

The background of the cover is a black and white photograph of a woman's back and shoulder. She has long dark hair. A large, vibrant bird of paradise flower is painted on her upper back, with its stem and leaves extending down her spine. The flower has bright orange and red petals and a purple center. The leaves are green. In the top left corner, there is a green square containing the word 'OI' in white. The text 'VIETNAM MAY 2015' is in the top left. The text 'THE WATCHMAN', 'EASY LIVIN'', 'HOW BIZARRE', and 'FLU PROOF' are on the left side. The word 'ECOTOPIA' is at the bottom right. The text 'NHÀ XUẤT BẢN THANH NIÊN' is at the bottom left.

OI

VIETNAM
MAY 2015

THE WATCHMAN

A Life Dictated by Time
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EASY LIVIN'

A Must for Foodies
PAGE 54

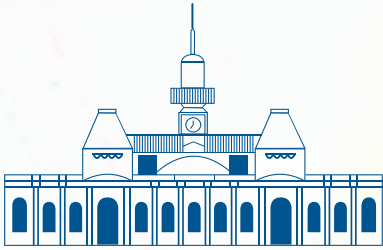
HOW BIZARRE

Thailand's Most Shocking
PAGE 72

FLU PROOF

Keeping the Virus Away
PAGE 92

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This Month's Cover

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Make-up Artist: **Xuan Phuoc**

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IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

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Thailand's weird and, sometimes, grotesque side



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COVER STORY

ECOTOPIA

Can adopting a more sustainable living be convenient for our lives? We look into how living and growing harmoniously with nature can better the ecosystem and everyday living in Saigon

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IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

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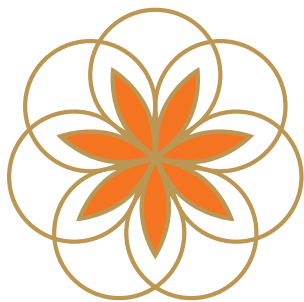
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Datebook

What's on this month...



MAY
16

What: Beatfest

Where: Phu Tho Stadium in District 11; 9am – 11pm

About: American singer Demi Lovato will headline the summer music festival, confirmed the organizers of YAN Beatfest. This year around 80 Vietnamese singers will join the festival, which includes 12 hours of non-stop music together with a series of culinary activities, games and shopping. Last year British pop singer Shayne Ward was the international guest for the event

Contact: Visit www.yan.vn/beatfest for more info



What: Escape Rainforest

Where: 13 Tan Trao, Phu My Hung, D7; 12pm; Prices vary

About: A water festival with two of the top 50 DJs spinning at the party. Nothing is more cooling on a hot summer day than grabbing your swimsuit and jumping into a pool. Free beer from noon to 6pm.

Contact: Tickets available at www.ticketbox.vn

MAY
16



What: Open Day: Ice Cream Social

Where: The American School (172-180 Nguyen Van Huong, D2); 9:30am – 11am

About: Visit their middle-high and elementary campus and enjoy some free ice cream. Academics: student-led tours for both campuses, teachers meet & greet, Q&A with principals and admin. Free activities include open swimming pool, bouncy house, arts & crafts and a balloon clown.

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



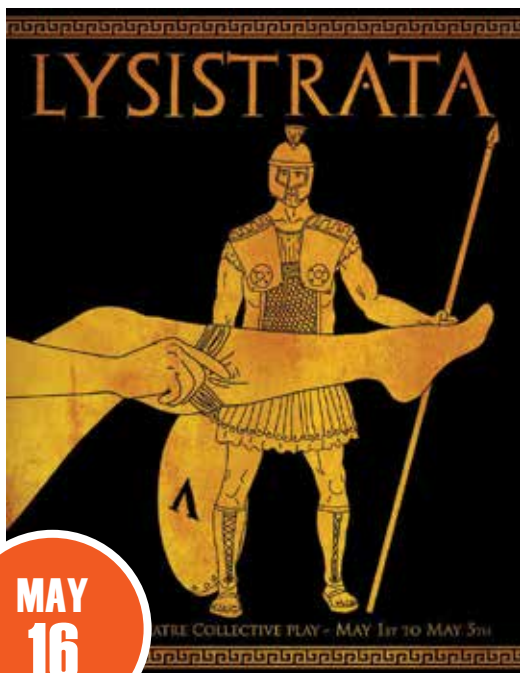
MAY
16-17

What: Breton Day 2015

Where: May 16 at Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4; VND100,000 advance, VND150,000 at the door); May 17 at Clubhouse (Sang Tao Road, Tan Thuan Ward, D7; Free)

About: The Breton Society in Vietnam will be promoting Brittany, its culture, history and economy. For Breton Day 2015, they have invited musicians renowned throughout the world who will present different aspects of Celtic music from traditional to modern. More than 40 musicians and seven bands will perform during the festival, including The Kemperle Pipe Band, Lang Dzu band, Celtic Rock Diaouled, Alan Pennec, Jakez Lesouef, Hot Tzigani band and Turbo Sans Visa.

Contact: Visit Facebook: "KBBV Bretons in Vietnam" for more info



**MAY
16**

What: Lysistrata's Toga Party

Where: Saigon Outcast (188/1 Nguyen Van Huong, D2); 6pm; VND150,000

About: Join Saigon Players for a night of theatrics, dress ups and fun for a good cause. Because who doesn't love a toga party? Come dressed as a Greek or Spartan or be creative with some white sheets and fabric. Along with a live theatrical performance, there will be an arm wrestling challenge, 'slave' auction, drink specials, raffle, live music and dancing. Prizes given out for best dressed.

Contact: Email saigonplayerstickets@gmail.com for more info



**MAY
23**

What: Saigon Charity Bazaar

Where: The Deck (38 Nguyen U Di, D2); 9:30am – 3:30pm

About: The biannual charity bazaar benefits the VinaCapital Foundation program Heart Beat Vietnam, which funds crucial heart surgeries for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. What started in 2006 on the shoulders of two Dutch ladies and 10 vendors has become a community event with crafters and charities such as Vietnam Quilts, Mekong Creations, Grace Cookies and Operation Smile among the 50 vendors who will be present. Small entrepreneurs with local and unusual products are encouraged to participate.

Contact: Email domlampel@gmail.com for more info

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MAY
28



What: Network Girls – Cocktails & Canapés

Where: Champagne Corner at Caravelle Hotel (Dong Khoi entrance on Ground Floor, 19-23 Lam Son Square, D1); 6:30pm – 9pm

About: Network Girls is a monthly event at venues in Ho Chi Minh City that gives expatriate and local female working professionals in Saigon a channel to meet each other and exchange ideas on life in HCMC, employment and business. Members of Network Girls usually meet on the last Thursday of every month for breakfast or cocktails & canapés.

Contact: For more info, email Ms. Van Ly at networkgirlshcmc@gmail.com or visit Facebook: "NetworkGirlsHCMC"

MAY
27



What: Loud Minority Presents Little Barrie

Where: Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 7:30pm; VND350,000 advance, VND450,000 at the door

About: Little Barrie is the brainchild of one of the UK's leading guitarists, Barrie Cadogan (Primal Scream). Having played with Morrissey, Edwyn Collins, the Chemical Brothers, Spiritualized and Paul Weller, Barrie now divides his time equally between Little Barrie and Primal Scream. The softly-spoken musician is known for taking on a whole different persona as soon as he hits the stage, with all the mastery and showmanship of a rock legend. Their latest album *Shadow* has received universal praise across the media, with NME crediting the three-piece for "taking rock back to its thrilling basics." They will also soon be heard in living rooms around the world through their score to the US hit TV series, *Better Call Saul*, the prequel to *Breaking Bad*.

Contact: Tickets available at www.ticketbox.vn

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MAY
30



What: Le Fruit Triathlon

Where: Ho Tram Beach, Ba Ria, Vung Tau

About: At the 14th annual Le Fruit Triathlon, the swim will be held in the East Sea, a perfect introduction to open water swimming for any first time triathlete. The cycle course goes towards the rainforest and back to the coast. The run takes place on Ho Tram Beach, so spectators and supporters can watch all stages of the race. And for the seventh consecutive year, Le Fruit will organize the only off-road triathlon for children (6 – 12) in Vietnam. Net proceeds from the event will benefit children in need to thrive in food-secure environments and to finance their education.

Contact: Visit www.lefruittriathlon.tumblr.com for more info



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**MAY
30**



What: Bourbon Street Jazz Festival

Where: Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); VND500,000

About: Headline act is Nina van Horn and her international blues band kicking off their China/Thailand/Malaysia concert tour with their first stop in Saigon to support this charity event. The band will perform a total of 2.5 hours of her songs in two sessions, mixes of international favorites, tributes to well-known jazz & blues artists as well as introducing the audience to her exciting take on current European jazz and blues styles. Supported by local bands Claudio & Bad Neighbour along with the Brooklyn Funky Blues band, among others. Concert complete with Cajun style food and refreshments. One hundred percent of profit goes to support programs developed to support sustainability of individuals and organizations and to promote social and economic development in the community.

Contact: Visit www.bourbonstreetjazzfestival.com for more info

What: Madagui Summer Camps

Where: Madagui (Km 152, National Road, Ward 1, Madagui Town, Da Huoai District, Lam Dong Province)

About: Five-day camps for kids 8 to 12 and 13 to 16 years old in Madagui Forest City Resort offering opportunities to experience new activities, learn new skills and make new friends in a safe environment. There will be interactive workshops covering various topics and exciting outdoor activities, and is conducted in English.

Contact: Visit www.vietnamsummercamps.com for more info



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Troi Oi

The country in numbers

~40%

of young Vietnamese show alcohol addiction signs, according to research conducted by Huynh Van Son, a psychologist and deputy chairman of the Vietnam Psychological

Association. Over half of the respondents said they tell lies to support their alcohol habit while 27.7 percent admitted to borrowing money for a drink. More than 37.9 percent said they drink regularly and another four percent proved to be heavy drinkers. The poll involved 470 from 18 to 28 years old, most of whom think of drinking as an indispensable choice of salaried people and as a way to bond with others as well as to improve their communication capability. Vietnam is among the 25 countries with the highest annual increases in rates of alcohol and beer consumption, the Health Ministry's Institute of Health Strategy and Policy said in early 2014.

~5,000

Vietnamese had food poisoning last year, according to the World Health Organization, who has called for more actions to ensure food safety in Vietnam. Rapid economic development brings challenges to ensuring food safety in Vietnam. Unsafe food containing harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemical substances causes more than 200 diseases – ranging from diarrhea to chronic diseases such as cancers. WHO's Five Keys to Safer Food explains five simple actions when handling food: keeping clean, separating raw and cooked foods, cooking food thoroughly, keeping food at safe temperatures and using safe water and raw materials when preparing food.



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USD92.8 MILLION

three-level roundabout recently opened in central Vietnam. The three-level roundabout, which connects Lien Chieu, Thanh Khe, and Cam Le Districts, has 50 spans and a total length of 2km. The lowest level is reserved for routes that do not intersect with railroads, while the first is 15 meters wide and has three lanes for vehicles with a top speed of 40kph. The second level is 17 meters wide and has four lanes. It is used for vehicles traveling to Da Nang from Hue and vice versa at 60 kph at most. The overpass also has a parabolic tower that is equipped with monitoring equipment for wind, earthquakes and vibrations. It also has a traffic monitoring system. The flyover will help eliminate chronic congestion at the Hue T-junction, the main gateway to the central area of Da Nang, which accounts for 30 percent of the total number of traffic accidents of the city, local authorities said.

USD 51,000

fine imposed on a farmer and his neighbor for selling a 30-metric-ton semi-precious gemstone found buried in their coffee farm in Dak Nong. Nguyen Chi Thanh reportedly discovered a large block of chalcedony while digging a lake. The block is believed to be the largest of its kind ever found in Dak Nong. Thanh, assuming he had ownership of the stone, sold it for VND70 million to a buyer, who then paid for the excavation

and transport despite an explicit order from local authorities asking them to wait for a final decision. Police seized the gemstone when it was being transported to nearby Dak Lak Province.

According to lawyer Nguyen Van Hau, people should immediately inform local authorities about such discoveries. Finders of high-value objects are eligible for an amount equal to 10 months of basic salary (currently VND2.15 - VND3.1 million) and half of the exceeding value, while the rest belongs to the state, he said.

3,800

trees in Hue will be destroyed under a new plan, according to the Hue Park and Green Tree Company. The plan will be executed in two stages, with the first for 50 urban streets from now till 2016 and the second for the remaining till 2019. The trees scheduled to be chopped down are underdeveloped, diseased, and unsuitable for urban streets, local authorities claimed. Of nearly 7,000 trees on the 50 said streets, 5,600 trees will be retained, another 500 will be moved to other streets and over 700 others will be chopped down. For the entire 2015-2019 period, over 3,800 trees will be lopped out of a total of 21,300 in Hue. However, the city will plant nearly 14,600 new trees from now till 2019. It is estimated that the total cost for the entire plan will top VND90 billion.

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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

EIS & IB

The European International School (www.eishcmc.com) announced last month its accreditation of International Baccalaureate program for all students at its Kindergarten through Year 12 campus. The IB Diploma Programme is in addition to the already accredited IB Primary Years Programme and IB Middle Years Programme. With successful accreditation of these programs, EIS has become an IB Continuum World School, offering IB education for children aged 3-18 years old. "The IB program brings virtually universal acceptance for tertiary education for graduates, and indeed has become the preferred university track for students for the academic, social and communicative benefits that better equip students for their future career track," said Dr. Nguyen Thi Quynh Lam, President of European International School. "We strive to inspire our students to become global citizens who embody all the attributes of the IB Learner Profile, IB students who will make an impact and a difference on the world around them. Change and development are not events, but rather they are processes with a focused vision. The school has always maintained a steadfast focus in its vision."



ALBA SPA HOTEL OPENS

Last month, Alba Spa Hotel (www.albaboutiquehotels.com) opened in Hue. In addition to spa treatments designed in collaboration with renowned spa guru Florence Jaffre (founder of famed Ytsara of Thailand), the 58-room hotel offers a 16.5-square-meter Jacuzzi that is flanked on three sides by vertical gardens and partitioned into hot- and cold-water sections. The Jacuzzi is filled with natural mineral water that originates deep inside the Earth. Heated by volcanic magma and enriched in magnesium, calcium and phosphorus while traveling through layers under the Truong Son Mountain Range, it springs out in a natural crater 30 kilometers north of Hue, where it is cautiously harnessed before being transported to the hotel. Alba Spa Hotel was designed by French Vietnamese Architects (FVA), whose use of bamboo, granite and tile is artfully woven into a variety of spaces including the airy lobby and bright restaurant.



