headquarters in District 1. "Membership has constantly been increasing," he says. "We have close to 300 members in Ho Chi Minh City and 120 in our Hanoi branch."

Behind him are shelves filled with plaques marking the chamber's partnerships and charitable contributions as well as a complete list of previous chairmen since its launch in 1999. Mr. Prakash's name is yet to be inscribed on the board. He's been in the position for six months and has another six months before his term ends and members elect another leader or choose to re-elect.

"For any two countries to make a more co-operative relationship the economy and commerce plays a very significant role," he explains. "But it has been a very vast, deep and long relationship between Indian and Vietnam. There are two reasons it is special - economically and emotionally. The first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the first president of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, had a very close relationship. India has been a significant supporter of independence for Vietnam and opposed the Americans in the American War. In times of difficulties during someone's life somebody who stands behind you becomes

really special and that is why India should be special to Vietnam."

The chamber has been supporting Vietnam in its own way by asking members for donations to local orphanages. It also hosts conferences, networking events and seminars, cultural programs and celebrations for Indian festivals such as Diwali. Among its members are major corporations such as Standard Chartered Bank and representatives of Unilever.

Flicking through its list of members directory, the word "pharmaceuticals" jumps out on nearly every page. Medicines are a major Indian import for Vietnam - it's Mr. Prakash's industry - while other notable imports include animal feed, corn, steel and machinery. Vietnam's exports to India include electronics (mobile phones and components, computers and electronic hardware), natural rubber, chemicals, coffee and wood products. Although it may not pack the economical punch of major industries, Mr. Prakash also highlights a more clear Indian trade on the streets of Vietnam's big cities too - restaurants.

ACT EAST

Mr. Prakash hails from the industrious city of Ahmedabad, dubbed "The Manchester of India" despite having more than double the population, where a pharmaceutical company chose him to manage its operation in Vietnam nine years ago. After six years he decided to start his own pharmaceutical and healthcare business, adapting to Saigon's humidity fairly easily and warming to its friendly people.

He now has a seven-year-old who has lived here all of his life and, Mr. Prakash says, hopes will follow in his father's footsteps. "It is peaceful here. Safety is a major factor and it is quite safe. Ho Chi Minh City is comparable to Mumbai but, of course, Mumbai is very vast in terms of the growth and population.

"I think the economy is strong here and in the coming times it will get stronger. The trade agreements, the population of Ho Chi Minh City and it being the commercially established city of Vietnam means it is

going to grow in the future."

Vietnam is currently India's 10th largest trade partner while India ranks 30th on Vietnam's investment ladder. India's Look East Policy of the early 1990s represented a desire to cultivate economic and strategic relations with Southeast Asia and counterweight the influence of China. This was twiggged last year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who leads India's new government into a new era of prioritizing Southeast Asia with the Act East Policy. During Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visit to Delhi last October, India offered a USD300 million line of credit for trade diversification which will enable Vietnam to import more polyester fabrics and yarns from India.

"The only difference with India's policy now is to put those observations into action," adds Mr. Prakash. "And I think Vietnam has significant potential in Southeast Asia to be among the strongest players in terms of manufacturing as well as the human resources industry."

The entrepreneur has noticed certain quirks in the way his compatriots and Vietnamese conduct business. "With geographical changes come cultural changes. There are no significant issues which impacts the business. In India they believe the customer is a god and they show extreme hospitality towards the customer. This can mean extending the hospitality through offering the customer dinner or lunch, treating the customer as a guest. They do this here but a little bit of a difference is the drinking [alcohol] concept which is a bit higher compared to India."

In 2000, Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes described Vietnam as India's "most trusted friend and ally." Mr. Prakash believes this sentiment still rings true today, adding: "Vietnam still remains a very strong partner for India. At the same time I hope Vietnam feels the same. Relationships and co-operation are increasing between the two countries day by day and year by year and I believe Indian commerce makes a difference."



SPICE ADVICE

An introduction to the incredible *masala* of Indian cuisine

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

WHEN ASKED WHAT he thinks of Vietnamese cuisine, Chef Mejo Kodyathu of Baba's Kitchen (164 Bui Vien, D1) simply shakes his head. "Not spicy enough," he proclaims. When Chef Mejo says "spicy," he isn't just referring to the heat quotient of chilies but to the innumerable permutations of spices used in Indian cuisine. Blessed with varying climates (tropical to sub-tropical to temperate), distinct populations (some spices are popular in the North but not so much in the South and vice versa) and wide trade routes (adding imported spices to India's already plentiful indigenous ones), it's no wonder that the Spices Board of India officially oversees 52 spices with an additional 57 on the ISO list. It estimates production of Indian spices at around 3.2 million tons valued at USD4 billion yearly.

Each spice (or "*masala*" in Hindi) has its own unique flavor, but when used in combination with other spices, makes for a rich, layered flavor profile. Some lighter spices are added towards the end of the cooking process as a flavoring or coloring while others start off the dish, flash fried in ghee (clarified butter) or oil to release and intensify their flavors. These are just a few found in Indian kitchens around the world.



FENUGREEK (METHI)

Grown in: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh

One of the most distinctive flavors of Indian cuisine, fenugreek tastes a bit like bitter maple syrup (so much so that it's often used to make fake maple syrup). When cooked, though, it exudes an almost dark caramel flavor, both with its complex sweetness and subtle bitterness. Fresh or dried leaves can be found in fry-breads and added to vegetable dishes for its high nutritive value whereas the seeds are commonly found in curries. "Very costly in Vietnam," adds Chef Mejo, as it runs VND50,000 for just 25g.

Try the leaves in prawn *methi tikka* kebabs and in the wheat flour *paratha* (flatbread) filled with ground fenugreek and pan fried. The seeds can be found in *rasam*, a South Indian soup with tomato, chilies and spices.



BROWN MUSTARD SEEDS (RAI)

Grown in: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh

While brown mustard seeds are of Himalayan origin, the use of mustard seeds in Indian texts date back to 3,000 BC. Mustard seeds as a spice or condiment makes them by far the largest spice by volume in world trade. While odorless when whole, chewing the seeds causes a chemical reaction (with the introduction of water) that produces an extremely bitter taste. Frying them until they pop in hot oil transforms the bitterness into a pleasant pungency, and they're a common fixture in Indian curry powders and in spiced *ghee*.

Try mustard seeds in South Indian specialties like Kerala fish curry, mango fish curry, *puri masala* (spicy, deep-fried bread) and *uppumav* (a semolina-based dish).



CUMIN (JEERA)

Grown in: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh

After black pepper, cumin is the most-used spice on Earth. Its intense flavor has been described as warm and bitter, earthy, musky, and spicy. Typically, it's used in two ways: heating in hot oil until the seeds crack to excite their volatile oils or throwing them in at the end as a kind of herbal garnish. Try cumin in *jeera* rice, *dal tadka* (stewed lentils flavored with a spiced oil containing cumin, curry leaf, mustard seed and Kashmiri chili) and on top of curries.



CURRY LEAF (KADIPATTA)

Grown in: South India

"Any dish, anywhere in Kerala that doesn't have curry leaf, people will say it tastes bad," says Chef Mejo of the fresh leaves that taste almost herbal, rather than spicy (and nothing like the curry dish we usually think of). "Every house has a curry tree," he adds of his home state. Used extensively in South India and Sri Lanka, these leaves are called *kariveppilai* in Tamil, literally "the leaf used to make curry," speaking of their importance in these regional dishes. Typically hand bruised then fried in hot oil or *ghee*, the aromatic curry leaves add flavor to the entire dish. They can also be added fresh on top of finished dishes. Curry leaves can last a week in the fridge or four to six weeks in the freezer. Try them in South Indian dishes like *thali* meals and *rasam* soup.



CARDAMOM (CHHOTI ELAICHI)

Grown in: Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu

Known as "green gold" or the Queen of Spices, cardamom is one of the highest valued spices in the world, "too costly," according to Chef Mejo. Cardamom has a pleasant taste, likened to mint, lemon, with a hint of pepper and sweet floral notes and is a member of the ginger family. The pods were chewed as mouth fresheners in ancient India. Today, cardamom is an essential ingredient in curries. Try whole cardamom in dishes like Hyderabad chicken curry and the mixed rice dish of Biryani and powdered cardamom in the *hariyali kabab* and in *korma* dishes. Cardamom can also be found in teas like the *masala* tea.



CHILI (MIRCH)

Grown in: Himachal Pradesh, Jammu, Kashmir

Indian cuisine uses many kinds of chilies: fresh, dried and powdered, chosen for their color, aroma or heat level. Dried chili is found in curries for its heat, whereas chilies with vibrant colors and less heat are popular as a colorant, much like paprika. But perhaps no chili is as full-flavored and vibrantly colored as the fiery red Kashmiri Chili. Chef Mejo also calls it "too costly" and "not spicy enough for Indians," explaining why it's used mainly as a garnish and before the advent of red dye, the coloring agent for tandoori chicken. Try it in the *dal tadka* and in various curries.



GARAM MASALA

Often wrongly called "curry powder," the ubiquitous *garam masala* is actually a combination of roasted and pounded spices. It literally means "hot spices," "hot" referring to the intensity of flavors designed to elevate body heat rather than just the capsicum heat. Chef Mejo's version includes cloves, cinnamon, bay leaf, cardamom and aniseed, but different regions and even different kitchens have their own recipes. Typically, *garam masala* is used to enhance the flavor of dishes, and is added sparingly towards the end of the cooking process. Try *garam masala* in any of the curries at Baba's Kitchen.

MARRIAGES REARRANGED

Love can transcend tradition, or the two can go hand-in-hand as our couples discovered

TEXT BY LORCAN LOVETT IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



Radha and Huyen

FALLING IN LOVE was the easy part for Varadhan Radhanath and Doan Thanh Huyen. Despite being from countries over 3,000km apart and barely speaking a shared language, the couple felt that nameless essential element was there.

“I was so besotted,” admits Radhanath (Radha), 50. “I could not wait to marry her. I thought my wife was the nicest person I had ever known in my life and my opinion has not changed. She did not know much English but it happens that she’s very smart. Because we only spoke English with each other she improved rapidly. And it’s not just the language, she picks up physical cues, the tone of the voice, she just knows. It’s very hard to find somebody that is super smart as well as super nice - she’s both.”

Radha, a journalist and former banker, moved to Hanoi 14 years ago where he met and equally impressed Huyen, 37. They married a year later in 2003, holding one Hindi ceremony in Chennai, southern India, and another in Huyen’s northern home city of Thanh Hoa. Overcoming the usual humdrum struggles of a lifelong relationship hasn’t been the only hurdle for the couple. They have been faced with appeasing two traditional families from distinct cultures, handling doubts from friends and negotiating prejudices within society. On the whole Radha plays down these challenges but Huyen is happy to highlight them.

“Some friends told me maybe I should marry someone from a rich country,” she says. “They asked why I would marry an

Indian and I found it offensive. I know that people did have racism in their mind but you don’t marry a person because of the country they come from. I believe Radha has faced racism based on his skin or because he is Indian. I do not care much about what people say so long as I can choose a good man who cares about me. If we can overcome [prejudices] between us there’s no more challenges out there.”

The couple who have a young son decided to stay nearer to Huyen’s parents in Vietnam although Huyen takes time from her job as the director of a digital sales company to visit India once a year while the Indian side often visits. “Radha’s parents very much let us decide how we want to carry on our lives so long as we are happy,” explains Huyen. “Of course they would have preferred we stayed somewhere near them when they got old and sick; I guess every parent wishes the same.”

Long term expat Radha emphasizes that he is out of touch with the complexities of India, however his time away has not stopped observations of cultural similarities. Both are collectivist and patriarchal societies, although he’s quick to add, “If I stepped out of line, I’d know about it pretty soon.”

Both encourage living among an extended family and stress the importance of child bearing, particularly having male children. “If I had been dating a Westerner it would be all about the individual,” Radha contemplates. “In Asia it is about the community and the family so we did not worry about giving each other space; that helped a great deal.”

Radha’s family comes from the Brahmin caste and, like most Indians, Brahmin are vegetarians who eat using their right hands. This naturally caused a stir at the first few communal dinners of both families. “[Indian eating etiquette] sounds a bit bizarre but I’m pretty sure it came from the need for hygiene. My mother is still particular about that and my grandmother would only eat off

of silver. When we eat together, her parents find it hilarious my parents eat with their hands. There has never been anything openly said to each other although my wife and I talk about it.”

Radha’s father has been left bemused when interacting with locals while strolling the streets of Saigon. “In Vietnam it is rude to say they do not understand. He did not understand why they were nodding and saying yes when they clearly did not understand,” says Radha.

Huyen has adopted a Hindu custom by giving up meat, but for health rather than religious reasons, and Radha will soon face their next big decision: where to send their two-year-old son Shyamalan for education. Radha pushes for a state school to further immerse his son in Vietnamese culture while Huyen wants him to attend an international school. She is keen for him to speak several languages including Tamil and English like his father and French and Vietnamese like herself. “He will have the Indian touch from his father and I’m very much open to this,” she adds. “He can pick up the best things from both countries.”

SEVEN VOWS

“Marriages are made in heaven and take place on earth. She is educated. She is beautiful,” says Pankaj. “She knows how to talk, she knows how to cook, she knows how to behave; she is a perfect life partner.”

“I love him so much I cannot live without him,” adds Poonam. “I’m so lucky he is with me. We are always smiling.”

Pankaj and Poonam have an arranged marriage. It began while Pankaj was celebrating Diwali back in India in November 2013. His parents were looking for a suitable match for him. Poonam’s parents visited his house with common relatives to meet him and his family. After the meeting, her parents invited them to meet Poonam who was coming to her uncle’s house that evening. Unlike times gone-by, consent is now sought from the bride and groom in India. The first meeting between Pankaj and Poonam was a success. This auspicious sign was only one factor in a handful of considerations including the background of the families, their *gotras*, or subcastes, and, perhaps most vitally, their horoscopes that the pandit (priest) would analyze and match. Factoring the time of their birth and zodiac signs, the couple’s horoscopes were compatible - they were made for each other.

On the first meeting, Pankaj and Poonam asked each other some basic questions and “felt comfortable with each other and, moreover, we liked each other and agreed to go one step further – say ‘yes’ to the wedding.” Two days later on November 10, 2013, there was a ring ceremony where they both exchanged rings and a pre-engagement ceremony called *roka* was held formalizing the relationship.

The news triggered an intricate and staggering process saturated with rituals and traditions spanning two months (after the ring ceremony) until the wedding on January 31, 2014. A passport was arranged for Poonam who would be leaving the country for the first time and embarking on a new life in Vietnam.



