



VIETNAM

7-2017

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This Month's Cover

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Image by: **Ngoc Tran**

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Datebook

What's on this month...

JULY 26-28

What: Vietnam Farm & Food Expo

Where: SECC (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7)

About: At present, Vietnam's agricultural products are present mostly in big import markets such as the US, the EU and Japan. The total agricultural export value accounts for 20% of the total export turnover of the country, striving to reach the total value of USD39-40 billion by 2020.

The show facilitates the promotion of Vietnam's agricultural commodities and foodstuffs to key export markets; at the same time expands new export markets, potential markets, strengthens the connectivity between exporters and importers to meet market requirements.

The consumers' current trend is towards fine, natural-derived products. Ensuring a fine products value chain "from farm to fork" is the first production criteria of many of today's true agricultural producers. The show aims to introduce, honor and promote brands as the pioneering and positive factors. The show does agribusiness networking to agricultural producers and domestic and foreign enterprises to enhance the investment, production and consumption of agricultural products in the value-added chain of products. This not only helps farmers benefit, but also contributes to the competitiveness of agricultural products.

Contact: Visit vietnamfarmexpo.com for more info



JULY 19

What: Stéphane Tran Ngoc & Stefano Miceli

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

About: Concert featuring Italian-born composer and pianist Stefano Miceli who has collaborated with hundreds of renowned orchestras across Europe and America including several performances at the world acclaimed Carnegie Hall (New York) both as a conductor and as a pianist. Stéphane Tran Ngoc is a veteran violinist born in Paris and winner of the Lipizer Prize, Paganini Competition, Aspen Music Festival, as well as Long Thibaud Grand Prix in 1990. He will be performing the Concerto for Strings and Violin by Peteris Vasks. The concert will also feature the Overture-Fantasy *Romeo & Juliet* by Tchaikovsky and the orchestral poem *Night on Bald Mountain* by M. Mussorgsky.

Contact: Call 28 3823 7295, 0903 604 539 for more info



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JULY 9

What: New Compositions in Music and Contemporary Dance by Vietnamese Artists

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

About: Every year, HBSO dedicates the month of July to the introduction of new original works from Vietnamese composers and choreographers in the fields of dance and music. The July showcase of New Compositions in Music and Contemporary Dance will premiere the Suite Symphony *Reminiscence* by Composer Nguyen Manh Duy Linh, Suite *Spring Prayer* for choir and orchestra by Composer Vu Viet Anh, and *Prelude & Fugue for Orchestra* by Composer Nguyen Do Anh Tuan. All works will be performed by HBSO's Choir and Symphony Orchestra under Conductor Tran Nhat Minh.

Contact: Call 28 3823 7295, 0903 604 539 for more info

JULY 16

What: Shane Filan Love Always Tour

Where: Lan Anh Stadium (285 CMT8, D10), 7:30pm-10pm

About: Shortly after announcing UK and Ireland dates for the autumn, ex-Westlife lead singer and frontman Shane Filan has decided to kick things off in a warmer climate. The tour comes in support of his recently announced third album, *Love Always*. The Irish crooner was last seen in town in 2014, promoting his debut solo album, *You and Me*.

Following a remarkable journey with Westlife and its breakup in 2012, Filan has cemented his status as one of the UK's most popular male artists. A followup to 2015's No. 1 album, *Right Here*, *Love Always* is "a collection of some of my favorite classic love songs," said Filan in a statement. "It's an album I've wanted to make for a long time," adding, "There's also a few original tracks on there, some that I've written myself. It's always amazing to get into the studio and see what we can create. I can't wait for my fans to hear the album. It has been a long time coming." So in this upcoming show, fans can expect no less than timeless love ballads, solo hits as well as the best of Westlife.

Contact: Visit ticketbox.vn to book

JULY 18

What: Vietnam International Finger style Guitar Festival

Where: HCMC Conservatory Hall (112 Nguyen Du, D1), tickets start at VND500,000

About: This is an annual event that has been organized continuously in Asia since 2010. With the participation of famous finger-style guitarists from many countries, this year sees 16 concerts in seven countries: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore. Finger style guitar is the technique of playing the guitar by plucking the strings directly with the fingertips, fingernails, or picks attached to fingers, as opposed to flatpicking (picking individual notes with a single plectrum called a flatpick).

Contact: Visit www.ifsgf.com for more info

JULY 29

What: A Night Of Romantic Music

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

About: EA Night Of Romantic Music is dedicated to the works of two of the most famous Romanticism composers of the 19th century, Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn's Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra in E major will be delivered by two young talents from the HCMC Conservatory of Music, Nguyen Thuy Yen and Pham Nguyen Anh Vu. Robert Schumann's Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, also known as *Spring Symphony*, considered one of Schumann's most famous compositions, will also be performed.

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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



The Rebirth of Vietnam House

With a grand opening this month, Vietnam House Restaurant is set to introduce Vietnamese cuisine with a modern twist. Through a unique partnership between celebrity chef Luke Nguyen and Windsor Property Management Group Corporation (WMC Group), the restaurant returns to its former location with a fully renovated interior and façade accenting the historic building on the corner of Dong Khoi and Mac Thi Bui.

The restored colonial building once housed the famed Café L'Imperial in the early 1900s, and was a popular destination for the city's affluent business class. The new Vietnam House Restaurant is set to bring back the nostalgia and charm of the storied street corner while the menu spans the country with classic dishes selected from North to South, delivering a traditional style while reflecting modern trends with culinary impressions from chef Luke Nguyen. With experiences and knowledge gained by travelling throughout Vietnam, Chef Luke invites diners on a rich gastronomic journey with unique presentations of classic recipes.

Watch the city's traffic bustle quietly by through classic arched windows while sipping premium coffees brewed from the finest Arabica and Robusta beans. To complement your lunch or dinner, select from the expansive wine list featuring 500 varietals including award-winning brands from vineyards around the globe.

Photographer Réhahn Will Display His Precious Heritage Collection In Hoi An

After the opening of his permanent gallery on Dong Khoi in Saigon and the opening of the Ageless Beauty Exhibition at the Fine Arts Museum in Da Nang, he will display his moving and colorful exhibition Precious Heritage in Hoi An, his hometown. The free outdoor exhibition will take place on Nguyen Phuc Chu Street, on An Hoi island, for two months, starting July 1. Through a selection of 40 photographs, echoing his museum, Réhahn shows how rich and diverse Vietnam's ethnic culture is. His famous portraits of young kids and old women from all provinces of the country represent groups of hundreds of thousand members to as few as hundreds like the O Du or the unique portrait of a Ro Mam, that required him to wait 3 years to get the authorization to visit them in their remote village. Posing in traditional costumes, they all symbolize ancestral customs, ancient knowledge passed on from one generation to another, the challenge to protect it and the hope in keeping it alive. The Precious Heritage Collection promotes the beauty and pride of these communities that, together, form the great mosaic of Vietnam's people.

That's what motivated him to create the Precious Heritage Art Gallery Museum unveiled in January 2017. By choosing to keep the museum free and with all texts translated in Vietnamese, English and French, the photographer aims to give maximum access to this side of Vietnam's identity for people to see what's beyond the more obvious images.



School Helps Build More Homes for Poor Families

Renaissance International School Saigon celebrated its 10-year anniversary last month, and the school's community raised USD5,200 to support the Habitat for Humanity charity that builds homes for poor families in Vietnam. The money raised was matched by the school's Board of Directors, therefore the amount donated doubled to USD10,400. Throughout the year, the students had also raised an additional USD1,900, which totalled USD12,300. The money will allow Habitat for Humanity to build 4-5 homes for families in need. In addition, students will also help build the houses.



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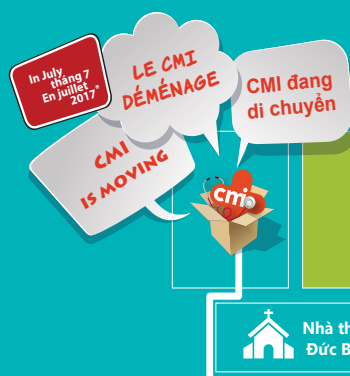
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The country in numbers



12

MOTORBIKES AND ONE ELECTRIC BICYCLE were damaged and buried under the car, while several advertising banners were also knocked down, after the driver mistakenly hit the accelerator instead of the brake. The CRV was traveling on National Highway 8 in Nghi Xuan District, Ha Tinh Province when it suddenly mounted the pavement and hurtled toward a restaurant. The vehicle continued over a row of parked motorcycles and only came to a stop after hitting a tree. Nobody was injured in the crash. Police officers arrived to investigate the incident, saying that the driver had stepped on the gas pedal instead of the brake. Later a crane truck arrived to remove the car.

23

LOCALITIES, INCLUDING HANOI AND SAIGON, have new area codes this weekend. After July 17, local telecom service providers will allow customers to use the old area code for at least 30 more days while playing recorded announcements in both Vietnamese and English to callers so that they are aware of the change. Hanoi's area code will be changed from 4 to 24, while Ho Chi Minh City's will be changed from 8 to 28. In February, the first 13 provinces and cities had had their phone area codes changed, followed by

another change at the end of April for 23 others.

With the upcoming completion of the last phase, all but four of the 63 municipalities and provinces in Vietnam will have had their area codes for landline numbers changed, a move that looks to re-organize Vietnam's area code system. In its earlier statement explaining the need for such a change, the Ministry of Information and Communications said the move was necessary to create a uniform system for area codes throughout the country.



~66,000

EMAIL AND FACEBOOK ACCOUNTS in Vietnam were stolen in an extensive cyberattack. A group of hackers have made use of a Google Chrome extension to steal the sign-in details of about 66,000 Facebook, Gmail and Yahoo Mail accounts together

with millions of cookies of popular sites, including Paypal, in Vietnam. The cyberattack was uncovered just over a month after Vietnamese Internet users were hit by the WannaCry global ransomware program, *Thanh Nien* reported.

WannaCry is a ransomware computer virus that targets the Microsoft Windows operating system, a global attack which was launched in May, aiming at a huge number of computer systems around the world by encrypting data stored on the computers to demand money. The cyber-security unit of Hanoi-based Internet company VCCorp found that the cyberattack had not been carried out by a lone hacker, but a group of professional ones. Email accounts of employees at Vietnam's major banks, such as Vietcombank, VietinBank, BIDV and OCB, were also on the list of victims.



5,000

NARCOTIC TABLETS WERE FOUND HIDDEN in dragonfruits at Hanoi airport. Police have busted a Ho Chi Minh City – Hanoi drug ring responsible for transporting thousands of synthetic narcotic tablets concealed in dragonfruits from HCMC. After receiving a tip that suspects would be shipping the drugs by air the C47 team coordinated with airport security at Noi Bai

International Airport to facilitate the bust. In total, police confiscated 5,000 suspected synthetic narcotic tablets from the traffickers. Two additional tablet-filled bags were also found stashed inside a suspect's bra while two others containing one kilogram of white powder, suspected to be ketamine, were concealed in a package of traditional Vietnamese *banh pia* cakes in their luggage.





~4,000

TRAFFIC-RELATED DEATHS OCCURRED in the first-half of 2017, a drop from the same period last year.

In the Jan-Jun period, 9,593 traffic accidents took place countrywide, killing 4,134 people and injuring 7,395 others, the National Committee for Traffic Safety reported. The number of accident dropped by 6.22 percent from the first-half 2016, whereas the death toll and number of injuries also declined by 5.25 percent and 11.23 percent, respectively. Road remains the deadliest means of transportation, with 4,031 people killed in 4,796 separate accidents on the road in the six-month period, according to the committee. There were 76 train accidents in the first half of this year, whereas the respective cases of river and maritime transportation mishaps were 50 and 10. In June alone, 1,569 traffic accidents of all kinds have occurred, claiming the lives of 643 people and injuring 1,348 others. The number of accident was down 10.6 percent, and the death toll declined by 16.93 percent. In the six-month period, more than 1.3 million new cars, motorbikes and electric bikes were registered in Vietnam.

10,000

VINASUN CABBIES SEEK PERMISSION for a rally against Uber and Grab in Vietnam. With tech-based drivers rapidly eating away at market shares controlled by traditional taxi companies, more than 4,200 Vinasun drivers felt they had been left with no other option but leave their job in the first

quarter of this year alone, the company said in a petition submitted to the central government. Conventional taxi firms can by no means compete with ride-hailing services in terms of fares, as the former normally buy cars themselves while the latter utilize private vehicles owned by the drivers or those hiring them. Vinasun has complained that these tech-based services operate without following strict rules imposed on traditional taxis. The Vietnamese company asserted that Uber and Grab have managed to avoid paying taxes and other fees. The taxi operator also decried Uber and Grab's ability to launch promotional campaigns and offer discounts without being required to first seek permission from competent agencies. Vinasun said it is willing to face competition, but the game must be fair for all sides.



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Rachel Sinanan has been in the hospitality industry for over 30 years in Australia, the UK, Indonesia and is now working with KOTO Catering in HCMC. KOTO Catering is a complete solution for all catering and food production needs. This pioneer social venture, in partnership between KOTO and Lotus Impact, hires talented KOTO alumni for further professional and leadership development.



WORKING IN THE CATERING

hospitality industry, I sometimes have things happen that I really want to share with the world... after all, stories are meant to be told.

Recently, I was asked to organize a 50th birthday party. The young Vietnamese girl was an Australian expat's personal assistant here in Ho Chi Minh City who wanted to organize the party as a surprise. She is very young, well, young in my eyes, she would have been in her early 20s (it will make sense at the end of this article why I have mentioned this).

She wanted something that would suit her Australian boss. So, being Australian myself, I thought, let's do something really Australian for the event. I took her around the wholesale markets in District 5, the ones around the corner from Lantern Street, Cho Lon street in District 5 as these are the ideal markets to find the perfect decorations here in Ho Chi Minh City. Yes, I knew I wasn't going to find things such as Aussie flags or bunting, but we did find some wonderful flowers, napkins and ribbons to decorate with in green and gold. We were even able to find a huge 50th birthday card (not in green and gold sadly, but it did look great.).

The young girl was getting really excited, she really wanted this party to be the party of a lifetime for her boss. After all, it was his 50th... an important year to mark.

I then talked to her about what food she wanted to have. We decided on a canapé style affair, as there would be a mix of not only Vietnamese and foreigners, but also a mix of 'big bosses' all the way through to the cleaners for the business this boss ran.

I encouraged her to have a mix of foods, including some fabulous Vietnamese options and to also include some traditional Aussie style foods. We included some fantastic Australian options which included things like salt and pepper fried squid rings, pickled carrot and beetroot with goat cheese mousse, mini lamb skewers with macadamia crust, seared Australian beef with horseradish cream, warm shots of pea soup with crispy ham and, of course, some mini lamingtons (makes me hungry just thinking about this event).

The party was to be held at their office, so on the day of the event, I arrived early at the office to help her decorate. About an hour later my team

of staff and all the fabulous food arrived. I helped the team finish setting up and we were ready to go. The decorations looked fantastic, the food looked and smelt wonderful, now we just need the guest of honor to arrive. He had been in Hanoi on business and was due to arrive back any minute.

You could feel the excitement from his team. I was hovering near my team thinking this is going to be a really heart-warming event. This boss is obviously loved and respected by his team.

Then, he arrived.

He looked quite shocked (more than surprise!). Everyone sang happy birthday to him and then started mingling, eating the food and generally it was a great atmosphere. Then, the guest of honor came over to thank me for my help organizing the party.

Turns out though, although, yes—his personal assistant got it right, it was his birthday on that day—she had the year wrong.

He was only turning 42... Ooops! My tip for the day: Planning a wonderful 50th birthday party is one thing but always, always check dates of birth! ■



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Island of Immigrants

An exclusive with Ngoc Thanh Tam, the star of *The Way Station*—winner of best film at the 2017 ASEAN International Film Festival And Awards

Text by Michael Arnold
Images Provided by The Way Station Production

IN A FILM MARKET DOMINATED by light comedies, last month's theatrical release of Hong Anh's brooding directorial debut *The Way Station* (Dao Cua Dan Ngu Cu, based on a short story by Danang writer Do Phuoc Tien) marks a poignant moment in the emergence of homegrown Vietnamese arthouse cinema. Awarded Best Film at the recent ASEAN International Film Festival, the movie is a densely concentrated morality play that effortlessly thunders its way through its heavy thematic meditations on freedom, jealousy, control, and the nature of the traditional subjugation of women. While it may be considered a touch ahead of its time by its local audiences in a country where feminism has a long road ahead, the movie's simple storytelling, tight cast and claustrophobic setting in the enclosed courtyard of a dark and grimy restaurant make for a richly disarming parable that compels viewers to face this country's traditional cultural burdens.

While the plot centers around the eminently likeable young male protagonist Phuoc (played by popular singer Pham Hong Phuoc, who took out Best Actor at the festival for this performance) the film's moral focus rests on Chu, the crippled daughter of the film's unnamed restaurant owner—whose Confucian sense of shame compels him to keep her hidden from public view. For the most part locked away in her room, Chu is cheerfully resigned to her forced isolation and the violent abuse she suffers at her father's hand, finding a measure of genuine freedom in sexual curiosity, and eventually claiming her ultimate liberation as a willing participant in her own murder. A model Sartrean prisoner who experiences the fullness of freedom in her own consciousness (represented throughout the movie in dream-sequences at the beach with her adoring but clearly troubled father) her character stands in contrast to the impotence of the film's other roles, who are even more trapped by their generally miserable mutual dependence.

Actress Ngoc Thanh Tam, who plays the role of Chu in the movie, was delighted to have been hand-cast by



Hong Anh, reportedly on account of her delicate strength of bearing. Describing herself as a “super-feminist,” Tam’s relatively international upbringing made it challenging for her to absorb her character’s passive acceptance of male control. It was somewhat surprising to her, then, that early reactions to the film showed a great deal of empathy for her character among young Vietnamese women.

“I didn’t expect my role to be inspiring anyone,” she explains during our interview shortly after the film’s premiere in Ho Chi Minh City. “To be honest, it’s a role that goes against what young women believe in nowadays, right? Even me, I don’t believe that Chu should suffer like she does. Women in Vietnam, we’re fighting every day for our rights, but underneath the surface there has always been an inequality that people can see and feel every day. So when you see their hidden pain, their hidden secrets on screen, I think that’s how the viewers feel connected to the character. Even though that’s against what they believe in, they can connect, they can see it, witness it in the women around them, from their

mothers... I think the mothers in many families suffer from inequality and bad treatment from their fathers, so I guess that’s why young women out there can connect more to Chu than I would have expected.”