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INTERCONTINENTAL ASIANA SAIGON MOTHER'S DAY PROMOTIONS

Market 39: To celebrate this special day their chefs prepared an extensive buffet. There will also be a family photo corner with a complimentary photo provided for each group to take away. Mother's Day Brunch is priced at VND1,698,000++ per adult, VND800,000++ per child with free flow Veuve Clicquot Champagne, wine, beer, cocktails and soft drinks. Mother's Day Dinner is priced at VND1,190,000++ per adult, VND500,000++ per child with free flow wine, beer, cocktail and soft drinks.

Yu Chu: Enjoy steaming bamboo baskets filled with dim sum with your family this Mother's Day. All-you-can-eat dim sum lunch is priced at VND388,000++ with free flow Chinese tea and a gift for moms. All-you-can-eat dim sum dinner is priced at VND498,000++ with free flow Chinese tea and a gift for moms.

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THE HO TRAM OPEN

A lucrative USD1.5 million Asian Tour tournament at the Ho Tram Strip (www.thegrandhotram.com) will make its debut as Vietnam's richest golf showpiece from December 3-6, 2015, officials announced last month. The inaugural Ho Tram Open will be staged at the country's first integrated resort, with the Greg Norman-designed Bluffs Ho Tram Strip golf course playing host to stars from the region's premier tour following a landmark three-year agreement. England's Robert Rock, the course's brand ambassador and a two-time winner on the European Tour, will be among the players competing in the inaugural Ho Tram Open.

"It's our hope that the launch of Vietnam's richest golf championship will provide the catalyst for the game to grow in this beautiful country, especially with golf returning to the Olympic Summer Games program in 2016. We are committed to stage the Ho Tram Open for three years and we will work closely with the Asian Tour and our partners to ensure its success in 2015 and beyond," says Colin Pine, General Director of the Ho Tram Project Company. Asian Tour Chief Executive Officer Mike Kerr welcomed the tour's newest tournament, one of four events to make its debut in the 2015 Asian Tour season. Set along Vietnam's spectacular coast, the par-71 layout offers stunning panoramic views and ocean winds that are sure to test the best golfers from the Asian Tour.

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Twists and Turns

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATTHEW KERSHAW

YOU'LL BE LOST, then you'll find your way out. But don't ask Matthew Kershaw how. Although he designs them, he's not always sure he can find his way out. Matthew loved creating mazes as a kid and never grew out of it. "I used to like to doodle in my notebook when I was bored in classes at primary school (around Grade 5), and my maze drawing began to evolve from then. After a few months the drawings became quite intricate and I continued to draw them for about a year. I rediscovered this skill about three years ago and I have been drawing mazes again ever since."

Often working in both a meditative and extremely focused state when freehanding, he visualizes a typical route a person would take and then inserts intertwining paths, dead ends and winding loops to confuse and stump players. Taking approximately an



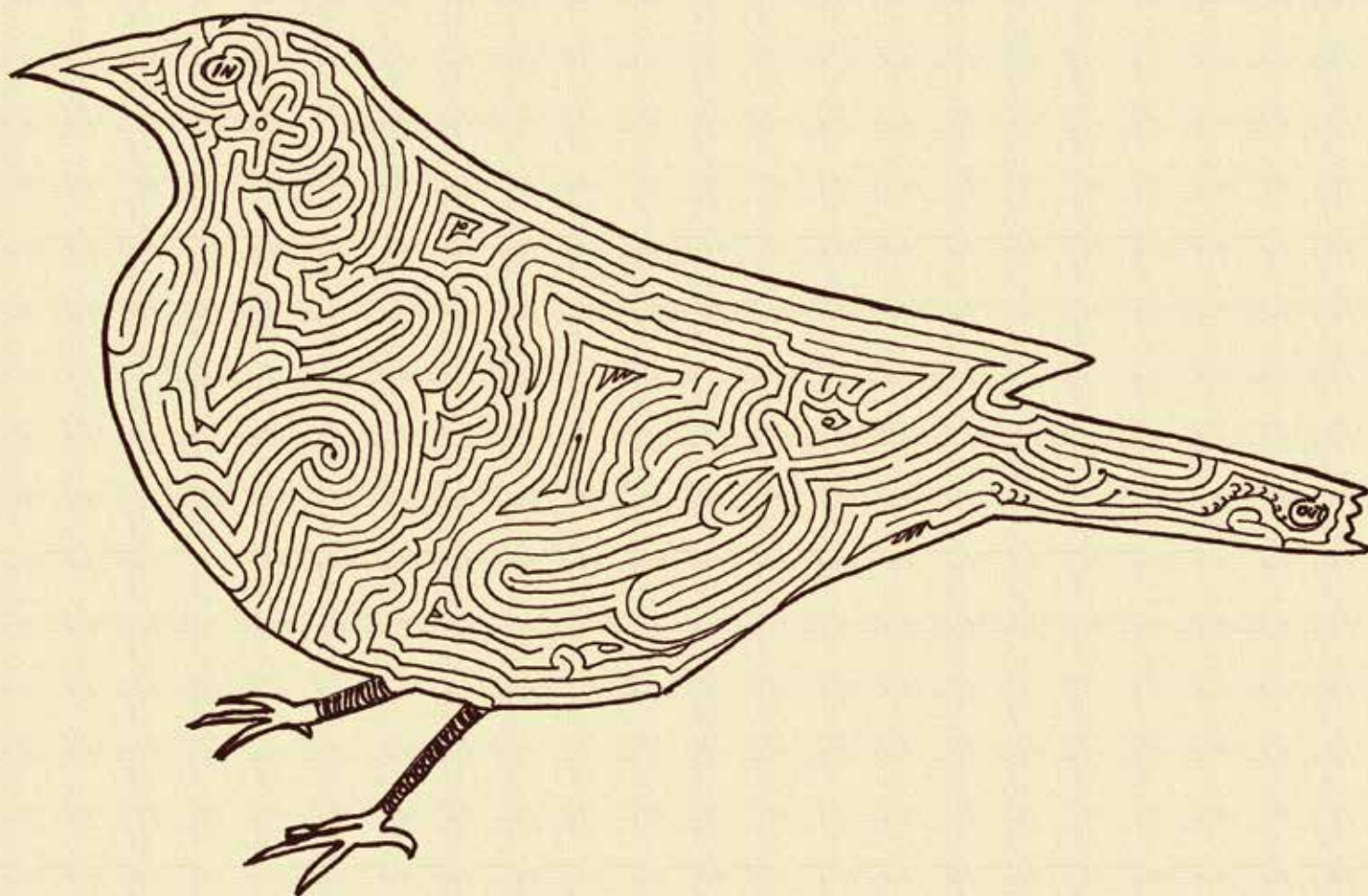
hour to complete, he labels his puzzles on the complex to difficult scale with some almost covering an entire A4 page. "In the future I plan to draw A3 size mazes and even larger," he says. "I can solve all my mazes soon after completing them but after some time I go back to them to try and I forget the precise way. So they can be pretty challenging even for the maze creator!"

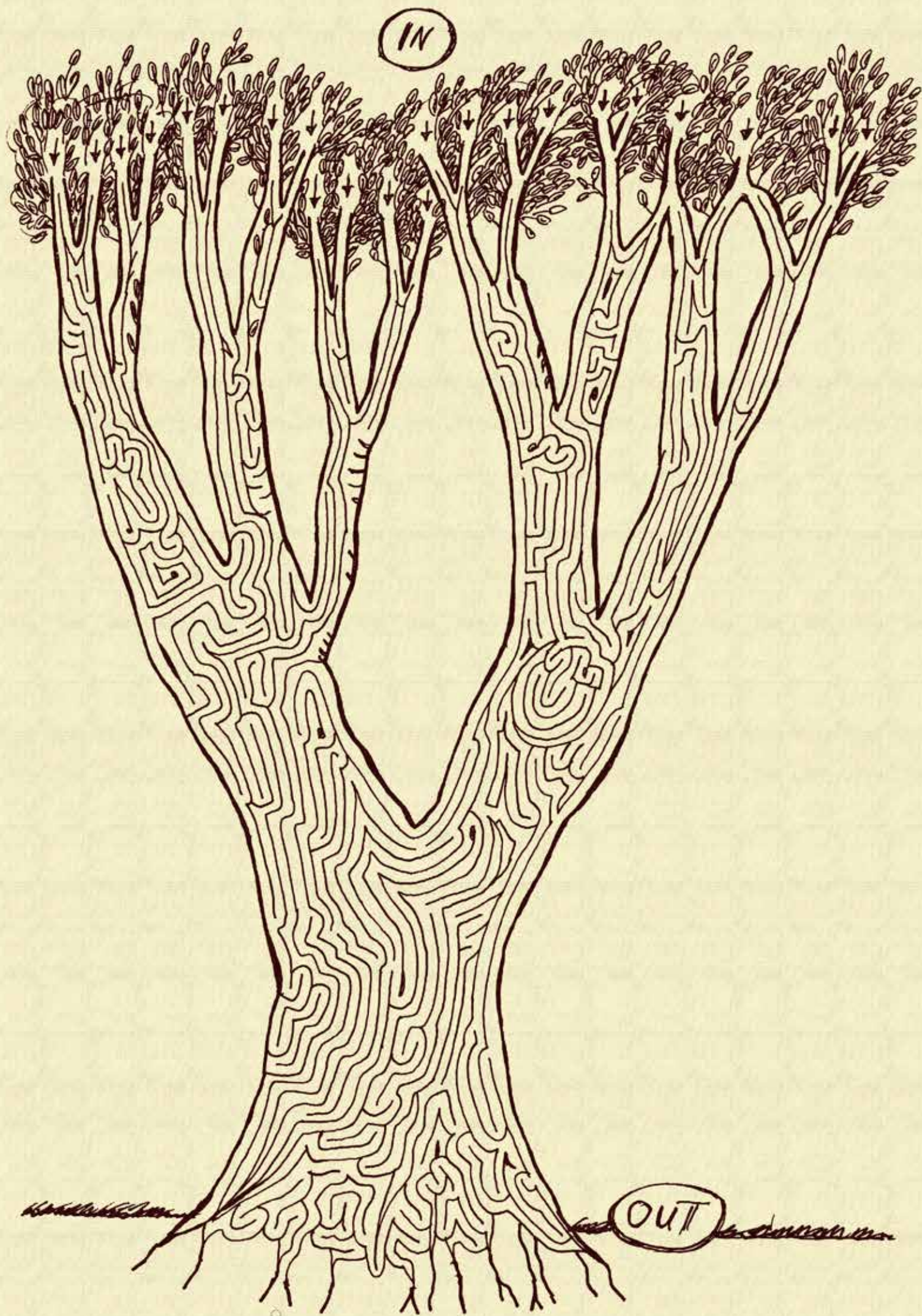
Matthew sees his creations more than mazes but pieces of art and have sold some of his work at art and crafts markets in Vietnam. "In the near future I plan to produce a maze book with 20 solvable designs, along with ornamental but also functional mazes on large framed color prints, coffee mugs and t-shirts."

More of Matthew's mazes can be found at: mazeworld.wix.com/amazing



Matthew Kershaw





Life is Beautiful

A chance to become parents through a new surrogacy law



A member of the Paris Bar, **Hadrien Wolff** has been practicing law in Vietnam for more than seven years, currently as a partner of Audier & Partners based at its HCMC office. Having gained extensive legal experience in the Netherlands and Cambodia, **Marijn Sprokkereef** is an associate at the Hanoi office of the same firm. **Audier & Partners** is an international law firm with presence in Vietnam, Myanmar and Mongolia, providing advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

Ciao! Hadrien and Marijn,

I am Italian and I married my Vietnamese wife in early 2010. We have been living in Ho Chi Minh City ever since and we enjoy every minute spent together. *La vita e bella!* However, there is something that troubles us; it seems that my wife cannot give birth even though we have tried many different methods. We feel more powerless than ever! When we almost gave up believing that one day we would have a child together, we heard that a new Vietnamese law allows for surrogacy. We are very curious to know whether this option is available to us as a couple. If so, what are the requirements?



IN JUNE 2014, the National Assembly of Vietnam passed a new Law on Marriage and Family, legalizing non-commercial gestational surrogacy for the first time. Since the enforcement of this new law, surrogacy has been a hot topic for many childless couples living in Vietnam.

In line with various other countries around the world, the new law only allows for so-called “voluntary and altruistic surrogacy.” It means that the surrogate mother may be reimbursed for her actual expenses, but that she may not receive any other commercial benefit for carrying someone else’s baby. Furthermore, the new law only allows for “gestational surrogacy,” which refers to the process whereby the surrogate mother is impregnated with an embryo that is created by in vitro fertilization from the ovum of the wife and the sperm from the husband. Traditional surrogacy, on the contrary, is not governed by the new law.

Good news so far, but what are the requirements for surrogacy and who may apply for it? In fact, the new law imposes rather strict conditions on both the couple requesting for surrogacy and on the

potential surrogate mother.

The husband and wife requesting for surrogacy, for example, may not have a common child already. Furthermore, it must be certified that the wife is unable to give birth to a child herself, even with assisted reproductive technology, and the couple must have received health, legal and psychological counseling before starting the process of surrogacy.

The surrogate mother, on the other hand, must have a kinship (i.e. sister or cousin) to the wife or husband requesting the surrogacy and she can only carry someone else’s baby once. Furthermore, she must have already given birth to a child, be of a “suitable” age and it must be certified by a competent health organization that she is in good health. Moreover, when the potential surrogate mother is married, she needs to have her husband’s written consent and she must have received health, legal and psychological counseling as well.

The consensual nature of surrogacy in Vietnam is underlined by the fact that there needs to be a written agreement between the parties involved. Such an agreement, which also needs to be notarized, must

contain full information about the parties and confirm that the conditions that we mentioned above are met.

Relevant to your situation, the new Law on Family and Marriage does neither impose any conditions on the nationality of the couple requesting the surrogacy, nor on the nationality of the surrogate mother. So as long as a person of kin to you or your wife is willing to carry your child, you can start the application process.

In the future, more hospitals may be allowed to assist with surrogacy, but for the moment you can only apply at the following three hospitals in Vietnam: the National Hospital of Obstetrics and Gynecology in Hanoi, the Hue General Hospital in Thua Thien-Hue Province and the Tu Du Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City.

We hope that the new law will offer you and your family loads of happiness.