Poonam and Pankaj

The wedding took six days following another engagement party. During the wedding rituals the groom wore a holy thread called a *janeu*, meaning he was not allowed to leave his house until all the rituals were completed. Turmeric paste was applied to both bride and groom in their respective locations to purify themselves. It was mustard oil on another day and at one point Pankaj wore the torn rags of a homeless person and asked his relatives and friends for money or fruit to complete the customs of one part of marriage and following the tradition and a ritual.

Pankaj describes the final day, which demanded an early start and plenty of assistance from all his relatives, of bringing out his clothes, putting *tilak* on his forehead, and getting the horse ready. He took blessings from God before riding the horse from his house to the temple where he prayed to God and his ancestors for further blessings and to complete the wedding rituals. Pankaj then went to his friend’s place (a groom should not return to his home once he has left for the wedding) to get ready for the main function at the wedding venue. A singing band and dancing relatives accompanied him along the kilometer ride to the venue, taking the party three hours to reach.

The couple lapped around a fire seven times, each one signifying a promise in the marriage which was the most important and auspicious ritual as the couple will be knotted for seven births (signifying the seven vows).

Once the vows were said Poonam’s father performed the Kanyadaan ceremony: he brought Poonam, took her hand and placed it in Pankaj’s. This marked the beginning of the ceremony of giving away the bride. The groom accepted the bride’s hand, while the *kama-sukta* (hymn to love) is pronounced in the presence of the father, the bride and the groom.

Along with other rituals Pankaj and Poonam took their seven vows: “We have taken the Seven Steps. You have become

mine forever. Yes, we have become partners. I have become yours. Hereafter, I cannot live without you. Do not live without me. Let us share the joys. We are word and meaning, united. You are thought and I am sound. May the night be honey sweet for us. May the morning be honey sweet for us. May the earth be honey sweet for us. May the heavens be honey sweet for us. May the plants be honey sweet for us. May the sun be all honey for us. May the cows yield us honey sweet milk. As the heavens are stable, as the earth is stable, as the mountains are stable, as the whole universe is stable, so may our union be permanently settled.”

Afterwards the newlyweds visited Poonam’s family home and thanked her parents for her upbringing, stating she was now a daughter of Pankaj’s family. Then she saw her groom’s house for the first time and was welcomed by Pankaj’s family where more rituals were performed.

“There are no words to describe how beautiful Indian weddings are and I am lucky to have Poonam in my life as my soulmate. Parents always find the best suited for us,” says Pankaj.

Poonam, who has a Masters in computer applications, says she enjoys a more liberal lifestyle in Vietnam compared to India but misses her family in India. “I like it here now. My best friend is Vietnamese who is my language teacher as well and I have so many Indian friends and we enjoy it here,” she says. “We celebrate festivals here and this is so far the best Indian community I have seen. It’s like our family now. When I left my home I was crying so much because it was very difficult to leave. The first time I met him I liked him as a person and the opportunity of leading a good life. Everything was perfect.”

When asked whether she thinks arranged marriages eliminate personal choice, she adds: “Your parents always ask what you want so it doesn’t matter if marriages are arranged. If you like your partner and your families are happy and agree, that’s the best it could be.”



SERENITY NOW

Finding your center amidst chaos

TEXT BY NPD KHANH IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

ON JUNE 21, 2015, millions of people in India and around the world celebrated the first International Yoga Day. But while most yogis outside of India link yoga with fitness, sports and weight loss, yoga is more than a physical exercise to Indians. To the near 1.3 billion Indians in India and abroad, yoga is a discipline in the physical, the spiritual and the mental. It is entrenched in every part of their culture. It is a compulsory subject for school children as young as five or six and it's practiced by those from all religions, from Hinduism and Buddhism to Jainism. For Avinash Kumar, a 21-year-old Indian health coach living in Saigon, yoga "is where I came from."

"Yoga was a class taught in my elementary school. When I was seven, I was selected for the school yoga tournament. Since then, I have not stopped practicing yoga," he shares. "Most people outside of India see only the physical aspect of yoga, the poses, the exercises, the health benefits and certainly that is also yoga, but that is only one among the many aspects of yoga. True yoga goes far deeper than that. Yoga is a philosophy, a way of life."

The word "yoga" is Sanskrit meaning "to unite." "We unite the body with the mind until each of our movements is a mindful one," explains Avinash. "We train our bodies through the physical exercises and we train our mind through meditation. To me, to practice yoga is to become friends with oneself, to learn everything there is to learn about our own bodies and our own selves." In Avinash's first tournament, the competitors were scored not on how many difficult poses they could pull off but rather by the comfort with which they entered a pose, held a pose, exited a pose, as well as whether they could hold steady breath while performing. Avinash's interpretation is not the only interpretation of what yoga really entails.

Yoga comes from five thousand years of history. Though none can pinpoint when and where exactly in India it originated, the undeniable fact is that it is an entrenched part, and a heritage of Indian culture. With such a long history, yoga has had time to develop a broad variety of schools with distinctly different practices and philosophy. Some are modern and trendy, influenced by global tastes and market, while others are ancient and deeply rooted in Indian philosophy and culture. Yet for all their differences, each of the schools is as valid as the other.

To date, an estimated 30 million people outside of India practice yoga. As for the number of practitioners inside of India, the birthplace of yoga, no surveys have ever

been able to tabulate an exact figure other than 'big'. The deepest level of yoga is a land explored only by yogis. According to Avinash, yogi is a word regularly misused by non-Indians.

"I'm just a normal person practicing yoga. I teach yoga to other people, yes. But I am not a yogi," he claims. "Yogis are those who are committed to studying the philosophy of yoga for life. They would forsake all worldly possessions and relations and go into the woods or the top of some distant mountains to live the lifestyle of hermits. They seek to become absolutely detached from everything and everyone else. That is a yogi."

OM

Ever since Guru Swami Vivekananda introduced yoga to the US in the 1890s, it has grown exponentially in both popularity and reach. To this day, yoga has become a multibillion-dollar global industry spanning numerous countries, from America to Europe, to Southeast Asia and even here in Vietnam where it enjoys a reputation as a trendy fitness and wellness exercise. This new popularity has in turn prompted thousands of young Indians like Avinash into leaving India and going to other countries to spread the knowledge and philosophy of yoga.

The downside to yoga's popularity however are less desirable aspects such as over-commercialization, false marketing, even the warping of one of India's greatest cultural heritages. A search for yoga schools and classes in Saigon would immediately turn up numerous ads featuring young, attractive models in yoga poses or new-fangled, market driven yoga concepts that promise svelte, sexy figures and an overall

better life. To traditional Indian yoga practitioners, this state of affairs can be an aggravating one. Within Avinash's yoga community however, the subject of over-commercialization of yoga is almost never brought up for discussion.

"It is a complicated topic not easily defined in clear black and white terms," he explains. "On one side, commercialized and marketed yoga can lack many of its deeper philosophies and beauty, but on the other, yoga and all of its fans benefit either directly or indirectly from the industry's commercialization and branding of yoga."

Avinash, himself, is employed in a commercialized yoga institution where students pay top dollar to be taught by him and other Indian born and trained coaches. "Just because it comes through the gate of a big corporation does not necessarily negate its virtues. I am one of the coaches there and every day I am teaching my students yoga as I understand it - the physical, the mental and the spiritual aspects of it."



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ONE CRAZY RIDE

Seeing India while racing down pothole-laced roads in a three-wheeled rickshaw

TEXT AND IMAGES BY RIC GAZARIAN

THE AUTO RICKSHAW labored down the ink-dark road. Oncoming giant trucks barreled toward us, blinding us with their headlights. The rickshaw dangled within centimeters of the road's shoulder. My driving partner, Keith King, and I were beyond exhausted. It was nearly 10pm and we had been on the road for 12 hours. And we were still many kilometers from our hotel.

This was day six of our 12 day odyssey. Keith and I drove 2,000km from Mumbai to Chennai in India. We were participating in an organized rally known as the Rickshaw Challenge (www.rickshawchallenge.com). The organizers of this event endeavored to boost the challenge quotient. First, they

provided us with a tired auto rickshaw. The rickshaw is a 7 hp vehicle more suitable for quick jaunts around the city with its lawnmower-like engine with a top speed of 50kph. Second, the race was held during monsoon season - violent, incessant rains. And the final challenge was the horrifying roads and traffic. The Indian people maintain a stoic equilibrium to endure the viciousness of these roads.

Why were we here? What were we thinking? According to Wikipedia, India has over 240,000 traffic fatalities a year. Aravind Bremanandam, the organizer of the event stated: "Something has already gone wrong, you just don't know about it yet! This is India." Our goal was to

experience India at the ground level, as a local. We believed this rickshaw rally was the perfect antidote.

The rally started in Mumbai where we met the other five teams and were given our rickshaw. We were trained in the basic operation of the vehicle and for a half day I drove it in an endless circle in a dirt lot while locals stood by and gawked. The short training did not adequately prepare us for the challenges ahead.

The next day the starting flag was waved and we were launched into the steamy madness of Mumbai. We spent nearly the entire day trying to escape the clutches of the city, thwarted by traffic, poor roads and mis-directions - the traffic nearly

swallowed us whole. We drove in circles and every other conceivable shape until we successfully exited Mumbai. One of our challenges that haunted us throughout the entire trip was encountered on our first day of navigating Mumbai - running out of petrol. The rickshaw is a bare bones machine with no fuel gauge so to measure our fuel level we would slide our dipstick into the tank, which was filled with a combination of petrol and oil. Despite continual measuring of the petrol, Keith and I set a rally record of running out of petrol 16 times. We eventually attained a jerrycan several days into the rally which helped our situation, but did not solve it.

During the humid afternoon on our first day, our contraption puttered and stopped in the middle of a busy road in Mumbai. I skipped out of the backseat and started pushing the rickshaw to the side of the road as Keith steered. I muttered silent prayers that no one would ram into the rickshaw as I pushed. I quickly waved down another rickshaw who bought me to a nearby gas station where I was to learn that all gas stations were staffed by a minimum of ten smiling men. After a lot of gesticulations, a plastic bottle was produced and filled. I made my way back to Keith and saw him surrounded by two policemen. I held my breath as I approached. Thankfully, the police were of the friendly and curious variety and after a couple of pictures we were on our way.

We were completely exhausted and frazzled when we reached our first stop, the small town of Alibag. Alibag was less than 100km from the starting line, yet

it had taken us over 10 hours to cover this distance – an indication of future challenges.

FAST FORWARD

Day eight was a very well-needed day of rest in Panaji, Goa, known for its famed beaches. The racers joined with the Goa Round Table later that afternoon. Round Table India is a philanthropic organization. Local chapters throughout the country have combined to build over 5,500 classrooms and benefit over five million children through their Freedom Through Education mantra.

We were to spend an afternoon at one of their Round Table India's local projects, a home for abandoned boys. Keith and I channeled our inner Muppet. I dusted off an old Halloween classic, Elmo, while Keith transformed into Cookie Monster. These costumes were part of our provisions we had brought from home. The costumes would hopefully induce some smiles upon our visit to the boys' home. On our way to the home, we received some funny reactions wearing a costume while driving a rickshaw in India in 35 degree Celsius weather.

A dirt clearing sat in front of the home where a dozen spirited kids kicked a football around the pitch. Upon seeing us, the children quickly congregated around and started grabbing, tugging and jumping on us. Then the picture taking began: handshakes, high fives, and a plethora of smiles. Names were shared, and quickly forgotten.

We were escorted into a darkened, grand room in the house and the kids were put through their songs and dancing.

The entertainment pulled at our heart strings. After a rewarding afternoon, we all departed and headed back to the hotel. We had one more night of rest before we hit the road for the second half of our adventure.

After another week of amazing highs and some brutal lows, we limped to the finish line in Chennai. I exhaustedly vowed never to drive a rickshaw again. The closing ceremony was hosted by another Round Table India school. Keith and I were the proud winners of the Bonkers Award. In this global league of nations, India stands alone as a unique outlier and we experienced it all at the ground level.

To capture the magic and the madness of the adventure, the team created a full-length documentary **Hit The Road: India** (www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjbcXz5JfjQ) that tracks their 2,000 km odyssey through India.

The Travel Scientists (www.travelscientists.com), based in Budapest and Chennai, organize events around the world and multiple rallies across India. One of these rallies is the Mumbai Xpress (www.rickshawchallenge.com/trips/mumbai-xpress) - a 14-day event from Mumbai to Chennai, covering 1,950km. Costs begin at 1,750 Euro per team. This year the event starts on August 8, so start planning!

BIO: Ric Gazarian is a travel blogger at **GlobalGaz** (www.globalgaz.com). He is on a quest to travel to every county in the world. He enjoys off-the-beaten path locations, unique experiences and must-see places. He is the producer of **Hit The Road: India** (www.hittheroadmovie.com).



Wine & Dine

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN



PLAN DE LA VILLE DE SAIGON

Fortifiée en 1790 par le Colonel V. Olivier.
Réduit du grand plan levé en 1795
par ordre du Roi de Cochinchine
par Brun Ingénieur

Renvois

1 Palais du Roi
2 Palais de la Reine
3 Arsenal et Forges
4 Palais du Prince

11 Place d'Armes
12 Mât de Pavillon
13 Briqueteries
14 Chantiers de construction
15 Bassin
16 Maison de l'Evêque d'Annam
17 Almonnaie

Rizières

Rizières



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Red Brick starter; Red Brick salad; Northern style fish filets; and Crab hot pot with beef shank and baby ribs

Brick by Brick

Come for the ambiance, stay for the food

TEXT BY JOEL ZORRILLA IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

WITH MAPS OF Old Saigon reminiscent of colonial times drawn expertly on the wall, **Red Bricks** (30 Ho Tung Mau, D1) conjures up an atmosphere of a time wedged between two eras: nostalgic Old European and the surprisingly chic 21st century Saigon. The ambience of unforgiving modernity bordering on the realm of contemporary art purveys

throughout this lovely establishment, yet keeping you grounded in the comforts of bygone times. The restaurant is a perfect spot to bring your significant other on that anniversary celebration or perhaps the ideal location to work up your courage and finally invite out your crush.

Sharing a platter of spring rolls amongst

lit candles while surrounded by a charming blend of bricks and wooden panels was very romantic. Red Bricks is spread over three tastefully decorated floors, complemented by wonderful Old School black and white checkerboard floors. The service is nothing short of exemplary, the smiling wait staff always within reach for my constant barrage of questions concerning the ingredients and origins of the dishes, or perhaps a refill on my red wine, an all-around true embodiment of warmth and hospitality the Vietnamese are known for.