MORAL QUESTIONS

In fact, *The Way Station*’s depiction of Chu is the film’s most progressive feature. While Chu’s carnality is gradually revealed over the course of the movie, there is absolutely no moral condemnation of her sexuality. There is no sense in which her death is a punishment for her sexual behavior, a trope that would have been easy for the film’s director to have fallen into. Chu, quite clearly, does not deserve death. She is neither portrayed as being immoral nor shamed in the storytelling for her sexuality; she is not made to seem unfilial, even though she flagrantly disobeys her father’s wishes. Chu is the most unambiguously free character in this story, even though she is the most physically constrained—none of the other characters experience freedom as acutely as she does in the way she has resolutely followed her own choices in



spite of her limitations. This depiction of a female role is refreshing and powerful, particularly in the Vietnamese context.

Her death is a difficult scene in the film that raises some of its most compelling moral questions. Enraged by the discovery that Chu has been visited in the night by the young men on his staff, Chu's father brutalizes her before violently raping his wife for having been complicit in Chu's deception all along—albeit for her equally problematic and tradition-constrained belief that Chu must bear a child. With the delusion of his absolute control fully revealed, the father meekly delivers death to his own daughter in the form of a bowl of

poisoned noodle soup, which Chu seems to take voluntarily.

"She nodded, like yeah, you can kill me, Let me go," says Tam. "I think that's also an act of feminism. Having the freedom of your life, to have the choice... Being a feminist is letting a woman have a choice, even if it might be a negative one—and here, the choice is death, but at least it's a choice that Chu gets to make."

One of the curious things about the movie's non-judgemental stance is in its misleading presentation of Phuoc as a narrator whose character progression seems to lead him to a morally vacant conclusion. After becoming enamored with Chu, he is incensed at the discovery

that she is secretly sexually involved with Mien, his roguish bunkmate at the restaurant. While he works through his jealousy and returns to Chu, eventually succumbing to her appeal and becoming

her lover also, his reaction to her murder is essentially limited to feeling sorry for himself. The film closes with a scene on the beach where Phuoc laments “Never again in this life will I taste happiness, never,” rendering Chu’s death something that’s all about him. Phuoc’s flaccid moral journey implies that violence to a woman is wrong because of its impact on the path of a man; *The Way Station* has teased the audience with a tale that empowers women but then interprets injustice toward them from a male perspective.

“I also believe that the movie is about male dominance in society,” comments Tam. “This is set 20, 30 years ago. Everyone says ‘poor Chu,’ but nobody does anything about it. My co-actor, I think he has a really good explanation—it’s because everyone really depends on each other in the restaurant, everyone is based on each other to survive. So no one actually has the freedom to do anything. If they had the freedom, I guess some of them would have saved Chu. But they don’t even have freedom for themselves. Everyone is treated badly in that restaurant. But they stay, because they don’t have anywhere else to go. The Vietnamese name of the movie is *Island of Immigrants*. An island is surrounded by water, it means that you don’t have anywhere to go, you’re stuck there. Everyone suffers, everyone lives in their misery, nobody does anything to free themselves.”

The film’s feminism is unsurprising

from a director whose own career as an actress has frequently dealt with the suffering of Vietnam’s rural women. Since transitioning into production a few years back, Hong Anh has been dedicated to advancing Vietnam’s art cinema through her company Blue Productions; she has also been busy participating in social activism for issues such as wild animal protection and LGBT rights. She has shot *The Way Station* as a complex film with multiple

layers and a rich symbolic tapestry that aids in the interpretation of its dramatic themes (readers can ponder for themselves what is represented by the goats, the Zippo cigarette lighter, and the Muslim character in the film)—and in having made such a strong offering in this work, all expectations are that both Blue Productions and Vietnamese arthouse cinema in general will see many more thought-provoking cinema pieces to come. ■



Ready, Set, Wait!

Before the movie becomes a blockbuster, there are numerous mountains of paperwork it has to jump over first

Dear Antoine,

My wife and I are both European, she got a job in Ho Chi Minh City and this is the main reason I am also here. I have been involved in the entertainment industry for many years and been working on a movie script that I would like to produce and direct as an independent producer in Vietnam. It seems clear that to protect my interests I must first set up an independent production company and, at a later date, when the project is at a mature stage bring on board associates. Can I start a company on my own or do I have to bring in a partner, and if I do have to bring in a partner what percentage must that partner own by Vietnamese law?



A member of the Paris Bar, **Antoine Logeay** has been practicing law first in France, mainly in litigation and arbitration, then in Vietnam for three years as an associate of Audier & Partners based at its Hanoi office. 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.

MANY WOULD SAY THAT Vietnam prides itself for having been the location of some of the best movies ever. However, it seems that the Vietnamese potential for film production is untapped, one of the reasons being the absence of tax incentives. Another reason could be the complexity of licensing requirements. Your project is a very exciting one and I will try to guide you through the applicable local regulations. Following its accession to the World Trade Organization in January 2007, Vietnam has gradually opened the movie production sector to foreign investment. However, restrictions remain applicable on foreigners to produce a movie in Vietnam. In particular, you cannot avoid partnering with a Vietnamese company.

First of all, you should find a Vietnamese enterprise that could be a suitable partner. This does not only refer to its ability to support you in the movie production, but the Vietnamese company must be a film production company with a specific certificate from the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism allowing it to operate in the field of movie production. This certificate is called the certificate of satisfaction of business conditions.

To give you an idea of the applicable requirements, the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism will grant such certificate if the company complies with certain conditions: Among other things, the charter capital of the company must be at least VND1 billion (i.e. the company must be invested with VND1 billion upon its establishment) and its director must have experience in the field of movie production.

For ease of reference, I will refer in this paper to such Vietnamese companies which have been granted with a certificate to operate in the field of movie production as “authorized Vietnamese companies.”

As a foreigner (either an individual or a corporate entity), you have to partner with one or more authorized Vietnamese companies in order to produce a movie in Vietnam. There are two ways to do it: you may either enter into a cooperation

contract with the authorized Vietnamese company(ies) or jointly set up a company with it (a joint venture film production company).

In the first case, you will have to conclude a contract with the authorized Vietnamese company on producing a movie in Vietnam. Under this option, you will not set up a local company. Your cooperation with the authorized Vietnamese company will only be contractual.

In the second case, you will have to partner with the authorized Vietnamese company(ies) to set up a joint venture company. You will only be allowed to own a maximum of 51% of the charter capital of this company (maximum foreign participation authorized) and the authorized Vietnamese company(ies) (your local partner(s)) will own the remaining charter capital. The joint venture company will produce the movie in Vietnam.

Before actually starting the movie production, however, the authorized Vietnamese company that is willing to produce the movie with you will have to obtain from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism a license allowing your partnership with it to produce the movie in Vietnam (under any one of the two options). The application file comprises the request for issuance of the license (according to the standard form of the Ministry) and the literary script of the movie in Vietnamese and in foreign language. In the first document (the request), it will be necessary to specify information such as the place or places where the shooting will take place, the movie production schedule and the list of main members of the team production (with their position in the team and personal identification information).

Please, be informed that the Ministry will check all information provided in the application file, in particular the script of the movie, and may have some questions or requests. If it has no such request or question, it will issue the license within 30 days from receiving the application file.

In addition to such license, your partnership with the authorized Vietnamese company will need to go

through other formalities with the Vietnamese authorities. As a general requirement applicable to all foreign investors in Vietnam (in all sectors, not only movie production sectors), you will have to be issued with an investment registration certificate (or IRC). The IRC is a certificate granted by the department of planning and investment of the provincial People Committee (in Ho Chi Minh City, the People Committee of Ho Chi Minh City). The IRC allows you, as a foreigner, to have investment activities in Vietnam. As from submission of a complete and valid application file, the department of planning and investment shall issue the IRC within 15 working days.

Finally, in case you choose the second option (setting up of a joint venture company), the joint venture company will have to obtain for its own the certificate of satisfaction of business condition referred to above, meaning that it will have to be invested with a minimum of VND1 billion upon its establishment, nominate a director with experience in movie production and fulfil other conditions as defined in regulations. You will also have to register the joint venture company with the business registration office. The business registration office will issue an incorporation certificate for your joint venture company called the enterprise registration certificate within 3 working days.

Last thing to keep in mind: you are right to raise the point of intellectual (IP) protection of your work. You should know that the Vietnamese law on IP explicitly offers to cinematic works a copyright protection.

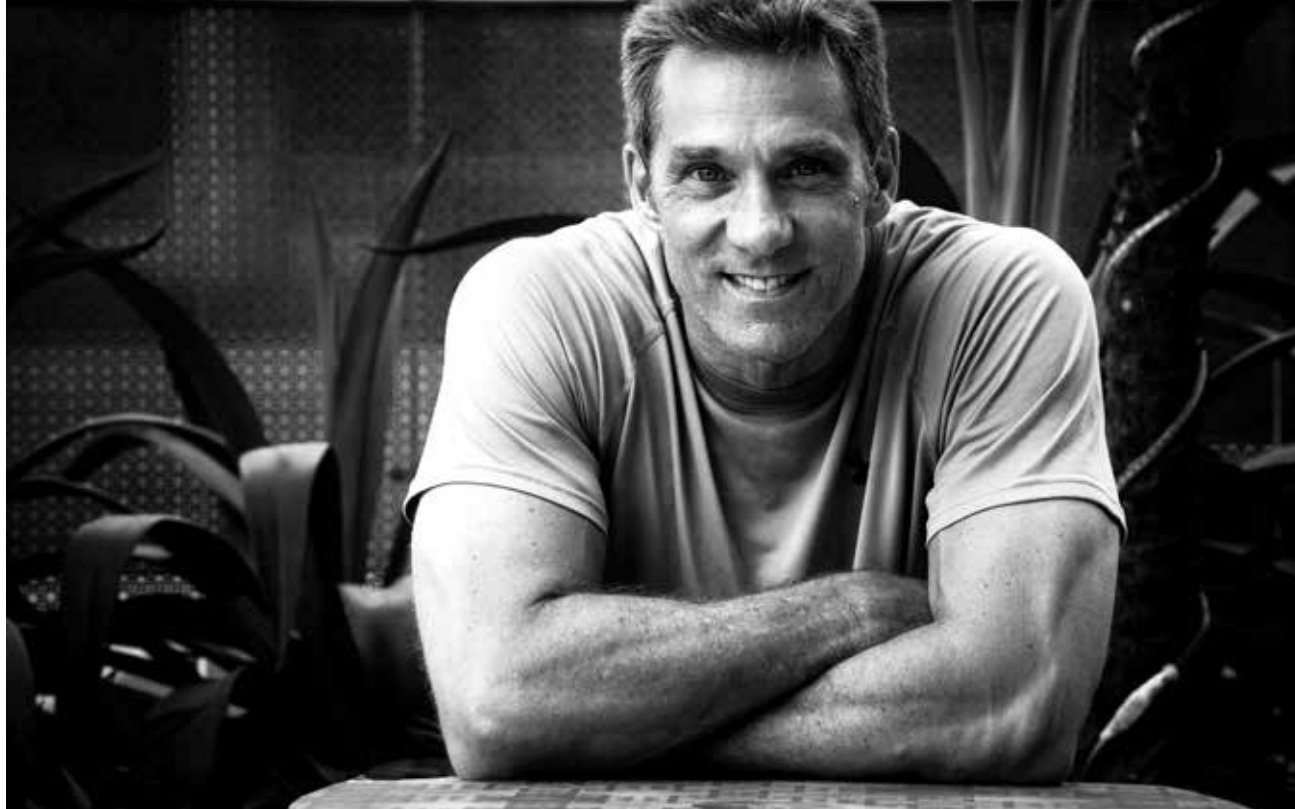
In principle, the author of a movie script is entitled to such protection without any obligation of registration or publication. However, I advise you to register copyright in order to facilitate court proceedings in case a conflict arises. You can register at the “Copyright Office” at one of its “Representative Offices” in Ho Chi Minh City or Danang or at the Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism of the People Committee of your location. ■

What a Knockout!

In conversation with martial arts film legend Gary Daniels

Text by **Michael Arnold**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**





“TALKING ABOUT MOVIES, IT really saddens me that people believe so much of what they see,” says Gary Daniels, one of the world’s most accomplished action heroes and the star of countless martial arts films—the kind you’ll surely have seen on late-nite TV. “I hear a lot about martial arts actors—*this guy’s such a badass, such a great fighter, I saw him in this movie doing this and that*. It’s kind of a pet peeve for me; you’re not a good fighter because you can fight in a movie, it just means you’re a good athlete. What you see in films is choreographed, practiced, rehearsed. Done over and over again until you get it right, so the camera angles can make it look right.”

That observation goes a long way to explaining the seeming disconnect between the aggressive, formidable figure Gary presents on camera and the relaxed, mild-mannered gentleman he appears to be in broad daylight. Despite the imposingly heavy muscular build, it’s hard to imagine that this now 54-year-old action star and kickboxing champion would willingly squash a bug. An actor who is as deeply affected by Asian spiritual wisdom as he is by its traditional fighting disciplines, Gary is the first to admit that his calm demeanor is something that he has consciously cultivated.

“I think there are two sides to everybody,” he muses, “I think all human beings have everything inside of us. We all have love, hate, jealousy, rage, and passion. It’s just, what do you choose to bring forth at any given moment? So it’s about learning to live consciously, and that’s a battle I’ve faced all my life. As a youngster, I was really into Marvel comic book heroes, and then when I saw Bruce Lee, I was like ‘wow, here’s a real superhero and I want to be like this guy’—so it was automatic, and I went

straight to the martial arts, and my goal immediately as an eight-year-old was to get involved in action films. That was a natural path for me. But I had a very bad temper, and I did use fighting to solve problems. You know, we focus so much time in the gym developing our muscles and our techniques, our stretching and flexibility, but we forget to think about how to focus; how to train the mind and our thoughts. I think this is something that’s missing in martial arts in general nowadays—especially if you look at MMA fighting. It’s all about the physical, not enough about the mental. I don’t think teachers teach students enough how to live consciously in the moment.”

“So it’s something I developed as I got older,” he explains. “I was very conscious of my weaknesses mentally. Having a bad temper, how it can affect your sporting life, how it can affect your personal life, your family life—having a bad temper is a very negative thing, so I consciously had to learn to think about my thoughts, learn to control my temper, and not just be that physical person.”

The father of four sons, Gary has always put family first. Despite a passionate devotion to his film career, the actor enjoyed fatherhood so much that he largely avoided the trappings of Hollywood in favor of spending his personal time with his boys. Part of his motivation in this was to ensure they were protected from the kind of domestic violence he experienced in his own past.

“My brother and I saw my parents fight, I saw my mum attack my dad with knives, Dad knocked my mum out, pots and pans were constantly being thrown... I can remember my brother and me, five or six years of age, just crying and so scared, running out of the house. Then my parents divorced when I was ten, and my mother remarried a guy who hated

me. He beat me growing up, and tried to stop me from doing martial arts. But that pushed me into my martial arts. I studied when I was eight years old, and because I couldn’t stand to be around family, my bedroom became like my dojo, my temple, my sanctuary. I had bricks and metal bars, all these things that I would train with in my room, which was full of Bruce Lee posters. This is what I think drove me into that world, it was my fantasy world, Bruce Lee, martial arts, oriental culture.”

“I used to go to Chinatown in London,” he remembers. “There was a store there where I could buy all my Bruce Lee stuff, I’d save up my money from my paper round. Then I’d go to see two Chinese movies every Sunday afternoon, all in Chinese. I couldn’t understand a word, but I was just enamored watching them. And then I would go to a Chinese restaurant and I would sit consciously near a big Chinese family at a big table and just listen to them, watch them eat, chewing their food and spitting the bones out, their whole culture was just so different. I don’t know why I was so enamored, it attracted me so much, and then I would have to go home and deal with that. I think it did push me really deeply into martial arts, it was my escape.”

Making Movies

Having played in his first Vietnam-based production back in 2015—Nguyen Phan Quang Binh’s drama *Quyen*—Gary is currently here to explore the potential for co-productions.

“Vietnam is an untapped territory, it’s fresh,” enthuses Gary. “There are Chinese producers coming here, some American companies that are starting to talk co-productions here, I know the Bollywood film industry is now starting to move into Vietnam. I’ve been talking

to a lot of the filmmakers here, they all talk about how they want to improve the industry, move it forward, take it to the next step. But to do that, they've got to start doing co-productions with Western countries or with China, start bringing in more foreign actors, crew. The growth potential here is tremendous, and I think we'll see Vietnam in the next 10 to 15, 20 years booming in the film and entertainment industry."

While this means new opportunities for homegrown cinema, Gary is cautious about the potential for Vietnamese cinema as an export. "When the Vietnamese make films," he observes, "they make them for the Vietnamese audience only. They're not making them for an international market, so they budget it for what they know can be made back from Vietnam. Action films are pretty much the most popular films in the world, but romance, drama, comedy, they're limited culturally, so if these are made in Vietnam it's difficult to sell internationally, because there are different sensibilities around the world. But when it comes to action films, a punch in the face, an explosion, a bullet in the head, it doesn't really need any translation!"

"In Vietnam, they're not making films for the Westerner," he notes, "they're making them for the local mentality, so it's kind of difficult for me to watch some of the Vietnamese films. I saw a film years ago called *Clash* with Johnny Tri Nguyen and Ngo Tan Van—I thought it was a tremendous action film. And then there was another one they did, *The Rebel*, which again looks beautiful, a really nice film. But other than that, I watched a film last year called *Tam Cam*, which Ngo Tan Van directed. I wasn't the target audience for that, but I heard it did extremely well here. With *Tam Cam* I saw the use of all the CGI, and the most modern techniques, so you can see they're developing, they're pushing forward."

Filming productions that focus on martial arts storylines has given Gary a unique perspective on the film industry in Asia. "The film industry is different in every country," he explains. "Hollywood is really the top, we have unions to protect actors, crew, camera, directors,

and you get treated very well. Everything is done so that you can make the best movie, and really, a lot of actors are spoiled, they have great trailers, drivers, everything, but it all comes down to what happens in front of the camera, that's the most important thing. A lot of foreign countries don't adhere to that. You will have actors on set twenty hours a day sometimes, and you get tired. When you're that tired, it's hard to act, to be, to emote, to find what you need to find inside. When you're doing fight scenes, fatigue comes in, and accidents happen. But in Asia, it's not just the actors, it's the crew. They're working ridiculous hours over here. And that's detrimental to the film, which is what we're all here for. But the one thing that you do notice in Asia is that the crews here, everybody does work so hard, and I have so much respect for them for that."