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



Pulp Art

The dying art of papermaking is given new life

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH**
IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**

BEFORE THE AGE of industrial paper production, the Vietnamese made paper by hand from pulp of various trees and plants. The two most popular types of pulp used were rhamnoneuron and bamboo. The paper made from rhamnoneuron was called *do* paper, a distinctly thick paper that can last for centuries without deteriorating. During the dynastic period, *do* paper was used only for royal decrees and is still produced today, preserved for cultural and historic purposes. However, paper made from bamboo pulp gradually declined, facing extinction until four years ago. Since 2011, artist Phan Hai Bang has been the force behind the resurrection and reinterpretation of the centuries-old bamboo papermaking art. With the backing of the University of Arts in Hue and the Asian Scholarship Foundation, Bang founded an artist group dedicated entirely to researching old and lost papermaking methods in Vietnam and adapting them to modern times. In 2012, the group held their first exhibition showcasing the end products of a year of research and work. The exhibition was called The Light of Truc Chi and it was here that the name Truc Chi started gaining attention in the local art and collector community.

“Why did I choose paper made from bamboo and not from rhamnoneuron? Two reasons: Because bamboo is a cultural symbol of the people - not royalty - but the simple, ordinary folks; and because it is cheaper than rhamnoneuron. I would be able to do a lot more using the bamboo than the expensive rhamnoneuron,” says Bang, founder of Truc Chi (www.vietnamtrucchiant.com) art garden and project. “*Truc chi*” means bamboo paper in old Vietnamese dialect. But *truc chi* is also more than just plain old bamboo paper. If it was just simple bamboo paper, then no matter the quality we would never have been able to make an art exhibition out of it.”

Bang’s distinctive *truc chi* paper art resulted from his experiments merging different techniques of papermaking and interfering with the paper forming process. In old papermaking methods, the last step is to apply an even amount of pressure over a block of wet paper stock until it becomes a single sheet. The process traditionally produces flawless sheets with uniform texture. However, since it is done by hand, if the pressure is applied unevenly, irregular shapes will form within the texture and the paper will be labeled unfit for writing.

“What we do is basically bend these

“To put it simply, *truc chi* is where paper is no longer just a blank canvas upon which one creates art. Art already exists within the paper. The artistic process already occurs as the paper forms.”



Phan Hai Bang

irregular shapes to our aesthetics and create art as the paper itself forms,” shares Bang, holding up a piece of *truc chi* paper whose irregular texture forms a monochrome painting as proof. “To put it simply, *truc chi* is where paper is no longer just a blank canvas upon which one creates art. Art already exists within the paper. The artistic process already occurs as the paper forms.”

Bang says this opens up many new art forms and disciplines as paper is the foundation of many forms of ancient arts such as painting or paper crafts, as well as modern arts such as light art. “Imagine you have been building houses and temples and towers for centuries and one day the mortar and steel with which you have been building with becomes something else, like, say glowing jelly that can reshape and reform and recolor itself to your will. It completely changes everything doesn’t it? *Truc chi* is exactly like that. In our first exhibition, we combined *truc chi* with visual lighting art.”

To date, Bang’s team of artists have created many *truc chi* works and intricate paintings, some of which are huge tableaus two meters tall, meant to be admired under specific lighting conditions or combined with other art forms. According to Bang, these combinations have been his goal since the beginning. “I’ve never been able to resist the prospect of creating new forms of art.”

This year Bang and his artist team have already held several exhibitions and toured throughout the country to raise awareness of *truc chi* art. “We’ve barely scratched the surface of what we can do with bamboo paper. New artists come to us and bring with them many new ideas, many new experimentations. I can only guess where we will go next.” ■





The Watchman

Life slowly ticks on in this dying profession

TEXT BY JOHN DAVIS IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

WHEN LE THI Hung goes on vacation, a once-a-year event during Tet, he padlocks the doors to his moveable cart, wraps it tightly with fabric and pushes it into a motorbike parking area around the corner and then hangs a sign on it that says, “*Nghi Tet* (Closed for Tet).” Mr. Hung, 59, is the proprietor and the sole employee of *Dong Ho Ong Hung* (Mr. Hung’s Watches), a small business that feels like a rarity these days. It has been in the same spot on Huynh Thuc Khang Street, near Ben Thanh Market, for a long time. It turns a (modest) profit, and is unaffected by the whims of the commercial real estate market because its owner is also its landlord.

In an age of fads and disposability, Mr. Hung fixes watches that may have cost VND20,000 or VND15 million but are worth much more to the people who wear them. From behind a plexiglass cart but still exposed to the elements – sun, wind, rain, dust – he manipulates tools that are Swiss made and high end: one contraption that opens watch cases and another that closes them; a device that checks



if a waterproof watch is still waterproof; a machine that checks if a watch is running too fast or too slow within a 24-hour period.

Mr. Hung likes to talk, and if you ask, he might tell you why a cheap quartz watch is a more accurate timepiece than a pristine Rolex, in his humble opinion. If you observe him, you might notice that he maneuvers like a surgeon, probing a watch's innards to figure out why it has failed. He uses an array of familiar tools, like tweezers, pliers and screwdrivers in all shapes and sizes, plus a few esoteric implements, like a contraption whose sole function is to lift a hand from the face of a watch.

In addition to hundreds of vintage watches that he hopes to fix and eventually sell, Mr. Hung estimates that he has thousands of spare watch parts, including hundreds of crystals (the glass) and movements (the gears). The parts sit carefully catalogued in crumbling drawers and boxes, some held together with duct tape and filled to the brim with yellowing envelopes. Everything is

labeled and Mr. Hung boasts that he can find any required part within a minute. That's also about how long it takes him to change a watch battery, lifting the pieces apart and fitting them back together with ease.

On Time!

If you linger, you will see that after 30 odd years in business, he has gotten pretty good at telling the type of repair a certain customer will be willing to pay for or how fast she might need it done. He did not, for example, try to dissuade a longtime customer from getting her USD65 Swatch fixed for the ninth time.

"Last time she came by, I told her she should think about getting a new watch, but she just kind of growled," he says. "What can I do? She likes this one." (The woman kissed the watch after he handed it back to her and exclaimed, "On time!" before walking away.)

Mr. Hung still occasionally repairs classic and expensive timepieces, including Tag Heuers, Movados and Raymond Weils. But

these days, he said, he also fixes "sports watches, colorful watches, watches so big they look like baby alarm clocks."

Most of his business comes from word-of-mouth and tourists who pass by and realize they haven't changed their watch battery in a while and it's cheaper to do it in Saigon than in their home country. Even after so long in the business, he still delights in the moment a broken watch's gears start turning again, propelling the minuscule hands on their first twitching leap forward. "They're just fascinating. You bring them back to life. It's like creating something that comes alive."

Mr. Hung was born and raised in Saigon. He has a degree in literature from a liberal art university, but could not find work after he graduated. His father was a watchmaker and suggested he learn the trade, which he did. However, over time, he has seen his trade wane and nearly vanish as cell phones became the norm. *Dong Ho Ong Hung* is open every day during business hours, more or less, "depending on my mood," he says. ■

Customers First

Seedcom is a new venture fund that hints at Vietnam's maturing startup market



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

EXCEPT FOR A few companies like Xiaomi that crave and leverage media attention, Asia is generally media shy. It's a symptom of multiple factors including fear of being copied, the government and competitors. Many new startups are quieter than before, hiding and hacking away at their revenues while building their teams. This is especially true in Vietnam this year. In 2014, Vietnam's startup scene leapt to a heightened euphoria with the viral success of Flappy Bird however, it came crashing down with the weaknesses of VC Corp and the persecution of HaiVL. The year ended on a somber note. But this hasn't stopped Vietnamese entrepreneurs; they're just more camera shy now.

Seedcom is a silent outfit building startups at the heart of Vietnam's startup scene and their most important founder is Dinh Anh Huan, a cofounder of *The Gioi Di Dong* (Mobile World). *The Gioi Di Dong* is Vietnam's version of Best Buy in America, which IPO'ed last year at over USD250 million, making millionaires out of all five partners. After the IPO, Dinh's focus has increasingly leaned towards Seedcom.

What's specifically impressive about Seedcom is not its goal of becoming a USD300 million company by 2020, it's their retail, supply chain, and ecommerce oriented investment portfolio. But in order to grasp that, we've got to understand *The Gioi Di Dong*.

The Gioi Di Dong was one of the most important Vietnamese IPOs in 2014. The success of the company, which started out with both an ecommerce site and a physical mobile phone store, has been scrutinized by every business newspaper and magazine in Vietnam. *The Gioi Di Dong* did things for customers that no other retailer was willing to do - prime locations with additional parking space for motorbikes and allowing customers to return their phones to storefronts within 30 days of purchase.

"No one else in the market is willing to put the customer first to the extent that we do," says cofounder Nguyen Duc Tai.

Not only has *The Gioi Di Dong* been a

retail success, but in terms of logistics, they have led the charge, promising as fast as 30 minute delivery time on any online order. And although their ecommerce portal only makes up six percent of their total revenue, that's still six percent of USD250 million. They're aiming to hit 15 percent by the end of 2015.

With this brief insight into *The Gioi Di Dong*, we can now begin to understand where Seedcom is headed. Take a quick peek at Seedcom's portfolio. The site lists 12 companies, all with some connection to retail:

Concung.com - Store catering to mothers and children with plans to open 400 shops by 2017.

Juno.vn - A shoes, handbags, and women's accessories online and physical store that also produces its own shoe label.

TheCoffeeHouse.vn - A coffee chain with its own coffee brand.

BaCayChoi.com - A company dedicated to kids and families providing activities and workshops.

Fivetechn - Works with multiple fashion brands to manufacture clothing.

Tiki.vn - The Amazon of Vietnam. It started out in books but has expanded into other categories while also opening an ebooks category recently with Miki.

GiaoHangNhanh.vn - This is one of Vietnam's most resilient and promising ecommerce logistics startups. For some, it might resemble aCommerce, but it's more likely to get deeper into the retail supply chain given the company it keeps within the Seedcom portfolio.

Haravan.com - It allows companies to regulate their SKUs and keep track of deliveries. All of the companies in the portfolio that require retail management and website development use Haravan.

Eway.vn - Eway is basically a technology company that builds affiliate marketing and digital services solutions on mobile. It's possible this company provides the avenue for the other companies to go mobile.

Cent - It's not clear what this company does yet but the Seedcom website says it builds ecommerce solutions and mobile games.

Spiral - It's also not clear what Spiral does, but Seedcom's website says it builds modern retailing solutions.

Firefly - The website says it's a call center service platform, but it really is a Vietnamese version of Zendesk, which will come in especially handy for all of the above B2C businesses.

As you can see, each of the companies above represents some aspect of the retail and ecommerce supply chain. Seedcom is essentially a full stack venture builder, accelerator, and funder. The companies can leverage the expertise of the retail goods from them while at the same time work together in non-competing yet related enterprises. It's a situation where you have one set of companies that provide B2B solutions for the B2C companies, which in turn are freed up to focus on the customer. This makes Seedcom particularly compelling. It feeds on itself. Seedcom's experienced leadership can pull in the talented 20-somethings and 30-somethings into new ventures. With this combination of expertise and talent inside an interwoven portfolio, their efforts can be calculated and resilient.

Vietnam needs more of this. These are serious entrepreneurs leveraging all of their strengths to build solid companies. It remains to be seen how successful this portfolio will be, but we have already heard through the grapevine that several of these companies are already at multi-million dollar valuations. ■

Green With Envy

Accentuate the positive



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



Brendan Wong



Cendrine Dominguez

POPULAR WISDOM AND grandmothers the world over will tell you that you can do your eyes or your lips, but not both; better yet, that you should choose your best feature and accentuate that. For the uninitiated, we're talking makeup here. Finishing school adages aside, this is advice that you can take home with you.

Emphasis in interior design entails strategically drawing attention to certain elements for a functional or aesthetic purpose. It requires that you make decisions about what's important. If you're blessed with great architecture, you'll want the furniture, lighting and decorative elements in your space to draw attention to that. Likewise a stunning view. On the other hand, your motives could be purpose-based: in a cozy family room or den, you'll want every visual element reinforcing that cushy L-shaped sofa as the place to be.

Emphasis is sometimes used interchangeably with the idea of a focal point, which is a related concept but with

a slight distinction. Every space needs a focal point or two: something visually compelling to draw your attention. In the living room by Cendrine Dominguez, that something is the pair of emerald green armchairs. Contrast almost always makes for a clear focal point. If you look a bit further, however, you'll notice that everything in this shot is framing the black velvet sofa. In addition to the armchairs, a reticulated floor lamp points like a giant arrow, asymmetrically balanced by an etagere on the other side. Even the art is long and low, close to the sofa itself for a cozy feel.

Although there's a lot more going on in the living room by Brendan Wong, the star of the space is clearly the architecture and view to the outside. A limited color palette of black, white, and emerald green makes the space an indoor extension of the terrace. And although the magnolia patterned rug is bold to say the least, its large scale actually mimics that of the

steel mullioned French doors, allowing it to complement rather than compete. An oversized antique mirror is the metaphorical cherry on top, dwarfing the sofa below and accentuating the soaring ceilings above.

Applying the principle of emphasis to your own home can be a broader task than some of the previous principles, simply because it relates to larger concepts of priority and purpose. The first step is discerning what is good or important in each space. Is there anything unique or inherently beautiful that you'd like to draw attention to? What about an eyesore that would be better unnoticed? Where do you want your attention to rest while you're in the space? The principles and elements of design covered in previous columns tell you how to draw and direct attention, so we won't rehash that here. The bottom line is creating enough visual impact to keep things interesting, and to use that impact in a smart way. ■



ECOT

In 1975, "Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston" by Ernest Callenbach was first published. The book described news dispatches of William Weston, a fictional reporter who travels to the new nation of Ecotopia set in 1999 (12 years after Northern California, Oregon and Washington seceded from the US to create the new order). Weston describes a country governed by eco-friendly principles and a female president, where citizens recycle almost everything, anything that can't be reused is banned, walking or magnetic-levitation trains are the main modes of transportation, and the few cars allowed are electric. All plastic is derived from plants,



OPIA

thus biodegradable. Refrigerators run on household septic tank methane. Microwaves are illegal, food must be fresh, and to build a house of wood you have to work in a forest labor camp planting the equivalent of trees you would need for construction. Forty years ago Ecotopia was labeled science fiction fantasy, but with Hillary Clinton announcing her run for presidency in 2016, a pedestrian-only boulevard on Nguyen Hue, aquaponics on Saigon's rooftops and green buildings in the city, could Ecotopia Vietnam be a reality in the near future? The people we interviewed for this month's cover story are working to make it so.