The restaurant, opened in October 2014 by Miss Vietnam 2006 winner Mai Phuong Thuy and her husband, serves mostly Vietnamese dishes, northern specialties and their chef's fusion creations. We ordered the signature Red Brick starter (VND119,000), a sample platter of four different varieties of stuffed rolls of seaweed and pork, mushrooms and pork, corn and crab, and "fish bread" (a bread roll instead of the normal philo dough with fish crumbles inside). The four kinds of dipping sauces - sweet chili, fish sauce, chili mayonnaise, and chili - complement the rolls deliciously. The dish was delivered to our table together with the Red Brick salad (VND129,000). The salad was one of the best I've had in Vietnam, a wonderful kaleidoscope of flavors made up of shredded cucumber, shrimp and jellyfish served with a fantastic sweet chili dressing with a nice fiery aftertaste. And crispy fried shrimp wafers added texture and complexity to the salad.

After taking a much deserved breather and savoring our glasses of excellent JP Chenet Cabernet Syrah (VND120,000/glass) from southern France, the first main dish arrived - Northern-style fish filets served with noodles, chives, dill and, one of my all-time favorite garnishes, peanuts (VND149,000). The fish was spiced, battered and perfectly fried. It was comfort fried food that made me want to order a bucket and happily spend the rest of the evening indulging on these wonderful fried chunks of joy.

After a slight rest period, they brought out a steaming large Northern-style freshwater crab hot pot with beef shank and baby ribs (VND399,000). The smell of pungent fish sauce assaulted my nose as I removed the cover, while I eyed the floating cubes of fried tofu swimming in the red broth. Hot pots are one of those Vietnamese dishes that can somehow bring contrasting ingredients together into a hot boil and make it taste delicious. The sweet taste of crab meat, the buttery thin slices of the beef shank along with a heap of tossed in greens in the spicy tomato-based soup was an explosion of flavors. That withstanding the fresh beef shank cuts, obviously selected by a meat connoisseur, were perfectly suited for the hearty broth of fried tofu, tomatoes and ribs.

We ordered flan (VND25,000) and a passionfruit mousse dessert (VND25,000) to complete the evening. While the flan was typical of what you expect around Vietnam - bouncy, sweet custard - the latter served as a spectacular finish: light fluffy and just the right amount of both sweet and tart presented beautifully inside the fruit's shell. ■



FROM TOP: Flan and Passionfruit mousse desserts

Time to Go Dutch

Discover Holland's best kept secret: its food

TEXT BY MIKE WAKELY IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

FROM THE MOMENT you walk through the large wooden merchant's doors, into the warm brick and wood interior, it seems like **The Bourgoncier** (62 Duong 65, Tan Phong, D7; www.dutchrestaurant.vn), is trying to coax you back in time. The walls are covered in paintings of trading ships from the golden age of the Dutch Empire, when, in the 17th century, the control of spice from modern-day Indonesia made little Holland the superpower of its time.

And like all empires, they became culinary magpies, collecting influences into their food from across Europe and Asia, from the sate of Jakarta to the smoked sausages of their Germanic neighbours. "I'm trying to bring a taste of Holland, to do something different. The Dutch brought the spice back, and food from Belgium, France and Germany. We keep it simple, and try to cook it like Grandma did," says Peter Cijssouw, the owner of the restaurant.

Dutch food has a reputation for being a simple, hearty and rich cuisine, most notable for heavy stews, potato covered hotpots and thick soups. It may lack the sophistication of French cooking, but at its heart is the same dedication to high quality products. It's clear that Peter is passionate about serving up traditional Dutch fare. "We are making everything that we can ourselves. From the mayonnaise to the smoked sausages, in order to make sure that they are just right."

We start with a portion of the *Bitterballen* or mini beef croquettes (VND80,000 for eight). The Spanish occupied Holland during the 15th century, and it is easy to spot their influence all over this dish. "It is the Dutch tapas, a classic street food that you find all over Holland. It's a must have," Peter tells us. The croquettes are delicious, warm and crispy but yielding to reveal a light and very meaty filling of beef ragu. Washed down with a cold beer (in my case a Leffe, a classic Belgian wheat beer) they are dangerously moorish. (They are running a promotion for the next two months – a portion of *bitterballen* and a bottle of Stella Artois for VND140,000.)

For our appetizers we both opt for the pea soup, or *Snert met Gerookte worst* (VND120,000). This is a thick, unctuous and wholesome dish, more akin to a stew than a soup, and could stand as a main course in its own right. The soup is made with the simple flavours of vegetables, rightly led by the dominant flavor of pea, flecked with strands of succulent pork and topped off with a few slices of the house smoked sausage. This is gorgeous comfort food at its best, a kind of Dutch soul food.

Our main course is a sharing platter called the Dutch Trio (VND390,000). This consists of

three different kinds of potato mash (endive, carrot and onion, and saurkraut) served with moist, locally produced slices of roast ham, a soft meatball and homemade smoked sausage, with a deep (and slightly sweet) onion gravy on the side. The meatballs are tender and packed with flavor. "They are inspired by a roadside meal that is popular with truck drivers in Holland," explains Peter. "The meatballs are left to gently simmer for many hours in a sauce, making sure that they don't dry out."

The next dish we try bears the most obvious mark of the Dutch adventures in Asia – the *Leeuwarden* or *Nasi goreng, sate* and *pangang* (VND260,000). These Indonesian dishes were brought back to Holland by the early travelers and adapted to the Dutch palate, so the sate sauce is creamier, the heat of chilli not as present and the sweet and sour pork noticeably sweeter. "This is not Indonesian food," explains Chef Antonius van Esch. "It is very much the Dutch interpretation of it, but this is also real family food – what my mother cooked me twice a week."

There is a growing wine list, but we chose to wash down our main courses with a chilled carafe of the Spanish house red (VND220,000), which was both refreshing and good value for a bottle. We also tried the homemade mulled wine (VND70,000), which was mellow and light, unlike the typical British Christmas drink, with a more subtle flavor of cloves and spices.

In a Dutch restaurant there was only really one way to finish our meal – the famous *Appelflap* or apple turnover (VND100,000). Sweet and cinnamon flavored apple wrapped in a delicate pastry and eased down with vanilla ice cream. Simple perfection.

And it is this simplicity that is the hallmark of Dutch food – simple but very hearty. The Bourgoncier has set its stall out to produce filling, homemade dishes straight from a family kitchen in Rotterdam – the true taste of Holland. "A Bourgoncier is a lover of food," says Peter. "Someone who sits down to enjoy the evening. Good food and good living." So head down to D7, armed with a big appetite, and go Dutch for the evening. ■

The croquettes are delicious, warm and crispy but yielding to reveal a light and very meaty filling of beef ragu.



Beef croquettes



Pea and ham soup



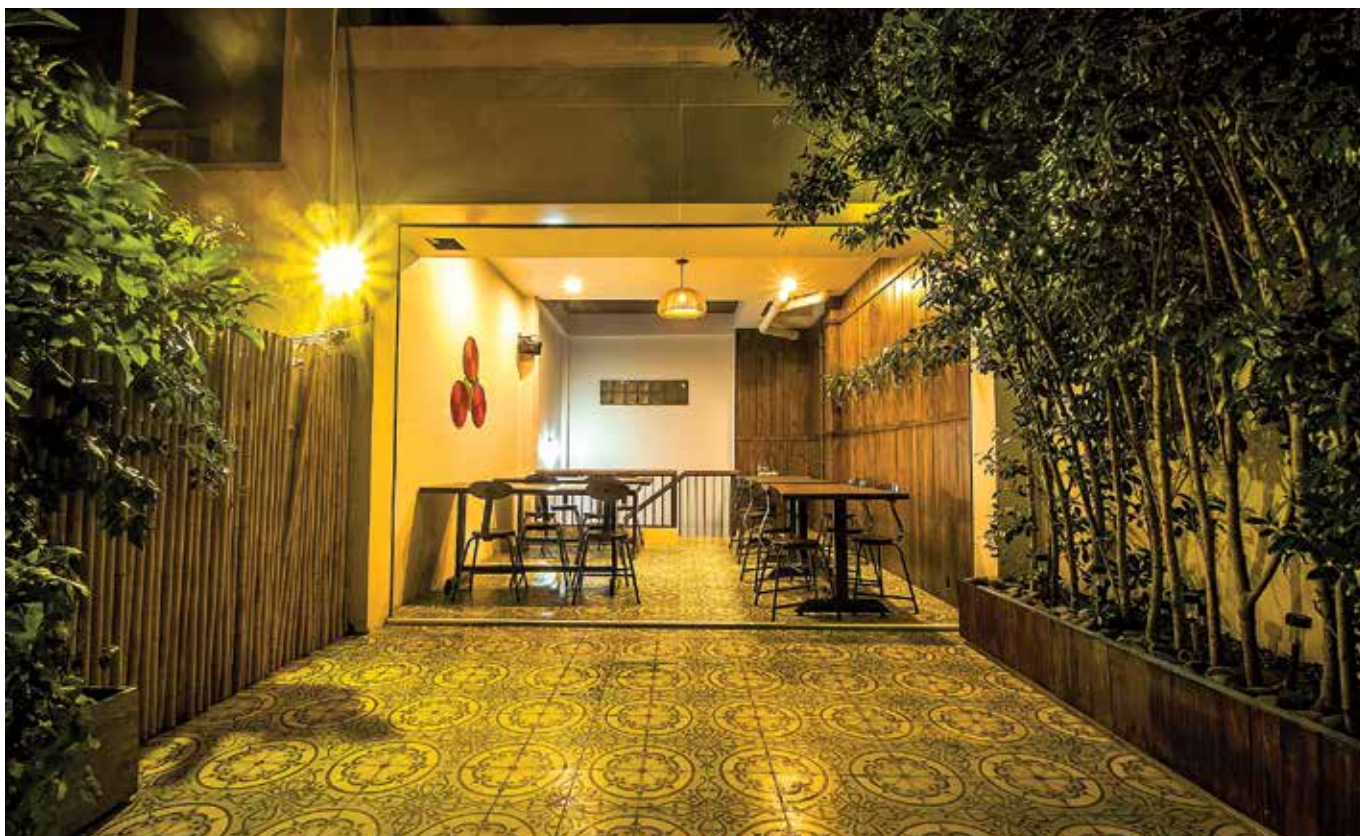
Dutch Trio



Nasi goreng



Appelflap



Drunken Chicken Hot Pot

A new eatery serves up no-nonsense Northern specialties

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

“KEEP CALM AND eat chicken hot pot,” says a stenciled sign in neat lettering at **Lau Dam Bong** (7G Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D1, down a small alley next to the HTV building). It’s as good advice as any I’ve received today, and when the hot pot involves drunken chicken, it’d be a travesty to refuse.

Opened in April of this year, Lau Dam Bong is the first foray into the world of restaurants for owner Nguyen Thanh Binh, setting out to recreate the dishes of the North. Born in Hai Phong, Binh took an interest in cooking when working as part-time kitchen help while earning a degree in Finance in Sydney. The attention to detail of a first-time restaurateur is seen in the minimalist chic décor: clean painted brick walls and polished cement floors anchored by sleek wooden tables embedded with powerful heating elements for the hot pot. The restaurant is narrow, with just twenty or so seats on the ground

floor along with a bar area, but deceptive in its size, as it encompasses five floors, providing seating for 120, with a dumbwaiter moving dishes between the kitchen and dining areas.

Lau Dam Bong’s menu isn’t divided into starters and mains per se, but is more like a collection of dishes you’d expect to find at a family feast in Vietnam’s North.

We start off light with *Ca ro dong* (VND79,000), a colorful salad of banana blossom, bean sprouts, julienned carrots and mint with a sweet and sour fish sauce dressing, topped with crispy fried perch. Sliced very thin, the fish is almost like a crackling, providing a wonderfully crunchy texture to the dish.

The *Cha com* (VND79,000) is another slice of Hanoi on a plate. *Côm*, or green rice, is traditionally available only in autumn, with the rice harvest. It’s a labor-intensive process to soak, steam, and husk the grains before pounding them flat. Here, it’s mixed with

very finely minced pork, lightly seasoned, then steamed and fried, almost like a sausage. You can still see the kernels of green rice in the sausage, providing moist, spongy bursts of flavor.

Moving on to Hai Phong, located at the mouth of the Cam River where it meets the East Sea, we sample the region’s specialty, *Nem cua be* (VND99,000). These fried spring rolls take on the square shape peculiar to Hai Phong, and are stuffed with minced pork, vermicelli noodles, bean sprouts, tree ear mushrooms, shrimp and crab. “Southern cuisine uses sate and chili whereas Northern cuisine uses less oil, less spices, to allow the ingredients to shine through,” says Binh. The excellent *Nem Cua Be* illustrates his point, bursting with chunks of crab and shrimp. In a generous moment, Binh lets it slip that the rice paper is wetted with beer instead of water, which makes them turn a golden brown when frying without getting burnt. The dish is meant to be eaten as a handroll, filling a lettuce leaf with the spring roll, noodles and herbs before being dipped into tangy fish sauce.

Another beautifully presented dish was the curiously named *Vit nuong gia chon* (VND120,000), “Roasted Duck Civet-style.” The Vietnamese word *giã* literally means “fake,” so this was duck made to taste like civet which in turn is a nicer way to say “dog.” Northerners are known for their penchant for dog meat, but here, Lau Dam Bong prepares the chargrilled duck with the same seasoning and presentation of its controversial cousin. Having never had dog meat before, I had to rely on my dining companions (who were coincidentally from Hanoi and Hai Phong) for their assessment. One bite and their eyes lit up, speaking



to the authenticity of the flavors. To the uninitiated, the duck was meaty, moist and well-seasoned with a hint of *umami* tartness from fermented rice (a seasoning distinctive to dog meat dishes), designed to complement the condiments: holy basil, raw, sliced lemongrass, and peppery slices of fresh ginger-like galangal, for a very bold, unexpected combination of flavors.

Our night ended with *Lau ga dam bong* (VND249,000), the chicken hot pot dish after which the restaurant was named. *Dâm bông* (the “d” is pronounced like a “z”) is a fermented liquid made from the same glutinous rice that’s used to make the very strong Vietnamese rice wine. Here it’s used to marinate the chicken which then goes into

cold water, not stock, to make the dish. The result is a broth that’s at once sour from the fermented rice and sweet from the chicken, yet very light. There’s a plate of crunchy greens to throw into the hot pot and rice noodles to accompany. The dish is made to order, so once the broth is gone, there’s no asking for more.