"As an actor, purely as an actor, you don't really want to be hired as a local," he adds. "If I'm hired out of LA, it means they fly me over, I'm put in a hotel, I'm paid a per diem, you get treated a lot better. Even when I did the Jackie Chan film in Hong Kong, because I was from Hollywood, I got treated so much better than the local Westerners, the *gwailo*, you know? They don't get treated well, they get paid really bad, the food they get is bad. If I'm going to work here as an actor solely, it's better to be known as an import than to be known as a local."

Now as a mature actor, however, Gary is finding himself more attracted to roles that are less reliant on his martial arts skills and more on his capacities as a dramatic actor. "That's definitely where I see myself heading," he confirms. "As an actor, you want to spread your wings. You don't want to just be known for action. When I got in the film industry, of course I was known for fighting and action, but the more time you spend in acting, the older you get in life, the more experiences you have, the more you feel you have to bring to characters. Life is the best acting class in the world, so the more experiences you go through in life, the more you want to bring this to your characters. Unfortunately, action movie characters are often written very one-dimensionally. When you're working in independent films, very rarely do

writers really get into the characters and the character development. I want to do family dramas—I mean, I've raised four kids, and I've been through some family dramas!—and that's something you want to bring to your characters, because otherwise it gets boring."

"But again, because I'm known for action, the buyers that buy the films, they want to see Gary Daniels kicking ass," he admits. "That's what they want to see. I've done a couple of straight dramas and they just don't sell that well, because I'm not kicking ass in those films. It's kind of frustrating, but you become a victim of your own success. But I don't really worry about that, because I don't worry too much about what other people think about me. I just want to be happy and I love my life. That's always been raising my sons and being with my sons; I'm happy when I'm in the gym; I'm happy when I'm training. It's about living in the moment for me, and being happy in that moment." ■







Years later, after studying the intricacies of distillation, fermentation and mixology, both in school and in bars and bistros around the world, Roddy has brought his family tradition to Saigon, where he stands as the maker of Vietnam's first handcrafted rum: Rhum Belami.

Sitting in his apartment in District 2, where he tinkers with different recipes and techniques in a small lab used to supplant the company's main facility, he's eager to share his work. Comprised of a lean, three-person team, Roddy is undoubtedly the scientist behind the rum, though he credits the synergy between himself, general manager Juyee Cheng, and designer Christian Gazia, who spearheads branding and communication, for bringing Rhum Belami to life.

He pours a glass of the Legacy Edition, serving it neat, and carefully watches my face while sipping it down. At first taste, the gold elixir is sweet and crisp with passionfruit and traces of herbs and flowers native to Vietnam, such as lemongrass and hibiscus. Then, the flavor evolves and the oak barrel that the rum is aged in becomes present, followed by a twist that's spicy, the result of red and black pepper. What's most surprising, though, is that it goes down dangerously easy at 55% ABV.

Drinking it, as the maker describes it himself, is an experience, and one that requires patience and precision to create. After distilling sugarcane juice, he obtains a pure ethanol solution of 96% ABV and integrates the various flavors at different parts of the process. "For example," he explains, "a flower cannot be introduced during fermentation. You have to use cold extraction." Referring to the bandé wood that can be tasted in the darker Premium Rhum, he notes, "For a wood flavor, you can create a solution and blend it with the rum afterwards."

As we talk, it becomes apparent that this experience Roddy has managed to bottle is the combination of his life's journey and the country in which Rhum Belami is made. Staying true to his heritage, he's brought the fundamentals of Martinique's rum tradition with him, yet the ingredients, like the osmanthus flower, the water from the Central Highlands, and the pepper from Phu Quoc, come almost entirely from Vietnam.

Simply finding these ingredients of satisfying quality can be a main challenge in obtaining consistency with each batch. "It's a real adventure when I go to the market here and look around at the products," says Roddy. "Like my grandmother, I use my hands to touch the fruit and inspect it closely. I need to be very careful choosing my suppliers to ensure we have the same quality every time.

"If you understand the process behind wine, then you can understand why I'm so picky with our rum. We use the same process with the weather and the natural ingredients. Like with wine, you can keep

In High Spirits

Vietnam's first handcrafted rum

Text by **Wes Grover**

Images by **Ngoc Tran**

RODDY BATAJON REMEMBERS

his grandmother's hands, weathered under the Caribbean sun, inspecting each fruit that would ferment inside a wooden barrel constructed by his grandfather, as she crafted a batch of the family rum. It was a ritual observed during his childhood, not for business, but for creating an experience with

friends and family.

"I was very young then and did not completely understand the process, but the passion was noticeable," he recalls of his time growing up on the French Caribbean island of Martinique. "She would add herbs to create different reactions in each barrel and I had quite deep feelings when I watched that."

this rum for a long time and after three years the taste will change. It will be more powerful.”

“There are lots of different spices and flowers that we can use here, like hibiscus and roses,” he goes on. “It’s perfect. That’s why I can say this is Vietnamese rum. I only import two or three products, one of which is the coffee beans used in the Premium Rhum. I really appreciate the Kopi Luwak from Indonesia. The flavor and the bitterness of this coffee. It’s expensive, but in the end you can taste it.”

In order to fully grasp how highly the connection with the location of production is regarded, it’s worth noting that Martinique holds the only distinction of *appellation d’origine controlée* (AOC) in the rum industry, recognized under French and European law. Typically reserved for products like wine and cheese, the designation is given to a food or beverage that’s truly unique to a region. This is a particular point of pride on Martinique, where fresh sugarcane juice and local spices

are a hallmark of the rum, giving characteristics and flavors specific to the island.

Emerging from this tradition, Rhum Belami is made strictly with sugarcane juice as the base ingredient, requiring immediate fermentation unlike the alternative of molasses. The latter is more prevalently used by large producers, allowing them to store the primary ingredient and export it around the world as needed.

Roddy further explains this differentiation, saying, “In the Caribbean, you have some countries that make rum with molasses and others with fresh sugarcane. The difference is tradition. Because of my heritage and because you can get everything fresh in Vietnam, I wanted to use fresh sugarcane. Working with a fresh product, the flavor is completely different. The color is different. You cannot compare the two.”

Establishing a small-batch spirit in a market that’s predominantly familiar with large-scale producers like Bacardi and Havana Club has been one of

the initial obstacles faced. While he’s confident that it’s mainly a matter of exposing Vietnam’s drinkers to Rhum Belami, Roddy concedes that “a lot of people are attracted to marketing, storytelling, and sharing it on a website. A lot of companies make money like that, but we try to be different.”

“We want a new way to consume alcohol,” he says. “If you change that, I think you change the way people spend a night together with friends. You change the experience.” At the moment, it’s an experience that can be found at a growing list of bars and restaurants in Saigon, including Cuba Casa del Mojito and La Bodega, as well as CohibaR and Factory 47 in Da Nang.

Ultimately, though, the ambitious distiller has larger plans for Vietnam’s first handcrafted rum. “I hope we can open a showroom here soon to show people what we do and teach them about the process,” he says, sharing his vision that already seems to be in the not-too-distant future after just launching in April. ■



Hey Buddy

An app creating shared experiences between different people

Interview by **Oi Vietnam**
Images Provided by **Tubudd**

TUBUDD (TOUR BUDDY) IS A travel app that aims to provide authentic experiences and insider knowledge from locals to travelers. Tubudd does not help users book hotels or plan a trip. Instead, users can book a local guide who will show them hidden gems and insider knowledge of the city.

We speak to Annie Vu, one of the five creators of Tubudd, to learn more.

Explain Tubudd and how is it different from other travel services like homestays and local expert concierges?

Tubudd is a service, a marketplace where travelers can book a local guide wherever they go. This local guide will not host them (like homestay), but they are like a friend (buddy) to them. They will be able to take them to local places. This is due to some problems when people travel, like the language barrier, the culture. Recently, an American woman bought a *banh ran* for VND700,000—that's so unfair to travelers and tourists anywhere. So, this buddy helps travelers avoid scams, explains the culture, the language, and helps them have a better trip without all these hassles.

With other travel agents people must book tours, Tubudd is different. Sometimes tours are big group with people you don't know, there is no privacy. In addition, it's all to tourist attractions, they will miss all the fun, the best places, the local spots that make a country special. And it will be cheaper as well.

The term "authentic experience" gets used a lot in the travel industry and have lost its meaning somewhat. What does it mean to you?

Because they will be taken cared, led by a local buddy who may not study



Annie and Anthony, one of the five co-founders

tourism but loves the city, the country, the culture and knows all the hide and seek spots in the city: Where best to have Vietnamese coffee, where best for *pho* and where best to buy clothes and so on. Travelers will be able to choose and go to places they need and want. To let the travelers live and experience the real things, the everyday things that Vietnamese people do every day, that's what we call "authentic experience," not only eating spring rolls in a Vietnamese restaurant.

What cities are Tubudd already in?

Pretty much all over Vietnam: Hanoi (some can cover Ha Long Bay, Sapa and Ha Giang as well), Vinh, Da Nang, Hoi An and Saigon. Outside Vietnam we have people in Manchester, some in Finland, Berlin, Marrakesh and some states in America.

My goal is to make Tubudd successful in Vietnam because I believe we can have more travellers to Vietnam once they know this service and advertise Vietnam tourism to everywhere to the world. Then would be South East Asia.



Do you believe it's necessary to personally experience all the places Tubudd operates in?

Yes, I do! Right now we are based in Manchester. We have Vietnamese students and my Western friends in other countries but because we have not had a website yet we have not gone wild in finding local guides yet. I believe I will receive lots of requests from people all around the world once we get our name out there. And I will go to every country Tubudd operates to meet them to make sure we connect with each other. That's why I and another co-founder are back to Vietnam in August.

One of the reasons why I came up with Tubudd idea was my trip all around Vietnam a couple of years ago. I went with my two Canadian friends and I believe without me they would have had lots of troubles and would not love Vietnam.

How do you recruit guides overseas and ensure safety for both users and guides? Are background checks done?

Right now, we are doing everything manually. But yes, all the guides should have background checks done. They will have to pay for it, and it will be stated on their profiles. In other countries like the UK, we use CBR check (they have to pay for it as well). We all have 10 minute chats with every single one of them, either via Skype or face-to-face. Other companies that offer similar services, they just get the guides to sign up online and there is no security involved. From now until we get the background check systems installed, we will use references to make sure the safety of both.

Will there be a rating system for the guides?

Yes, ratings and reviews. If the guides have lower than three stars we will give

them warnings and any lower than two stars for three months we will terminate them.

Will the app be available in every language?

Yes at first the website will be in English, then Chinese, French, Spanish and other languages. The app will have them as well.

Is it free to use? How will you monetize Tubudd?

It is free to use for the user: They can chat, talk to Tubudd guides before they book. They will only have to pay Tubudd guides' prices. The price will be set by the guides so different guides have different prices. We will charge the guides a certain percentage of how much they earn. It also depends on their rating and reviews as well. We have Top Tubudd for guides who constantly have five stars ratings and we will charge them a lower percentage. ■



Breaking the Mould

Simon Stanley gets an exclusive preview of Phu Quoc's first beach and river-front "all-pool villa" resort, where breakfast lasts all day, where the spa is all-inclusive, and where the luxury resort concept gets a 21st-century facelift.

Photos by **Fusion**

EVEN WITH A DELAY AT Tan Son Nhat airport, we're still up, down, and stepping out into Phu Quoc's clean coastal air in less than an hour. Passing through arrivals, I quickly find myself wrapped in the arms of Fernando Arroyo, the General Manager at Fusion Resort Phu Quoc, who has brought along a handful of his team to greet us. To spread the word about this brand new resort, they're offering "free hugs" to everyone and anyone exiting the terminal, whether they're a guest or not. Even a passing pilot and his crew get the Fusion welcome. The nearby 'meeters and greeters' for the island's other luxury resorts all seem rather austere by comparison as they idly wave their name boards.

For Fusion, now with six hotels and resorts in operation across Vietnam, that's exactly the sort of contrast they're aiming for. "We want to offer a different kind of five-star experience," explains Fernando as we make the (complimentary) 40-minute transfer to the property. "We're aiming for something more down-to-earth, more personal, without the fuss and formalities of a traditional hotel or resort."

One of the best examples of Fusion's fresh and unique approach to hospitality is their team of 'Fusionistas' who are also

here to welcome us for this sneak peek of Fusion Resort Phu Quoc.

"Your Fusionista is there to guide and support you for the entire duration of your stay," says Fernando. "They're warmer and friendlier than a butler, but also much more creative than a concierge. We understand that travelers visiting Phu Quoc today want more than the standard tourist-bus excursions to the fish sauce factory, for example. They want a more personalized vacation experience. This is where the Fusionistas come in."

So, whether we want to organize a private tour of a black pepper farm, says Fernando, if we want to arrange a seafood barbecue on the beach one evening, or if we simply want some insider information on the local area, our personal Fusionista is there to help.

Natural Elegance

From the zen-like reception to the giant circular pool overlooking the beach, Fusion Resort Phu Quoc cries out for relaxation and rejuvenation. This expansive low-lying beachfront plot in the north of the island boasts 97 stylish yet rustic thatched villas, each immensely spacious and each opening out onto its own private pool, garden and outdoor

dining and lounging area.

To watch the waves from your terrace, upgrade to one of the gorgeous beach-front villas, or, for a lazy few days lounging out with a book and a freshly pressed juice, the breezy river-front options are ideal.

While my one-bed garden villa is more than ample for a two night stay—offering oodles of natural light, a catalogue of original design features and soothing natural materials, plus a sunken wooden bathtub, and a quirky rotating TV for movies in the bath or in the giant kingsize bed—families and groups of friends can opt for two or three-bedroom villas with private en suite bathrooms throughout. For the ultimate indulgence (or for the ultimate party pad) the five-bedroom "Grand Beach Villa" is straight out of a James Bond movie.

Wall-to-Wall Pampering

With a strong focus on health and wellbeing, each Fusion Resort proudly offers a unique "all-spa inclusive" service, guaranteeing each guest at least two 'spa journeys' per day, at no extra cost, in their private 20-double-room facility with a verdant pepper orchard at its core. There's also daily yoga, meditation, and tai chi lessons, plus a modern fitness center and



personal trainer service.

Life can't be bad when the toughest decision of the day is whether to stay glued to the swaying rope lounge and finish my book, or head to the spa instead and get the resort's signature Natural Living Pepper massage, featuring Swedish massage techniques and Fusion's homemade black pepper oil.

I opt for the latter, and oh, wow. It's going to be a good weekend.

Wine & Dine

Just to amplify the stress-free vibes here, Fusion offers a unique approach to breakfast time. You know how it's sometimes a chore to drag yourself out of bed before a hotel's breakfast cutoff? Not here.

While they still serve an enormous international buffet each morning, served in the beautiful Secret Garden restaurant, Fusion's "breakfast anytime, anywhere" concept means you can literally get your croissant and cappuccino or your banh mi and cà phê sua da at any time of the day or night. You can also enjoy it anywhere you please, be it the bathtub, the beach, or the bar.

For evening meals, Secret Garden becomes a relaxed restaurant serving

Vietnamese specialties and international favorites with seating both indoors and out.

Phu Quoc is famous for its beaches and its seafood. Enjoy them both at Pez cá, a casual seafood restaurant overlooking the ocean. "We're serving lots, and lots of local seafood here," says the resort's head chef. "We've got lobsters, crabs, clams, oysters, smoked and grilled fish, sea urchin, and much more. Oh, and lots of cold beer too, in the traditional Vietnamese way."

At the pool's edge, Soul Kitchen knocks out healthy smoothies, juices, and snacks by day, and transforms into a laid-back open-air bar by night - the perfect spot for signature sundown cocktails.

For guests unable to leave the blissed-out bubble of their private terrace, in-villa dining is also available.

Switching Off

It's Sunday now and only on my last morning do I check my phone for the first time since leaving Saigon. There's wifi throughout, of course, but disconnecting from the mainland (and the real-life stresses and strains that reside there) is what a trip to Phu Quoc is all about. Fresh emails and text messages have been filling up my inbox all weekend, and yet I've felt

zero guilt in ignoring them all.

My flight leaves in five hours, so there's still time for one last trip to the spa, one last dunk in the pool, and one final stroll along the beach. For me, "I was on Phu Quoc" is still a perfectly acceptable excuse for dropping off the grid for a while, and Fusion Resort Phu Quoc is filled with reasons to do exactly that.

Fusion Resort Phu Quoc

Address: Vung Bau Bay, Cua Can village, Phu Quoc Island, Kien Giang Province.

Phone: +84 297 3690 000

Email: info@fusionresortphuquoc.com

Website: www.fusionresortphuquoc.com

OPENING PROMOTION

GET 40% OFF during your first stay!

Valid for bookings between June 1st and Oct 31st 2017

Price includes:

- Daily spa treatments
 - Fusion's "breakfast anywhere, anytime" service
 - Round-trip airport transfers
- Terms and conditions
- Non-refundable booking
 - Pre-payment required
 - Offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other discount or promotion



Away We Wow (Things We Do For Love)

Valenciani's Summer 2017 collection is all about retro-style classics of the 1960s. With the spirit of fun, Adrian focuses on exploiting wide, comfortable, youthful shapes on soft fabrics. In addition to typical floral motifs, he also incorporates both polished or geometric patterns in various creative effects.