THE HOUSE THAT BAMBOO BUILT

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

Finding hope in conservation

THE UBIQUITOUS BAMBOO is forever tied in to Vietnamese culture and identity. For centuries, the Vietnamese have seen themselves in the hardy, strong, ramrod straight plant, a fitting symbol for the strength and resilience of the people. The fact that bamboo grows in clusters speaks of the nation's solidarity. Throughout the ages, the lowly bamboo has found its way into Vietnamese poems, folk tales and idioms. A young, mythical Thanh Giong used sharpened bamboo poles to repel foreign invaders. "Their stems are thin, their leaves slender, but they can become ramparts and citadels," goes the famous poem *Vietnamese Bamboo* by Nguyen Duy. "When the bamboo is old, sprouts will appear," says another proverb, highlighting the importance of the older generation paving the way for the new. And who can forget the moral of one bamboo chopstick being easily broken, but the strength in numbers of an entire bundle of bamboo chopsticks?

Not only is the plant symbolic, it's incredibly practical, used to make everything from the essentials of housing and furniture, fish and bird traps, utensils and boats, to the artistic, including musical instruments and paper, not to mention its nutritional and medicinal value.

On a particularly muggy morning, we find ourselves walking through a shady grove of bamboo at the 10-hectare Phu An Bamboo Village, guided by Jacky Gurgand, an octogenarian Frenchman. An agricultural engineer, Jacky has been coming to the village several times a year since it was founded by his student, Dr. Diep Thi My Hanh, in 1999, to help with the irrigation of the property and the nomenclature of the 350 specimens housed there. "Feel this one," he says. "We call it Miss Saigon, the Beauty Queen

of bamboo." Sure enough, the bamboo is silky smooth to the touch. A little further down, we arrive at another clump, this one with a gritty sandpaper-like exterior. "Mr. Saigon *non rasé* (unshaven)," he says with a mighty laugh. Throughout the morning's visit, Jacky introduces us to many of the 101 varieties of living bamboo at the village, a dual purpose ecomuseum and botanical conservatory dedicated to all things bamboo located 40 km north of Saigon, in Binh Duong Province. He shows us the incredible diversity within the bamboo family: a species that grows sturdy perpendicular branches making it a natural ladder, one that has thorns which villagers use to build corrals for livestock, and a painted variety, yellow with perfectly straight green streaks, looking like drips of paint. Jacky has personally measured one species on the property which grew 80 cm in one day (bamboo is the world's fastest growing plant, with certain species able to grow 91 cm in a 24 hour period), which leads him to mention Bamboo Torture, the alleged practice of fixing a prisoner above a sharpened piece of bamboo and allowing it to grow straight through the body (affirmed as possible in a 2008 *Mythbusters* episode).

THE IRON TRIANGLE

Armed with a degree in Environmental Ecology from Vietnam and a doctorate in Environmental Science and Technology from France, My Hanh returned to her hometown of Phu An in the late 90s, only to be asked by the villagers why she didn't use her extensive schooling to help her own village. Best known for being one of the areas (along with An Tay and An Dien) making up "The Iron Triangle," a stronghold of the Viet Minh during the war, seeing the

many varieties of bamboo that grew there sparked a vision in My Hanh — to transform the Iron Triangle into a Green Triangle. With the help of the Rhone Alps Region (France), Binh Duong Province, the Pilat Regional Nature Park (France), and the University Of Natural Sciences of Ho Chi Minh City, the Phu An Bamboo Village was born.

The picturesque complex is divided into two main areas. The botanical garden houses clusters of bamboo collected from all over Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos with a view to conservation. To date, 450 taxa have been collected, including 20 threatened or endangered species. My Hanh says her passion for bamboo will have her jump on any transportation available to get samples that the village doesn't yet have, recalling a particularly arduous trek to Lang Son in Vietnam's far north, bordering China. "It was deep into the jungle and the path was dangerous. The locals couldn't speak Vietnamese clearly, so they didn't understand exactly what we were looking for. We just had to trust them. But in the end, we got what we came for." Back at the village, the bamboo are grown in separate clusters to avoid cross-species contamination, and are used for research in the adjacent museum/laboratory complex. Over the years, My Hanh's research has led to eye-opening results including finding species that flower regularly but still live (debunking the myth that bamboo dies once it flowers) and that

growing bamboo enriches the soil even more so than rubber, yams and cashews. My Hanh points to bamboo's role in improving the soil conditions after the devastating eruption of Mount Pinatubo and re-greening post-atomic Hiroshima, leading to research into phytoremediation, or how certain species of bamboo can be useful for soil decontamination and sewage treatment.

However, far from being an impersonal research facility, the Bamboo Village reaches out to the local community in meaningful ways. On any given day, groups of students on field trips can be found learning about bamboo and its many uses. The center encourages children not to burn bamboo leaves, but to leave them on the ground and let them naturally compost, providing nutrients for the soil and for insects and worms, as well as to prevent soil erosion. Information on proper techniques for cutting, transplanting and fertilizing are shared with farmers who previously often cut bamboo too early, before they matured, leading to reduced profitability and sustainability. My Hanh and her team painstakingly identify each sample, at times requiring DNA analyses back in France, and study their individual characteristics. The results are shared with farmers to help them select the right kind of bamboo for their use, whether it be construction material, handicrafts, paper pulp or even toothpicks. My Hanh is encouraging the use of bamboo for canal construction



““I WANT THERE TO BE MANY MORE BAMBOO VILLAGES.
IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ONE, THERE'LL STILL BE
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“I SAW NEW GREEN SHOOTS. THEY STILL WANTED TO LIVE, SO WHY SHOULD I BE DISCOURAGED? I LEARNED A LESSON THAT DAY FROM THE BAMBOO. I HAD TO HELP THEM STAND UP AGAIN.”



in the Mekong Delta, as the hardy trees are able to grow even in flooded soil. In addition to encouraging bamboo farming, training for local villagers on making bamboo products and crafts has contributed, in part, to an 80 percent reduction in poverty in the village since the initiative began. Awarded the UNDP Equator Prize in 2010 for being a model in sustainability, innovation and community empowerment, it's estimated that the Bamboo Village has positively affected the lives of up to 3,000 families.

That positive impact has helped fuel My Hanh in some of her darkest moments when she felt like giving up. In 2012, typhoon Pakhar damaged 40 percent of the village's bamboo trees. "I was truly in the depths of hell. Everyone saw the destruction and left. It was just me and my dog who stayed. I called everywhere for help. The local authorities were busy helping other homes in Phu An that had been damaged. But then I saw something. The bamboos were bent every which way and the typhoon had stripped them down to their roots, but they were alive. Even among the broken branches, I saw new green shoots. They still wanted to live, so why should I be discouraged? I learned a lesson that day from the bamboo. I had to help them stand up again."

Help eventually did come from all corners of the globe and all together, it took My Hanh and her team of student volunteers seven weeks to salvage what they could, one grove of twisted trees bent 90 degrees over now a reminder of that event.

Sadly, though, the very existence of the village remains under threat. Every year, the village receives VND200 million



in funding from the National University of Ho Chi Minh City, but needs to raise another VND500 million to meet its operating budget. This year, it'll need even more, as construction has begun on the Green House that will encompass a laboratory, classroom, library, canteen and a place for the workers to sleep, replacing a dilapidated 15-year-old structure.

It is hoped that My Hanh's win-win conservation and livelihoods model can be replicated elsewhere. There's talk about building other bamboo villages as well as a village in the Mekong Delta attempting something similar, but with coconuts. She also advocates using fast-growing bamboo instead of other types of wood, lessening deforestation which in turn slows down climate change. Even growing bamboo in amongst other tree species can rehabilitate degraded land.

Looking forward, 63-year-old My Hanh has bigger dreams for her bamboo. "I want there to be many more bamboo villages. If something happens to one, there'll still be others left. I also want families, even in the city, to grow a clump of bamboo. I have a species, *bambusa multiplex*, that can grow in a pot. If even half of the city's 8 million people did that, we'd have 4 million bamboo trees releasing oxygen, helping to filter the pollution. It just takes a few helping hands. I also want this bamboo village to survive. We've had so many successes; we received a UNDP prize, I've registered it with the New York Botanical Garden's Virtual Herbarium... but I won't live forever. When I'm old and sickly, I want others to carry on my work. Please help protect the Phu An Bamboo Village."

The Bamboo Village is open daily from 9am to 6pm. Visit www.ecobambou-phuan.org for more information. Along with a pottery factory, a reclining Buddha and a chocolate factory, a visit to the Bamboo Village is also on the itinerary for those on the Binh Duong excursion by Exo Travel Agency (41 Thao Dien, D2; 3519 4111; www.exotravel.com)



WIND & WATER

One of My Hanh's favorite examples of bamboo architecture is the multiple award winning Wind and Water Café. Also in Binh Duong, the café is the work of renowned architect Vo Trong Nghia. From the outside, the aerodynamic, thatched building looks curiously like a giant mushroom, set in a shallow lotus pond. Its interior, though, is even more unique. Other than the foundation, there is no steel or concrete used in the 10m high by 15m diameter structure. Instead, the frame is made of 48 arched bamboo columns with a 1.5m wide oculus at the center of the dome to let in light and air, reminiscent of a bamboo Pantheon. The entire VND1.5 billion construction used approximately 7,000 Thai bamboo trees, known for its construction grade canes. The graceful arches and symmetry of the adjacent bamboo café recalls outstretched bird's wings in flight, built around a cooling water feature. Coffee and other drinks are reasonably priced. The café is located just off the main highway at 6/28T Khu 3 Phu Tho, Thu Dau Mot, Binh Duong.



A CALL FOR CHANGE

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

When more than words are needed

TO THE VIETNAMESE, Minh Hong became a household name when she became the first Vietnamese to set foot on Antarctica in 1997. The 20-something won a contest that sent her, along with 34 youths from 25 countries, on an UNESCO environmental awareness project to the world's southernmost continent. "I was an active, crazy, young person working for *Vietnam Investment Review*. I had no idea about climate change. I mean, I loved the environment. I never threw garbage on the ground, so I guess I considered myself an environmentalist," she recalls with a laugh. "It was totally a big shock, though," she says of the harsh expedition. "I came to realize how I was absolutely ignorant about the environment. For the first time in my life, I learned about the ozone hole climate change and greenhouse gases. Looking back, I realize how I had no awareness about the world's problems. I just cared whether my salary was good and if my friends liked me."

Organized by Robert Swan, the first person to walk to both the North and South Poles, the purpose of the expedition was for these young people to go back to their home countries and spread the word about the harmful effects caused by humans on the environment. It worked.

Upon her return to Vietnam, Hong decided that if her life was to have any purpose, she'd have to quit her job and start working on environmental projects despite not having any training in environmental studies. The Russian, English and Economics student joined the World Wildlife Fund in Hanoi. When she returned to Antarctica for a second time in 2009, she saw a banner for an international environmental organization called 350.org and saw an

opportunity to lead the charge for a nationwide grassroots climate movement in Vietnam (www.350.org.vn). This time, she wasn't interested in awareness raising. It was time for action.

350.org's stated mission is to "reduce carbon dioxide levels from more than 385 parts per million to 350 parts per million, a safe upper limit to avoid a climate tipping point, by encouraging citizens to action... to raise awareness about anthropogenic climate change, to confront climate change denial, and to cut emissions of carbon dioxide in order to slow the rate of global warming." Now the Southeast Asia Co-Coordinator of 350.org, Hong's mission is to adapt the 350.org spirit to the local context. In addition to carrying out the organization's regional and global campaigns, Hong's projects include the solar bottle, using daylight to provide interior light to poor homes with just a soda bottle, water and a little bleach; getting corporate sponsors to buy solar cookers (a simple device which uses direct sunlight to heat, cook or pasteurize food or drink) to distribute to poor families; and cooperating with businesses, asking them to green their offices. "Instead of waiting and complaining, why not think of solutions that are feasible? Do whatever you can to be part of the solution," says Hong.

NUMBERS

We talk in Hong's Binh Thanh office, laptops and plush rhino toys with bandaged horns, part of a campaign with WildAid, strewn about in the cramped space, made smaller with stacks of posters, banners and signs.

"That's our second mission," Hong says as she sees me eyeing her staff who are decidedly young and seemingly far too few considering the enormity of the issues they're facing. "We're out to build capacity, especially among the youths." Since being established in 2011, 350 Vietnam is the largest youth-led climate change movement in the country. Hong counts over 10,000 volunteers in 20 provinces, and over 30 Vietnamese Celebrity Goodwill Ambassadors among those who've heeded the call. "We try to include people from the provinces, too, instead of just Hanoi and HCMC where the youth have all the advantages. We put on activist workshops so people stop thinking that climate change can only be addressed by the ministries, NGOs and elite university students in Hanoi, but can be done at the grassroots level, in the villages. If we give them the tools, the leadership skills and some funding, we can get them to be as creative as they want. They will think of solutions that we could never think of. Vietnam is still a developing country, but we're too lazy, waiting for the government. The key is to let the grassroots approach work, especially among young people who can take action. They're well ahead of the adults." Hong points to small successes like a seaweed project in Nha Trang, ecotourism in Dong Nai and even a solar cooker cooking competition organized in Saigon's Phu My Hung.

While Hong advocates the benefits of change on a small scale, like painting roofs white and growing plants on the walls which can save 20-30 percent on electricity usage or using rice husk charcoal instead of the more toxic "beehive charcoal" common to Vietnam, she realizes that she needs to reach the real decision makers in government ministries and large corporations to enact change on a larger scale.

"The tendency is for countries to switch to renewable energy. A lot of them are closing down coal-fired power plants while Vietnam plans to build more. We're enjoying the electricity, but going against the global trend," says Hong of Vietnam's long-term energy plan which includes building 57 new coal-fired power plants likely requiring the import of 20-30 million tons of coal by 2020.

350.org is fighting back by targeting companies who invest in fossil fuel energy. "There's absolutely some shaming involved," says Hong passionately of the divestment campaign launched in February. "We're approaching [large banks investment funds] because they're the ones holding a lot of money and can decide to invest in coal mines versus renewable energy sources, so we're trying to influence their decision of where to invest by providing them with documentation that says that as demand for coal-powered energy decreases, their investments into fossil fuels will be risky.

Most of the people we've talked to say they hadn't been aware of the issues, but we haven't been able to talk to the biggest guys, the decision makers yet."