There are only a few Vietnamese desserts on the menu (VND15,000 – VND25,000) but then again, people don’t come to Lau Dam Bong for the desserts. Even for those without food memories of Northern cuisine, the restaurant offers some very unique flavors not found in typical Saigon fare, using authentic Northern ingredients carefully prepared in a bright, upbeat setting. ■

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Goi ca ro dong; Cha com; Nem
cua be, Vit nuong gia chon and
Lau ga dam bong

The Other Down Under

New Zealand's rise in New World winedom



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

THE RISE OF New Zealand wines in the last 30 years has been nothing short of meteoric. Thirty years ago New Zealand wines were hardly consumed outside the country but now they've become serious players in the international wine scene.

Although most of the major grape varieties are planted in New Zealand, the two star ones, those whose wines people find more astonishing, are sauvignon blanc and pinot noir. New Zealand's sauvignon blanc in particular is very characteristic, packed with lots of flavors (passionfruit, melon, pineapple, white flowers, etc.), making it very distinctive and rather different to sauvignon blanc from other countries.

The specific climate of New Zealand, and the particularities of the soil (alluvial in most regions, consisting of sandstone, clay and gravel left by receding rivers), are mostly to 'blame' for these wonderful wines.

There are wine producing regions in both of New Zealand's islands. The North Island has six main wine areas including Hawke's Bay, which runs 350 km along the Pacific

Ocean, the oldest existing wine region in the country, and producing some of the best pinots and chardonnays. The South Island has four wine regions with Marlborough the most well-known, famous for its fresh and delicious sauvignon blanc. In fact, around 76 percent of all grapes grown in Marlborough are sauvignon blanc. Wineries like Villa Maria, Allan Scott, Yealands and Craggy Range have really put New Zealand wines at the top of the international market, delivering complex, delicious wines, many of which can be found and enjoyed in Vietnam.

Craggy Range, owned by Australian-American TJ Peabody and New Zealand winemaking legend Steve Smith MW, recently showcased five of their fabulous wines in Saigon. Craggy Range is producing wines of great complexity. One particular characteristic of the label is that every wine they make is a single-vineyard wine. For example, its Martinborough pinot noir is one of the best pinot noirs I've had that hasn't come out of Burgundy. The aroma of red fruits and black cherry, lavender and violets in the mouth is very well balanced,

and finishes long and elegantly. And if you are after something different and still elegant, try Sophie.

Allan Scott wines, established by Allan and Catherine Scott in 1990, are fresh, delicious and inexpensive. Allan, who loves Vietnam and usually visits the country every year, is down-to-earth and proud of the popularity that his wines have gained globally.

In New Zealand, each region has its own individuality and originality and although great pinot noir and sauvignon blanc wines are being produced, try some of the alternatives. I've tasted great chardonnay, riesling, pinot gris and even a bordeaux blend made in this fantastic country.

What I Am Drinking This Month

Ugarte Crianza, Rioja (Spain): A fabulous modern style Rioja, with great nose of leather and dark cherries. The palate is smooth and delicate with more red and dark fruits, a touch of leather and long lasting. Nicely paired with steak, charcuterie and medium-hard cheeses. Available at Saigon FNB, Wine Embassy and Ole restaurant. ■



Barcelona Bouillabaisse

A delicious French stew inspired by the Mediterranean coast



Vietnamese chef **Jack Lee** (www.chefjacklee.com) has served a host of Hollywood A-listers from Angelina Jolie to Barbra Streisand, and recently returned to chef for Acacia Veranda Dining (149-151 Nguyen Du, D1). His biography *You Don't Know Jack* by Oi writer NPD Khanh will be released later this year.

TRAVELING AS A chef gives you a different perspective on the places you visit. While most people are checking out the sights and experiences each city has to offer, chefs are always keeping their eyes on the cuisine – and we tend to spend a lot of time in the local markets on the lookout for new ingredients.

My recent trip to Barcelona in Spain gave me the experience of a lifetime. It's a great foodie destination with a rich culinary heritage and a friendly local

people who take their food seriously. The focal point of the Spanish cuisine, of course, is the tapas bar, which can be found on every corner – that's where Spaniards tend to while away their hours when they have enough time to spare for a quick snack or a brunch that extends way late into the afternoon.

Being close to the ocean, seafood is abundant in Barcelona, and they use it in their local take on Spain's most popular signature dish – *paella*. The Mediterranean

Coast version of this traditional old Spanish mainstay inspired me so much that I became interested in experimenting with applying similar techniques to my favorite French cuisine. What proved most interesting was a blend of the flavors of the Spanish coast with the rich Provençal French stew, *bouillabaisse*. I'd love to share this special fusion recipe with you to try out here in Vietnam. ■



MEDITERRANEAN BOUILLABAISSE

Fish Stock:

- 5 lb of fish heads and bones
- 3 cups of Chardonnay
- ½ cup of olive oil
- 3 stalks of leeks, washed and roughly chopped
- 4 onions, peeled and quartered
- 2 bunches of celery stalks, roughly chopped

Bouquet Garni:

A small bunch of thyme, parsley, dill and fresh bay leaves with 8 black peppercorns, secured in a cheesecloth and tied together.

Soup:

- 4 tbsp of olive oil
- 3 large leeks, washed and sliced
- 2 large fennel bulbs, sliced
- 2 large onions, peeled and sliced
- 4 shallots, peeled and sliced

- 4 large potatoes, peeled and diced
- Good pinch of Spanish saffron
- 3 tbsp of orange zest
- 2 cans of Italian-style tomatoes (500g)
- ½ lb of jumbo prawns, peeled and deveined
- 2 lbs of assorted fish fillets, sea bass, halibut, monkfish
- ½ lb of scallops
- ½ lb of Alaskan crab legs
- 1 dozen mussels, scrubbed well
- 2 dozen Manila clams, scrubbed
- 2 Tbsp of Pernod

Rouille:

- 1 roasted red bell pepper
- 1 potato, peeled and boiled
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tsp of sambal chili
- ¼ cup fish stock
- 5 garlic cloves

A pinch each of saffron and cayenne pepper
Salt and freshly-ground black pepper

Croutons:

- 12 baguette slices, each approximately 3/8-inch thick
- 1/2 cup virgin olive oil

Instructions:

For the Stock: In a large stockpot over a low to medium flame, heat the oil. Sauté the leek, onion, and celery for five minutes until tender. Deglaze with Chardonnay, cooking for 5 minutes to allow the alcohol to evaporate. Place the bouquet garni in the stockpot tied to the handle for easy removal. Add the cold water & fish parts. Simmer gently for 10 minutes, stirring to mingle flavors. Allow the stock to slowly simmer. Skim and discard the fish foam that

rises to the surface. Do not boil! If the stock boils, these impurities will be incorporated into the liquid. Simmer for 30 minutes, turn off heat and let steep for 15 minutes. Pass the fumet through a china cap (strainer).

For the Soup: Heat the olive oil and add leeks, fennel, onions & shallots for a few minutes then add potatoes and saffron and cook over a medium heat until all the vegetables are golden and soft, about 25 minutes. Then add the tomatoes, orange zest and fish stock and bring the soup to a boil. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Add fish, prawns, scallops, mussels and clams & simmer for 10 minutes. Then add the splash of Pernod and remove soup from the heat and cover.

For the Rouille: Broil the bell pepper, turning to blacken all sides. Place the roasted pepper in a paper bag, close it, and let it "sweat" for 5 minutes so it is easier to peel the skin. Remove from the bag, peel the skin and discard the seeds and stem. In a food processor, puree the potato, roasted pepper, mayonnaise, fumet, garlic, sambal chili, saffron and cayenne. Season with salt and pepper. Cover and refrigerate until needed.

For the Baguette: Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Lightly brush the baguette slices with olive oil and bake on a cookie sheet until crisp. Set aside.

Assemble: To serve, ladle the hot soup, making sure that everyone gets some prawns, scallops, mussels, clams, fish and crab legs. Spoon the rouille over the baguette and place on top of the soup and garnish with some parsley.

Bon Appetit!

>>The List

Wine & Dine

BARS



Blanchy's Tash

Known for its cool house music, live DJs at weekends and innovative range of cocktails. Downstairs is a trendy bar where the glitterati 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



Chu Bar

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

158 Dong Khoi, D1



Harry Casual

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

RI/49 Hung Gia 3, PMH, D7



Last Call

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

59 Dong Du, D1
3823 3122



O'Brien's

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

74/A3 Hai Ba Trung, D1



The Fan Club

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

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

Also Try...

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

Chill Skybar

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

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

Donkey Bar

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 bot

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.

onTop Bar

Located on the 20th floor of Novotel

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

167 Hai Ba Trung, D3
3822 4866

Purple Jade

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

1st floor – InterContinental Asiana Saigon
3520 9099
6pm until late
dine@icasianasaigon.com

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

Saigon Saigon Bar

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

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

CAFÉS



Bach Dang

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

26-28 Le Loi, DI



Café RuNam

No disappointments from this earnest local cafe consistently serving exceptional international standard coffee. Beautifully-styled and focussed on an attention to quality, 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, DI
www.caferunam.com



Chat

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

85 Nguyen Truong To, Q4



The Library

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

Ground floor – InterContinental Asiana Saigon
3520 9099
dine@icasianasasaigon.com



The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, DI



Windows

Centrally located near the Notre Dame Cathedral overlooking the 30/4 Park near the Reunification Palace, the cafe is a go-to place among the locals to see and be seen. It has outdoor and indoor air-conditioned seating.

12 Alexandre De Rhodes, DI

Also Try...

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

CaffeBene

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

58 Dong Khoi, DI
3822 4012
caffebenevietnam.com

Ciao Café

There's rarely a tourist who's been through inner-city Saigon and hasn't stopped in on the super-friendly-looking Ciao Café. It stands up well

as an expat mainstay too, with its fashionable décor that varies from floor to floor and its classic selection of Western cafe and bistro favorites.

74-76 Nguyen Hue, DI
3823 1130

FB Deli Coffee

The cafe offers signature coffee beans imported from Italy. Customers can also enjoy homemade cakes along with tiramisu, muffins and sandwiches. All cakes 50 percent off from 7pm-10pm.

SE-1 My Khanh 2 Apartments, D7

L'Usine

L'Usine is a retail, café and gallery space occupying two locations in the center of DI. 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, DI
70B Le Loi, DI
www.lusinespace.tumblr.com
9am – 9pm



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CHINESE



Dragon Court

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

11-13 Lam Son Square, D1
3827 2566



Dynasty

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

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



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

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

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

Yu Chu

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

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



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

SPANISH



La Habana

Cuban venue with fine Spanish cuisine, Cuban cigars and German beer. A wide range of tapas and cocktails. Great bar atmosphere and late night entertainment.
6 Cao Ba Quat, D1
www.lahabana-saigon.com



Olé

With all the warmth you'd expect from a decent venue in this category, Olé serves authentic and tasty Spanish favorites with great tapas and highly-recommended paella. Family-run venue with a passion for great food and good service without undue fuss. Feel at home.
129B Le Thanh Ton, D1
012 6529 1711



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 25 39



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"



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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, D1
www.augustinrestaurant.com



La Creperie

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

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



La Fourchette

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

9 Ngo Duc Ke, D1
3829 8143
www.lafourchette.com.vn



Le Bacoulos

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

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



Le Terroir

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

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1
www.tycozsaigon.com

Also Try...

L'essentiel

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

98 Ho Tung Mau, D1
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, D1
3821 3056

La Villa

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

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

Le Bouchon de Saigon

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

40 Thai Van Lung, D1
www.lebouchondesaignon.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



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

INDIAN



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



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



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.

SA 26-2 Sky Garden 2, Phu My Hung, D7

2213 1481 | 2245 0096 | 093 806 9433

Hotline: 0906357442 (English)

bollywoodvietnam@gmail.com

Facebook: bollywoodvietnamindiancuisine



Ganesh

Ganesh serves authentic northern Indian tandooris and rotis along with the hottest curries, dovas and vada from the southern region.

38 Hai Ba Trung, D1

8223 0173

www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com



Saigon Indian

Saigon's original Indian eatery is still going strong, located in a bright, roomy upstairs venue in the heart of District 1. 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, specializing 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

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



Inter Nos

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

26 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2
090 630 12 99
info@internos.vn
www.internos.vn
facebook.com/internossaigon



La Bettola

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

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



La Cucina

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

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



La Hostaria

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

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



LovEat

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

29 Hai Trieu, D1
086 260 2727
www.loveat.vn



Also Try...

Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1
3824 4286

Opera

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

2 Lam Son Square, D1

Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1
3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

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

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

Pomodoro

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

79 Hai Ba Trung
3823 8998



JAPANESE



Achaya Café

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

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



Ebisu

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

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



Gyumaru

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

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



Ichiba Sushi

Ichiba 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.ichibasushi.vn



Monde

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

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



Robata Dining An

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

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

Also Try...

Blanchy Street

Inspired by London's world-famous Nobu Restaurant, Blanchy Street's Japanese/South American fusion cuisine represents modern dining at its best in the heart of downtown, a truly international dining experience in a trendy, modern and friendly setting. Great sake and wine selection.

74/3 Hai Ba Trung, D1
3823 8793
www.blanchystreet.com
11am - 10:30pm

Chiisana Washi

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

River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
6683 5308



K Cafe

One of the larger Japanese restaurants in the city, this exemplary sushi venue is an ideal choice for business and friendly gatherings.

74A4 Hai Ba Trung, D1
38245355
www.yakatabune-saigon.com

Osaka Ramen

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

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

Sushi Dining Aoi

Sushi Dining Aoi is one such restaurant, where the whole atmosphere of the place evokes the best of the culture.

With its typical Japanese-style decor – the smooth earthen tones of the wooden furniture and surrounds, the warmth and privacy of the VIP rooms – it's possible to believe you're in a more elegant realm.

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

Yoshino

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

2A-4A Ton Duc Thang, D1
3823 3333

KOREAN



Galbi Brothers

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

RI-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 kooky styling and a great attitude – and some of the most finely-presented signature Thai cuisine you'll see in this city, much of it authentically spicy. Long Live the King! Reservations recommended.

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



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

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



Nossa Steakhouse

A stylish restaurant featuring Italian cuisine and Western steaks with a wide selection of imported steaks from Australian and the US. Nossa brings food and decor together to create a cozy ambiance. With an attention to bringing authentic flavors, we provide good food, good prices and good taste. Special promotion for first year anniversary: Buy 1 steak get 2nd steak 50% off.