Photographer: **Tung Chu**
Makeup and Hair: **Minh Lộc**
Model: **Phạm Hương**
Clothes: **Valenciani** by Adrian Anh Tuan (89
Mac Thi Bui, Q1)
Location: Presidential Suite, New World
Saigon Hotel








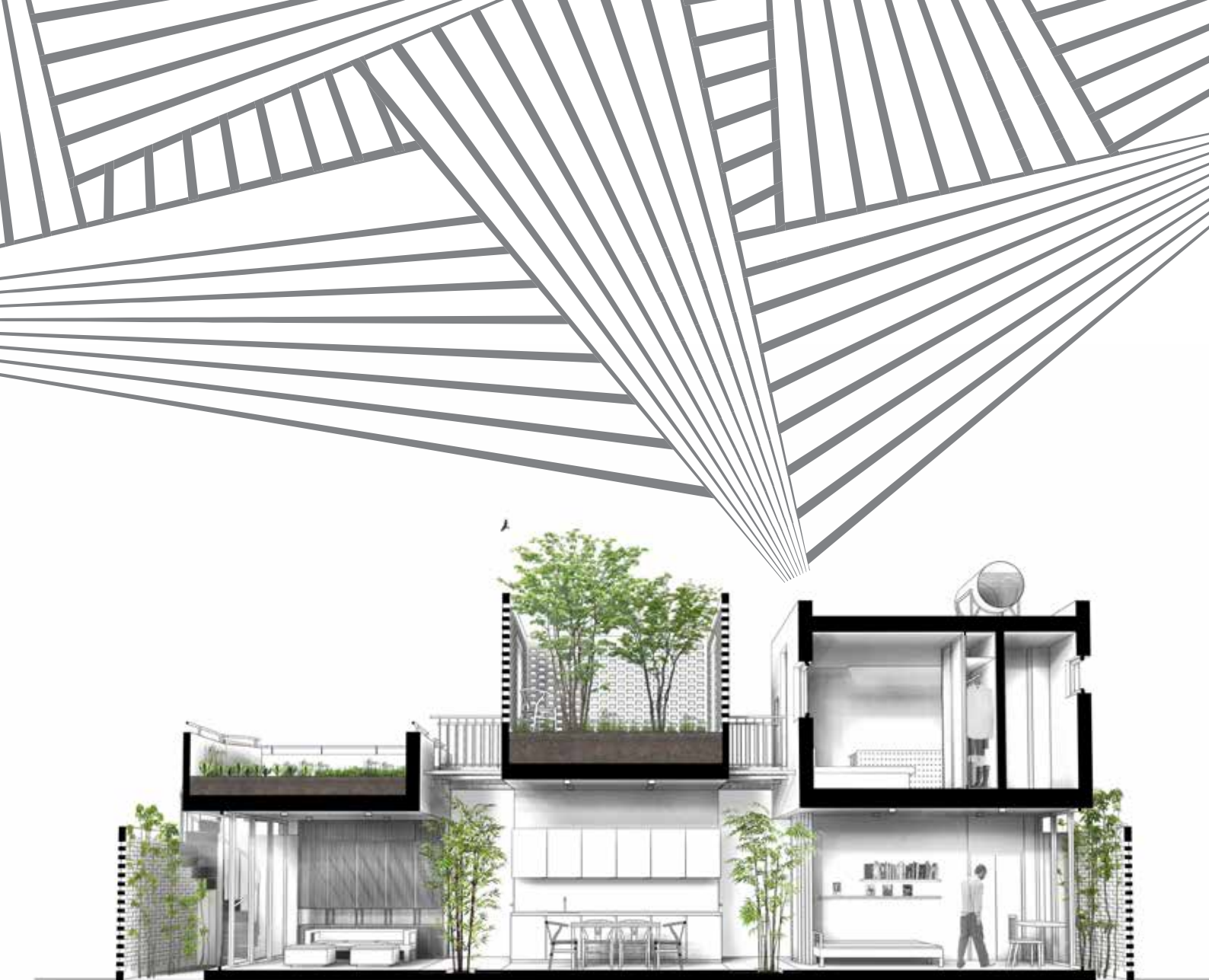


Working Life

A top-down photograph of a wooden desk. A hand is writing in a spiral-bound notebook with a red pen. The notebook has a black cover and a white page with a small table at the top. To the right of the notebook is a white smartphone with a black screen. The desk is made of light-colored wood with visible grain and knots.

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This month we explore how people find meaning in work and define themselves through their professions. Work is one of the driving forces of migration. This is true all over the world, and of Vietnam too. People have been coming to this country for this very reason: As workers or entrepreneurs, recruited or on their own initiative, for a short time or forever. These are stories about work and the workplace in this dynamic country.



THE BUILDING OF AN ARCHITECT

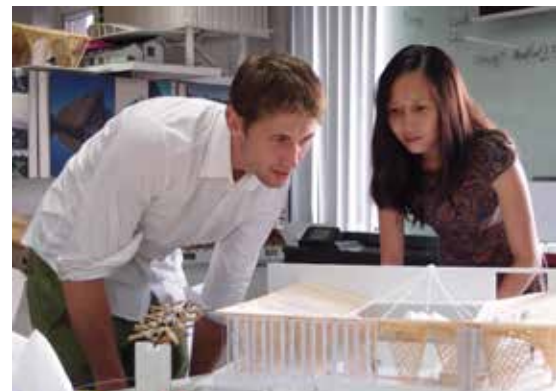
The function of a building is just one of many things an architect has to think about when designing

Text by **Tasso Dattenberg-Doyle**
Images Provided by **Marek Obtulović**

FROM A LAYMAN'S PERSPECTIVE, the business of architecture resonates with grandeur. The word calls to mind grand designs and an intellectual flair, but as Marek Obtulović tells it, these are images conjured up by the egomaniac, who exists in every profession after all. This desire to distinguish oneself and leave one's mark on the planet (something a building certainly can achieve) is a hindrance to the higher calling of the chief builder, that is to say to create the best possible housing for an environment, whether that be work, leisure or a blend of both.

Buildings are more than a convenience, they are the locus of most of our activities. We spend more time indoors than outdoors and, as such, it is necessary to treat these spaces with special interest. Opening up a room brings light, interior modelling lends flow and movement to the space and an exterior design lends a face to the construction. This whole, a creation purpose-built for humans should however work in harmony with the outside world, insists Marek.

For him, the work of an architect is similar to a conductor. This is not meant





as a boast but to make me understand that harmony is at the heart of a successful project. As many instruments must bend and unify into coherence, so must a building be holistic in character; its individual components working together to form something that feels like a whole to those who occupy the space.

To Marek, architecture is, first and foremost, work in creating an atmosphere. The building blocks of the profession, the sketches, lines, calculations and myriad other tasks are certainly important; they are the constituent parts, the practical parts of the product, but the essence of the final creation lies in the effect it has on those who pass through its rooms. This, he insists, is the most important consideration for his work: How will people feel when they see and experience it. This effect is often unconscious. Few people lend particular attention to the details that bring a room to life, but then that means he has done his job right. The point is not to remind people of the architect's agency but to create a seamless and satisfying space.

Beyond purely professional motivations, there is an evident philosophical attraction to his work that drives Marek. "If you don't love it you can't do it," he explains, citing the arduous studies needed to break into this world and the subsequent workload that comes with running one's own architectural firm, "I'm frustrated every day." However, it is this personal

connection that keeps him working. His work is often unfulfilled, that is to say that many projects and ideas never make it to construction. How could they? Architecture, like cinema, is a medium that demands huge financial investment. Andre Tarkovsky said that cinema was the saddest art form precisely because of the money required to make even a minor project. That was in the 1960s and now you can actually string together a reasonable film on any budget (see *Tangerine* shot entirely on iPhone 5ses), but there's no such luck for the architect. Melding stone, metal and glassware is an expensive business and one that frustrates the architect. Painters can paint all they want but the ideas of the architect rarely make it beyond a fetal stage.

Despite this drawback, Marek sketches prodigiously. It reveals one's inner character, he explains. From one sketch to another, he can read different aspects of a person's personality simply by looking at sketches. A pattern emerges from one's ideas and the designs one conjures up, our likes and dislikes and our aesthetic preferences end up displayed black on white. If this practice is an extension of the mind then, it also has a therapeutic quality. Marek's work may not always reach full bloom but that is not to say that the work is for nothing. It educates him about himself on one level and on another, more practical, level it serves to improve technique.

An important side of this job is mood curation. When we describe a building we describe a sort of organism. A room breathes, it can be bright, warm, inviting. This is the terminology of sensation because that's how we experience it. A room can open us up and be a source of comfort. Conversely, it can make us feel claustrophobic and constricted. These are not the result of purely physical parameters; a large room can feel small, and a small room can feel large. The architect's job is to ask themselves these questions and find a solution, albeit within the remit of the finances at his disposal, the design desires of the company making the building and the possibilities afforded by the location. It seems like a lot to process.

Buildings are man's creation for man. Inside we are shielded from the adverse effects of the outside world to the point where we can become oblivious to them. Within four walls the seasons don't change, light is always provided and, best of all, we can store food. This dislocation from the real world is strange and unnatural but it makes life more comfortable. Over the millennia we have withdrawn further and further from the arduous outdoor life and retreated into dry, heated, habitable pockets. For Marek that time is over. He wants to bring nature back into our lives by ushering it in through the front door. "I want to help society, our cities and the environment," he explains. To that end, his dream is to make buildings that work around nature and even incorporate it. Pollution and the damage to the environment are dissonance to Marek and it's time to find some harmony.

Marek is an architect living and working in Hanoi, though he occasionally darts back to his native Czech Republic. Before starting his own architecture studio, ODDO Architects, with his wife Mai Lan Chi he worked at the prestigious Vo Trong Nghia Architects. ■

A Fork in the Road

An inside look at the ingredients to success

Text by **Tasso Dattenberg-Doyle**
Image by **Ngoc Tran**

AS A RESTAURATEUR, TONY FOX has worked his way from the bottom to the top of the food chain. His humble beginnings in the business, he recalls, were in the kitchen peeling carrots. From there he graduated to bigger and better things: potatoes, and he didn't stop there. He continued to work, moving around the world (at one point even working for Peter Stringfellow in New York) and now it certainly seems to have paid off. Tony is the owner of five of Saigon's best-known establishments: Ciao Bella, Portofino, Saffron, Twenty21one and Blu, the Thao Dien Riverside Serviced Apartments restaurant we're conversing in.

Food and hospitality are in his blood. The carrot-peeling job that got his foot in the door of the business was the product of nepotism. His family has, for generations, worked in the hospitality business in his native England and it was there that he cut his teeth, as well as a number of unfortunate vegetables.

So how does someone with such roots move to Saigon and set up a string of successful restaurants? Tony considers his answer slowly before finally finding the right answer: "You need a Man Friday." In Tony's case this right-hand person is actually a Woman Friday, an invaluable aid with local knowledge and the savoir-faire to get the job done in situations where others might be completely lost. As Tony goes on to explain, there are still a few niggles and unforeseen difficulties that one has to contend with as a business owner in Ho Chi Minh City. This ranges from the regular problems in the food business of getting the right ingredients fresh, to utilities issues with electricity and water. Every one of these issues would be a nightmare to navigate without knowing the exact channels and procedures to fix such issues, not to mention a healthy knowledge of Vietnamese. With his trusted Woman



Friday then, Tony is equipped to focus on what matters most to him, the actual run of the restaurants.

Being a restaurateur is not as dandy as it sounds however. In a business where reportedly 99 percent of businesses close their doors before the first year is out, it is no surprise that one has to stay on one's toes. Tony visits each one of his establishments (spread across the city) at least once a day. He's up bright and early and makes his first stop at 6am, ensuring that all is in its proper place and providing guidance where it may be required. As Tony explains, the fact that he started from the bottom

was the best sort of training. Now he knows every detail of every position underneath his own. If someone is being wasteful with the peeling, something which may seem innocuous, then he can correct these errors. This is the smallest detail, so you can be sure the manager has his eye on the workings of the more senior positions as well, and that over five restaurants, at least five times a day.

It seems an exhausting business, moving hither and thither and keeping a watchful eye on all proceedings but Tony enjoys it tremendously. He enjoys managing but also cooking and

choosing the menus for his restaurants. As a chef himself, he is confident when assessing the quality of the food his staff serve and they can trust in his judgment too. It is not a purely managerial position he occupies then because he has risen through the positions he now employs.

Beyond his work as a boss, Tony also serves as something of a father figure to many of his employees. He likes to stick with people he has worked with before, some of them for nearly 15 years, and he likes to hire their family members as well. As he sees it, there's a bond of trust and that gives not only security but a sense of family to his businesses.

His advice to restaurateurs is straightforward: "Your first consideration has to be location, location, location." A location can make all the difference in the life and death of a restaurant. Sitting by the river with a cool breeze wafting over us, it's easy to see why location and the associated ambiance have to be your first consideration, after all that's where your first impressions are drawn from. After that you need to choose a good menu, something that's missing from the local restaurant scene. With his roster of establishments, Tony was one of the first to bring Asian tapas and New York-style Italian cuisine to Ho Chi Minh City and can attribute much of the success of his restaurants on this timely move. As a manager his thoughts have to be business—as well as food-orientated and a degree of business savvy is necessary to even get started as a restaurateur. Of course, with a local helping as second-in-command, this business is mercifully facilitated. Without their aid he insists he could never have gotten anything off the ground.

Tony has been a significant figure on Saigon's cuisine scene for over a decade and in that time he has heard untold numbers discuss the possibility of opening up a restaurant or bar in Saigon. The thought process seems to be that these establishments are straightforward and relatively inexpensive to run but that is simply untrue. Even with a bit of help from your friends, owning and running a bar is hard work and requires every bit as much attention, knowledge and elbow grease as any other business. For Tony the days of peeling carrots and potatoes are firmly in the past but like any good manager this has not gone to his head. His feet firmly planted on the ground, he can be found every day walking through his restaurants, doting on patrons and staff alike. ■





The Suite Life

We catch up with Blair Fowler who gives us an insight into the life of a hotel general manager

Text by **Tasso Dattenberg-Doyle**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**

THE RENAISSANCE RIVERSIDE Hotel Saigon on Ton Duc Thang has an ecosystem of its own: 336 rooms, a ground floor bar, spa, two restaurants, skybar, lounge, rooftop pool and a fitness center are all compacted within the cream monolith overlooking the Saigon River. Like many luxury hotels, the Renaissance seems to swallow you whole when you step off the Saigon pavement and into its marble lobby. The air is cool, guests and staff alike crisscross the large, open surface and the constant stream of noises palliates. The sense that pervades this area, and the rest of the hotel, is stability and assuredness. The ecosystem accommodates you, the foreign body, as it has done many thousands before, to enjoy its many attractions and shake

off your worries. This, of course, is the ultimate attraction of hotels: a home-away-from-home where everything is provided for in a seamless stream of conveniences. It's even better than home in fact, so how does it all come about? In the Renaissance, this gestalt atmosphere is the keepsake of Blair Fowler, General Manager (GM) of the hotel, and while everyone has their part to play to keep everything running smoothly, he's the one who has to oversee them.

Blair became a *hôte* after completing his studies in hotel management in his native Australia. The training, which formed the basis for understanding the overall run of a hotel, was useful for accelerating around the learning curve that one goes through

with any profession. It is, however, clear that, like with any profession, there is no substitute for experience. As Blair explains, the most valuable piece of advice he was ever given in the business was "you don't know what you don't know" and every day in the life of a general manager can bring you up to date on another blank niche.

What are the main functions of the GM? Slowly the floodgates open. "As the GM you have the oversight of everything in the hotel. A large part is owner relationship [Marriott in the case of the Renaissance], another part is managing the relationship with the management company [Marriott's subsidiary in Bangkok] and then the next part is running the operation. The direct reports

that I have reporting to me are Director of Sales and Marketing, Director of Operations, Director of Finance, Director of Human Resources and then the Director of Engineering.”

In person, Blair is very friendly and attentive, a must-have quality in the business of hospitality I imagine, but it's clear that his responsibilities keep him busy at all times when he is in the building. As he's talking the power cuts out for a few seconds. Blair checks his watch. “The backup generator should come on faster than that,” he explains, before making a quick call to the people in charge of that department who also report to him.

In the first instance, it is clear, the role of a GM is to be hands-on. Every day Blair makes sure that everything is in its rightful place. The food has to be prepared and displayed correctly, the beds need to be made and staff have to be attentive to their guests. If there's something missing, something that needs to be fixed or a problem that the staff need help dealing with then it's to him they turn. If he were up in his office the whole time he would be unable to help or give advice based on the immediate needs of the situation, he explains. A hotel is only as good as the people who run it and the buck stops with the GM. It is up to them to make sure that every aspect of the hotel is moulded to provide the right experience for the guests, from the top down and back to front. While the GM is not an engineer or a chef or an electrician, it is their responsibility to coordinate with these different groups in order to tie together the whole ecosystem.

Quite aside from these practical

difficulties however, the hotel industry in general and particularly top tier jobs like GM are built for the adventurous. Hotels, by their very nature, are a destination for the international, for holidaymakers and those in the business alike, Blair explains. His own work had already taken him from Australia to New Zealand, New York, London, five years in Thailand and then to Vietnam. Working in such a business requires adaptability and, for those willing to dip their toes in unknown waters, it can provide a wealth of opportunity for travel.

One big drawback is admitted. Hotels are a 24-hour business and when you're the one in charge you can be up all hours. When it's midnight and the guests are a-roistering there is still work to be done and diligent GMs like Blair make sure that even late-night slots run with the efficiency of primetime.

When I asked Blair what he enjoyed most about his business, I was surprised when the answer came: “Mentoring.” From anyone's perspective, the world of 5-star hospitality seems glamorous. It calls to mind images of celebrities from the movies, a life of excess and luxury. Don't get me wrong, hotels can provide that, but for Blair and hopefully for many other GMs it is more than that. Blair explains to me that he is a mentor, helping more junior members in the company grow their careers. He says that he had a mentor when he was coming up as well and still has a mentor today. Beyond the manifold duties required in the run of the hotel it is fitting to see that, at the top level, there is still a duty of care in the role of the manager of these stately second homes, and one which they enjoy wholeheartedly. ■



Wine & Dine

CHIYODA SUSHI / IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN







Like No Other, This Sushi Is

The popular Chiyoda Sushi brand in Japan is now making its mark in Saigon

Text by **Joel Zorrilla**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**



THANKS TO ITS SIZEABLE Japanese expat population, Saigon is blessed with countless fine sushi restaurants, and it's rare for a new one to power through the stiff competition, but with 25 years of experience behind various sushi restaurants across Tokyo, new sushi chef in town—Moriya Masahiro—is to be reckoned with. And thanks to Chef Moriya, **Chiyoda Sushi** (178 Pasteur, D1) has distinguished itself with some unique plates found nowhere else in the city. Open since December in Vietnam, the Chiyoda started in 1959 and currently operates over 200 restaurants in Japan.

On recommendation from the owner and chef we tried a bit of everything, and it was phenomenal from start to finish. The first dish were rolls that catered to a more Western palate: Dragon roll (an omelet and vegetable filling covered in thin slices of avocado, VND185,000), and the Ebi Ten Roll (battered deep fried

prawns rolled up and topped with salmon roe with a side of house-made sauce, VND105,000). The former roll was soft with a delightful creamy texture provided by the avocado, while the latter roll was a fantastic textural mix of crunch and softness from the fried prawns and roe.