Asked whether she considers herself an activist, Hong pauses before answering. "I'm just interested in activities that lead to good changes for our society. I also want people to be aware of what they can do. Instead of suffering from pollution and complaining about it on Facebook, know how to boycott those companies!"

Hong's organization also works in wildlife conservation, partnering with WildAid on their "When the buying stops, the killing can too" campaign urging consumers not to buy rhino horn and other endangered wildlife products. "Vietnam, along with China, is leading the world in rhino horn consumption. People believe it cures cancer and other diseases, but it's not true. We've put on school events and talked to authorities regarding enforcement. We've even helped provide sniffer dogs to detect wildlife products. But really, it's the rich people who consume the most. Social media campaigns and the like don't work on them because they're so powerful. But we're targeting many different angles. When their children come home from international school, they can tell their dad that he's doing something bad. When business people go abroad and see images of dead rhinos with the Vietnamese flag next to them, it becomes a matter of national pride. We're getting cancer doctors to talk about it. We're showing people the facts that 70-90 percent of rhino horn in the market is fake so they'll be hesitant to make that next purchase. But we have to escalate it to the next level before it becomes too late. If the trend continues, in six years' time the rhinos will be all gone."

When asked whether she feels like she's fighting a battle that can't be won, Hong replies: "Sometimes I feel depressed. But then I look at the things I've achieved and I know for sure things have changed. When I talked about climate change in 1997, people looked at me like I was an animal; they didn't know what I was talking about. But now, everyone is talking about climate change. The same with renewable energy. At first, it was very difficult to mobilize just 50 volunteers. Now I have 10,000. The young people are not stupid like the older generation, so there's hope. One day, my son, who only cares about computer games, came home from school and said that rhino horn is just like fingernails. I never told him about that. The singer Thanh Bui came to his school to talk about it. Things like that make me want to continue to do things for him and for his friends. It's too late for my generation. Our work is now for the children."



IMAGE PROVIDED BY 350.ORG



GROWING POWER

TEXT BY NPD KHANH

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

The potential to produce sustainable food in your own home

A MECHANICAL ENGINEER, a medical equipment specialist, a biotech worker and a budding IT technician are redefining the purpose of rooftops as simply places to dry clothes; they are pushing for a rooftop aquaponics movement. Collectively called Vnaquaponics (www.vnaquaponics.com) the team of four are among some of the pioneers of aquaponics in Vietnam.

“Aquaponics is essentially the combination of aquaculture and hydroponics,” explains Huynh Minh Thuan, the spokesperson and medical equipment specialist of the group. Aquaculture is the practice of rearing water-bound animals in tanks. Hydroponics is its plant-based counterpart. “In aquaponics, we build a symbiosis system using fish and plants. The fish live in one tank, the plants grow roots in a connected tank. Fish create nutrient rich water by producing organic waste and attracting bacteria. Plants then extract nutrient from this nutrient rich water, thus cleansing the fish’s habitat. Plants also shed leaves and other plant materials into the water supply, and the fish eat this plant waste. And there you have it, a complete and self-contained food production cycle that requires minimum land resources or human intervention.”

In other words, aquaponics is the future of ecological agriculture. Not only does it maximize limited resources, it also produces far better yields than traditional farming and requires neither the use of growth hormones or constant human care. A good aquaponic system can run on automated mode for weeks, needing only the occasional harvests to keep the plants from overgrowing. The cost of building a full-size aquaponic system is roughly VND3 to VND5

million per square meter depending on the complexity of the system.

VALUE OF CLEAN FOOD

According to Thuan, aquaponics is still relatively unknown in Vietnam, where the community is composed mainly of hobbyists rather than professional farmers. “We are basically a bunch of guys who know our way around wrenches and DIY projects, have some knowledge of gardening and are either concerned or made to become concerned about the state of our food safety by our wives or girlfriends,” shares Thuan. “A couple of years ago, there was a food scandal involving chemically contaminated beansprouts. People were so scared of being poisoned by these toxic beansprouts that many started looking into growing clean beansprouts in the privacy of their home. So they started searching for tutorials online and you know how Youtube likes to suggest similar topics to watchers. One thing led to another and that was how the aquaponic movement starting appearing in Vietnam, through sheer accident and food safety fears.”

In terms of weather conditions, the country’s tropical climate and year-round sunlight is especially ideal for aquaponics. Ironically, at the moment, aquaponics in Vietnam is more popular as home decor than an alternative to traditional farming.

“Over half of our population is involved one way or another in the agricultural industry. You would think in a country like this, it would be the farmers who pounce on aquaponics tech, but



“OUR NUMBER ONE GOAL RIGHT NOW IS TO SPREAD AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF AQUAPONICS TO THE VIETNAMESE PUBLIC”

no. It's the ladies who fancy a lovely bouquet on top of their fish bowls that are the first consumers of aquaponics products right now," says Thuan. Explaining this puzzling state of affairs, Thuan believes the agriculture industry in Vietnam is mired in traditional technologies and out-dated thinking, and that despite several food safety scandals in recent years, the majority of local farmers do not understand or value clean, organic food produced by aquaponics. "Your normal farmer, when we approached them with an aquaponic model we designed specifically for Vietnam, is not very interested. From their perspective, they have worked the same way for centuries so if it isn't broken, why change it?"

Which is a shame, according to the group, as Saigon holds tremendous potential for aquaponics with its ideal weather conditions and under-utilized rooftop space and, most importantly, a young educated population who knows the value of clean, organic food. One of Vnaquaponics's long-term goals is to change this general mindset towards food production and safety. "We have only just started out and are a long way from doing what we really want to do," says Thuan. At the moment they have their hands full with several personal projects and some for clients.

"We have designed and built several flora and fauna systems specifically for local weather conditions," says Vo Hoang Nhan, the group's mechanical engineer. "We learned how to build aquaponic systems from Western manuals and books, but the conditions of Vietnam are different from America and other European countries. A lot of adjustments in construction materials, plant and fish types are needed. A lot of adjustments in handling the fresh produce too since the yield in a tropical country is much more than in a temperate country!" Nhan, whose rooftop serves as the testing grounds for the group's design and building trials, boasts that he has harvested more than 100 kilograms of fish within the last two months and that he hasn't had to buy his greens from the markets for a long time now.

Recently, Vnaquaponics has started building an elaborate website as a hub for information on the topic. Though the site is not yet finished, it already holds a substantial amount of documentation on the group's experiments with various designs. "Our number one goal right now is to spread awareness and knowledge of aquaponics to the Vietnamese public," says Thuan. "Once we've got the basics down pat, good business will soon follow."



INTO THE WILD

TEXT BY TAYNE EPHRAIM IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

A trip back to nature at Cat Tien National Park

VIETNAM'S GOTTEN A lot of flack in recent years, as complaints are being volleyed by disgruntled tourists. Lousy service, congested roads, botched itineraries and cut-throat vendors and scammers are just some of the reasons there's now less than five percent visitor return rate here. However, what these folks fail to realize is Vietnam's most valued treasures are not found in overpopulated Saigon or government-planned beach resorts, but rather lie somewhere off the beaten path – uneven, broken paths that lead to Cat Tien National Park. Made up of evergreen forest, bamboo woodland, farmland, wetlands and home to amazing indigenous wildlife, Cat Tien National Park is the largest natural rainforest in Vietnam.

So, weary and exhausted from breathing Saigon soot, we embark on a journey to Cat Tien, bound for the Ta Lai Longhouse along the newly completed Long Khanh Highway. For approximately three hours, jackfruit plantations, rubber trees and scenes from nature blur pass our car window until we reach our destination.

Tai La Longhouse's on-site manager Matthew greets us at the rickety cable-stayed bridge at the end of Ta Lai road, waiting by his moped. Cars are not allowed over the bridge, Matthew informs us, for reasons that become quickly apparent as we cross over the fragile metal slats with the muddy river below peeking through the gaps. Matthew drives on ahead with our bags – all of them atop the bike. Eight months of living in Vietnam and he's already hauling like a true local.

We pass through Ta Lai village where a rambunctious wedding is taking place and arrive at our guesthouse. Commonly known as "The Longhouse," it took months to complete and helps ethnic people (Tay, Ma and S'tieng) living near the park earn a living and mitigate their reliance on natural resources. Located near the forest's edge at Cat Tien National Park, the 125m² communal house is made from environmentally-friendly materials such as bamboo, wood and palm leaves. The building itself, a traditional bamboo structure

of the local Ma people, is built atop a small hill overlooking a lake that flows into and waters the rice paddies. With April being the tail end of the dry season, the lake's waters are barely high enough for a canoe to make the crossing but when the waters are high enough, the longhouse has its own entrance where guests can cross the lake with kayaks.

"What are you doing living out here in the jungle, Matt?" I inquire after our brief tour of The Longhouse and its carefully manicured surrounds.

"Just loving life, really," he replies.

Eager-eyed young Matthew, hailing from London, completed his Masters thesis on the black howler monkey in Belize. I would argue that his next greatest scholarly achievement is the book of animals he has lovingly compiled for the longhouse – *Animals of Ta Lai* – giving tidbits of information about the animals living in the park, and with a woven cover like something out of a Wes Anderson movie.

The Longhouse is the brainchild of Frenchman Francois Bovary and jointly run by a team of Europeans, Vietnamese and local minorities. Its construction involved almost everyone in the village. They hire guides from Ta Lai whenever they need the help. "We've got a pool of good workers we already draw from, but with the bigger groups coming in we can extend the opportunity for new hands to get on board as well. We'll hire two who we know are good, and two who are new to give them a chance," says Matt.

A percentage of the accommodation's earnings goes right back into the community coffers, along with sales from the specialty coffee – another one of Francois' side projects, of which a dollar from every bag sold is put toward community projects. "Twenty percent local," says Matthew, the beans partly sourced from Ta Lai's volcanic soil. They also employ local electricians and builders on any new projects, trying to get the local community involved in any way they can. "Keeps the money coming into the community coffers in a way

that makes everyone feel like a winner, the environment included.” Ta Lai village was once famous for its intricate knives, an art that Francois has a dream to revive from the funds The Longhouse brings in.

It’s high noon by the time we’re settled in with the unrelenting April heat at its peak, so after a delightful lunch (the food being one of the guesthouse’s strong points) we opt for a breezy jaunt around the village with the lovely Trang, the newest addition to The Longhouse team.

We were surprised by the village’s concentration of Christian paraphernalia, with door-hung crucifixes, rosary beads, and even a station of the cross set in plaster by the village’s main church. According to Trang, in a strange twist during the colonial period, the village had a deadly reputation of resistance to outsiders and a particular taste for the blood of French missionaries, who avoided the whole area like plague. Nonetheless, by a baffling turn of events, somewhere along the way the whole village found itself converted.

In any case, whatever hostility to the outside world that may once have existed has entirely vanished, and we encounter nothing but curious smiles, hellos, water buffalo, and the usual giggling children coming out of their houses for a look at the latest bunch of strangers in town. We pass a weaving house where local folks carry on with their traditional craft. Some teens are having something of a fashion shoot outside, flaunting the local wears. One even has flowers in his hair.

THE JUNGLE BOOK

Back at the guesthouse, over a dinner of pear-stuffed chicken and battered prawns (meals are VND150,000 a head, served buffet-style, every one of them blowing expectations out of the water - the kitchen staff never fail to deliver the goods), Matthew lays out our options for the next day. They have their own fleet of kayaks and mountain bikes for guests to rent, and there’s plenty to see. There’s an island sanctuary for gibbon rehabilitation (*Dao Tien* or Gibbon Island), a bear rescue center for the endangered sun and moon bears, and the exotic *Bau Sau* (Crocodile Lake) in the heart of the wilderness area, taking a solid day’s return ride to reach it and its resident crocodiles. There are also a number of smaller hikes, including the 10km Green Hill hike to the Bat Cave, a cavern atop a hill deep in the jungle swarming with horseshoe bats where a flashlight and steely nerves are recommended.

The animals themselves (many of them critically endangered) are surely the stars of the show and the park’s biggest drawcard, where one may spy such oddities as the world’s smallest deer (the mouse deer, at an abominably adorable 12 inches in height), the world’s largest bovine (the imposing minotaur-like gaur), the incredible Sunda pangolin (an armadillo-like oddity like something out of *Pan’s Labyrinth*), and the world’s best-named monkey, the crab-eating macaque. “They don’t *only* eat crabs, that’s a common misconception,” says Matthew.

Night in The Longhouse is a surprisingly comfortable and homely experience, even in the middle of April. The structure can sleep up to 30 people, with bamboo screens brought in to section off one bed from the next. Its open-ended design, with slits in the roof on both ends to let the night air ventilate through, keeps the entire room relatively cool, and ceiling fans have also been installed for added comfort. I slink under the mosquito net and onto my cushy mattress. A storm rolls over in the night, first of the season, but I’m out like a light about as soon as my head hits the pillow and don’t hear about it till the day.

Come morning we take mountain bikes, provided with a complimentary backpack of bottled water, pump, and spare inner tubes, out into the park. It’s a few kilometers ride to the park entrance by bicycle, passing through the village and the odd sight of its Christian graveyard. The track passes through the light forest and plantations bordering the park, with watchtowers having been installed every few kilometers where we caught a good view over the foliage and its hidden creatures. Park headquarters, a little further on, is where the bear rescue center is located, playing a critical role in teaching visitors about the vital role the animals play in the jungle’s ecology. The park’s moon and sun bears are to be found here, sadly no longer free to roam the park because of poaching and deforestation, and rare leopards, crocs, and golden-cheeked gibbons also. Entry fees go directly into projects to help ensure their survival.

Continuing on deeper into Cat Tien National Park, it’s not long



“NIGHT IN THE LONGHOUSE IS A SURPRISINGLY COMFORTABLE AND HOMELY EXPERIENCE, EVEN IN THE MIDDLE OF APRIL.”

before we find ourselves immersed within the jungle’s natural cacophony of cicadas, rustling leaves and fluttering birds. There’s a set of rapids I waste no time in getting my feet into and giving my face a good splashing with, and a massive ancient *tung* tree a few hundred meters off the track. As for the fauna though, our only confirmed sighting is a surprised monitor lizard scurrying out of our path. But the rest of the jungle’s inhabitants, though doing their best to keep out of sight, certainly have a way of making themselves heard.