36 Pham Hong Thai, D1
0938 584 188 / www.nossa.vn

NOSSA
 STEAKHOUSE



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



Pho 99

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

139 Nguyen Trai, D1
536-1 Bui Bang Doan, D7



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



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VIETNAMESE



Five Oysters

Five Oysters serves authentic and excellent Seafood & Vietnamese food with draught beer at VND10,000 as well as a promo of VND10,000 per fresh oyster daily. There's also a rooftop, a great place to start or end the night! Recipient of Certificate of Excellence 2014 from Tripadvisor and Top Choice 2015 by Lianorg.com. Recommended by VNexpress.net, Lonely Planet, Utopia and Saigoneers.
234 Bui Vien, D1



Frangipani Hoa Su

Frangipani Hoa Su offers Vietnamese cuisine with a variety of dishes from different parts of Vietnam ranging from pho, bun bo Hue to mi quang. It serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. It also has an open space and a VIP air-conditioned room together which can hold a maximum capacity of 500 people, making it an ideal venue for different types of events and functions.
26 Le Van Mien, D2
frangipani.restobar@gmail.com



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 Chan, Binh Thanh
6258 1508
papaya@chi-nghia.com
www.chi-nghia.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



Quan Na - Vegishouse

A Vietnamese vegetarian and vegan restaurant that uses the freshest ingredients to create dishes such as fresh spring rolls, sticky rice, curry specialties and coconut-based desserts. Decor is swathed in dark mahogany wood and red curtains.
796/7 Truong Sa, Ward 14, D3
Opening time: 10:30am-2pm; 5pm-9pm
9526 2958
Facebook: quanna.vegishouse



Red Door

Red Door offers traditional Vietnamese food with a contemporary twist. The restaurant is also a platform for art talk, science talk, and social talk; where ideas and passions are shared.
400/8 Le Van Sy, D3
012 0880 5905
Facebook: "Reddoorrestaurant"



Also Try...

3T Quan Nuong

Tasty BBQ venue situated above Temple Bar. The venue has a traditional, rustic theme with old-style furniture and a quaint Vietnamese decor, making this a nicely atmospheric restaurant and a great place to dine with international friends new to the cuisine. The menu features a number of local favorites.
Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1
3821 1631

Banh Xeo 46A

Fun Vietnamese-style creperie popular with locals and expats alike for its tasty, healthy prawn pancakes, along with a number of other traditional dishes.
46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

Cha Ca La Vong

If you do only one thing, you'd better do it well – and this venue does precisely that, serving only traditional Hanoian Cha Ca salads stir-fried with fish and spring onion. Delicious.
36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Com Nieu

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

venue is best known for its theatrics. Every bowl of rice is served in a terracotta bowl that is unceremoniously shattered upon serving. Unforgettable local food in a very pleasant traditionally-styled venue.
59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3
3932 6363
comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com
comnieusaigon.com.vn

Cuc Gach Quan

Deservedly one of the highest ranking Vietnamese restaurants in Saigon on Trip Advisor, this delightful restaurant serves up traditional, country-style foods and contemporary alternatives in two character-filled wooden houses located on opposite sides of the street from each other. Unique food in a unique setting and an unbelievably large menu.
10 Dang Tat, D1
3848 0144

Highway 4

The menu reflects the 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

Nha Hang Ngon

Possibly the best-known Vietnamese restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Hang Ngon serves up hundreds of traditional local dishes in a classy French-style mansion.
160 Pasteur, D1
3827 7131
www.quananngon.com.vn
8am - 10pm

Temple Club

Named after the old-style Chinese temple in which the venue is located, the ancient stylings of this impressive restaurant make for an unforgettable evening spent somewhere in Saigon's colonial past. Beautiful oriental art that will please all diners and great local cuisine.
29-31 Ton That Thiep, D1
3829 9244
templeclub.com.vn

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

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

INTERNATIONAL



EON51 Fine Dining

On the 51st floor of the most iconic building in town, EON51 offers a unique dining experience with unparalleled 360 picturesque views of Saigon. It brings a taste of Europe to Asia using fine local foods and top-quality imported ingredients.

L50 Bitexco Financial Tower, 2 Hai Trieu, D1
Reservations@EON51.com
8 6291 8751



MAY Restaurant and Bar

We have over 20 years experience in hospitality business in Vietnam with some famous Brand such as Shadow Bar & Café and MAY Restaurant & Bar.

MAY- short for 'Me and You', it is all in one premium casual kitchen & bar downtown. Located centrally on the historic Dong Khoi street with a fusion of Western and Asian cuisine and pride themselves in their wine list and international standard of service. Happy Hour from 3pm to 7pm. You can even receive a 10% discount by calling 091 711 1921 or make reservation at www.mayrestaurant.com.vn

19 -21 Dong Khoi, D1 / 8am - 1am
6291 3686 / 0917 111 921
may.restaurant19@gmail.com
Facebook: "may.restaurant.bar"



Portofino

Portofino serves cicchetti - a tradition from Venice best likened to Spanish tapas, but usually served in larger portions, featuring cheeses, salad, pasta, prawns, pork, beef, salmon and seafood. Highlights for innovation: Trippa alla Romana - tripe with chickpeas, marinara sauce and fried egg; Slow braised pork belly served on mascarpone polenta; and Mozzarella in Carozza - breaded fresh mozzarella, anchovy and basil toasted with pomodoro sauce.

15 Dong Du, D1



Saffron

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

51 Hai Ba Trung, D1
382 48358



TnT BBQ

TnT BBQ delivers authentic American BBQ right to your doorstep. This delivery only BBQ joint specializes in smoked ribs, chicken, beef brisket, pulled pork and turkey breast.

0166 666 7858
11am - 10pm
facebook.com/tnbbqvietnam



Zombie BBQ

Zombie BBQ is a modern American BBQ restaurant featuring smoked ribs over Beachwood smoke for 8 hours. Offerings include BBQ chicken specialties from around the world as well as Alligator, Fresh Jalapeño poppers, Mexican street tacos with grilled meats as well as Vegetarian food. A never ending parade of meats find their way into the spit roaster as well as new creations every week.

628A Vo Truong Toan, District 2
6685 3756 / 09 1851 0139
4pm - 11pm
Facebook: ZombieBarbequesaigon



Also Try...

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

Boomerang Bistro

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

107 Ton Dat Tien, D7
www.boomerang.com.vn

Chit Chat

Daily menu change for their breakfast and dinner buffets, served in a relaxing atmosphere with eight live cooking stations with over 60 varieties of domestic and international dishes. A meeting

place to enjoy a cup of coffee from selected premium blends and delicious homemade pastries and cakes.

Hotel Equatorial
242 Tran Binh Trong, D5
3839 7777
info@hcm.equatorial.com
www.equatorial.com

Corso Steakhouse & Bar

With an extensive wine menu, contemporary Asian cuisine and wide range of juicy, sizzling steaks cooked to your liking by our professional Chefs, Corso Steakhouse & Bar is the perfect choice for a special celebration or formal business dinner.

117 Le Thanh Ton, D1
3829 5368 ext 6614
www.norfolkhotel.com.vn

Deutsches Eck / German Corner

The restaurant is fast becoming 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, Schwarzbau Exquisit, and Schwarzbau Weisse.

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

GreenS

Greens hopes to provide a healthy alternative to the many fast food options now available in the city. They use only high quality, fresh ingredients from their partner organic farms in Dalat to use in their salads. They also offer online delivery.

158/11, Nguyen Cong Tru, D1
www.greensvn.com

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

Khoi Thom

Khoi Thom has evolved into an authentic Mexican-style cantina serving home-style dishes, many from the Mexican chef's family.

29 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3

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

Market 39

Market 39 unites the best of East and West in a buffet and a la carte dining experience, along with one of the best Sunday brunch buffets in town.

6am - 10pm
Ground floor - InterContinental Asiana Saigon
3520 9099
dine@icasianasaigon.com

Scott & Binhi'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





The Queen of the Mekong Delta

A kaleidoscope of cultures, religions and food in Can Tho

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JAMES PHAM



A PLAIN TUNIC. A fragile canoe floating silently on the river. A conical hat worn just off center. A flock of swallows flying over rice fields ripe for harvesting.

So goes the imagery in *Chiec Ao Ba Ba*, one of Vietnam's most beloved songs from the 70s, a melancholy melody that paints a picture of a long-haired beauty waiting for her lover at Can Tho's Ninh Kieu Pier, an image of a simpler life in the Mekong Delta.

Known as the "Western Capital" of Vietnam, the city of Can Tho is the largest in the Mekong Delta and fourth largest in Vietnam. Just like the song that's at once hopeful and wistful, looking forward and looking back, Can Tho itself is a paradox. The city of over a million people boasts an international airport and Southeast Asia's longest cable-stayed bridge, but it's equally well-known for its low-tech floating market, endless rice paddies and tiny home factories churning out everything from noodles to bricks.

I find myself standing on the Ninh Kieu Pier, the place where lovers meet, at least in song. It's midday and scorching hot, and there's not much meeting going on, other than a few school kids out for the summer watching the boats go by at the juncture of two rivers: the Can Tho River and the Hau Giang, a tributary of the Mekong. Some workers are sprawled out on the stone benches of the neatly manicured riverwalk, catching a bit of shuteye under the watchful eye of the seven-meter tall copper statue of Uncle Ho that dominates the park.

I walk past the pretty Can Tho Market, built in 1915 and fully restored with its red roof and Sino-French architecture, and head towards Can Tho's cultural downtown, packed with museums, temples and pagodas, all within a 20-minute walking radius. As the heart of the Mekong Delta, Can Tho is a wonderful kaleidoscope of peoples and cultures from all over the region.

I first visit Ong Temple (32 Hai Ba Trung), right on the waterfront, a beautiful Chinese temple completed in 1896. Also known as the Guangzhou Assembly Hall, it speaks of the influx of Chinese workers to Vietnam starting around 1770, creating their own communities alongside the Vietnamese. The colorful temple is built in the shape of the Chinese character for "nation," and is filled with intricate carvings and altars to the Goddess of Fortune, General Ma Tien and General Kuan Kung with statues of the God of Earth and the God of Finance. Dozens of coils of incense hang from the ceiling, leaving the temple in a permanent smoky haze that's not all together unpleasant. To the side, a young mother leans in as a man pores over a book of Chinese characters, reading her fortune. The sign says that believers can ask to be released from bad luck in general, or from a litany of ills, including sickness, litigation and flooding. She slips the man a note and leaves with a smile. Apparently, things are going to be okay.

From there, I walk to Munirangsyaram, a Khmer Theravada Buddhist pagoda (36 Hoa Binh) located on one of Can Tho's largest streets. There's almost a sense of dislocation, seeing the golden spires punctuate the Can



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Ong Temple; Munirangsyaram Pagoda; Pitu Khosa Rangsay Pagoda, View from Chua Phat Hoc Buddhist Temple and Phu Ly Khmer Pagoda

Tho skyline. The three golden towers that adorn the front gate are very Angkor Wat-like but in miniature. Up the stairs, the area for worship is surprisingly plain, in stark contrast to its ornate façade. The small area features a 1.5 m high statue of the Buddha on a lotus flower, surrounded by several smaller statues. Back outside, three shy Khmer boys emerge from the adjoining dormitory. They're from Soc Trang and have come to Can Tho for university, a closer alternative than going to Saigon. Ethnic Khmers have been living in the Mekong Delta for centuries and Cambodians still refer to the area as Kampuchea Krom,

or "Lower Cambodia," not without some lingering animosity.

"This is a Khmer temple, not Cambodian," says Cuong, groundskeeper of the smaller yet much more interesting Pitu Khosa Rangsay Pagoda (27/18 Mac Dinh Chi). To get to it, I walk past a group of men playing an animated game of Chinese chess followed by a wall of glass jars housing Siamese fighting fish outside a school. The pagoda is turning out to be hard to find, located in a warren of alleyways right in the middle of a residential neighborhood. "We're Vietnamese, not Cambodian. We're born here," Cuong

corrects me as I ask about the compact building, colloquially called the "After Pagoda" because it was built a few years after Munirangsyaram. Despite its smaller size, its architecture is much more photogenic, with a sanctum, bell tower and monks' house. Dragons, fairies, birds and deities adorn its three levels, each displaying large Buddha statues serenely tucked under painted bodhi trees. It's said that in the early 70s, there were more than 400 Khmer pagodas serving the one million or so ethnic Khmer in the Mekong Delta.

Day turns to dusk and I make my

way directly across the street from Munirangsyaram to the Chua Phat Hoc Buddhist temple (11 Hoa Binh). Built in 1951, the three-story temple is hosting special ceremonies today for Buddha's birthday. The faithful gather to bathe a small statue on the ground floor, while men and women don grey smocks in preparation for a Buddhist reading on the top floor. I spot a teen who doesn't seem to be with anyone. "I come here because it's peaceful," says 15-year-old Tuan who frequents the temple on his own most days after school. Looking out over Can Tho, Buddhist prayer flags fluttering in the wind, backed by golden Khmer spires in the distance, glinting in the late afternoon sun, I feel at peace, too.

Another holy book says that 'man cannot live by *bread* alone,' so I head over to De Tham Street, known to locals as "Food

Street" in search of whatever non-bread dishes are unique to Can Tho. I have rather low expectations because everyone I've asked to name a dish unique to Can Tho, has had the same response: a furrow of the brow, followed by a long pause, and the inevitable... "nothing." Without a dish to truly call its own, Can Tho has co-opted the best dishes from all over the region that people brought along with them as they moved to the "big city."

Bun nuoc leo Soc Trang is a noodle dish with Khmer origins most known for in Soc Trang, 60 km southeast of Can Tho. The soup base is made from slow boiling fish stock and was originally flavored using Khmer *prohok*, a pungent fermented fish paste, but the Vietnamese version uses pickled river fish instead, often seen piled high in local markets. It's then served with noodles, whole shrimp, roasted pork, pork crackling, fish balls and

a heap of fresh herbs and shredded banana blossom. Fish heads are dipped in a kumquat fish sauce.

Also from the Khmer people in Soc Trang comes *banh cong*, a deep-fried ball of doughy goodness. Named after the ladle that's used to fry these muffin-like cakes, they're a happy marriage of rice flour, whole mung beans, eggs, taro and minced pork, all topped with freshwater shrimp, eaten with fresh herbs and dipped in ginger fish sauce.

Taking in the rich fabric of cultures that have combined in this picturesque city by the river, the labyrinth of waterways that crisscross their way through endless patchworks of rice fields, the broad smiles of a gentle people, it's easy to understand why this place has been immortalized in song: "Even if you visit only once, words do not do it justice. The river will remain beautiful for a thousand lifetimes." ■



FROM TOP : Bun nuoc leo Soc Trang and Banh cong

IF YOU GO...

- All the religious sites mentioned here are free to visit. However, please remember that they are active places of worship, so dress accordingly.