Possibly one of the best sakes I've had, Hakutsuru Mizore (VND328,000 for a small bottle that serves two) is a dry yet fruity spirit, which we had served cold. For the price, it's practically a steal, giving most top shelf competitors a run for their money. As we savored the sake, they brought us the dish that stole the night— Saba Bou Specialty Sushi (VND150,000 half portion, or VND290,000 full portion). Consisting of pressed slices of mackerel served in perfectly sliced larger rectangles on rice layered with flat pieces of seaweed and artistically interlocked with a thin tube of ginger, where the backbone was previously removed. Mackerel is usually



Clockwise from top left:
Dragon roll, Sashimi,
Saba bou,
Agedashi tofu



oily with a strong fishy flavor, however, paired with layers of seaweed strips and ginger and it becomes a one-of-a-kind exotic twist on sushi, and if you have never had anything like it we highly recommend giving it a try. Following this we enjoyed a beautiful Tokusen Sushi Mori mixed sushi platter (VND298,000), a mix of ark shell, prawn, scallop, yellowtail tuna, salmon, sea bream and flake fin. Each piece was a testament to Chiyoda's dedication to sourcing and importing the freshest cuts possible.

Here I delved into unknown territory, which left me equally impressed—flame grilled *nigari*—a heavenly fusion of half roasted and half raw fish, both sides complementing each other beautifully. We ordered the Aburi Nigiri Zukushi (VND198,000), which came with scallop, salmon, prawn, yellowtail and flake fin *nigiri*, all so soft and delicate that we were able to divide them all perfectly with a butter knife.

On recommendation of the chef, we tried one of the Agedashi tofu, (VND50,000). It was essentially soft deep-fried tofu squares served in a rich beef broth, the contrasting tastes and textures were absolutely delicious and served as a nice contrast from the flow of raw fish. Last but not least, an array of gorgeously plated sashimi on a bed of ice and various types of seaweed. We were treated to three very contrasting piles of fresh raw sea creatures: Toro tuna stomach (VND388,000), salmon (VND118,000) and giant snail, *iketsubugai sashimi* (VND238,000). The salmon was sweet and wonderfully soft on the tongue, but here I must highlight a flavor and texture combo that I've never had before, the giant snail was an aqueous and crunchy experience packed with a light yet satisfying flavor, and the *toro* was sweet and slightly fatty which melted in our mouths, both an absolute delight to eat and finish our meal with. ■





NU is New

Asian Fusion cuisine with
a splash of drama

Text by **Wes Grover**
Images by **Ngoc Tran** and **NU**



Frisee salad

THERE'S A FLAIR FOR THE dramatic and creativity that's on full display as soon as you walk into the newly opened **NU Bistro** (2nd floor, 25 Ho Tung Mau, D1). Situated just off Ham Nghi and up a small staircase, the main doors open to a colorful setting of old French architecture and decorative art inspired by Chinoiserie culture that foreshadows the unique fusion dishes found on their innovative menu.

Large mint green columns, exposed white brick walls, and a sprawling mural of a woman with peacock feathers flowing in her hair define the inviting space, with modern furnishing that's both stylish and comfortable. Open seven days a week from 10am to midnight, NU has a refined atmosphere that's equally appropriate for anything from a casual Sunday brunch to elegant afternoon tea. On this particular occasion, however, we're visiting to explore their enticing dinner fare. The staff are friendly and attentive, the dimmed lights create a cozy, evening atmosphere, and the full bar beckons as we settle into our table.

Starting with a round of drinks, we navigate their extensive list of classic cocktails before landing on the signature *C'est La Vie* (VND170,000), a thoughtfully prepared cocktail of cachaça, red grapes, lime and sugar, as well as a pot of their lychee and grape iced tea (VND130,000), both of which arrive in remarkable fashion. The *C'est La Vie* comes ensconced in a glass dome that traps dry ice spewing smoke from out of the coaster and holds a beverage that pleasantly walks the line between sweet, bitter and a spirited bite. The tea, too, is presented with dry ice emanating from the pot, which holds a fresh and fruity concoction that furthers the restaurant's knack for dramatic presentation.

Before long, our appetizers arrive and we embark on a culinary fusion of East and West with a cauliflower coconut soup (VND80,000) that's garnished with a flaky homemade pastry holding bits of bacon. The thick, pureed broth is creamy, yet still light and delicately flavored with a touch of onion.

Next was a frisée aux lardons salad with bacon (VND130,000) of ample portion. A deep fried filo egg at the center provided a tasty crunch, while the yoke was still runny enough to mix in with the thick-cut, crispy bacon and assortment of veggies that included cherry tomatoes, radishes, and carrots.

Polishing off our starters, we

transitioned into the main course with a magnificent pan seared duck breast with Huyet long black rice (VND220,000). Lightly seasoned, the succulent duck comes paired with a tart Vietnamese mulberry sauce that rounds out the flavorful dish, complemented with baby carrots and healthy lotus seed pods mixed into the rice.

At the manager's recommendation, we couldn't pass up on the tagliatelle with amatriciana sauce (VND170,000), a house favorite that did not disappoint. Served perfectly al dente, the fresh pasta was mixed into the rich, red sauce with large chunks of spicy Vietnamese sausage, giving a delicious local twist to

the classic Italian dish.

By this point, we were comfortably full, but after eating our way through the flavorful surprises and creative takes of each course, we felt passing up on dessert would be woefully regrettable. And so, we found ourselves plunging into a decadently layered tiramisu (VND120,000) that, naturally, is presented in its own unique way. Served in a small clay pot with a chocolate crumble on top and Bailey's sauce inside, the dessert arrived with a small saucer of sweet cream to pour over and a scoop of vanilla ice cream on the side, providing just the right way to end our evening at NU Bistro. ■

Clockwise from top left: Cauliflower soup, Duck breast, Tiramisu, Amatriciana pasta



One-Stop Street Eats

Getting your street food fix at Asian Streat

Text by **James Pham**

Images by **Ngoc Tran**



WE'RE BLESSED TO BE LIVING in a part of the globe where many cities are legitimate contenders for the world's best street food capital, from Singapore to Saigon and Bangkok to Bombay. **Asian Streat** (151/6 Dong Khoi, D1; enter through the art arcade, but instead of turning right towards L'Usine, take the stairs to the left) aims to bring some of the region's best street food dishes under one roof.

Open since the end of 2016, Asian Streat (a mashup of "street" and "eat") seats about 30 in a narrow space inspired by Old Saigon with vintage photographs, patterned tile floors and colonial-era pale yellow and green walls. What it lacks in space, it more than makes up for in a menu featuring some of the area's best loved street food fare, including Singaporean Chili Crab, Indonesian Beef Rendang, Hydrabadi Biryani Mutton and everything in between.

The unifying factor is that the tiny kitchen helmed by chefs from Sri Lanka and northern India churns out food to order, just like at a food stall. Our Chicken Tikka (VND120,000)



Counter clockwise from top left: Kottu, Chicken tikka, Hopper marking, Hopper with fish

was a standout, large chunks of tender chicken breast marinated in yogurt and Indian masala, and well worth the 15 minute wait to have it fresh off the grill with just a touch of charring. Instead of being smothered in gravy, Asian Streat's version is lighter and healthier, with a side of kicky green mint and coriander chutney made all the more refreshing with a generous squeeze of lime.

While the *laksa* and *nasi goring* have their definite appeal, we opt instead for some Sri Lankan dishes, a rare opportunity in Saigon to sample an in-your-face cuisine based on dominant, powerful flavors thanks to the island's famed spice production, colonial history and strategic location as a trade hub.

We order the hoppers (VND130,000),

bowl-shaped pancakes cooked in a rounded pan (like a small wok) right at the entrance of the restaurant. Made from slightly sweetened and fermented rice flour that forms a thickish base and tapers into paper thin walls and often has a fried egg at the bottom, the hoppers are a good vehicle for the big chunk of *ambul thiyal*, a hearty, peppery dry fish curry dish sautéed in a blend of spices with a distinctively sour flavor provided by *goraka*, a tamarind-like fruit. The tartness is balanced by *seeni sambal*, a side dish of caramelized onions cooked down until soft with the addition of garlic, ginger and chili flakes for a lovely afterburn.

We finish with the Kottu Veg, a dish that looks like Pad Thai but tastes more

like fried rice, a Sri Lankan favorite made from shredded roti bread tossed with slivers of carrots and spring onions and bound together with egg. Traditionally, it's made with leftovers or whatever's on hand, so expect the odd bone or crunchy bit of gristle. Here, it's served with a bowl of curry sauce to moisten and add extra flavor to the stir-fried flatbread. Asian Streat makes its curry separate from the meat, meaning that vegetarians can still enjoy full-flavored sauces.

In addition to its city-spanning a la carte menu, Asian Streat also serves a popular Saturday lunch buffet (VND180,000) from noon to 3 pm with 20 or so dishes that change every weekend. ■

Bun cha



THIS IS A GREAT VIETNAMESE noodle dish that's light and just packed with flavor. It's like a salad with a delicious dipping sauce, or dressing, and it's so easy to put together too.

It is hard to find someone with greater knowledge of food and culture in Hanoi than writer Thach Lam. In his famous work, *Hanoi – 36 Old Quarters*, a rustic Confucian scholar, upon smelling *bun cha*, or rice noodles with grilled pork patties, during his first visit to the capital, breaks into verse: "In 1000-year-old Thang Long, is it the most precious object?"

Bun cha, served with small, savory, crispy, caramelized pork and thin rice vermicelli on a bed of fresh vegetables and mixed fish sauce, is considered one of Hanoi's 15 quintessential noodle dishes.

Though the origin of *bun cha* is not clearly known, it has for long been a popular dish that can be found on a traditional shoulder pole at street corners as well as in restaurants around Vietnam and in Vietnamese restaurants abroad.

Ingredients

• Pork belly	500 g
• Lean pork shoulder	500 g
• Rice vermicelli	1 kg
• Lemongrass	4 stems
• Shallot	5
• Garlic	3 cloves
• Herbs	200 g
• Caramel syrup	2 tbsp
• Lime juice	2 tbsp
• Salt, fish sauce, pepper, seasoning	enough

Dipping Sauce

• Fish sauce	50 ml
• Lime juice	2 tbsp
• Garlic	3 cloves
• Chili	1
• Sugar	2 tbsp
• Seasoning	1/2 tbsp
• Water	50 ml
• Green papaya	100 g
• Carrot	100 g



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



Instructions



1. Slice the pork belly into thin pieces. Mince the pork shoulder.



2. Finely chop the lemongrass, stalks only. Mince the shallot and garlic. Using a fine cloth, squeeze the liquid out of the lemongrass, garlic and shallot. Reserve.



3. Divide the liquid into two equal parts and use to marinate both types of pork. Season with salt, fish sauce, pepper, seasoning and lime juice. Let marinate for 1h.



4. Roll the pork shoulder into balls. Grill until golden brown.



5. Grill the pork belly until golden brown.



6. Serve with fresh herbs, noodles and dipping sauce.

Dipping Sauce

Mix lime juice, fish sauce, garlic, chili, sugar and seasoning together. Garnish with cut carrot flowers





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

Lesson Learned

Why attend a wine tasting if I already know what I like?



I OFTEN GET ASKED BY wine lovers why they should go to wine tastings and wine events when they already know which wines they like. It's the same kind of thinking that around half of the people drinking wine have.

After asking and finding out what they like—they may refer to grape, style, area or even a particular brand and/or wine—my usual answer is that if you have not tried all the wines available (and no one has), or at least a decent selection, how can you know that by sticking to what you know (and like) you have made your best choice, and that perhaps there is a much better wine at a much cheaper price that you have not come across yet.

And I guess it's all about personality and economics. For example, while I do my best to try as many wines as possible both for business and personal reasons, this can be hard work and sometimes in busy periods like

international exhibitions, I just feel like drinking something that I know and that I like; and this is reflected in my cellar—which usually has around 200 bottles, and very few references will be represented by more than one or two bottles, with only about five which I buy by the case.

On the other hand, my dad, who is 82, really knows the wine he likes, and this is also represented by his cellar. He only stores one wine, and he is not too friendly to try new wines that I bring home when I visit.

While my dad has never been a wine drinker, and drinks wine for health reasons as instructed by his doctor, I enjoy the discovery of new wines, the excitement and the thrill of not knowing what a new bottle will bring.

I used to be a little bit like my dad long ago, I used to drink mostly Bordeaux and Barossa when in

England and Rioja when visiting Spain; even when visiting my parents in the house they have in the Mediterranean, I would ignore the local wines and go for a bottle of Rioja. This behavior repeated for many years, until one day I decided to give it a go to a couple of bottles of local wine from Yecla—being so cheap my expectations were rather low.

However, when I opened the bottles and tried the wines, I realized what an idiot I had been, for so many years going to that area and never trying the local wines, which were wonderful and delivering great value for money. I then went back to the shops and tried as many local wines as possible, and I was fascinated.

That taught me a lesson: if you have the opportunity, try new wines, you never know when you will discover something amazing that may catch your heart (and your palate). ■

Wine & Dine

ROOFTOP BARS

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call 1900636997

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Liquid Sky Bar

A casual destination to escape and unwind in the sun. In the evening, the space transforms into a rooftop lounge where guests and locals will come to socialize, dance or just let loose. On the mezzanine level, comfortable lounges and a flow of cocktails create a casual and fun atmosphere. It is the perfect spot to watch the sunset over the horizon.

21F - Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon
8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1 / 3822 0033



Rex Hotel Rooftop Bar

Set on the fifth floor, Rex Hotel Rooftop Bar makes up for its modest height with breath-taking views of Vietnam's French colonial structures such as Saigon Opera House and People's Committee Hall. Rex Hotel Rooftop Bar is also fitted with an elevated stage and dancefloor, hosting live Latino bands and salsa performances at 20:00 onwards.

141 Nguyen Hue, D1



Tropicana

Tropicana is the first and only rooftop bar in Thao Dien, District 2. The venue, with its sweeping views, looks over the Saigon River and Thao Dien, with an exciting selection of beverages, including signature cocktails, an extensive wine list and liqueurs. The bar is based on a Latin concept with live music and a Latin food menu.

Tuesday to Sundays: 5PM till late
41 Street 41, Thao Dien, District 2, Ho Chi Minh City
info@tropicanasaigon.com
Phone: (+84) 165 424 3972

SUNDAY BRUNCHES



Hotel Equatorial

Indulge in extravagance with the freshest seafood, roasted meats, international dishes, all-day breakfast favourites, and decadent desserts. A family brunch your kids will love. Complimentary for children below 6 years old. Prices: VND790,000 ++ per adult, VND395,000 ++ per child (12 years and under. VND990,000++ includes house wine, and beer VND1,390,000++ includes champagne, craft cocktails, wine, and beer

11.30am - 2.30pm
242 Tran Binh Trong, D5
3839 7777
www.hochiminhcity.equatorial.com



Indulgent Sundays @ Nineteen

A legendary buffet in the Heart of Saigon. Sensational cooking and an intimate, lively atmosphere are guaranteed. Authentic cuisine from around the globe, prepared by award-winning chefs, with fresh seafood as the highlight of the brunch. From noon to 3pm, with options from VND 890,000++ without drinks to VND 1,490,000++ with a free flow of Champagne, cocktails, house wine, and beer.

19-23 Lam Son Square, D1
hotel@caravellehotel.com / 3823 4999



Le Meridien

Centered around three distinctive dining venues - Latest Recipe, Bamboo Chic and Latitude 10 - Le Meridien offers three brunch packages, prices range from VND1,500,000 to VND2,500,000 and include Oriental and International cuisine.

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1
6263 6688 - ext.6930
www.lemeridiensaigon.com

BARs & CRAFT BEER BREWERIES



Acoustic Bar

A place to catch some high-quality live music in a lively atmosphere. Plus, the frequent rotation of performers means that even the most regular of patrons are kept on their toes.

E1 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3



Aperitivo

Cosy, friendly, and chic, with a quality cocktail and wine list, delicious deli sandwiches by day and night, Aperitivo is a great place to relax and unwind after work.

80b/c Xuan Thuy, Thao Dien, D2.



BiaCraft

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

90 Xuan Thuy, D2

CHINESE

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Dragon Court

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

11-13 Lam Son Square, D1
3827 2566



Dynasty

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

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



Kabin

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

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



Li Bai

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

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



Ming Court

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

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



San Fu Lou – Cantonese Kitchen

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

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



SAN FU LOU
CANTONESE KITCHEN

Also Try...

Hung Ky Mi Gia

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

20 Le Anh Xuan, D1
3822 2673

Ocean Palace

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

2 Le Duan Street, D1
3911 8822

Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

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

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

Shang Palace

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

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

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

Yu Chu

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

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



Bach Dang

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

26-28 Le Loi, D1



Café RuNam

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

96 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
www.caferuam.com



Chat

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

85 Nguyen Truong To, D4



K.Coffee

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

Opening time: 7AM- 10PM.

Sunday closed.

86 Hoang Dieu, D4
8253316 / 090 142 3103



La Rotonde Saigon

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

77B Ham Nghi, 1st Floor, D1



The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1





Le Terroir

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

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



Le Bacoulos

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

13 Tong Huu Dinh, D2

3519 4058

www.bacoulos.com



Le Jardin

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

31 Thai Van Lung, D1



Long Phi

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

207 Bui Vien, D1



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1

www.tycozsaigon.com



Also Try...

La Cuisine

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

48 Le Thanh Ton

2229 8882

La Nicolse

A traditional 'neighbourhood' French restaurant, La Nicolse serves simple, filling French fare at exceptional value in the shadow of the Bitexco tower. Most popular for its steak dishes, the restaurant has an extensive menu which belies its compact size.

56 Ngo Duc Ke, D1

3821 3056

La Villa

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

14 Ngo Quang Huy, D2

3898 2082

www.lavilla-restaurant.com.vn

Trois Gourmands

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

39 Tran Ngoc Dien, D2

3744 4585



INDIAN

Fest.vn
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Ashoka

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

17/10 Le Thanh Ton, D1
33 Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2



Ganesh

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

38 Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com



Natraj

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

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



Saigon Indian

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

1st Floor, 73 Mac Thi Bui, D1



Tandoor

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

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



The Punjabi

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

40/3 Bui Vien, D1



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SASCOVietnam

www.sasco.com.vn

ITALIAN

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call 1900636997

FEST



Ciao Bella

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

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

Ciao Bella



La Forchetta

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

24 Hung Gia, PMH, D7
3541 1006



La Hostaria

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

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



Portofino

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

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



NO.1 Pizza In The World

"Pizza is not meant to be tasted, but to be eaten". We aim to make pizza a more familiar dish in Vietnam. Come try our specialties, pizzas cooked in wood-fired oven, roasted chicken prepared in rotisserie oven, mouth-watering beef, or pasta dish for crab lovers.

From July 17th - 27th (17:00 - 21:30) each guest gets a chance to win 10%, 30% or 50% discount on each of their pizza orders.

Lot L5-18, 5F Saigon Centre, 92-94 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia St., D.1, HCMC
(028) 3821 8319
pizzalogic.hcm@gmail.com
http://pizzalogic-hcm.com/index-vn.html
Fest.vn or call 1900636997



Also Try...

Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1
3824 4286

Opera

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

2 Lam Son Square, D1

Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1
3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

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

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

Carpaccio

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

79 Hai Ba Trung
3823 8998



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



Gyumaru

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

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



Ichiban Sushi

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

204 Le Lai, D1
www.ichibansushi.vn



Kesera Bar & Restaurant

An Ideal place for your city escape and enjoying Japanese fusion foods. We have the best bagels in town, fine wine and cigars in a custom cabinet and is a must-do for anyone visiting the city.

26/3 Le Thanh Ton, Ben Nghe Ward, Dist 1
0838 270 443



SORAE Sushi Sake Lounge

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

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

Level 24, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai St., Dist 1, HCMC
08 3827 2372
<http://www.soraesushi.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/Soraesushi/>
Weekend Brunch at only VND 680,000
Fest.vn or call 1900636997



Sushi Dining Aoi

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

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



Yoshino

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

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

Also Try...

Blanchy Street

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

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

Chisana Hashi

Serves authentic Japanese cuisine including sashimi, sushi, tempura, sukiyaki and shabu shabu.
River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
6683 5308

K Cafe

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

74A4 Hai Ba Trung, D1
3824 5355
www.yakatabune-saigon.com

Osaka Ramen

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

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



KOREAN

Fest.vn
call 1900636997

FEST



Galbi Brothers

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

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



Lee Cho

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

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7
5410 1086



Seoul House

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

33 Mac Thi Bui, D1
3829 4297



THAI



Koh Thai

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

Kumho Link, Hai Ba Trung, D1
3823 4423

Lac Thai

Hidden away down a narrow alley in the heart of downtown this unique Thai restaurant boasts authentic flavours and surprising character. Eat downstairs at tables in a cosy, themed environment - or be brave and climb the narrow spiral staircase to the attic and crouch on cushions in true Thai style while attentive staff serve plates to share.

71/2 Mac Thi Bui St. D1
3823 7506

Thai Street

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

26 Thao Dien Road, Thao Dien, D2
0866549525

The Racha Room

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

12-14 Mac Thi Bui, D1
090 879 1412

Tuk Tuk Thai Bistro

Kitch and authentic, Tuk Tuk brings the pleasure of street-style Thai food into an elegant but friendly setting. Now a fashionable venue in its own right, Tuk Tuk's menu features some unique dishes and drinks you won't see elsewhere.

17/11 Le Thanh Ton, D1
3521 8513 / 090 688 6180

STEAKHOUSE

Fest.vn
call 1900636997

FEST



B3 STEAKHOUSE & CRAFT BEER

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

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



Corso Steakhouse & Bar

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

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



El Gaucho Argentinian Steakhouse

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

74/1 Hai Ba Trung, D1



Nossa Steakhouse

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

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



New York Steakhouse

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


25-27 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, D1




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

Open 11am to 11pm
North & South Indian food

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Of course we can cater!
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Full Menu
www.woknroll.vn

0122-690-8881

Scam for the full menu

VIETNAMESE

Fest.vn
call 1900636997

FEST



Five Oysters

Five Oysters serves authentic and excellent Seafood & Vietnamese food with SG Green beer at VND12,000 as well as a promo of VND10,000 per fresh oyster daily. There's also a rooftop, a great place to start or end the night! Recipient of Certificate of Excellence 2014-16 from TripAdvisor and Top Choice 2015 by Lianorg.com. Recommended by VNexpress.net, Lonely Planet, Utopia and Saigoneers.
234 Bui Vien, D1



Mountain Retreat

Home style cooking from the Vietnamese north in a quiet alley off Le Loi, Mountain Retreat brings a rural vibe to busy central DI. The breezy and unassuming décor nicely contrasts the intense northern flavors ideally suited for the international palate.

Top floor of 36 Le Loi, D1
+84 90 719 45 57



Nhà Hàng Di Mai

Every family has an unique recipe which is handed down from generations and perfected to create that hearty comfort food. Our customers can relive having home-cooked food experience as our signature recipes are crafted with passion and tradition. Every meal is a delight in Di Mai. Explore the culinary journey of traditional authentic Vietnamese flavors set in an open kitchen, modern contemporary design.

136 - 138 Le Thi Hong Gam St., Dist. I, HCMC
08 3821 7786
nhahangdimai.com/
https://www.facebook.com/nhahangdimai/



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



The Hue House

Located on the 10th floor roof of the Master Building, The Hue House opens up to a breezy space with views over the city. The décor is simple yet elegant – bird cages repurposed into lamps, bonsai centerpieces in pretty ceramic bowls and lots of greenery. The menu highlight unique ingredients only found in Hue, like the Va tron fig salad with shrimp and pork, assorted platter of rice cakes meant to be shared, the sate-marinated ribs come with a plate of crunchy greens and mixed rice, originally grown by minority groups in the Central Highlands, and many more.

Rooftop Master Building
41-43 Tran Cao Van, D3
Opening time 10am-10pm.
0909 246 156 / 0906 870 102



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

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 Sach Quan

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

10 Dang Tat, D1
3848 0144

Hum

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

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

May

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

19-21 Dong Khoi, D1
3910 1277



Bamboo Chic

Bamboo Chic serves an inventive menu of Japanese and Chinese dishes and creative cocktails. Open for dinner, the contemporary space features modern velvet chairs with purple and plum pillows and dramatic beaded chandeliers inspired by the Saigon River along with live music from the house DJ.

Level 9, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1

6263 6688

www.lemeridien.com/saigon

For restaurant promotions go to fest.vn or Call 1900636997

BAMBOO



BoatHouse

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

40 Lily Road, AP5C, 36 Thao Dien, D2

boathousesgn@gmail.com

+84 8 3744 6790

www.boathousesaigon.com

www.facebook.com/boathousevietnam



Noir: Dining in the Dark

Diners choose from a selection of set menus served up by visually impaired waiters completely in the dark. Choose from one of three set menus (East, West and Vegetarian) with four or five tasting portions per course (starter, main, dessert). Purposely, not much more information is provided.

178/180D Hai Ba Trung, D1



Latest Recipe

Latest Recipe invites diners to an international culinary experience set against views of the Saigon River. An open kitchen is the focal point of this contemporary space, with chefs preparing an array of dishes to order. Every Sunday Latest Recipe serves an elaborate brunch buffet filled with tantalizing dishes from around the world.

Level M, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1

6263 6688

www.lemeridien.com/saigon

For restaurant promotions go to fest.vn or Call 1900636997

Latest Recipe



Panam - The Backroom

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

12pm-1am / Tel: 0122 733 0235

91 Pasteur, D1

(in a side alley behind Cuba la Casa del Mojito)



Poke Saigon

Poke is a traditional Hawaiian dish made with fresh, cubed raw fish and toppings. Poke Saigon is the first poke restaurant in HCMC where diners create their own bowl. Located on the second floor of an apartment building, the dining space reflects the menu: fresh, fun, creative and healthy. There are many different options for your poké bowl with bases that include sushi or brown rice, including mix-in sauces like wasabi mayo and gomaes sesame and toppings such as wakame seaweed salad, crab salad and poke options: ahi tuna, salmon, shrimp and more. We are available for delivery.

Tue-Sun 110am-8pm

2nd Floor, 42 Nguyen Hue, D1

0902474388

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



Stellar Restaurant

Occupies a refurbished villa within the upscale District 2. The restaurant serves a menu of familiar European cuisine. Lunch and Dinner at Stellar can expect well-executed renditions of Italian and French cuisines combining traditional technique with some Asian influences.

9:00am-10:30pm

43 Tran Ngoc Dien, Thao Dien, D2, HCMC.

0837445115

reservation@stellar.com.vn



twenty21one

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

21 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3

TWENTY21ONE



Villa Royale Downtown Antiques & Tea Room

Villa Royale Downtown is nestled in a charming French Colonial Villa on Ho Tung Mau Street.

Whilst browsing the vast array of collectible pieces you can sample a delicious menu of freshly prepared meals and delectable desserts.

Tea enthusiasts will delight in the 40+ flavours available from TWG.

Opening Hours 10am -10pm everyday

A Level 1, 25 Ho Tung Mau street, District 1, HCMC

Phone (84) 3821 0088

www.villaroyaledowntown.com



Travel & Wellness

MIA MUI NE / IMAGE PROVIDED BY MIA MUI NE





MANY HAPPY RETURNS

Mia Mui Ne turns 15 in style

Text by James Pham
Images Provided by Mia Mui Ne



ALL PAINTINGS START OUT equal, nothing more than a simple mix of pigment and canvas. It takes something special to transform one into a work of art, a universally appreciated balance of execution and inspiration.

Set on the Mui Ne - Phan Thiet stretch of beach just four hours from Ho Chi Minh City, **Mia Mui Ne** (www.miamuine.com) shares many of the same ingredients as its competitors—a long, narrow plot of land bookended by the main road and a stretch of sandy beach. But it's what Mia has done with those elements that has made it into a Mui Ne favorite, now set to celebrate its 15th anniversary.

From its humble beginnings as a budget backpacker inn, Mia Mui Ne is now all grown up, sporting a barefoot luxury chic thanks to a recent 2015 renovation. Only a keen observer might be able to divine its age based on its lush, mature gardens and a faux graffiti wall with notable dates behind the bar. Well-travelled guests might also see similarities in effortless sophistication and Instagram-ready backdrops shared with Nha Trang's iconic Sailing Club and the luxe Mia Nha Trang Resort, owned and managed by the same group.

However, if this family of properties were social media royalty, Mia Mui Ne with its bright pops of color, gorgeously mosaiced pool and vivid nautical stripes would boast Kylie's fresh, young appeal to Mia Nha Trang's more elegant Kim. The property is basically your favorite beach house Pinterest board come to life, with framed glass menus and whimsical signs showing the way to the men's bathroom on



the left because “women are always right.”

It's easy to roll with Mia's fun, easy-going exterior, but the truth is that every element of the property has been carefully tweaked to get the most out of it and then some, with lots of serendipitous touches of luxury thrown in for good measure. Compact rooms are made to feel more spacious by the addition of outdoor showers, vintage tiles and televisions cleverly hidden behind sliding panels. Custom-designed dispensers so pretty you'll want to steal them are filled with high-end L'Occitane products. And instead of inspirational poems, a practical card containing the week's weather forecast is provided at turndown along with premium chocolates.

BAREFOOT LUXURY

The same thoughtfulness applies to the resort's layout. Mia's 31 rooms are spread across a pretty hotel block and a handful of duplex bungalows, each hidden behind beautifully manicured pathways so as to preserve the views. The Xanh Spa is aptly named (“xanh” meaning “green” in Vietnamese), tucked away behind a wavy wall and set in lush garden surrounds with flowing water features, flowers and chirping birds. Comprised of a lemongrass-infused steam room, two semi-outdoor treatment rooms (one set up for Thai massage) and an air-conditioned double room, the spa offers a range of treatments focusing on everything from sunburned and sensitive skin to prenatal massages and lighter massages just for kids. After a refreshing tea of honey, ginger and mint, I opt for a relaxing full body massage, the therapist's magic thumbs and firm kneading strokes releasing tension from knots I didn't even know I had, all in a cocoon of lingering lavender and the soothing sounds of trickling water.

The heart of the resort, however, is the beachfront pool and restaurant, a hive of activity where a host of complimentary daily activities like yoga, Vietnamese language classes, coffee classes and liqueur tastings take place to a fun, upbeat island vibe. The wide beach itself is home to Sailing Club, the resort's kite surfing school, taking advantage of Mui

Ne's 260 days a year with winds over 12 knots. Where other properties reserve the beachfront for its most expensive rooms, Mia has generously dedicated that premium space to a striking pool surrounded by comfortable seating areas and to Sandals Restaurant with its upstairs Kid's Club and library ensuring that the beach can truly be enjoyed by all.

The new and improved Mia extends to its take on upscale beach fare with emphasis on light, fresh flavors. The included breakfast is worth the price of admission alone, with a buffet of cheesy quiches, freshly baked breads with homemade jams, banana peanut waffles and freshly squeezed juices including daily shooters with zingy flavors like ginger pear. Diners can also choose one from among 18 a la carte options, ranging from the decadent, like a croissant brimming with cream cheese, smoked salmon, capers and dill beautifully presented on a wooden board or a hearty Spanish breakfast, to the lighter yet tasty Quinoa cake or Spiced oatmeal with caramelized pears and crunchy granola. The resort is also known for its incredible smoothie bowls, cold and refreshing, and incorporating fresh fruit, nuts, seeds, cereals and other superfoods with names like Green Goddess (avocado, mango, banana, coconut milk, peanut butter, spinach and honey) or the Red Dragon, taking advantage of Phan Thiet's best-known crop with its juicy red flesh, banana, raspberries and homemade coconut milk.

Lunch and dinner fare are also equal parts execution and inspiration, designed to tantalize with serendipity, like in the miso mayonnaise that accompanies the Chili Salt Phan Thiet Squid, the Fish and Chips given an extra kick with ginger beer, and the Sesame Tuna Salad with tropical notes provided by sweet mango and a coriander-ginger vinaigrette. Sandals even serves refreshing popsicles to beat the afternoon heat with flavors like Watermelon Hibiscus or the adults-only Cucumber Lime Mint with rum.

Constantly reinventing itself even after 15 years, Mia Mui Ne offers the same family-friendly feel but with a barefoot luxury look that ensures it will always have many happy returns. ■





Welcome to Panama

Images by **Mike Colin**

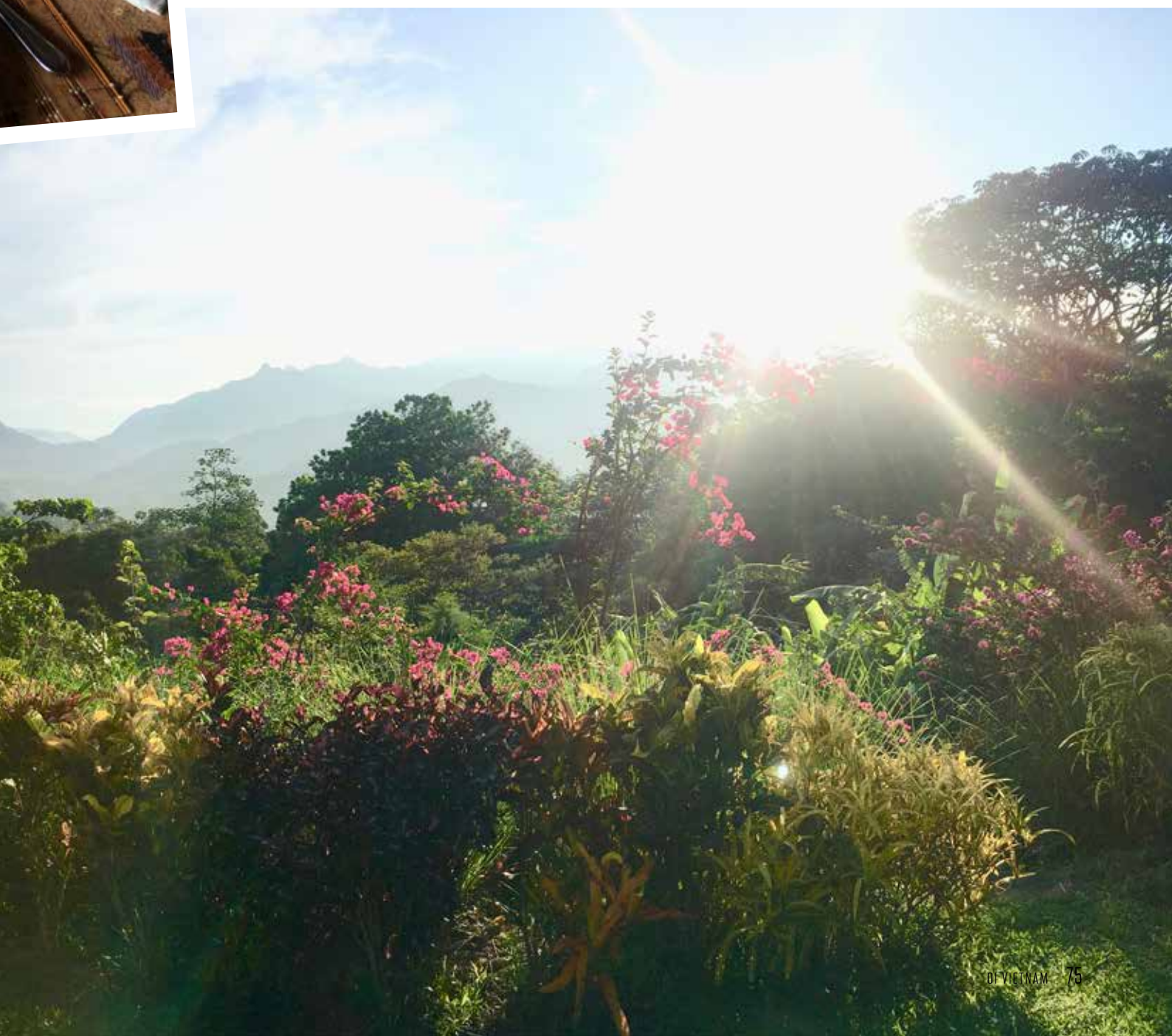
AT THE CROSSROADS OF TWO oceans and two continents, Panama City is a dynamic metropolis. That's never been truer than it is today. Everywhere in this steamy, tropical town are foreign investors talking shop in upscale cafés, expat fortune-seekers toasting their fates in wine bars, cranes stalking the rooftops of a skyline that seems to grow before your eyes and — on the downside — traffic that puts even the most congested American city to shame. Central America's capital of international finance is in the midst of a prolonged boomtown fever. Over the past decade, Panama has enjoyed the fastest growing economy in Latin America.

As a result, new hotels and restaurants have sprouted across the capital. Healthy competition is keeping standards high, and Panama City has a plethora of top-quality, luxury experiences for cut prices. ■











Disconnect to Reconnect

Going unplugged at An Lam Retreats Saigon River

Text by **James Pham**

Images Provided by **An Lam Retreats Saigon River**

ONE OF THE HOTTEST TRENDS in luxury hotels in recent years has been “digital detoxing”—encouraging guests to completely unplug from modern life with wellness in mind. To that end, resorts have used a combination of honey and vinegar—bribing guests into giving up their devices in return for discounts and providing a host of non-screen wellness activities or bringing down the hammer and physically locking up phones and creating no Wi-Fi zones.

While the luxe **An Lam Retreats Saigon River** (www.anlam.com) isn’t billed as a digital detox property, all the elements are there for a blissfully unplugged staycation.