All too quickly we find that our time in the forest has run out, and it’s farewell to The Longhouse and its endearing staff, back over the rusty suspension bridge to our waiting driver and civilization. Back to a jungle of another kind, with its own natural cacophony of car alarms, buzz saws, and shrill motorcycle horns, where the tangles of vines are replaced with telegraph wires and bright bird cries with the automated cries of *bo bia ngot* hawksers.

A wildlife discovery trip (three days, two nights) to Cat Tien National Park, with accommodations at Tai Lai Longhouse, can be booked through **Ginkgo Voyage** (www.ginkgovoyage.com or 3914 3344).



BREAKING GREEN

TEXT BY RACHEL CABAKOFF

Is Vietnam on the cusp of a green building revolution?

VIETNAM GREEN BUILDING Council (VGBC) has been at the forefront of building green in Vietnam. Originating from California, US, VGBC was established in 2007 and, as a Green City Fund, Inc. program, the nonprofit covers a wide range of categories when it comes to building green in this country. VGBC encompasses infrastructure, development and manufacturing, consumer behavior and even transportation. What lies at its core is raising awareness and advocacy, their Green Building Certification system (also known as LOTUS), along with research and education. Similar to the US Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certification program, LOTUS stems from VGBC and applies exclusively to buildings in Vietnam.

As the Southern Regional Coordinator and Chairman of VGBC, Melissa Merryweather was brought on during the early stages in 2008 and is a major editor of the LOTUS certification system. She has been a key participant on many green projects in Ho Chi Minh City.

"The fact is, if you really start out to design something in a truly sustainable way, you will enhance your own brand quite subtly from the bottom up. And when you give yourself the tools to improve it as well," says Melissa.

VGBC's LOTUS rating system ensures building projects throughout Vietnam are constructed with the highest degree of environmental responsibility throughout their life cycle and with the lowest amount of impact. As Vietnam is the fifth most vulnerable country in the world to climate change, LOTUS includes adaptation mitigation, making it the first certification system to do so.

"So you're going to design it right and you're going to construct it right - LOTUS is unique in that it requires the construction to match your design or better." She explains that most certification systems are flawed, whereas LOTUS prevents companies from cheating the system. "The other thing VGBC is working on is putting out a LOTUS certification system for single family homes which would be amazing because there is no other competitor in the region except in Singapore."

If a project is successful and becomes LOTUS certified, the building will get points and be awarded with a Silver, Gold or Platinum rating, meaning that your platinum rated building is as good as any other platinum rated building in the world, says Melissa.

PAYBACK

Over the past decade the city is gradually becoming greener, but there is still a long way to go and many obstacles to overcome. "There's been a massive building increase. Vietnam is behind China and perhaps India and Indonesia. It's one of the fastest construction booms in the world. The numbers are boggling," says Melissa.

According to BCI Asia and global commercial real estate firm CBRE Group Inc., the number of projects currently under construction, including offices, retail, hospitality and residential, totals 381. As far as future projects go, from 2015 to 2030, that figure jumps to an estimated 582. With the help of VGBC, major projects have been implemented around town and companies are becoming more educated and aware of the sustainable options available.

"We've been in a really happy situation showing that in Vietnam you really can build very sustainably with no extra cost or very small extra cost that really has good payback," adds Melissa. "I've seen the benefits for the managers and for the occupants. I've seen manufacturers get their work force really interested in all of these issues and educate them so then they go home and they practice this stuff as well."

Some examples of VGBC LOTUS certified projects includes the Pou Chen Kindergarten (*pictured above*) located next to a shoe factory in Dong Nai Province. Designed and constructed by Vo Trong Nghia Architects in 2013, this "Farming Kindergarten" accommodates the factory workers' 500 children.

"The client proposed a suitable building for sustainable education for the employees' children. So we built the building as one continuous structure to show the fluidity of the idea of sustainability and to provide a place with lots of landscape for the children to run



around and to be more active,” explains Takashi Niwa, a Partner at Vo Trong Nghia Architects.

Using natural and local materials, the building incorporates a vegetable garden roof, a water recycling system, solar water heating and more, earning it a Silver Level LOTUS certification. “Our target is to bring back more green to the city not only to improve the energy efficiency but also to improve the happiness for living,” he adds. “It’s good motivation to become a greener city. I think in a few more years we will be seeing a lot more green buildings.” Pou Chen kindergarten is just one of many green structures Vo Trung Nghia’s team has worked on throughout Vietnam.

“Right now we’re seeing a couple of really exciting projects. We’re working on one factory for a garment producer and they’re going for Platinum LEED and Platinum LOTUS green certification at the same time,” says Melissa. “So far, it looks like they’re saving something like 45 percent of their energy and they’re considering going off the grid. It is a very cool project and I think we’re starting to see some people really try to reach a very high bar now for the first time.”

Take for example the Big C Di An hypermarket in the Green Square commercial center in Binh Duong Province which actually achieved both LOTUS and LEED certification. Saving 30 percent of energy consumption, this is the first project with a solar battery system in Vietnam, according to *The Saigon Times*.

In addition, there are a number of factories outside HCMC that are LEED or LEED and LOTUS certified. As far as direct changes go in the city, head over to President Place (93 Nguyen Du, D1) located in the heart of Saigon, which was the first building in Vietnam to reach LEED Gold certification in 2012. With its use of locally-sourced sustainable construction materials, a rooftop garden, efficient air, lighting and water systems, President Place has not only minimized its effect on the environment but also operating costs for the tenants.

“What I like to say about green building is that it’s very difficult to apply green building later. You could always improve things but if you start your project from the concept stage onward, then you can integrate very easily and it actually doesn’t cost anything extra,” Melissa continues.

One major change in the city’s infrastructure is the canals. One of Saigon’s largest canals - Tan Hoa-Lo Gom - was so polluted with sewage it became a health issue to neighboring residents, affecting nearly 1.2 million people, according to Vietnam.net. What originally began in 2010, the World Bank funded this USD167 million project to improve the canals. Since the project began, 13 bridges have been built; landscaping has been upgraded along with added mitigation flooding and wastewater collection. A more recent canal development totaling USD450 million will focus on the Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe Canal

and another USDD100 million to fund the restoration of the Hang Bang Canal, originally recognized as the Canal Bonard.

In addition to their LOTUS certification, VGBC focuses on local awareness by educating young architects, engineers, building owners, local government and businesses providing anything and everything one needs to know about being green. From certification systems to free lectures at universities and schools to offering their own education program and workshops for individuals and organizations, VGBC strives to raise awareness throughout the country.

“In this country there has been a lot of talk saying ‘sustainable buildings are so expensive’ and that’s utter nonsense. People who’ve said that don’t really know much about sustainable construction,” says Melissa. A unique resource VGBC offers is their free online Vietnam Green Database, providing information on options to living green such as sustainable cooling systems and alternatives to using bricks for building.

SUBSTANTIAL SUSTAINABILITY

In addition to VGBC, there are green social clubs and groups in Saigon for people to get involved in, for example the Green Drinks social club. Originating from London in 1989, Green Drinks was organized with the intention of bringing environmentally conscious individuals together to discuss, network and bond on all things green. Spreading all over the world, Green Drinks (Facebook: Green Drinks Saigon Lounge) found its way to Saigon in 2009 as the 455th club to open and the first in Vietnam.

“We’re really trying to showcase information that is factual and substantial. It’s the substantial end of the sustainability market,” says Melissa, who is also a co-organizer of Green Drinks since its inception.

Meeting on the first Thursday of each month at Zest Bistro Café, Green Drinks organizers bring in speakers to discuss topics from alternative energy and sustainable coffee to green building certification systems and fundraising, recycling and more. “What we’d really like to do now is to have it reach out to more of a professional network, so people who are interested in green subjects but also professionals who are involved in sustainability. So they can know what else is going on and who else is operating in the sector.”

Their next meeting will be on May 7 and will feature Gavin Smith, Director of Clean Development Fund at Dragon Capital, and the topic is *Hydropower: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*.

“The Vietnamese are looking forward, children are getting an education, and family well-being is really important. So I think sustainability could actually play a major role in the next phase of Vietnam’s development and I think it really has to,” says Melissa. “It’s exciting to see groups like VGBC starting to make an impact.

A man with dark hair and a striped shirt stands with his arms crossed in front of a dense urban skyline. The buildings are a mix of modern glass skyscrapers and older, more varied structures. The sky is clear and blue.

BUILT FOR LIFE

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

The state of sustainable architecture in Vietnam

WHEN THE POWERHOUSE Kjørbo Building opened last year outside of Oslo, Norway, it was quickly lauded as the world's most environmentally-friendly office building, unbelievably designed to produce more renewable energy than it uses. Over the next 60 years, the world's first building to be renovated into an energy-positive structure is expected to generate enough energy (thanks in part to the largest rooftop solar photovoltaic system in Norway and the use of geothermal energy for heating) to cover the total amount of energy used to produce the building materials, construction, operation and disposal.

Just a few months ago, another Oslo building, this time a combined shopping mall / residential structure garnered top honors for a retail space at the BREEAM Awards 2015, utilizing seawater for heat exchange, LED lights and solar cells, low carbon materials and a green roof featuring 84 different plant species found locally.

A feat that might seem years away for most countries, can feel almost light years away for a developing country such as Vietnam. *Oi* speaks to Andrew Currie, Managing Director of OUT-2 Design (out-2.com), on sustainable architecture and environmentally-friendly interior design solutions for Vietnam.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE?

For us, it ranges from everything to getting the planning right before construction, so a building can stay there and stay relevant for a very long time, to using non-toxic construction and fit outs. Studies have shown that you can have all the technology you want, but if the bones of the buildings are not good, it won't be "future-proofed" for the long term, meaning it won't be fit for changing purposes or be flexible for future use. A few weeks of careful planning in the beginning of a project can have a huge impact on the life and sustainability of a building. Then there's also a narrower band which is where current trends are, more about bringing greenery into the buildings.

WHAT'S THE STATE OF SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE IN

VIETNAM?

I would say Vietnam is lagging a long way behind [the rest of the world] and one of the main reasons is there is little incentive for people to build green. Right now, it's purely the developer's choice. But in many [other] regions, governments legislate building green, so you have to do it. You also have to do it because people who use these buildings want it. We work with a lot of multinational tenants who rent buildings. Given a choice, 90 percent would choose green buildings if they were available, but they just don't have that choice here.

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO BUILD MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY STRUCTURES HERE?

To be honest, in Vietnam, most accreditation [for environmentally-friendly buildings] is focused on manufacturers who need to meet higher environmental standards from international brands. For example, an international brand might say to their suppliers: 'We need our factories to be more environmentally-friendly' and will assess their manufacturers on their environmental sustainability and certification. Eventually, if manufacturing facilities aren't certified, they won't get orders.

Other than that, it's really the developers who have the ability to build better buildings. But that's probably the biggest gap between the rest of the world and what's happening here. There's probably one developer who's really committed. There are many passive things that don't cost [a lot of] money, like solar shading, protecting buildings from the sun. Instead, a lot of work goes into trying to mitigate this later, like using metalized heat-reflecting blinds which are really expensive.

To get beyond that, to the next level of sustainability, theoretically doesn't cost money when the building quality is high. But with the buildings here, that are generally built to a much lower standard, it'll cost maybe 20-50 percent more. But initial cost aside, that jump immediately gets you ongoing operational savings of 20-30 percent. Most people don't look at that here at all, and it's



crazy, because from a landlord's point of view, they charge tenants a service fee of USD6-USD10 per meter, and they get that money regardless of how efficient the building is used.

WHO DO YOU THINK SHOULD LEAD THE WAY TO CONSTRUCTING GREENER BUILDINGS - GOVERNMENT, INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES OR LOCAL ONES?

The real inroads will be made when more Vietnamese companies get behind it. The perfect domain for this are companies who own or build their own buildings like offices, schools and universities. Universities normally lead the way in this because they own their own buildings and benefit more from their operation. They're also interested in creating a better image for themselves and are seen as serving society. If a university can't invest in their own buildings, who else can? As far as offices go, the Unilever Homebase building uses all the tools of sustainability: orientation, passive solar shading, it has six atriums to bring light in and follows all the principles of efficient design and energy efficiency. This was possible because it was built for a specific user.

WHAT POSITIVES DO YOU SEE FOR VIETNAM?

Here because of the inefficiency of buildings, it probably takes a lot less time [to recoup sustainable building costs] as opposed to overseas where buildings are much more sophisticated. The technology costs are dropping every year, too. We're doing a Phu Quoc boutique resort project, and for USD20,000, we can generate all the power it needs, not including air-conditioning, through solar and wind energy. We looked at that four or so years ago, and it would've been USD50,000-USD100,000, so the technology has come way down. Those figures put it back on the table.

I was in Sydney recently and saw a 30-story building with vertical gardens. But when you looked closely, a lot of those weren't growing very well. But in the tropics, it's so much easier to do. Definitely integrating planting and landscape into buildings

is inevitable here given the environment and climate. Vietnam has real opportunities to start integrating urban agriculture into buildings which is a global trend, but a lot harder to do in Europe, from a climatic point of view. If you put a garden on the roof here, it'll grow.

All it's going to take here is for somebody to embrace [sustainable architecture] on a reasonable scale and the biggest opportunity is for a local entity, whether it be a developer or end user. Most people are looking at a green agenda to get it into a brochure, green this, eco that, but without understanding what that means, to be sustainable and to do it properly, not just for great marketable imagery. It's sitting down and talking mechanics. Gardens are just icing on the cake. Unfortunately, half to two-thirds might say: 'We'll just put the gardens in and not do the rest.'

The trend would be for buildings to try to be self-sufficient on their own and not rely on external forces. At this stage, there are no government subsidies, nothing local. But the trend overseas is to create better, nicer spaces that people enjoy more. That's slowly happening here. You're now seeing a lot of nice, livable houses being designed by younger, local architects who want quality of life.

WHAT CAN INDIVIDUAL HOMEOWNERS DO TO MAKE THEIR HOMES MORE ECO-FRIENDLY?

For homeowners, the main issue is about efficient use of energy. It's not very high tech or sexy, but first of all, put in windows that actually seal when closed, but with the ability to ventilate. Leakage is probably the biggest inefficiency. Insulating houses can also cut temperatures by four to six degrees.

The biggest single trend is changing lighting to LED, something everyone can do. A good LED bulb can cost USD30 but it's lighting you don't have to change for five years. One of the problems here is longer-term thinking isn't the norm. Many people say, 'I'll buy the USD2 bulb. If it breaks, I can buy 15 of them.' But people are getting there. It's just taking a while.