- Try *Bun nuoc leo Soc Trang* at 12 De Tham, just across the street from the Chua Phat Hoc Temple. Look for the sign that says "Phi Long," run by Loan and her father, Long, since 2001. A bowl is VND 30,000 and fish heads are served separately (also VND 30,000). They also make very good *goi cuon* (fresh summer rolls) for VND5,000 each. For *banh cong*, try the little outdoor stall at 34 De Tham. It's not much to look at (expect low plastic tables under a tarpaulin), but in addition to *banh cong*, Banh Xeo Hue Vien also serves up everyone's favorite *banh xeo* (sizzling turmeric-colored, rice flour crepes filled with shrimp and pork) for VND25,000 each. Expect the Mekong Delta version to be much bigger than the ones you'd find in Vietnam's Central and Northern regions. One is enough for a filling meal.

- The 92-room Victoria Can Tho Resort makes a stylish base from which to explore the area. Set right on the banks of the Hau River, its French colonial architecture and spacious gardens create an aura of sophisticated serenity. A complimentary shuttle boat ferries guests to the nearby Ninh Kieu Pier. Until September 30, rooms start at VND2,385,600++, including buffet breakfast. See www.victoriahotelsasia.com for more.

- For those looking to explore the surrounding area by river, Victoria Can Tho Resort also arranges boat trips that include sights like the Cai Rang Floating Market, the ingenious stilted nurseries over the river and the 1672 Khmer pagoda, located in a jungle setting at Phu Ly in nearby Vinh Long.



West Hotel Can Tho

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY **WEST HOTEL**

West Hotel

Western shining pearl
88-90-92 Hai Ba Trung Street,
Ninh Kieu District, Can Tho City
Tel: (84) 7103 683368 – (84) 7103 688689
www.canthowesthotel.com
info@canthowesthotel.com

WEST HOTEL is located at Ninh Kieu pier, in the heart of Can Tho City, with 80 well-equipped, state-of-the-art rooms conforming to international 4 star standards. Together with a team of professional and dedicated staff, West Hotel promise to bring you the most comfortable stay in Can Tho.

WEST HOTEL offers river/city views; air-conditioned rooms include a wardrobe,

in room safe, minibar and a flat-screen TV with satellite/cable channels. Complimentary wireless internet access keeps you connected, TV listings and cable provider is available for your entertainment. The en suite bathroom comes equipped with shower facility, slippers, hairdryer and free toiletries.

Operating a 24-hour front desk, the hotel features a fitness center and free parking on site. Other facilities include a café/bar, indoor and outdoor swimming pool, spa and restaurant overlooking the beautiful Hau River. The in-house restaurant serves a delectable spread of Asian and Western dishes. Special diet meals can also be prepared upon request, while after-meal drinks are offered at the bar. The hotel is also ideal for

conferences, meetings, events and weddings with a capacity of up to 150 people, and provides a modern hi-tech sound and lighting system.

WEST HOTEL is just 300 meters from the Can Tho Museum, 6.2km from the Cai Rang Floating Market and approximately 5km away from Tra Noc airport. West hotel is in a shopping district and minutes from Ninh Kieu Park and Ong Pagoda. The friendly staffs can assist guests with car/motorbike rentals, luggage storage, laundry services and tour arrangements. Airport transfers and business facilities are also available.

Most importantly, the outdoor local market are at the doorstep, which offers an insight into the lives of the locals. ■



Meet Mama Zu

The saving grace of Sapa

TEXT BY LORCAN LOVETT ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIDGET MARCH

A FEW DOZEN groggy tourists shuffle off the sleeper train and board a transfer bus to Sapa, one of Vietnam's top destinations. Inaudible slurs on the bus develop into excited chatter as they beam at guidebook photographs of terraced rice paddies swirling around lush green hills, a trademark image of the country's north.

Seconds after the bus's arrival there is a silent acknowledgement of shattered expectations. Only garish neon lights and incessant peddlers can be seen through a cold opaque fog. Disappointed, I almost turn around and head back to Hanoi myself but

there's one thought preventing me: I must find Mama Zu.

The 50-year-old Black Hmong guide has come highly recommended from fellow travelers. For the moderate post-haggle price of VND250,000 she takes trekkers out of the eponymous crude capital of Sapa district and into the communities of ethnic minorities living in the surrounding country in the province of Lao Cai. It is home to several ethnic groups including Hmong, Dao (Yao), Giáy, Pho Lu and Tay who can all be differentiated by their color dress. Most common in Sapa are the Black Hmong whose

women offer tours and homestays to tourists looking for an alternative experience to agencies and increasingly expensive hotels.

Prices have been exceedingly high at the tourist hotspot recently. In the run-up to Vietnam's six-day public holiday, lasting from April 28 to May 3, a group of avaricious hoteliers were fined by local authorities for soaring prices, with one reportedly charging over USD2,000 a night. The fully-booked hotels argued the price hike was made to "discourage booking."

Sprouting up startlingly quickly, hotels promise revenue for the Hmong through their





wealthy visitors yet this comes at a cultural and environmental price. Hotels matter in Mama Zu's world. I find her standing outside Holy Rosary Church wearing a traditional deep indigo blue dress, hence the ethnicity's name Black Hmong, with a pink top on underneath and a purple bandana. Black velvet covers her knees down to her ankles and large silver hoop earrings jangle next to her warm crinkled smile. She has a fittingly maternal glow.

At an altitude of about 1,500 meters, people say Sapa has four seasons in a day: cool spring at dawn, sunny summer at noon, cloudy autumn in the afternoon and winter at night. It felt like winter had overrun its slot on this chilly morning as we walked across the road and past the market.

"It's still very beautiful," Mama Zu assures me in her squeaky voice just before dodging a passing truck. Those looking for fluent English guides are unlikely to find any among the Hmong women. Mama Zu learnt her broken English when she began guiding ten years ago, two years after an influx of hotels she says. Since then, she adds, there has been a lot of change.

We walk towards a plot of indigo plants and she grabs one of the dewy leaves, rubbing it on my hand. It leaves a jade green

mark which gradually turns dark blue. The Hmong people use this natural coloring to dye their clothes, a lot of which are hemp. Many Hmong women's hands have an almost permanent dye after they've finished making clothes for the family. The Hmong achieve their darker dress color by mixing the dye and fabric twice a day for a month.

Mama Zu's hands have evidently not been soaked in dye lately although she still makes her family's clothes while her husband makes metal bracelets.

The guide skips up a steep muddy path, deftly avoiding the loose stones which jut out. Well-equipped trekkers would gasp in disbelief at the footwear below her traditional dress. She sports plastic camouflage slippers in which she hikes for hours every day. They're incongruous but seem to do the job.

We begin to talk about the cost of animals which are sometimes shared out in her village of Hau Thao. "I have one cat and four piglets. Our buffalo died and a buffalo cost VND20 million. A 10 kilo piglet cost VND400,000 and then we feed it up and get VND100,000 per kilo." Black piglets dart away either side of the path while cattle stray nonchalantly toward it much like they do anywhere in the Vietnamese countryside. Rearing livestock is vital here but the flora is just as important.



Bamboo shoots protrude through a thick layer of fog which settles below us. Mama Zu emphasizes her respect for the plant with a mix of enthusiastic gestures. She explains bamboo is used for construction in her village as well as having medicinal and nutritional purposes.

"You Buy One From Me"

Nearly halfway through the seven-hour trek we pass an isolated nursery which Mama Zu's children had attended. She has three children, two of whom are adolescents and another older daughter who is 18 and married. She lives about three hours away by scooter after following the tradition of moving in with the husband's family.

What do her younger son and daughter do? "They help make bags to sell and they talk to tourists," she answers. "Their English is very good. They spend two days a week in Sapa and the rest in Hau Thao. When they are older they will work in the hotels." Mama Zu, who has two brothers, says her sister died two years ago and her mother is still trekking around Sapa at the age of 70.

Traversing the lofty hills of Sapa is hungry work. Luckily there is a stop for food in a wooden hut on the walk, a bowl of tasteless instant noodles included in the trek's price. There is a strong sales streak running through the Hmong. They're encouraged to start trading young. One of their core tactics in capitalizing on the tourist boom is by

selling their famous handicrafts. Five little girls approach us, each carrying a bundle of colorful bracelets. They waveringly chant the slogan "you buy one from me" creating an almost eerie sound that soon fades away. Understandably they're more concerned with playing games and joking among themselves. At the hut a deaf mute boy wearing a sweater patterned with the US flag shoots me a shy glance and then juggles some stones, craving for our attention. His infectious grin must be an uplifting sight for fatigued tourists. After playing with the child, we walk through the tiny village of Han Da, small wooden houses scattered around a school and church.

"In my village when the fog falls you see the big Catholic church too," Mama Zu remarks, adding she is not Catholic. By now she is just plain 'mama' to myself and a fellow trekker. "Mama, what's this plant?" "Mama, what's that noise?"

She uses a combination of broken English, animal noises and her own language to explain. There are about four million native Hmong speakers in the world, of which 2.7 million are speakers of dialects that are mutually intelligible. In Vietnam, the Hmong population is about 1 million strong and the dialect spoken by the Hmong in the north is similar to that spoken in Laos and Thailand. The basic words Mama Zu teaches us sound like "oua jow" for "thank you" and "gaw nyaw lee cha" for "how are you"

although it's not a leap to say the spelling would be very different.

On our return to Sapa town we see men working on a cluster of hotel developments which will boast views of Fansipan, Indochina's highest mountain with a peak of 3,143 meters. The ground underneath turns into a smooth, new road. The boom town is stretching out its reach into the countryside. I ask Mama if this relentless development can really be a good thing. She understands the question but shrugs her shoulders and says, "I don't know."

Ahead we spot an old hunchbacked woman hobbling along the road. Surprisingly for us all, it's Mama's mother. After the cheerful family reunion the four of us finish the walk together.

Mama reveals a small book full of written praise from trekkers all over the world. Although she is unable to read it, she puts her blind faith in these references. We write ours. In a place seemingly filled with tourist traps, she has proved herself as a charming, authentic and affordable guide - the saving grace of Sapa.

Illustrations are from Bridget's new book, "A Summer in Sapa," full of drawings and paintings of four months spent there last year. She also gives art lessons to adults in Saigon. Visit www.bridgetmarch.co.uk or email bammah@hotmail.co.uk for details. ■



Make Mine To Go

Integrating food into your travels



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

ON THE SHARED nature of food, American chef and food writer James Beard said, "Food is our common ground, a universal experience." I love the way that food, or more specifically, the sharing of food, has a unique way of bonding people, transcending all barriers, be they language, financial or cultural. While visiting museums and historic buildings can certainly help you understand a nation's past, there's something immediate and tangible about the insights a simple meal on the street can provide about how people actually live. Thankfully, you don't have to be a foodie to appreciate how food can add an extra layer of adventure to your travels.

Markets

Travelers naturally gravitate towards the colors and vibrancy found in markets around the world. Some are very traveler-friendly, like the amazing La Boqueria in Barcelona where gregarious chefs make small talk as they prepare tapas or Istanbul's Grand Bazaar where shopkeepers happily hand out samples of Turkish Delight or cups of apple tea. Vietnam's markets? Not so much. Often due to the language barrier, but more likely because shopkeepers can't be bothered with camera-toting tourists who obviously aren't there to buy, it's difficult to start any type of dialog despite there being so much to ask about: odd-looking fruits, unidentifiable animal parts and dried plants, to name a few. If you're interested in markets, an easier way to access them is through cooking classes, many of which include a market tour. With a friendly guide mediating (and one who often has pre-existing relationships with the vendors), it's much easier to ask questions and comfortably photograph. Some hotels will let you accompany the chef for free to the market as he makes his daily run, so don't be afraid to ask.

Street Food

In *The Food Traveler's Handbook*, food writer Jodi Ettenberg says: "Food, mostly cheap food, became the way that I wanted to see a country, to understand how it moved and why people did what they did. I found food to be the most effective way to get a glimpse of the soul behind the



Barcelona



Saigon Street Eats Tour



Family and friends sharing a meal



Jessica, WithLocals Host



Luan, WithLocals Host



Jodi Ettenberg in Saigon

IMAGE BY JAMES CLARK

façade. Street food was... the practical option available to everyone, tourists and locals alike."

For the less adventurous who might feel lost sitting down to a meal where even ordering can be daunting, street food tours are a great way to sample new foods while learning about the culture. Barbara Adam of SaigonStreetEats.com says, "Unless you speak Vietnamese or have a [Vietnamese friend], it's off-putting to be the only foreigner in a place, not knowing what to order or how to eat it." While street food tours tend to be a little too packaged for me, I can definitely see the appeal for those who may be reticent to try unusual foods on their own.

Sharing Meals

Some of my favorite travel experiences have

involved preparing and sharing home-cooked meals. I've been fortunate that friendly locals have taken me in for impromptu meals all over the globe, from a gregarious old metalsmith in Cairo to a family of fishermen in Kampong Chhnang, Cambodia.

If you're only in a place for a few days and don't speak the language, making those connections may be difficult. Thankfully, there are several organizations out there seeking to connect people through food.

Mealsharing.com, the culinary equivalent of couchsurfing, was designed as "a global community of people who get together, learn from each other, and share home cooked meals." Getting its start as an underground movement in Chicago and Berlin, the meal sharing community which pairs hosts with guests, has grown into meals shared in

hundreds of cities around the world. Founder Jay Savsani says, "Every time I meal share, it's really exciting. What type of gift should I get? Where are my hosts from? You drive up to their home and there's usually a 5-10 minute awkward period but the instant they bust out, "Oh, we have some appetizers and something to drink," the awkwardness ceases. Meeting under the context of meal sharing, you're attracting open-minded, kind people. We're meeting in the context of something good." Jay's vision is for real people to connect over food. "The end goal is to have more and more locals host. It could be the grandson in Saigon who really wants to practice English and brings someone into the home with grandma's cooking. Basically, meal sharing is an online platform to enhance your offline life." While some meals are free,

others have a pre-determined “chip in” amount, ranging from just enough to cover the ingredients to those who are aiming to make a supplementary income.

Another site that offers home-based eating experiences is WithLocals.com (available in Southeast Asia and the Netherlands). I’ve used them to connect with locals who take me to their favorite eateries, but also with people who host a home-cooked meal, often with family members around who don’t speak a word of English. It’s one thing to be invited into an expat home, but a totally eye-opening (and truly authentic) experience to climb up a narrow ladder to a common bedroom/living room/kitchen area which an entire family shares with a ceiling so low you can barely sit up straight.