Originally a posh private residence on the banks of the Saigon River, An Lam has expanded into 19 suites and villas set down a non-descript side street in Binh Duong, just north of Saigon. Most guests, however, arrive via a 25-minute complimentary shuttle boat ride from downtown Ho Chi Minh City, passing the restaurants and high rises of District 2 and quiet Thanh Da along the way, onto a stretch of the Saigon River barely known

to even the city’s longtime residents. Not even half an hour from the city center and yet somehow a world away.

We’re whisked to the riverside deck and choose a welcome drink from the extensive menu of wines, mocktails, cocktails and juices. There’s no reception area per se. Instead, An Lam uses a system of dedicated butlers, one person assigned to each room for the duration of the stay, thereby getting to know each guest. Our butler’s been in contact with us from even before our arrival, discreetly

ascertaining our needs and wants and she now quickly takes care of formalities and shows us to our room, a gorgeous three-room suite with its own plunge pool, study and designer bathroom. Throughout our stay, she’s our personal Siri, popping in and out to book spa appointments and shuttle boat rides and to suggest daily activities.

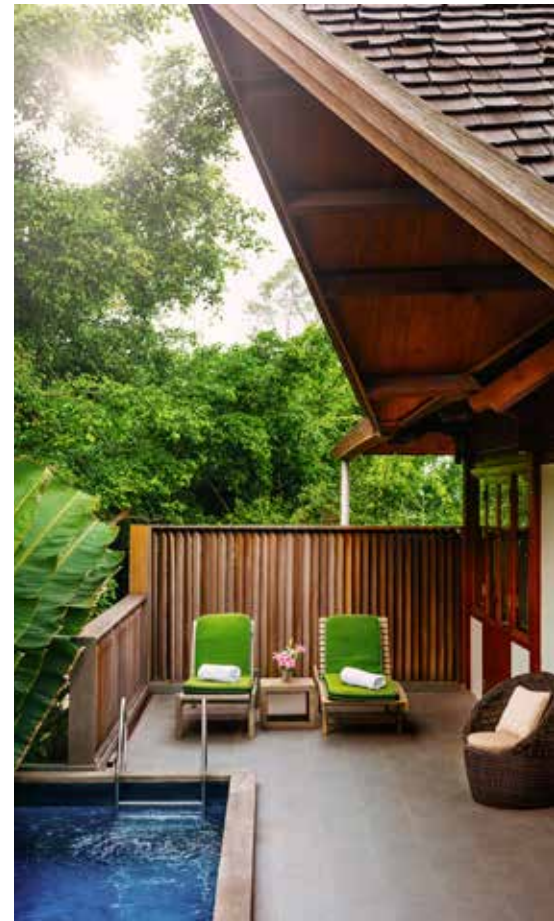
While Wi-Fi throughout the property is lightning fast, the quiet, natural surrounds of An Lam begin to take effect and we find ourselves going offline, the





usually constant FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) replaced by simply reveling in the now. One afternoon, we meet with one of the chefs for a complimentary cooking class, the makings of spring rolls neatly laid out on a gigantic wooden table under the shade of a huge Chinese banyan tree. It feels good to focus on chopping and mixing, creating something tangible rather than digital. We learn the secret to making the perfect *nuoc cham* dipping

sauce, starting with a base of 1:1 fish sauce and sugar, cooked over low heat to mellow out the flavors and making it wonderfully thick and glossy, then chilled for an hour to avoid cooking through the minced garlic and chilies. Later, we enjoy the crunchy spring rolls as an afternoon snack while watching the river flow on by. On another day, we join a walking tour of the beautiful gardens filled with dozens of species of ornamental plants and flowers,





some resembling a string of bright red Chinese firecrackers, others showcasing dragon-like fronds, all dominated by towering banyans, their soft tendrils falling like curtains to create an aura of wild mystery. From fishing on the jetty to complimentary daily activities to lazing by the pretty pool, we find ourselves plugging in to life instead.

Savor The Moment

While the compact property is loaded with private little corners, gorgeous function rooms and even a scenic tree house, the one spot we find ourselves returning to again and again is the waterfront, the riverine heart of An Lam where we can almost feel our body rhythms recalibrating to the flow of the river. Our day starts there, with a leisurely breakfast where guests are encouraged to order as much as they like from a gourmet a la carte menu. We indulge in freshly baked breads, freshly squeezed juices and gorgeous meals of Eggs Florentine and homemade waffles with cinnamon. Our server prompts us to try a killer shrimp wonton soup and we happily oblige. Dinner at Tram's Cookery, the resort's main restaurant, is equally leisurely, with its exposed rafters, colorful lanterns and panoramic windows open to the elements. An Lam's menu is well conceived with reliably good Vietnamese and Western classics. However, the menu truly shines with its forays into fusion cuisine, and one evening we enjoy a standout fusion set menu dinner featuring a stunning starter platter highlighted by a shredded papaya and mango salad with big chunks of shrimp and seafood, its presentation a playful riot of colors, textures and heights incorporating various greens, pumpkin flowers and crispy shrimp crackers. It's followed by a Sea cucumber and trio of mushroom soup, our nervousness about the sea cucumber's unusual but not unpleasant mouthfeel soon giving way to serendipity as we see how it plays off the earthy sweetness of



the mushrooms. The main was a Duo of beef tenderloin, Rossini-style, with the tart sweetness of the tomato chutney and caramelized balsamic onions in a red wine jus providing the needed acidity

to cut through the addictive richness of the seared foie gras. An Lam favors large plates for maximum presentation, but also to accommodate generous portions of finely prepared fare. Add an and the



mouthwatering basket of freshly baked breads and homemade dips, and dinners are a gloriously languid affair. In the moment, enjoying the river breezes and watching clumps of hyacinth and the odd barge roll slowly on by, we don't even reach for our phones to document the meal. If it's not Instagrammed, did it even happen? For once, we find ourselves not caring and choose to savor the moment, the meal, the now.

On an overcast afternoon, our retreat to the senses continues at the newly renovated spa, set in a wooded corner of the property, tucked behind gorgeous pebbled walls and soothing water features. Somewhere between the long, firm strokes of a Balinese massage, methodically working out the kinks in each quadrant of my body, I feel my mind powering down. In the digital world, rebooting is usually a bad thing. It means something has gone wrong, followed by anxious, interminable seconds of wasted productivity. But here in the posh, plush spa with its buckwheat face pillows and scented face masks, it feels cathartic to completely shut down, the usual whirring of background noises in my mind silent for once. As the therapist moves on to my Oatmeal and Honey facial, working the delicious scents of shiso and sweet almond from the premium Thann products into my skin, time seems to slow and then stop. There are no thoughts of emails to answer or things to do. There is only the now.

Considering its proximity and boutique nature, An Lam Retreats Saigon River makes for the ideal Saigon staycation. Its high staff to guest ratio means each guest can expect truly personal service where even the smallest details are taken into consideration. The resort also partners with local operators to offer speedboat tours to Cu Chi and the Mekong Delta, as well as fascinating tailored tours of Binh Duong and Saigon. See our resort review of An Lam Retreats Ninh Van Bay, An Lam's brand new sister property in Nha Trang, in last month's issue. ■



Autumn Wenders

Known as The City of 10,000 Shrines, Kyoto is the perfect destination to experience a kaleidoscope of autumn colors

Text and Images by David Muller



TO CELEBRATE MY WIFE'S BIRTHDAY, I booked a surprise trip to Japan to experience the majestic sights and sounds of Kyoto. Pleasant, cool days prove wonderful for walks through temples, gardens and bamboo forests. It makes for a romantic experience, where a couple can find secluded hideaways along the garden path to hold hands and create beautiful moments.

After a long day, the perfect way to rejuvenate the muscles is to soak in an *onsen*, or Japanese hot spring. Many hotels and bathhouses tap the volcanic spring waters as they bubble up through the ground. An important, if not unusual note, is that many establishments refuse entry to bathers adorned with tattoos. This rather arcane custom originated with preventing Yakuza, Japanese organized crime members, from entering and causing trouble. Unfortunately, many foreigners also run afoul of this rule. To spare any inconvenience or embarrassment, it's best to check with the bathhouse by phone or email first, especially if you're traveling to some of the larger *onsen* located on the farther outskirts of the city.

Translated as 'pure water,' Kiyomizudera temple founded in 780 AD, takes its name from the mountain stream that runs through the temple grounds. The Otowa Waterfall at the base of Kiyomizudera's temple splits into three separate streams. Drinking the waters from each stream may bestow upon the pilgrim the benefits of success at school, longevity or a happy love life. Alas, the search for good fortune comes with a warning. Drinking from all three streams is to tempt the gods. They view those drinking from all three as being selfish and greedy. Those who do invite ill-fortune. Suffice it to say I'm too old for success at school, therefore I drank to my heart's content from only two streams.

Shops, restaurants and teahouses dot the area leading to the temple. It's a welcoming area to meander through at your leisure on your way up or down from the temple. The path leads to Maruyama park where women donning kimonos vie for the perfect spot to take a photo with a backdrop of autumn leaves. Shops around Kyoto specialize in renting kimonos for the day to those who came unprepared.



Tourists the world over pose in formal dress for the perfect shot throughout the temples and gardens and make for an amusing sight when caught behind more modern cityscapes.

Kinkakuji temple, also called the 'Golden Pavilion,' is one of the most famous structures in Kyoto. Its history is pocked by fires that destroyed it on several occasions. The current reincarnation of this structure was completed in 1955 after a crazed novice monk set the old temple ablaze. The golden pavilion's façade and interior is decorated in gold leaf, allowing it to glimmer in the sunshine, its reflection in the adjacent pond a spectacular sight to behold.

Eikan-do Zenrin-ji Temple draws a huge crowd at night when the temple's gardens are lit up with an intricate array

of lights. The lights of the garden mix with the shimmering stars to cast an eerie glow above the gardens' central pool.

Tofukuji temple is an opportune spot to experience the breathtaking explosion of autumn leaves. A covered bridge allows people to feel like they are floating above the canopy, staring out across a sea of red and gold adorned maple trees to the valley below.

Due to the large volume of tourists crossing the bridge, taking photos while on the bridge is banned. Security guards in immaculate attire are posted on either end desperately trying to enforce the rule. I wasn't going to miss the perfect shot and snapped a prohibited and beautiful photo of my wife staring out across the endless autumn expanse.

Arashiyama, meaning 'Storm





Arashiyama area; the temple is abundant with thick mosses entangling the ancient forest's lush greenery. At the hill's peak is an intricate, red pagoda surrounded by pine trees that compete for aerial dominance with the pagoda's needle-like spire.

Strolling about gardens and temples all day is sure to stoke the appetite as well as thirst. The gods make sure that doesn't go unsatisfied either. Down the path from the temple is Kaede café, a quaint Japanese coffee and tea house. Here I stopped to try a traditional matcha green tea before crossing the small field in front of the café to view Rakushisha house. It's rumored that the famous poet of the Edo period, Matsuo Basho, stayed to write the poem *Saga Nikki*. Built in 1644, it is the perfect example of a feudal Japanese farm house.

By now we were famished and craved sustenance. Demanding the freshest and highest quality ingredients in their food is a Japanese hallmark. This means the restaurant cuisine is tantalizing and delicious. Located next to a crystal-clear brook is the all-you-can-eat BBQ buffet restaurant, Chifaja. We splurged and chose the "Excellent Menu" for JPY ¥3,300 (USD30), allowing us to gorge on prime cuts of Kobe beef for 90 minutes. For an extra JPY ¥1,200 (USD11) we also enjoyed free flow sochu and sake. With all our senses finally sated, and plenty of images captured on camera to take home and look upon with fondness in the coming days and decades, we found ourselves ready to bid farewell to Kyoto and the Land of the Rising Sun.

Thanks to Japan, my wife's birthday in November was one she will always remember in vivid detail. Kyoto is a magical place to visit in all seasons, but autumn is its most exuberant, displaying a fleeting and brilliant explosion of seasonal colors to the city's landscape before the winter snow wraps up the city like a white blanket. ■



Mountain,' is an area on the outskirts of Kyoto that can be reached by a vintage train. It winds through the mountain passes to reach a plateau. The mountain slopes are a blaze of color in autumn contrasted by the greenery of Arashiyama bamboo grove with its turquoise green bamboo shoots towering up into the sky. The grove had an eerie calm despite the canopy of leaves which rustled overhead in the wind. It prodded my imagination to conjure up the legendary samurai who once inhabited the area during Japan's now bygone feudal era and almost see them prowling the groves.

Gio Temple is located on a hill near the



Regional cheeses and cured meats of Portugal

Portuguese Food Tastes Like The World

How Portugal impacted world foods, while Portuguese food was influenced by the wider world

Text and Images by **Zara Quiroga**

TRAVELING AROUND THE WORLD, I've realized how little is known about Portuguese food abroad. When people think about Southern European cuisines, Italian and Spanish are more likely to come to mind. As tourism to Portugal is increasing, things are slowly changing. Portuguese food is finally starting to get the recognition it deserves!

In the 15th century, after people from Europe and the Middle East had already spread their influence across Portugal, the Portuguese decided to go beyond their borders. Even though the Portuguese explorations across the Atlantic are well known, it all started in the northern coast of Africa. Besides quenching their thirst for gold, it was in the African continent when they came across black pepper. This is when the Portuguese started developing their taste for spices. If by the beginning of the 15th century the Portuguese were exploring Africa, by 1498 they had reached India and by 1500 they were already in South America. Between colonies, trade posts and religious

missions, Lisbon was now connected to Africa, South America, the Middle East and Asia.

The Influence of Portugal on World Cuisines

Chilies are widely associated with Asian cuisines. For instance, it is impossible to picture a steaming bowl of *bun bo Hue*, without the heat induced by the chilies. But it was only in the 16th century that Portuguese sailors brought chilies from Mexico to Asia. World foods as we now know them wouldn't be the same without the exchange of ingredients that the Portuguese trade facilitated. When Portugal took over Goa, India, they did so thinking about its strategic location for the spice route that they were eager to dominate. This is when they introduced chilies, which Indians started incorporating into their cooking. From here until the rest of Asia developed a taste for these powerful peppers, it was just a matter of time.

Beyond chilies, Portugal was responsible for bringing some well-

known ingredients from the Americas into Europe, Africa and Asia. The most widely used include potatoes, cacao, tomatoes, beans, peanuts and corn. At the same time, the Portuguese took other products to the Americas, two of the most notable ones being wheat and sugar, which changed the way locals ate forever. Asia, on the other side, was the source of many of the spices that we now take for granted in the West, after the Portuguese brought them in: cinnamon, ginger, cardamom and clove, amongst others.

In Portugal, folks enjoy a cup of coffee (from Ethiopia) after every meal, and tea mostly when they're feeling sick. Still, it was also by the hand of the Portuguese that tea (from China) became a common beverage in Europe. Even though it'd be easy to associate the British love for tea with their presence in India, drinking tea actually became fashionable in Britain after Catarina de Bragança, from the Portuguese nobility, got married to Charles II of England. Even though the East India Company was already selling



Clock wise from topleft: Peixinhos da Horta, Portuguese Olives, Polvo a Lagareiro

tea in London, Catarina popularized the very British habit of afternoon tea.

After several centuries of food exchanges all over the world, what were once upon a time new ingredients are now so assimilated that we tend to forget about their origins. Still, while traveling, I reminisce about the influence that my country has had on several cuisines around the world. Tempura, one of the standard cooking techniques in Japan, comes from Portugal, from the habit of battering and deep-frying vegetables like green beans.

In any given Indian restaurant around the world, I come across vindaloo, and I can't help but think how this strong dish is the Indian adaptation of Portuguese *Carne de Vinha D'alhos* (meat marinated with wine and garlic), which Goans adapted substituting the wine with vinegar. In Asia, it will be impossible for me to bite into an egg tart, without craving a *Pastel de Belém*, which is the original Portuguese custard tart.

The Taste of Traditional Portuguese Food

Traditional Portuguese dishes result from the geographical position of Portugal, tucked between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, with a noticeable influence from the wider world, notable when it comes to the use of spices.

Despite the impact that the Age of Discoveries had on Portuguese food, the main characteristic of most traditional Portuguese recipes is still simplicity. Staples such as olives and olive oil, tomatoes, bread, various meats and plenty of fresh seafood are prepared in ways that highlight the original flavor of the ingredients, without diffusing them.

While the north of Portugal is more meat focused, giving special attention to pork, the south of the country is more seafood oriented. Portugal has the highest per capita consumption of fish in Europe, eaten mostly grilled (sardines, mackerel, sea bass, sea bream, tuna from the Azores Islands, among others) and stewed.

Still, nothing says Portuguese food like



Bacalhau, that is, salted cod fish. More than 365 preparations involving salted cod are said to exist, one for each day of the year. While every family virtually has its own cod recipe, the most common across the country are *Bacalhau à Brás* (shredded cod sautéed with string potatoes, onions and eggs), *Bacalhau à Gomes de Sá* (cod fish casserole) and *Pastéis de Bacalhau* (cod fritters).

Back in the day, the heavy use of spices was seen as a sign of wealth. When these seasonings became widespread and affordable, their usage started decreasing. But if there are two spices that the Portuguese still can't live without, those are piri-piri from Africa, and cinnamon from Asia.

Piri-piri is used to condiment the famous Portuguese charcoal grilled chicken, which has very little to do with Nando's, the South African chain that popularized this typical Portuguese dish internationally. In Portugal, where people would traditionally eat at home or sitting down at a restaurant during special occasions, *Frango no Churrasco* (grilled chicken) was for many years one of the few take-out food options. Along with fried potatoes, and an extra splash of peri-peri sauce for those who like it hot, it's still one of the most beloved foods in the country.

The most important spice still being

used from the times of the Spice Route is undoubtedly cinnamon, used to flavor the vast range of Portuguese pastries and desserts. Portuguese sweets tend to be egg-based. About 500 years ago, many of the now typical Portuguese sweets were invented by nuns and monks in convents. Those who had devoted their life to religion, used egg whites to starch their clothes, leaving them with large amounts of egg yolks which they didn't discard. Instead, they developed recipes in which they could use them, such as *Leite Creme* (eggs custard), *Pudim Flan* (eggs pudding) or *Pudim Abade de Priscos* (bacon pudding). The famous *Pastel de Belém* (widely known in Asia as Portuguese egg tart), is the most iconic pastry in Portugal and, arguably, the most representative Portuguese food in the international context. Without a generous sprinkle of powdered cinnamon right before biting into it, *Pastéis de Belém* wouldn't be the same!