PALLET PLEASING

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

Creating eco-friendly repurposed furniture

FURNITURE UPCYCLING IS one of the hottest DIY trends — old doors gaining new life as tabletops or headboards, ladders as bookshelves, bathtubs turned into sofas. It appeals to people on all different levels: the arts and crafts moms have a project to add to Pinterest, the too-cool-for-Ikea crowd gain a one-off conversation piece, the cost-conscious need only apply some elbow grease along with a healthy dose of creativity and friends of the Earth can sleep well knowing that they've salvaged something otherwise destined for a landfill somewhere.

Enter the Pallet Project Saigon (www.palletprojectsaigon.com), a home-based partnership between housemates Janel Orbida and Steve Laughlin repurposing pallets into one-of-a-kind, functional pieces decorated by both established and up-and-coming artists.

Down a quiet lane in District 2, the friends share a house with creative types. There's a language teacher, an artist, and the founders of Green Youth Collective, a training project that aims to enhance environmental sustainability by installing organic gardens on unused rooftop and wall space around HCMC. Add to that the musician, artist and passionately vegan friends (the home Wi-Fi is named "Hippies House") that come in and out and the creativity flows through the space like electricity.

"It started out by us buying pallets to use as bed frames," says Janel, a dreadlocked reggae and funk musician from the Philippines who oozes a laid back vibe. "Pallets are so multipurpose. You can

build anything with them. It's a cheaper way of making furniture, a cheaper solution. It lasts long enough, surviving the wear and tear of a few years of staying in a house."

Some of the pallets also got made into a coffee table which friends took to doodling on. A year later and the unvarnished table is still there, every inch covered in colorful swirls, cartoons and messages. The idea for Pallet Project Saigon was born.

"In the Philippines, I was into recycling, not really for environmental reasons but more for repurposing. I made upcycled lamps and worked for an NGO making bags out of tarpaulin-like billboard material. I liked the idea of taking something that's been used but using it again for a different purpose. My background in making and designing stuff came just the same as my music; it came by ear."

The other half of the duo is Steve Laughlin, a UK electrician by trade. "I started out as an apprentice and got stuck with all the sh!t that no one else wanted to do, working with brickies, chippies, tackers... So I've been around a lot of trades," laughs Steve, the more environmentally-minded of the two. "Over the last five years, I've become more interested in permaculture and sustainable living... Just because the world is going a bit wrong at the moment and there's got to be something we can do. In Vietnam, nothing gets wasted; they reuse everything. It's a much better way of doing things instead of throwing away something with a little bit of a



stain or a scratch; that seems so wasteful.”

USABLE ART

Together, the two have merged their construction and design backgrounds, sharing the work of selecting the pallets and carting them home on the backs of motorbikes then sanding and trimming to prepare them for the artists before finally varnishing and adding coasters and a glass top.

“We thought that it was really good that we could build these tables, but it would be so much nicer if we could collaborate with other people to give our artist friends another canvas (or pallet) to work on,” says Steve. “We give the artists free rein; that’s the one thing we don’t like to have a say in. The designs are unique to that one table. Sometimes they’ll tell us ahead of time what they’re going to do, sometimes not. Some just make it up as they go. That means for each piece, there’s just one. We want the artist to see it as a 3D canvas,” with the artist getting the larger share of the proceeds.

So far, the artists have used acrylic paint, spray paint, ink and even a soldering iron to create a host of designs based on nature, portraits or more abstract concepts. “It’s an art piece you can use,” adds Janel.

What began as mainly a side project has now gained traction among the Saigon community. “We wanted to do something — instead of just working and being... something we both enjoyed and liked. It’s been great to see interest in the project,” says Steve. “At our first showing, we took three tables and our catalog. We didn’t expect to sell anything. We just wanted to see what the reaction was and if people would take any of our cards. But then we sold all three and thought: ‘We can do this. Let’s make another batch!’”

The pair look to continue using pallets but branching out into other designs and types of furniture, all the while giving new life to old wood.



Wine & Dine

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN





Inter Nos Restaurant



Secondhand Treasures

Casual dining in a chic Indochina-inspired setting

TEXT BY RACHEL CABAKOFF IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

“WHEN I WAS young I wanted to open a small smoothie or café cart. Something very small like a wooden cart with only five seats,” said Kalen Nguyen, who co-owns *The Vintage Emporium* (95B Nguyen Van Thu, D1) with her partner Linton Bortwick. Much bigger than a five-seat cart, The Vintage Emporium is the latest trendy resto-café in Saigon.

“The whole concept is residential, a blend of French and Southeast Asia, which is kind of what Saigon is. The carvings on the wall are not necessarily Vietnamese but more Indochina or Thai and the weavings on the walls are from Sapa,” explained Linton. “Almost everything is either recycled or secondhand.” From the ingredients, design

and décor down to the salt and pepper shakers, it is obvious where their passion lies - every piece of furniture and wall art ties in with one another creating gallery-like installations while still giving off a relaxed vibe. Upstairs has a more intimate setting with additional seating and an amazing wall of vintage photographs featuring locals spots around town.

As far as the menu goes Linton handles the food - writing up new menus and occasionally adding experimental dishes. During the opening stages, he reached out to various sous chefs around town for culinary advice to construct the café’s well-balanced menu. Now Tran Anh Tu and Dao Dinh Nam, both with five-star restaurant backgrounds,

lead the kitchen. “The idea is healthy and quality food at a reasonable price.”

Kalen and Linton, who also have experiences in five-star hospitality industry, have the trained eye and palette for the perfect equation to a successful dining experience. Officially opening last June, The Vintage Emporium is the product of a lifelong goal for the couple.

The menu comprises of sandwiches from the classic BLT (VND80,000), Saigon baguette (VND95,000), to organic and fresh salads like their prawn and green mango salad (VND95,000) and more. And for breakfast, choose from a selection of scrambled, poached or eggs any style, toasted muesli, French toast or pancakes - you won’t go wrong here. Sourcing their breads from an outside baker, the café uses sourdough, rye, baguettes and sandwich breads that are also available for individual sale; while fruits and vegetables are sourced from organic suppliers.

Keeping Creativity Alive

We started our dining experience off right with a light, refreshing smoothie (VND60,000) - mango and lychee for me, watermelon, mint and lychee for my companion. I have made this mistake time and time again, ordering a smoothie before my meal and end up full before the food has even made it out of the kitchen. However, this was not the case here. Made with ice, fresh fruits and a dash of sugar syrup, they were light and refreshing - the perfect welcome drink.

We then moved onto the greens. Linton recommended their popular Smoked salmon salad with mixed leafs, capers and aioli dressing (VND145,000) and the Cajun spiced chicken salad with minted yogurt (VND120,000). The smoky flavor of the salmon balanced well with the creamy aioli dressing, complemented by tomatoes, avocado and fresh cut onions. The Cajun chicken salad (also available in sandwich form) woke up our taste buds from the Cajun spices used to grill the chicken. For those who have zero tolerance for spicy food, have no fear, the creamy yoghurt dressing and mixed grilled vegetables took the edge off, leaving tender chicken that made for a delectable dish. Both held up to their standards as favorites and we could see why.

We decided to split a main dish because the salads were of generous portions. We chose a traditional Italian favorite, the Pappardelle spiced lamb ragout (VND195,000). The pappardelle was slow-cooked until tender and then hand torn by the chef for perfection, the true Italian way Linton explained. The pasta was complemented by a red carrot jam sauce, Parmesan shavings and a crispy garlic breadstick, and left us wanting more.

Kalen and Linton like to keep the creativity alive in the kitchen, changing the menu every now and then. A new one is expected to pop up in a few weeks incorporating Moroccan cuisine while throwing in a dish we haven’t seen in awhile, an Australian meat pie. Those looking for a new brunch hideaway with friends or simply a fresh reading spot, this is it. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Kalen Nguyen; Smoked salmon salad; Smoothie; Cajun chicken salad; and Lamb ragu

Easy Livin'

Inter Nos serves up warm, authentic Italian hospitality

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

A RED-HEADED JAZZ singer croons the lyrics of Gershwin's *Summertime* to an appreciative Friday night crowd, the melancholy strains of a violin adding to the song's languid yet uplifting melody. It's meant as a lullaby after all, and it's perfect for this sultry, hot season Saigon night, perfect for the chic, laid back vibe of **Inter Nos** (26 Le Van Mien, D2, open for dinner only starting at 5 pm, live jazz on Thursday and Friday nights).

"And the livin' is easy"

Open from the beginning of the year, Inter Nos has been living up to its Latin name, meaning "between us", nailing the balance between great food and great space. Set on a quiet street in Thao Dien, the huge space (seating capacity of 250) has been cleverly designed to be something for everyone. Stone, steel and glass give off an artist's loft feel complete with exposed ceilings and lighting provided by both old-timey incandescent bulbs and lovely floor candles, and floor-to-ceiling glass windows creatively section off

areas while maintaining the openness of the restaurant. On this particular Friday night, diners spill out into the leafy outdoor seating streetside as well as the open courtyard located right in the center of the restaurant, drawn in by its twinkling lights and illusion of privacy created by purposeful landscaping. A large VIP/function room doubles as a kids' corner where accidental friends colored, played and took their meals. While some couples gravitate to the intimate booth seating of the expansive back-lit bar area, most congregate in the main dining room with its eclectic arrangement of everything from tables for two to huge farm tables for twelve. The owners designed the free-flowing space to live up to its name, encouraging guests to feel free to mingle, from parents of children and their newfound playmates to acquaintances in Saigon's smallish expat community.

"Fish are jumping"

Crafted by Chef Marco Cortesi who's worked the kitchens of the Park Hyatt, New

World Saigon Hotel and La Bettola, Inter Nos' menu is squarely classic Italian, featuring dishes from the length of the country. His philosophy of cooking simple food with the freshest ingredients (cheese and pasta are among the ingredients made on-site) guides the menu.

We start with Parma ham with melon (VND249,000) from the north of Italy, paper thin slices of ham generously draped over large slices of melon, a delicious battle of sweet and salty, before moving on to an Italian tomato soup (VND180,000) served with aromatic croutons and a dash of cream — simple and comforting while allowing the powerful flavors of just a handful of ingredients to shine through. Chef Marco hails from Milan so the Milanese seafood risotto (VND285,000) turned out to be a solid choice, al dente yet creamy, featuring octopus, prawns and firm chunks of fish, finished off with a touch of tomato sauce.

For the mains, we move to Italy's south coast and its Mediterranean flavors. The Black fettuccine with spider lobster (VND375,000) from the day's menu is beautifully



constructed, tossed with olive oil and cherry tomatoes, and cooked from beginning to end in a single pan, ramping up its intensity by allowing the pasta to soak up the sweet juices of the meaty lobster.

The Oven-baked tilapia with fresh tomatoes, mixed olives and potato slices (VND395,000) is a wonderful combination of what Chef Marco calls “sunny ingredients.” Tilapia on its own is almost like tofu — it’s lean, neutral and decidedly “un-fishy” which allows it to take on the flavors of whatever it’s cooked with. Here, it’s the clean slate for the tomatoes and olives which does very much taste like a sunny day in the Med.

The Chocolate fondant (VND175,000) for dessert was definitely worth the wait, one of the best I’ve ever had. Served piping hot in a ramekin, once broken open, it oozed melted chocolate and earns high marks for being

rich without being overly sweet. Children, especially, will love the wow factor of the Inter Nos ice cream (VND95,000). Made on site, it’s wheeled out on a trolley with a production of cutting out slices from the towering blocks. The vanilla is creamy, but the chocolate with swirls of coffee is a show stopper.

“Your daddy’s rich and your ma is good-looking”

Inter Nos is owner Le Hoang Lan’s first foray into the restaurant business. Lan (whose brother Le Hoang is a famous film director), trained in medicine and also owns Medilas, a chain of skin care clinics, but she is perhaps best known for being the General Manager (Insurance and Operations) for Prudential Vietnam. In her 11 years there, she helped

set up the office and recruit a work force of 50,000 agents. Perhaps it’s her business background that has Lan surrounding herself by the best. Inter Nos boasts an Italian chef, a French sommelier to offer guidance on its extensive 200 plus item wine list, a French grill team who man the custom-built wood and charcoal oven and an excellent wait staff with stellar English.

Explaining why a finance / beauty expert would suddenly veer into the hospitality industry, Lan says: “We loved eating authentic Italian food in our summer trips to Italy, and I wanted to bring that passion back to Vietnam. I also found that I really enjoy meeting people and gathering with friends. I go to restaurants and see families quietly eating together so I wanted to create a place that was full of life.” Between us, Inter Nos does all those things exceedingly well. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Parma ham; Black fettuccine with spider lobster; Tilapia oven baked with fresh tomatoes, mixed olives, potato slices; Chocolate fondant; and Inter Nos ice cream





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

Bordeaux Icon

Château Palmer, a sought after wine

THE NAME PALMER was given to the estate by Charles Palmer, a Major General from the British army who bought the winery in 1814 and then invested a great deal of time and money in developing the estate. Between 1816 and 1831 he purchased more land and buildings and by the 1830s his property had expanded to 163 hectares, 82 of which were vineyards. Palmer's Claret, as it was called, quickly gained popularity in London clubs and even found favor with the future King George IV. However, Palmer was living the fast life irresponsibly and by 1843 he was forced to sell Palmer's Claret. The estate changed hands several times and in 1938 four families from Bordeaux came together and bought the property, which their descendants still own today. In 2004 Thomas Duroux, a young enologist was appointed head of Château Palmer, in charge of guiding the name

through a quiet revolution - continually raising the level of excellence, meeting market expectations, and innovating while respecting the past. For Château Palmer, this was more than a periodic revitalization; it was part of an ongoing process of renewal that started a long time ago and continues to this day.

Thanks to the Wine Warehouse, who distributes Château Palmer in Vietnam, I recently had the opportunity to enjoy a vertical tasting of five of these fantastic wines. The night started with Alter Ego, the young sibling of Château Palmer. Alter Ego was born with the 1998 vintage, a result of a new approach to selecting and blending, aiming to interpret the Château Palmer *terroir* differently without departing from the values that the label is known for: finesse and elegance, aromatic richness, harmony and length. Four vintages of Château Palmer (starting

in 1999) complemented the evening, all unique and charming, sharing everything that makes them famous: elegance, perfumed aromas, complexity and great length.

The wines owe their amazing fruit content to the high proportion of Merlot (47 percent), with only 47 percent of Cabernet Sauvignon and six percent Petit Verdot. When you smell these wines, you are in paradise. Every red and black fruit has entered the wine, giving it an amalgamation of wonderful aromas: blackberries, black currants, plums and raspberries, with fragrances of violets, roses, cedar wood and cigars. These aromas are matched by the complexity and roundness of the palate, delivering a great length of silkiness and velvetiness.