In *The Food Traveler’s Handbook*, Jodi doles out advice for finding cheap eats around the globe. Part handbook, part travelogue, Jodi also features stories and tips from other travelers. Some of the advice is basic (eg. choosing stalls that are busy; avoiding vendors who cook and also handle money; eating seafood near the coast, etc.) but a lot of it is thought-provoking, even for the seasoned traveler. Some of my favorite tips include: using cough drops as an icebreaker for taxi drivers and then asking them where they ate lunch (not where they think tourists should eat); finding a midday meal at hospitals and universities, places known for having cheap food with high turnover rates hence fresher food; bringing along fruit (not sweets) to give to kids on long bus/boat rides in developing countries as a way to start conversations with locals; and looking for places with families and older locals as customers (people with the most discerning tastes).

I asked Jodi about some of her more unique food experiences.

In your travels, which countries have you found to be the best/worst for cheap eats?

Cultures where street food is part of daily life have proven to be the best — Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos among them. In Europe, cheap and fresh base ingredients are plentiful in Spain and Portugal, where it has been great to eat small tapas or lunch specials for very reasonable prices. And with a booming street cart culture in many US and Canadian cities, it’s become easier to eat cheaply... though still nowhere near as cheaply as Southeast Asia! It’s harder in places where location makes food expensive. Iceland was one of the hardest places to eat at reasonable prices, but the beautiful landscapes made it well worth it anyway.

You talk about a “service swap” with vendors – being taught how to make a specific dish in return for bringing guests from the hostel back, teaching English to a spice seller in return for a lesson on spices. Do those suggestions really work? Those cooking spaces are awfully tight and the vendors are usually busy.

It certainly doesn’t work for every stall, that’s for sure. Most amenable is when I

return a few times then ask to come early, as they’re setting up. When the stall is set up and customers haven’t yet trickled in is my golden hour for food learning. Less applicable for soups as these are often sitting for hours, but more for snacks and stir-fried meals. If it gets busy, of course I bow out.

What’s the best way to convince a fellow traveler to break out of their food comfort zone and try something new?

I think it’s about providing a space where they can trust you to guide them appropriately, be it in a long web piece (my Saigon Street Food Guide was written for that purpose!) or to take a tour that lets them explore food safely. After that, they’re usually emboldened to keep trying on their own.

How do you deal with food fatigue? Isn’t it exhausting to always be searching out authentic food experiences instead of just giving in and having something from McDonald’s?

It doesn’t ever feel like fatigue. At no point am I saying “oh, if only I could just eat that burger!” I have celiac disease so it’s limiting to eat in life, in general. That’s my biggest stressor. Worst case I just go to the supermarket and cook up a meal — not a bad “worst case” to have! But usually with help of excited readers, local vendors, and lots of questions, you can easily find your way toward a wonderful meal.

“The Food Traveler’s Handbook” is available at Amazon.com and also via Jodi’s site: www.legalnomads.com where you can also find her Saigon Street Food Guide. ■



GEAR REVIEW

CAFFLANO KLASSIC

While I’m all for trying new foods, some things require consistency, like a great cup of coffee. With the superb quality of beans available in Vietnam, there’s no reason your cup of joe should be anything less than extraordinary. But in talking to a trendy French restaurateur recently, we both laughed sheepishly to discover the other too often settled for the dreaded 3-in-1 instant coffee packs. So when I came across the Cafflano Klassic, a portable 470g all-in-one coffee maker that recently won the “2015 Best New Domestic Coffee Equipment” award from the Specialty Coffee Association of Europe and has been garnering buzz from the likes of *Wired* and *GQ Magazine* UK, I knew I had to try it.

The beauty of the Cafflano Klassic is in its simple yet good-looking design. What looks to be an insulated tumbler actually opens up into a ceramic foldaway hand-mill, a drip filter, a tumbler and a measuring cup. Add beans and hot water, and you’re good to go. The hand grinder fits up to 30g of whole coffee beans and you can manually adjust the fineness of the grind. The grounds fall into a stainless filter dripper (no disposable pods, cups or paper filters to throw away, yay!) and the top acts as a measuring cup with a little hole as a spout. Hot water is meant to infuse the grounds for 30-45 seconds after which the rest of the water is poured in. Remove the filter and enjoy your cup of coffee in its own thermal mug.

While I wasn’t sure if I’d enjoy the process of grinding my own beans or the time it took to do it, within days, I found the ritual to be soothing and the smell of freshly ground beans rather intoxicating. I’ve enjoyed incorporating making coffee into my morning routine. The coffee drips faster than the typical Vietnamese aluminum filters and I’ve scaled down the amount of water I use to get a richer taste (the tumbler is tantalizingly big at 15 ounces). The Cafflano Klassic is really well-made and feels solid in your hands (reflecting its rather high price point at USD99) and looks very sleek. The only thing I’d change is the lid, which perfectly sits on the top of the cup (used to pour hot water) and the tumbler (to keep the coffee hot), but which doesn’t actually screw onto the tumbler. The makers intended the coffee to be drunk immediately after grinding, so if you like your coffee on-the-go, you’ll just have to be careful with it. In all, though, the Cafflano Klassic is elegant in its simplicity and a drool-worthy addition to any coffee lover’s kitchen or carry-on.

Cafflano Klassic is currently available in 19 countries and is looking for distributors in Vietnam. In the meantime, order one in red or black from www.cafflano.com and check out “Cafflano” on Facebook for more user tips.

Muong Thanh Hospitality

New market segmentation in 2015

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY MUONG THANH

MUONG THANH HOSPITALITY is known as the largest Vietnamese hotel chain operating up to forty-five 3,4,5-star hotels nationwide. The mergence between the nation-specific characteristics and the tendency towards modernism makes the Muong Thanh hotel chain unique and memorable for any customer.

By determining its objectives for nearly 20 years, Muong Thanh Hospitality is consistent with the humanist business philosophy, associated with the mission to preserve and introduce Vietnam's unique culture to the world. Furthermore, the operation of Muong Thanh Hospitality contributes to the development of the locals through job opportunities and community-oriented activities. All of these are the principles of doing sustainable business at Muong Thanh Hospitality.

With over 17 years of experience in hospitality, Muong Thanh Hospitality is expanding, extending its scope of services and upgrading service quality to offer all guests the pure taste of regional cultures throughout Vietnam.

In 2015, the group is expected to launch 10 hotels of 3 to 5 stars nationwide. We offer a variety of standardized solutions and facilities to satisfy a full range of needs and desires as well as provide guests with unique experiences. Different segments have different tastes and preferences and, perhaps most significantly, different price points.

Market segmentation is about dividing customers into groupings that are in some way similar or the same. Muong Thanh Hospitality is now dividing the market into 4 of the most common as described below:

- **Muòng Thanh Luxury:** An upscale brand of Muòng Thanh Hospitality offers travelers hotels located in Vietnam's major city centers, business districts and tourist destinations. Muòng Thanh Luxury's comprehensive range of high-standard services contributes to the well-being of both business and leisure travelers. Be sure to take advantage of our local culture experience approach towards enriching your stay, where we will provide you with local insight and a fresh look at each city.

- Being favorably located in the prime location of large cities, 4-star Muòng Thanh Grand Hotels have brought great pleasure to all guests traveling for leisure, business, special occasions, conventions and conferences. The magnificent combination between the cultural culinary traditions of ancient villages in the mountains of Vietnam, and modern architecture and facilities of Muòng Thanh Grand Hotels will surely give



customers "a relaxing moment, a touching sincerity."

- **Muòng Thanh Holiday** is a collection of 4-star hotels that are mostly located near tourism attractions, each with their own characters and identity. The hotels will offer guests unforgettable experiences of local culture as well as a unique atmosphere.

- **Muòng Thanh Standard Hotels** are the most long-standing properties of Muòng Thanh, which are tied to the group's history. They are the best choice for travelers looking for affordable accommodations with

high quality service. Their significant Muòng Thanh colors are harmonized with the culture and the sincerity of the local people. ■

In 2014, Muong Thanh Hospitality was honored with The Guide Awards (an annual program of The Guide) for enterprises, organizations, individuals and localities that made notable achievements and contributions to the overall development of Vietnamese tourism.

Slow Down

A pagoda worth taking the time to explore



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

THERE IS A famous temple in Cho Lon that I have visited more times than I can count. It's one of the oldest and most visited in that district. The Thien Hau pagoda (710 Nguyen Trai, D5) is an evocative place that is worth lingering in for an hour or so and, on a hot day in District 5, it provides a cooling retreat from the bustling community of traders and dealers outside.

To get a good view of this 18th century pagoda you need to stand directly across the street from it. From there you can see all the details on the roof which features gorgeously glazed, ceramic dioramas of feasts, battles, traders, demons, dignitaries, actors and merchants from other continents set against creatively modeled Chinese houses, palaces and shops. It is incredible that these old ceramics have survived the ravages of weather and time to look as beautiful as the day they were created. From this side of the street you see this magical old temple through a moving wall of roaring traffic, with street cafes to the right and left. Bird sellers with chirruping caged sparrows are completely inaudible above the din of motorbikes and taxis that trundle by, kicking up dust and spewing diesel fumes.

Pick up a cold drink and, when the lights stop the traffic, you can slip across the road and into the forecourt of Thien Hau pagoda. Now the scale of this precious building becomes apparent and with two more steps you walk through a solid granite doorway into another world. A hush descends and you are in a place where everything is sacred, where civic pride and community endeavour meet the gods and ancestors, where all the richness of the lives of Cho Lon's residents can be seen.

On the walls of the first inner courtyard there are some unusual friezes, possibly from the 1970s, depicting modern buildings, factories, a school and the interior of an elegant house. Maybe built by local philanthropists and entrepreneurs - these places must be very important to the community here. I can't image such urbane images being installed in a religious building in Europe. How different Westerners are from Asians in this regard.

The central covered yard of the pagoda is hung with incense coils sending prayers and wishes out to deities and forebears, the spirals of smoke captured in vertical rays of sunlight that penetrate the gaps between the roofs. The colorful ceramic

frieze continues around the rim of each courtyard. The stories from history and Chinese mythology create an imaginary world where fact and fiction co-exist. If you take a seat and linger in this cool space for 20 minutes you will also see two aspects of contemporary Cho Lon: the locals quietly carrying on with their religious rituals, and the foreign visitors gawping at the overwhelming visual feast as they snap photos and wonder at the richness that surrounds them.

Step into the ante-room to the right where there is yet another delight that has little to do with religion or ancestors but adds to the eclectic mix of incense coils, bronze-faced deities, relief friezes of factories, a 19th century fire-fighting device and dioramas of ancient fables. On the walls are large watercolor paintings of the 12 animals of the zodiac, each one a masterpiece. The animal of the year, the goat, is topped with a red garland and rosette. There are rows of elegant Chinoiserie chairs so take a seat to appreciate this unique gallery and decide which is your favorite.

One thing is for sure, this pagoda is not for rushing. ■



The Sound of Silence

A solution to snoring and sleep apnea

INTERVIEW BY **NDP KHANH**
IMAGE BY **NGOC TRAN**

Orient Skincare and Laser Center
244A Cong Quynh, D1; 3926 0561/62/63/64
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64D Truong Dinh, D3; 3932 5781
945 Cach Mang Thang 8, Tan Binh; 3970 3674
www.orientskin.com

TO MOST PEOPLE, snoring is at worst a nighttime annoyance, however, this seemingly benign quirk can hide great dangers. Excessively loud snoring, aside from irritating whoever has the misfortune of sharing your bed, is a sign of poor health and possible sleep apnea - a dangerous disorder that typically comes with a host of similarly alarm raising afflictions such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and, even on its own, can cause death. For years, the only cure for excessive snoring and sleep apnea was an extensive and costly jaw realignment surgery. Not anymore. In this issue, *Oi* talks to Dr. Ho Xuan Vuong from the Orient Center on a

new medical solution - Fotona Night Lase - to a decades-old problem.

What exactly is sleep apnea and how common is it?

Obstructive sleep apnea is a sleep disorder characterized by pauses in breathing or instances of shallow or infrequent breathing during sleep. Each pause in breathing, called an apnea, can last for several seconds to several minutes, and may occur, by definition, at least five times in an hour. Prolonged and untreated sleep apnea leads to poor sleep, fatigue, epilepsy and eventually death by asphyxiation. Sleep apnea can afflict people of all genders and races though overweight males over 40 have a significantly higher risk. It is estimated that four percent of adult men and two percent of adult women are afflicted with sleep apnea.

How does Fotona Night Lase end snoring and sleep apnea?

Loud snoring and sleep apnea have a similar root cause: obstructed breathing in the soft palate and uvula. To fix this problem, the uvula and soft palate need to be tightened. It used to be that we could only do this through surgery. The surgeon cuts the patient's jaw and face and reconstructs the jawbones, forcing the muscles in the area to reshape themselves to the new jaw. Recovery time post-surgery varies from person to person but I've seen extreme cases where a patient takes an entire year to recover. Fotona Night Lase, on the other hand, is a completely non-invasive procedure. A solid state Er:YAG laser is administered to the soft palate and the

uvula to stimulate and tighten the area's soft tissue. With time and good application, this treatment will end snoring and sleep apnea.

Is anaesthetic required in Fotona Night Lase?

Not at all. It would defeat the purpose of a non-invasive procedure, wouldn't it? The only thing the patient feels is mild warmth at the treated area.

How many sessions does a full Fotona Night Lase treatment require? How long does each session take? Are repeated treatments required?

A full treatment is carried out in three sessions with each session lasting only ten minutes. There's a down time of two to four weeks between each session. An entire treatment can therefore take as long as two to three months to complete. After the first session though, the snoring will decrease by 70 percent. If the patient maintains good health and refrains from smoking and excessive drinking, no repeated treatments are required.

Are there any side effects? Can the patient drink and eat normal solid food in between sessions?

The treatment has no significant side effects and does not interfere with the patient's eating and drinking in any way. Right after a session, the patient may feel warm or even hot in their mouth, similar to a mild case of inflamed throat and mouth, but even that should pass quickly. ■

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>>The List Travel



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Kids & Education

Baby Signs

Communicating before
your child can talk

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD**

I'VE ALWAYS FOUND it odd the way we communicate with babies. Some of us babble away to our kids as if they're thoroughly versed in adult concepts, while others wheedle and croon in a horrid mush of words ending in 'iddle' – but the one thing that everyone loves is the point when baby starts talking back.

It's wonderful. The emergence of an infant's language ability is really her entry into the human sphere. We're perhaps best defined, after all, as creatures touched by language; it is words that make us whole. I don't mean particular languages, of course – English, Vietnamese, French – but more that it's the very essence of what language enables us to do that makes us who we are. It's language that allows our minds to represent things that are outside of us; to forge connections between things not otherwise obvious to the senses; to envisage possible situations and visualize how to bring them about. Take away any limb and we remain human; take away our bodies and we die human; take away our gift of language and we will remain something far less than what we were.