Digging into Portuguese cuisine is one of the most interesting ways to get to know our country. While I would definitely recommend an extended exploration, I know most travelers' free time doesn't match their appetite or desire for discovery. This is why I always recommend whoever visits my country to spend a solid amount of time in Lisbon. Beyond the popular landmarks and picturesque neighborhoods



Clock wise from topleft: Bacalhau a Bras, Salada de Polvo, Bacalhau, Portuguese people enjoying dinner out in Lisbon, Custard tart

that remind us of a time gone by, the capital city of Portugal is also the best place to start getting acquainted with the most traditional preparations of Portuguese cuisine.

You shouldn't leave Lisbon without trying a few cod fish recipes. Tasting the extremely fresh flavors of salt rubbed fish or seafood grilled over charcoal, served with potatoes and a splash of the most golden of olive oils, is also a must. Indulge with the different types of wine my country produces, while munching on *petiscos* that are small servings of Portuguese specialties meant to be shared, featuring items such as regional cheeses and charcuterie, *Salada de Polvo* (octopus salad), Roasted Chouriço that is set on fire at your table, assorted seafood like garlic prawns, clams in white wine sauce or goose barnacles. Don't underestimate the meat based preparations, specially the most unique ones like *Carne de Porco à Alentejana* (pork with clams) or *Cozido à Portuguesa* (Portuguese meats stew). Above all, do what the Portuguese do and end your meals with dessert, followed by an espresso coffee.

In Portugal, we love not only to eat, but also to talk about food. Here, we eat fresh, plenty and often. In Portugal, food helps us enjoy life. I hope you get to enjoy it this way too when you come to visit! ■



BIO: Zara Quiroga is a Portuguese travel and food writer. She's the co-founder of travel website Backpack ME (www.bkpk.me), along with her husband from India. She is also the author of *Lisbon in 100 Bites - The Ultimate Lisbon Food Guide* (www.lisbonfoodguide.com). The book introduces readers to the typical Portuguese dishes they are likely to come across during a trip to Portugal in an unpretentious and fun way. To download the *Lisbon in 100 Bites* ebook with a 30% discount, use the offer code [vietnamlisbon](#).

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Kids & Education



Primed for Business

All Grade 5 ISHCMC students got a chance to taste the world of business, we asked four about their experiences

Text and Images Provided by ISHCMC

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL HO CHI MINH CITY (ISHCMC) students participated in a Young Entrepreneurs' Market at Saigon Outcast and Snap Cafe in April. We speak to four of those Grade 5 Business Entrepreneurs who sold products and developed services as part of their business entrepreneurship unit. The products developed are all linked to the School's International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (PYP), where students are empowered to practice skills, develop their ideas and knowledge while naturally taking action in authentic real-world contexts.

Sebastien

Tell us about your PYP project.

For my product I was selling google cardboards, like a Virtual Reality (VR). I did this with a partner who also made game wheels—this is cardboard cut like a wheel where you add your phone and then you have a game. Our company was called Re-Cardboard, the product we made can be reused. For the game wheels we used recycled cardboard.

What challenges did you encounter and what were the processes you had to follow?

Some of the challenges we encountered were material shortages. We could not find the materials locally so during our Tet holiday in Japan we bought the lenses. I had to search a lot and visited many shops and finally in the last shop I found two lenses. Luckily, my grandma helped me by calling the manufacturer and ordered some for me and then had them shipped to Vietnam.

Another challenge I encountered was cutting the cardboard. At first I did it by hand, however, the quality wasn't too good, then I heard about a laser cutter in school so I contacted the Digital Tech Department, wondering if they could help me cut the template for the google

cardboards with the laser cutters and they were happy to help, so that was a big help.

What lessons did you learn?

When I was making the google cardboards in the beginning I knew it was going to be complicated, but after the PYPx journey I learned that even if things are complicated you should always start because you will finish, which is what happened for me. I finished the staging piece despite it being very difficult. There were times that it was extremely complicated, but with support I succeeded.

What would you do differently?

When I was making my VRs I was making them late at night because I was busy during the day. It takes about 1.5 [hours] to assemble one by myself, so maybe next time I might have someone else help me so I don't get to bed too late and feel tired the next day. Next time I would perhaps hire someone or have a friend or partner help me.

Will you continue with your business? How has this equipped you for the future?

I am continuing and, amazingly, my friend Brian at the store, iKnow agreed to sell them there. Maybe after school I will start making them. Brian thinks that people will buy them because of the interesting story behind the product and because it is a good product. I will have a big poster behind the VRs in the store. I am going to see if I can sell 4 VRs over the summer, if people buy them I will continue to sell them.

I am not passionate about being an entrepreneur so if they do not sell, I might stop being an entrepreneur for now. I might do another business at some point, but this experience was really powerful and taught me a lot of things so I am happy that I went through this. I think I am equipped for the future and I know the points of being an entrepreneur and what to expect.





I learned that 4 of them were very successful. One of the recipes was not working and another had ingredients that were not appropriate for dogs and cats. Sometimes I would be up till 11pm making treats the night before the sale—this was not good—I should have baked a couple of days in advance and should have been more organized.

Part way through my journey I was very disconnected with my business and felt lazy. I did not want to bake anymore treats and this was a problem because I was only half way through. I had to learn to love my business, which I did. I got to love my business because I knew that with each purchase I would be helping a dog or cat find a home.

What would you do differently?

In the beginning of my journey I was embarrassed and not proud of my business, I did not think it could be successful. I wish I would have been more open to suggestions and in this way have improved my business. I did not take feedback very well and often rushed through my work. I think that I could have been more organized by planning ahead.

Will you continue with your business? How has this equipped you for the future?

I will continue my business because I know that I still have customers who enjoy purchasing them from me, and I think that I can donate more to ARC because I feel they deserve it.

I feel as though my business will be better in the future when I have more experience and I feel more confident. I feel as though I can be even more successful if I work harder and share my story to my customers to help them understand my business. There is always room for improvements.

Mia

Tell us about your PYP project.

My business was called "think Positive." I was selling homemade dog and cat treats. I chose this business because I really have a strong connection with animals, but sadly I have an allergy to both dogs and cats so I had to figure out a way to help them without coming in contact with them. I am donating my money to an organization called ARC (arcpets.com), they are a group completely run by volunteers that save abused and neglected animals. I am donating my money because I believe they are doing great things for our community and I

want to show my gratitude.

What challenges did you encounter and what were the processes you had to follow?

At the beginning I wanted to do everything with my friend and we were supposed to choose something we were passionate about. My friend had great ideas, but I could not relate a hundred percent to those ideas. After I chose my business, I had to begin the creation of my product and I had to pick out recipes that I liked. I had to do research on each ingredient to make sure they were OK for dogs and cats to eat. I had to do about 5-6 recipes.

What lessons did you learn?



Keira

Tell us about your PYP project.

I was working with my best friend to make cupcakes, and with the proceeds we are going to donate to a charity that supports education for girls—we want girls to have an education. We wanted to try something new, we both believe that trying something new is adventurous. I had watched many baking shows and decided to try it. I am a risk taker, it makes me feel that I can achieve something good, and I am proud that we can donate money to charity.

What challenges did you encounter and what were the processes you had to follow?

Since my partner was also my best friend we had many discussions because we both had different perspectives. I found that I was doing the heavy lifting and that she was not doing so much—that was what I thought. However, she did do things behind the scenes that I did not know and I only found out later that she actually did something. Now I feel that we have gotten closer because of the challenges we faced together.

What lessons did you learn?

I learned to be organized, if you are not organized during the PYPx it gets difficult. I learned to collect data right away instead of doing it later, or even forgetting about it. I learned to be confident speaking about my enterprise. I had to be prepared because people won't be interested or come again if I do not present well.

What would you do differently?

Honestly, I would not bake cupcakes, they are a perishable product. They have to be made right before the market, I didn't have much time to prepare.

Will you continue with your business?

How has this equipped you for the future?

I probably will not continue. I lost interest in baking, it is really hard and I realized that I am not that comfortable as a baker, but I will most likely do something else. If I start another business I have to see from the perspective of my partner to avoid arguing; have to look closer to see why a person is doing what they are doing and work out all problems and share responsibilities.



Hwa Jun

Tell us about your PYP project.

My PYPx project was selling Korean food because I am passionate about cooking and I am Korean. I wanted to choose a project that was also connected to my home country. I cooked traditional Korean street food such as *tteokbokki*, it is cylindrical-shaped rice cakes with spicy sauce.

I was doing this project with my Korean partner, we are both passionate about cooking and we thought we would work better together as a team rather than individually.

What challenges did you encounter and what were the processes you had to follow?

One of my challenges was working with my partner, we sometimes had different ideas about pricing. I wanted to sell a portion for VND40,000 and he wanted to sell for VND20,000. I found 20 too cheap and he said 40 was too expensive so we compromised and priced it for VND30,000 using both our ideas.

The other challenge was recording customers (gender and age) because we had so many customers at the same time. I did manage to find out how many customers we had and used the income to determine the financial outcome per customer.

What lessons did you learn?

I learned that I have to take more

risks when I do projects. At first, my plan was to have about 5 different kinds of dishes, but they all had problems and got old in less than 30 minutes while others were super spicy and most [people] would not have liked them, so we ended up with one dish. If I were to do it again I would try and get more items on the menu.

It is easier to work with a partner than individually. At first I worked by myself, but getting a partner helped me get new ideas and we were able to design a logo and brainstorm before doing new things.

What would you do differently?

If I were to do this again I would try more dishes because one of my goals was to introduce Korean food and that is better done with more items on the menu. I wanted to show different kinds of Korean food.

Maybe I would try to work by myself because I learned how to work with a partner for this, but now I want to learn how I can be more independent.

Will you continue with your business?

How has this equipped you for the future?

Maybe when I grow up I will try and start this business again, but for now I will focus on other stuff, such as school and friends. Although I really want to show Korean food to people who are not familiar with it, right now I just want to focus on my studies and friends. ■

Cooperative Learning

By using this method, each of your students will feel that he or she is an important member of the class



Amy Melton is a Grade 1 teacher with a Bachelor and Master's degree in Elementary Education at the International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP).

IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE WALKING past two different types of classrooms. Inside the first one, the teacher is leading the class as a whole but not much engagement is present among the students. Then you peek into the other classroom and see that the teacher is directing the beginning of an activity or lesson, where the students are actively participating and discussing the activity in small groups. Which classroom do you think is learning more socially and academically?

The majority of student learning happens within the classroom. However, it's up to the teacher to manage and engage their learners by using various ways of learning styles. There are so many strategies that are used by teachers to get their students involved in their learning. Traditional classrooms usually have the typical rows with the teacher delivering the lesson standing at the front of the classroom. How does this show student learning? Students learn best through interaction and inquiry. So how can we get our students to interact with each other more by participating through discussion? Teachers who may want their students to become more engaged; I would recommend moving away from the traditional classroom style. Changing the dynamics of the classroom really does affect the students. This is where cooperative learning comes into play.

What is cooperative learning? According to Teacher Vision, "cooperative learning is an instructional method where students work together in pairs or groups to complete a task." The use of this method has shown increased student interaction and academic achievement. Instead of teaching the students as a whole class throughout the entire lesson, the teacher would provide some direction during part of the lesson, but then let the students be in control of their own learning and work with their own peers.

While I was teaching my first few years in North Carolina, we were

introduced Kagan Structures, and we implemented the strategies into our day-to-day lessons. Kagan Structures are instructional strategies that increase student engagement and cooperation. There are over 200 structures and they are content-free, where any of the structures can be implemented into daily lesson plans. Some strategies that I use quite often in my current classroom are RoundTable, Stand up, Hand up and Pair up, Match Mine, Quiz-Quiz Trade and Numbered Heads Together. I still have yet to implement more into my classroom with my Grade 1 students. By using several of these learning strategies, I definitely think that students benefit from cooperative learning. For more information on these strategies, please go online and search for "Kagan Structures," which many can be obtained for free.

We see student learning by engaging and asking questions with other students. As teachers, we need to create an innovative learning environment where the students feel safe and comfortable to talk to their classmates. In a traditional classroom, the majority of students don't feel comfortable when they are called out and have to come up to the front of the classroom to speak. Using these strategies, students would feel more comfortable by being in smaller groups and they will more likely participate in small group discussions.

From my own experience, it was a challenge for me to introduce these strategies because they needed to be used consistently in the classroom. Each strategy is quite different to implement, especially for my young learners because of the number of instructions given, but after the students understand, the strategies are quite invigorating. I suggest introducing 2-3 strategies a week, and then use them on a weekly basis in order to avoid explaining repeatedly. By using these strategies, the response from my students was unbelievable as they were not just communicating with their peers, but also excelling in their

learning. I also saw their confidence boost, especially with my English as Additional Language (EAL) learners. I also witnessed more friendships develop and saw them grow as learners. When introducing and implementing these techniques, you have to keep reinforcing each strategy by how it should be displayed so that the students will receive the best outcome. The teacher should always monitor the students to ensure that they are staying on-task and the teacher should also be available to answer any questions the students may have during the discussion. They also need to be held accountable individually for their learning, as this will eventually help them boost their own confidence. The students' motivation improves as well as their engagement. As teachers, we have to face challenges and overcome our fears of trying something new, but you will be surprised how these strategies can help your students.

Cooperative learning strategies can work in any classroom setting—regardless of age groups, the number of students in a class or subjects taught. I have used these strategies in Kindergarten, Grade 1 and even Grade 3. Every year, I have several EAL learners and by using these structures, it affects them in a positive way. I also like how these techniques can challenge my students to make them think more and improve their social interaction.

Education keeps evolving and every student learns differently. It is up to us as teachers to keep the students engaged in the classroom. When I was in elementary school, I clearly remember seeing the teacher up at the front of the classroom just talking and we sat listening. Then we would be handed worksheets to complete individually, which became evidently boring. Students just don't learn that way anymore and as teachers, we need to use innovative ways to help boost our students' learning and curiosity. This is why I believe the cooperative learning strategies help today's learners. ■

First Year of Life

Is it time to go to the doctor again? Probably



AS PEDIATRICIANS, WE SEE children every day—that’s the joy of this profession. Of course, we usually see children when they are sick, but it’s also very important that we see them when they’re healthy. Wellness checks are our main tool to monitor the growth and development of a child from birth until late adolescence, not only physically but also mentally. We need to ensure that they’re achieving their milestones by looking for red flags that may indicate an underlying problem. As with everything, prevention is better than cure, so if we catch something earlier, we can then address it earlier—which is far better than catching it late.

A good example of this is language acquisition. Research is very clear about what a developing child should be able to express linguistically at each stage in their growth. Sometimes a child may be slower than is normal, and this could be because the child suffers from a condition such as autism spectrum disorder. It could also be due to completely benign reasons—it’s not uncommon for a child growing up in a multilingual household to fall short of their milestones while their speaking skills develop in two or more languages at once. It’s also less of a concern if a child has difficulty expressing him or herself verbally, but is still perfectly capable of understanding complex instructions such as “go into the bedroom and bring me my phone.”

Sometimes a problem can be caught during a wellness check and corrected easily—if you notice that a two-year-old child has the linguistic capacity typical of a one-and-a-half-year-old, there is only a six-month gap between what is expected and what the child is able to do. With special attention this issue may be resolved, whereas if a child does not receive a wellness check until four years old and is discovered to have the developmental level of a two-year-old, that’s a far more challenging problem. If we see things that are not quite right, we advise parents to see a specialist.

During the first year of life, there are many things happening—so the



Drawn to pediatrics by her profound love for children, **Filipina Dr. Agnes R. Viay** practiced at Family Medical Practice between 2006-2010, returning here in 2013. In addition to treating patients, Dr. Agnes was formerly host to the Saigon International Mother & Baby Association, discussing pre- and post-natal topics with new and soon-to-be mothers.



frequency of wellness visits is higher compared to when a child is older. Children should ideally receive the first wellness check straight after birth following being discharged from hospital. This should be followed by checks at one month, two months, four months, six months, nine months and then at 12 months; and then after that, every three months until 18 months; and then at two years, 30 months, 3 years, and then yearly after that.

Developmental Milestones

In Western countries, newborn screening is usually routine, while in Vietnam this is not guaranteed. One example of a condition that will be screened for is congenital hypothyroidism. If you catch this condition early, medication can be prescribed that should ensure the child leads a normal, healthy life. This is the importance of the well-baby check, to find clues that can help us to intervene and make dramatic changes to improve a child's lifelong health.

Normally we do wellness checks, especially for younger kids, together with vaccinations. This is a perfect opportunity to discuss with parents any concerns they might have. We can ask about developmental milestones as well as checking nutrition and other physical attributes, such as head circumference. As we administer the vaccinations, we give appropriate advisory guidance on

topics such as healthy eating or accident prevention if a child has just started to crawl or walk.

Parents usually appreciate professional advice, although not always—sometimes for cultural reasons we run into differences of opinion. In this culture, many parents may view an overweight baby as being healthy and happy, whereas as a doctor I find myself having to warn parents of the potential for heart disease, diabetes, and other serious problems later in life brought on by childhood obesity. Now we have a nutrition clinic at our practice, so I often refer parents of overweight (or underweight) children to our specialist.

So far, I've never come across a parent who refuses vaccinations in Saigon, although there are some who choose only certain vaccines that they want and refuse others. Some parents question why we vaccinate against certain diseases here when this is not done in their home country. In fact, it is always recommended to follow the immunization schedule of the country where you are living, because the dangers can vary from place to place. In the case of chickenpox, for example, a vaccination is not routinely given in some European countries because contracting the disease naturally will give a child the best protection. Vaccination is recommended in Vietnam, so the chance of contracting the natural illness is rather low compared to in a child's home country. In this case, it is advisable

to vaccinate—contracting the disease naturally later in life, especially during pregnancy, would be a far more serious problem.

International schools here usually specify a list of vaccinations a child must have before being admitted. A physical examination is also required—different schools have different forms, but the format of these wellness checks is generally the same. It used to be the case that we would need to run skin tests and check for TB, but blood and urine testing are no longer required. Usually these kinds of study-placement tests are only asked for by parents sending their children to schools overseas. Even so, it is very important to have a vaccination book, because if a child doesn't have a record of vaccinations received, we can't accept hearsay. If a child doesn't have a record, we will either test for antibodies or vaccinate again.

Parents should be very careful to ensure their child receives all their wellness checks, especially during the early stages of life. We can monitor physical growth, cognitive skills, eyesight, hearing and a number of issues that are most easily resolved following correct diagnoses as early in life as possible. By looking at the overall picture when a child is well rather than only focusing on healing when he or she is ill, we can help to ensure a healthy passage into adulthood. ■

Education

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www.renaissance.edu.vn

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