Try going a little deeper than that, and you're really entering serious navel-gazing territory – the question of 'yes, but what really is language?' is one that philosophers and gurus have built entire careers on. Those questions aside, the function of language in transforming us from animals of instinct into people is something that is a source of constant wonder to the parent. Most parents are fortunate enough to receive their package of pure biological functions squirming in a blanket just after being born, and the slow transformation of that wriggling human worm into a conscious child who will just not stop talking is as miraculous as the birth itself. If only (once they've mastered this language thing) they could learn how to keep themselves quiet while you're all trying to get some sleep, and this whole arrangement would be perfect.

There is one seldom-considered tragedy in this whole process, however, and that is the fact that while the structures of language

descend upon an infant in the very early stages of development, a baby's physical capacity to make the sounds of speech takes much longer. It's tough enough for baby to learn how to thrash his arms around properly – let alone form the precise shapes of the tongue and co-ordinate these with the vocal chords to produce words. This means that for the first year or two of life, the infant mind is voiceless in the baby's body – it knows what it wants, and it can recognize what it hears, but it just can't say anything. If you wondered why babies cry so much, this could well be part of the problem – your baby is trapped in a prison for the mind.

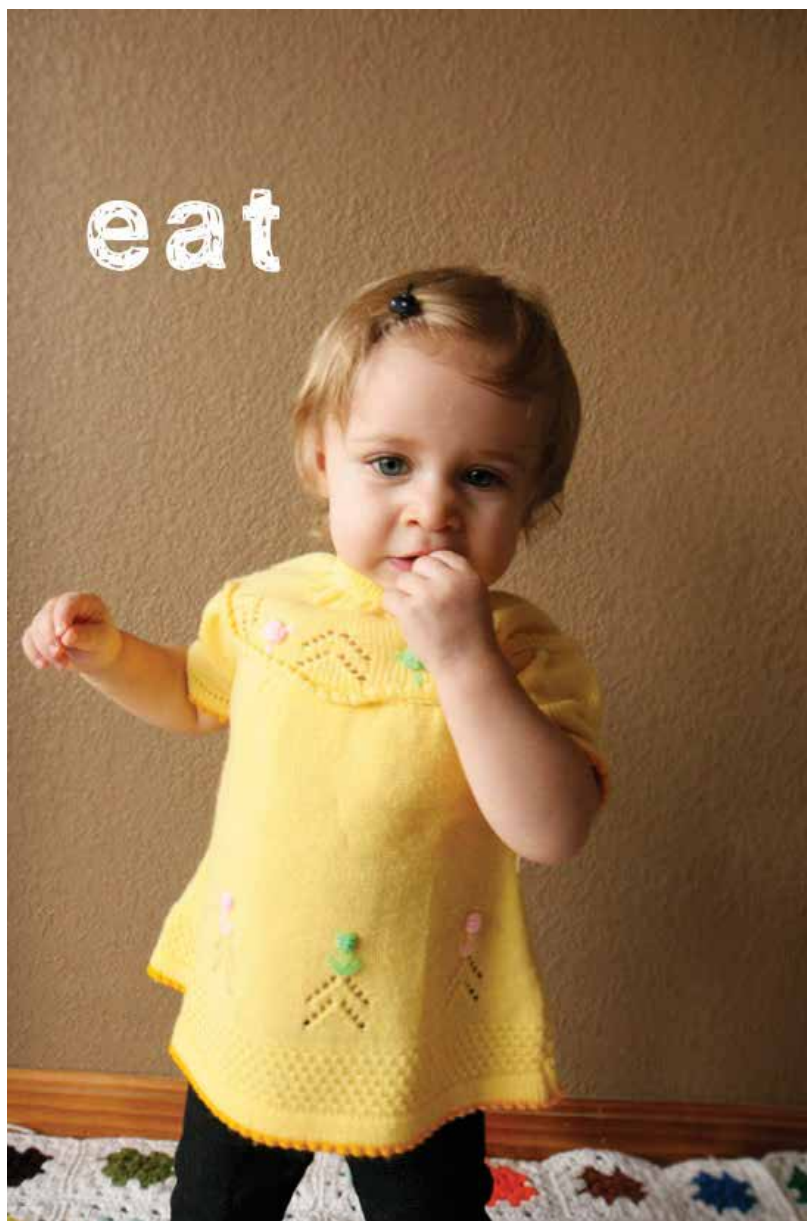
Demonstrate and Repeat

There's a rather interesting solution to this problem, however, and it's been gaining rather a lot of traction recently now that it's been recognized as monetizable. Based on

observations made some two hundred years ago on the comparative academic success of able-bodied children born to deaf parents, research in the 1970s revealed that prelingual babies can learn to communicate with their hands much earlier than they can speak. In simple terms, babies as young as four months old can learn to sign.

So yeah – it's true that you can hold actual conversations with your kid while they're still in diapers. They're not going to be weighty topics of discussion, sure – you'll discover your child has fixations on milk and going to the toilet pretty early on – but there are two really compelling reasons why this is a genuinely brilliant idea.

The first of these is that it gives your baby an early release from cognitive isolation. Instead of screaming to be changed, baby can tell you what she needs in sign language, meaning that she will cry a *whole lot less*.



more



please



**Instead of
screaming to be
changed, baby
can tell you
what she needs
in sign language,
meaning that she
will cry a whole
lot less.**

Secondly, your own behavior towards your child changes once they identify themselves as being able to communicate. The subtleties of this are covered in an excruciatingly abstruse fashion throughout the works of Hegel – but suffice it to say that when you respond to your baby as a human communicator, the reassurance you provide to her sense of self-identity is immensely liberating. To a child of less than a year old, the recognition of its independent mind is a major head start.

I mentioned that this idea has been monetized – there are volumes dedicated to the subject available for purchase, and a number of flashcard kits being hawked to teach both parents and baby in turn the vocabulary of simple signs they'll need. A cursory Google search, however, will yield ample such resources for free. Regardless of how you set yourself up, the process of

teaching sign language to your child is pretty much the same as you'd teach any language – demonstrate and repeat. Always use the sign for water when you hand over a drink bottle or give baby a bath; always use the sign for sleep when it's time to go to bed. Baby will pick it up and start using the signs independently within weeks. It works like magic.

The only reservation that parents tend to have about all this is the fear that if their child starts depending on sign language to communicate, won't that delay the urgency to develop skills in vocal language? The answer to that is a simple 'no,' it doesn't. Nothing can stop that endless jabbering from kicking off at around age two and a half – so if you were thinking of peaceful nights while junior signs herself off to sleep instead of chattering incessantly, then sorry no, you shall not be spared. ■

Cyber Safety

How to make sure your child surfs the web safely

HOW SAFE IS your child online? A question that, in all likelihood, didn't concern our parents when we were children. However, advancements in technology over the past 20 years have led to a point where we need to be more vigilant than ever. Children now have access to faster internet speeds, online gaming systems and, more often than not, a handheld device or smartphone. Before these advances, something or someone highly visible and tangible was probably the biggest danger to children. Now, there are a plethora of pitfalls lurking behind a computer screen. And, if recent research is to be believed, more of us are using these tablets and smartphones as a form of 'digital dummy' than ever before – pacifying youngsters so that we can perform any number of tasks and errands on a daily basis.

What can you do? Every school has a duty to ensure that its pupils remain safe, be it online or otherwise. In the past few years, the UK government made internet safety a particular focus of their inspection process for schools. But given the incredible rise in access to the internet and its amazing functionality, the responsibilities do not lie just with schools. Now, more than ever, teachers and parents

need to work together to ensure that children remain safe.

Depending on the age of your child, it's likely that their school has already begun educating them on the subject of internet safety (sometimes referred to as E-Safety). Regardless of how old your child may be, or whichever school they attend, there are a number of strategies parents can employ at home to further strengthen the key messages behind internet safety:

Have an honest and frank discussion with your children

Can you honestly name the websites your children frequently visit? And to whom they speak? If the answer is "yes," then fantastic. However, if the answer is "no," why not sit them down and ask them to talk you through where they go, friends they might have and rules that they might follow themselves? Any alarm bells that ring can probably be dealt with then and there, in a calm and mature fashion.

Be diligent

There's good reason why Facebook has an age restriction of 13 but there are a surprising number of parents who are either unaware of it or choose to ignore it, to keep their pre-teens happy. Many other



James Quantrill is a senior teacher at Saigon Star International School. He moved to Vietnam in August 2014, having previously taught at an outstanding school in the UK.

apps and websites also hold age restrictions as the content is considered inappropriate.

Set parental controls

You can use Parental Controls to not only set a limit on the number of hours that your child can use the computer, but also the types of games they can access and the programs they can use. On an iPad or iPhone, you can quickly set restrictions by clicking on "Settings," "General" then "Restrictions."

Set the right example

When the issue of internet safety was raised in the UK, with it came a responsibility for all educators to ensure that they were setting the right example. As a result, it is common practise now for teachers to lock their computers when they leave their classroom. Although this practice might be considered a little "over the top" to do at home, it sends the right message to children that personal information and profiles are to be respected, and not to be easily accessed by others.

Don't fall foul of common misconceptions

"My child is too clever to be caught out" is the cry from some parents when discussing this topic. I have seen first-hand evidence to the contrary. Even the brightest, most astute children need educating about how to behave online, particularly when it comes to communicating with strangers and sharing personal information.

"I am not equipped to help" - something to which people who are less confident with technology may feel. Even a conversation or some time shared on the internet together may demonstrate to your child that you have an active interest in their online behavior.

Of course, there may be times when a trusted adult may not be immediately available to deal with something children see, or find online that they don't like. This is the point at which we, as educators (be it parents or teachers), hope that children follow the examples we have set, the advice we have given, listen to their moral compass and make the right choice. ■



Nothing is Absolutely Certain

The power of not knowing



Currently Head of Science at Renaissance International School Saigon, **Gavin Machell** has been teaching for 28 years, 26 of which were in international schools in Papua New Guinea, Hanoi, Bangkok, Monaco, Guangzhou and Mumbai.



THEY SAY THAT knowledge is power but in the internet connected world of the 21st century, knowledge is so plentiful and abundant that if knowledge really does equate with power we should all be much more powerful than we were just a few years ago. It would seem though, that this is not the case.

Globally, over 2,200 international schools deliver the IB Diploma, one component of which is a compulsory subject called Theory of Knowledge (ToK). If this subject can be encapsulated in a single statement it would be something like: "Beyond the Cartesian assertion 'I think therefore I am,' Nothing is *absolutely* certain."

In many ways, ToK plays a dirty trick on our teenage students. At a time in their lives when they have only just emerged as individuals in their own right and are starting to form their own opinions about the world around them, instead of repeating what their parents or teachers have told them, ToK pulls the rug out from under their intellectual feet.

Teenagers ooze certainty, as any parent

will know if they have ever got into an argument with one. They often see the world in black and white, good and bad, true and false. ToK attempts to point out, amongst many things, the following:

- History is written by the winning side.
- Science is not actually about facts – it's about theories that are impossible to prove.
- Mathematics is only as good as the assumptions that you start with.
- Art can be anything you want it to be.
- The same words mean different things to different people and the language that you speak places limits on how you think.
- You can't place 100 percent trust in your own memory.
- Much of what you think you can see with your eyes is actually made up by your brain.

So, in the light of that lot (and that's just the tip of a very big iceberg), where can we find certainty? It's a rotten trick to pull on an adolescent as they begin to realize that all their certainty was based on things that

they thought were true but which, by about midway through the course, they begin to doubt.

At about this time, they start getting comfortable with saying things like: "Well, I don't know for sure, but this is what I think." Such words are music to my ears! They are a prelude to what a ToK student actually thinks, to what original thoughts are actually going on inside their brain. What a far cry this is from earlier years where students were encouraged to learn facts which they must then regurgitate in an examination. Finally, the students are actually beginning to think for themselves.

This is one reason why IB Diploma students do so much better when they get to university than their peers with other qualifications. According to data held by the National Student Clearinghouse in the US, IB students are "38 percent more likely to graduate from university with a degree than other students in higher-education institutions."

So, teaching students that it's okay to say "I don't know" can be quite empowering. ■

>>The List Education

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www.igs-hcmc.de



EtonHouse International Pre-School @ An Phu

Following an international curriculum for children aged 18 months to six years, in the early years, an Inquire-Think-Learn approach is followed, inspired by the Reggio Emilia Project of Northern Italy. It is a play-based, inquiry model in which children co-construct their learning in close, respectful collaboration with their teachers. This helps us provide an environment where children take responsibility for their own learning, allowing them a head start in life.

1st and 2nd floor, Somerset Vista, Hanoi

Highway, An Phu, D2

08 6287 0804

www.etonhouse.vn/schools/hcmc

info@etonhouse.vn



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



International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP) is an elementary school catering for ages 18 months to 11 years. With 90% of our teachers having master's degrees, we are able to promise a vigorous American curriculum whilst including specialist subjects such as music, art, sport and the languages. ISSP focuses on developing the whole child within a purpose built campus.

92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh

2222 7788 / 99

www.issp.edu.vn



International School



The Montessori International School of Vietnam

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

Thao Dien Campus:

42/1 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien Ward, D2

An Phu Campus:

Ground floor, Block B, An Khang/Intresco Apartment, No. 28, Duong 19, Khu pho 5, D2

3744 2639 / 0903 858659

montessorivn@gmail.com

www.montessori.edu.vn



Renaissance International School Saigon

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

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

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

www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



The American School

The American School (TAS) is an international school that has been 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, D2
08 3519 2223 / 0903 952 223
admission@tasvietnam.edu.vn
www.tas.edu.vn



The International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)

The most established international school in HCMC and recently celebrating 20 years of success. ISHCMC is a fully accredited IB World School, authorized to teach all 3 programs of the International Baccalaureate curriculum to students aged 2 to 18 years. ISHCMC is fully accredited by both the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), two of the most prestigious international accreditation organizations. ISHCMC has over 1000 students from over 50 different nationalities.

28 Vo Truong Toan, D2
(08) 3898 9100
admissions@ishcmc.edu.vn
www.ishcmc.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)

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

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

Saigon South International School

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

78 Nguyen Duc Canh, D7
www.ssis.edu.vn

Faces & Places



Saigon Drift

Having performed over 8,000 car stunts in 50 countries, Russ Swift made his appearance in Saigon at Vivo City mall to thrill audiences with performances that included drifting, two-wheelies and 360 degree spins.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY **MOTOR IMAGE VIETNAM**



Sake to Me

Last month's grand opening of Nakama (Sake showroom, 63B Tran Quoc Thao, D3) saw guests enjoy a sake tasting along with a brief introduction of how the brew is made in Japan.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY **NAKAMA**



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