If you are looking for something special to reward your palate or as a present for a wine lover or close business partner, Château Palmer will definitely meet, if not exceed, your and everyone's expectations.

What I'm Drinking This Month: Costiers de Nîmes 2012 (Syrah, Carignan, Grenache). This is a fantastic wine. The nose delivers a mix of spices, cedar and pepper, which is replicated on the palate with great complexity and good length. I fell in love with this wine the moment I tried it, and each time I drink it I am still in love. It goes well with red meats, sausages and burgers, and is available at Wine Embassy. ■





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

Fruitful

Fruit + Alcohol = Delicious Sauces

MY TOUGH JOURNEY to becoming known as “the Vietnamese chef who cooks for the stars” started right here in Ho Chi Minh City, where as a boy I was exposed to the fine flavors of the old French cuisine as well as the abundance of local produce. Having been away for so long, it’s truly humbling to get back to my roots and witness the great changes that have taken place in this country – but the thing that amazes me most is that even after so many years, its culinary heritage has remained just as it was, with perhaps even more varieties of fresh food available now than there ever was when I was growing up here.

For me, the most awe-inspiring part of any Vietnamese market is the fruit section. After years of cooking and experimenting with fruit in the US – where I was most interested in its role in improving health – I’ve found rediscovering the boundless resources of exotic fruit here a study in constant amazement. Fruit is more than just nutritious, it’s a natural remedy for imbalances in the body, and consuming delicious fruit has a marked effect on both health and beauty. Forget Botox and plastic surgery – nurture your body from the inside, and the effects will show up clearly on your skin.

As a culinary artist, returning to Vietnam has allowed me to explore the surprising contrasts of taste that are available in this country, and I’ve discovered that applying some basic Western cooking techniques on concoctions of local fruit with alcohol results in some surprising sauces. Intrigued at the thought of hitting upon some as-yet undiscovered possibilities, I started shopping at Ben Thanh Market with all the tourists –

except sticking closely to the areas selling meats, seafood, fruit and vegetables. I would talk to the locals around me about the benefits of each fruit, and they would tell me that people in Vietnam generally only use it for juices and fruit platters. Using fruit to make sauces and soups was unheard of. So I realized that I had to try all these exotic fruits for myself before I made a fool out of myself in the kitchen.

Dragon fruit, soursops, mangosteens, golden apples, green mangoes, green starfruit... the research was wild, and it was hard to hold back. I ended up eating so much fruit that I was ill for several days. But over the course of my overindulgences, I’d learned so much about each fruit’s flavor and texture. I started to carefully pair each one with an alcohol to make for the most flavorful base, and then eventually developed them into sauces to match each protein.

My little French-Californian kitchen has now become irrevocably Vietnamese, with a fresh watermelon soup, a *vu sua* dressing (I dare say it’s Vietnam’s first Caesar Salad dressing), a passion fruit sauce for my *foie gras*, short ribs infused with guava, and a langoustine with soursop sauce. For those of you who enjoy cheffing (and eating) out there, I encourage you to join me on my quest for healthier eating in Vietnam – and to think outside the box while you’re staying here. We’re living in a tropical seaside country, so let’s push even the simple things to the edge – everything we need is just beyond the north gate at *Cho Ben Thanh*.

I’d like to propose a toast – in fact, let’s make it something even more exotic with a little kick for good measure. ■

WATERMELON SEAFOOD MARTINI

SERVES 4-6

Ingredients:

Watermelon	1
Lemongrass	2 stalks (rough cut)
Onion	50 gm (chopped)
Thai chili	2
Lime	1 tablespoon
Mint	20 gm
Cilantro	20 gm
Tom yum paste	1 tablespoon
Fish sauce	1 ½ teaspoons
White wine	½ cup
Chicken stock	2 cups

Skewer: Scallop or salmon
Olive or tomato
Shallots

Heat up the pot

1. Add oil
2. Add onion, lemongrass, chili, watermelon, tom yum paste, mint, cilantro
3. Add white wine and reduce by ½
4. Add chicken stock and cook for 20 minutes
5. Add lime, fish sauce to taste
6. Add ½ tsp of oil on pan, medium high heat
7. Season scallop or salmon with salt & pepper
8. Sear each side for 2 minutes
9. Skewer olive, cooked seafood, pearl onion, and baby tomatoes

Be sure to strain the soup before serving. Bon Appetit!

>>The List

Wine & Dine

BARS



Blanchy's Tash

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

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



Cavern Pub

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

9:30pm (buy 2 beers – get 1 free). Live music is from 9.30pm-1am.
19 Dong Du, D1
090 826 5691



Chu Bar

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

158 Dong Khoi, D1



Ice Blue Bar

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

54 Dong Khoi, D1



Last Call

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

59 Dong Du, D1
3823 3122



The Fan Club

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

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



Also Try...

Chill Skybar

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

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

Donkey Bar

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

Game On

Opened in July 2013, Game On is one of Saigon's biggest sports bar, serving breakfast, lunch and

dinner. The bar also has an extensive drinks menu including coffees, juices, beers, wines, vodkas, and more. Game On also boasts a function room for corporate meetings or private parties.

115 Ho Tung Mau, D1
6251 9898
gameonsaigon@gmail.com

t.le.
119 Bui Vien, D1

The Observatory

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

5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4
www.theobservatory-hcmc.com

onTop Bar

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

167 Hai Ba Trung, D3
3822 4866

Purple Jade

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

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

Red Bar

RED offers one of the longest Happy

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

70-72 Ng Duc Ke, D1
2229 7017

Saigon Saigon Bar

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

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

CAFÉS



Café RuNam

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

96 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
3825 8883
www.caferunam.com



Guanabana Smoothies

This Californian smoothie bar specializes in healthy all-natural smoothies using fresh fruits and vegetables from locally-sourced farms, with no condensed milk or artificial sweeteners added. Their smoothies can be enhanced with nutritional supplements such as green superfood, whey protein, and spirulina. Best sellers include their Special Blends and veggie smoothies. Fresh roasted coffee, hot panini's and pastries are also available, along with speedy Wi-Fi.

23 Ly Tu Trong, Q1
0909 824 830
www.guanabanasmoothies.com



Hatvala

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

44 Nguyen Hue, D1
3824 1534
8am - 11pm
hatvalavietnam@gmail.com
www.hatvala.com
[facebook.com/hatvala](https://www.facebook.com/hatvala)



Les Saigonnais

Les Saigonnais houses a boutique, cafe and artist space in a charming mix of colonial flavor and contemporary settings. Visitors can check out Designer Dieu Anh's chic modern fashion line for men and women, along with accessories. There is also a quaint balcony where you can enjoy an afternoon coffee while watching the world go by.

1st Floor, 77-79 Ly Tu Trong, D1
Facebook: "LES SAIGONNAIS"

LES SAIGONNAIS
 by dieuANH



The Library

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

Ground floor – InterContinental Asiana Saigon
7am - 12am
3520 9099
dine@icasianasaiagon.com



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Also Try...

AQ Coffee

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

32 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3
3829 8344

Caffe Bene

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

58 Dong Khoi, D1
3822 4012
caffebenevietnam.com

Ciao Café

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

74-76 Nguyen Hue, D1
3823 1130

L'Usine

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

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

CHINESE



Dragon Court

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

11-13 Lam Son Square, D1
3827 2566



Dynasty

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

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



Kabin

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

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



Li Bai

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

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



Ming Court

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

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



Ming Dynasty

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

23 Nguyen Khac Vien, D7

Also Try...

Hung Ky Mi Gia

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

20 Le Anh Xuan, D1
3822 2673

Ocean Palace

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

2 Le Duan Street, D1
3911 8822

Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

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

12 Duong 26, D6

3755 1577

www.7kyquan.com

Shang Palace

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

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

Yu Chu

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

First floor, InterContinental Asiana

Saigon (Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan)

3520 9099

www.intercontinental.com/saigon



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

SPANISH



La Habana

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



Olé

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



Pacharan

Ho Chi Minh City's original Spanish restaurant, Pacharan occupies a high profile corner spot on Hai Ba Trung. Spread over four floors, it offers a casual bar, two floors of dining (one which becomes a destination for live Spanish music late at night) and a rooftop terrace. Features an extensive menu of tapas, main courses, sangria and wines.
97 Hai Ba Trung Street, D1
090 399 25 39



Tapas Saigon

Tasty tapas at Vietnamese prices not far from the center of District 1. Fresh ingredients, broad menu with food prepared by a Spanish chef. Best washed down with authentic house sangria.
53/26B Tran Khanh Du, D1
090 930 0803



VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill

VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill only uses the freshest ingredients, many imported from Spain, for the most authentic tapas experience in Saigon, starting from under VND50,000/plate. Cool décor, indoors and outdoors eating areas, a well stocked bar, and great wines from VND60,000/glass (sangria just VND130,000 per HALF liter). Delivery available.
90 Cao Trieu Phat, Phu My Hung, D7, HCMC
08 5410 6721
Facebook: "VIVATapasBar.PMH"



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164 Bui Vien, District 1

49D Xa Lo Hanoi, District 2

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North & South Indian food

Halal & vegetarian dishes

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"Baba brings India to Vietnam"

FRENCH



Augustin

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

10D Nguyen Thiep, D1
www.augustinrestaurant.com



La Creperie

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

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



La Fourchette

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

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



Le Bacoulos

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

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



Le Terroir

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 on the ground floor.

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1
www.tycozsaigon.com

Also Try...

L'essentiel

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

98 Ho Tung Mau, D1
0948 415 646

La Cuisine

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

48 Le Thanh Ton
2229 8882

La Nicoise

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

56 Ngo Duc Ke, D1
3821 3056

La Villa

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

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

Le Bouchon de Saigon

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

40 Thai Van Lung, D1
www.lebouchondesaigon.com

Trois Gourmands

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

18 Tong Huu Dinh, D2
3744 4585



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

INDIAN



Ashoka

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

Ashoka I

17/10 Le Thanh Ton, D1

08 3823 1372

Ashoka II

33 Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2

08 3744 4144



Baba's Kitchen

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

Always friendly.

164 Bui Vien, D1

49D Xa Lo Hanoi, D2

3838 6661



Bollywood

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

2213 1481 | 2245 0096 | 093 806 9433

Hotline: 0906357442 (English)

bollywoodvietnam@gmail.com

Facebook: bollywoodvietnamindiancuisine



Ganesh

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

38 Hai Ba Trung, D1

8223 0173

www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com



Saigon Indian

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

1st Floor, 73 Mac Thi Buoi, D1



Also Try...

Bombay Indian Restaurant

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

250 Bui Vien, D1,

9am - 10.30pm

Curry Leaf

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

62 Hung Gia 5, D7

curryleafvietnam.com

The Punjabi

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

40/3 Bui Vien, D1

3508 3777

ITALIAN



Ciao Bella 🍷 Or's Pick

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

11 Dong Du, D1
3822 3329
tonyfox56@hotmail.com
www.saiгонrestaurantgroup.com/ciao

Ciao Bella



Inter Nos [R]

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

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



La Bettola [R]

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

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



La Cucina [R]

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

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



La Hostaria

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

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



LovEat [R]

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

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



Also Try...

Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1
3824 4286

Opera

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

2 Lam Son Square, D1

Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1
3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

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

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

Pomodoro

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

79 Hai Ba Trung
3823 8998



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

JAPANESE



Achaya Café

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

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



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



Ebisu

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

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



Gyumaru

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

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



Ichiban Sushi

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

204 Le Lai, D1
www.ichibansushi.vn



Monde

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

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



Also Try...



K Cafe

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

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

Chisana Nishi

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

River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
6683 5308

Osaka Ramen

This sleek, open-kitchen contemporary eatery serves up Japanese noodles starting from VND78,000. There are also

set menus, individual dishes and a range of smaller, appetizing sides.

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

Robata Dining An

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

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

Sushi Dining Aoi

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

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

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

Yoshino

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

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

KOREAN



Galbi Brothers

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

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



Kang Nam Ga

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

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



Lee Cho

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

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7
5410 1086



Seoul House

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

33 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
3829 4297



Won's Cuisine

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

49 Mac Thi Buoi
3820 4085



THAI



Baan Thai

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

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

Koh Thai

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

Kumho Linh, Hai Ba Trung, D1
3823 4423

Lac Thai

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

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

71/2 Mac Thi Buoi St. D1
3823 7506

Tuk Tuk Thai Bistro

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

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

The Racha Room

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

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



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

STEAKHOUSE



Au Lac Do Brazil

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

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



El Gaucho

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

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



Indaba

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

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



New York Steakhouse

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

25-27 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, D1



Samba Brazilian Steakhouse

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

10C Thai Van Lung, D1
3822 0079



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VIETNAMESE



Com Nieu

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

59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3
3932 6363
comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com
comnieusaigon.com.vn



Frangipani Hoa Su

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

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



Hoa Tuc

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

74/7 Hai Ba Trung, D1
3825 1676



Papaya

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

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



Quan Bui

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

17a Ngo Van Nam, D1
3829 1515



Quan Na - Vegishouse

A Vietnamese vegetarian and vegan restaurant that uses the freshest ingredients to create dishes such as fresh spring rolls, sticky rice, curry specialties and coconut-based desserts. Decor is swathed in dark mahogany wood and red curtains.

796/7 Truong Sa, Ward 14, D3
Opening time: 10:30am-2pm; 5pm-9pm
9526 2958
Facebook: quan.na.vegishouse

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 Hanoi's Cha Ca salads stir-fried with fish and spring onion. Delicious.

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Cuc Gach Quan

Deservedly one of the highest ranking Vietnamese restaurants in Saigon on

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

10 Dang Tat, D1
3848 0144

Highway 4

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

101 Vo Van Tan, D3
www.highway4.com

Hum

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

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

May

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

3/5 Hoang Sa
3910 1277

Temple Club

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

29-31 Ton That Thiep, D1
3829 9244
templeclub.com.vn

Nha Hang Ngon

Possibly the best-known Vietnamese restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Hang Ngon serves up hundreds of traditional local dishes in a classy

French-style mansion.

160 Pasteur, D1
3827 7131
www.quananngon.com.vn
8am - 10pm

Thanh Nien

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

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

Propaganda Bistro

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

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

INTERNATIONAL



Boathouse

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

40 Lily Road, An Phu Superior Compound, D2
3744 6790

www.boathouse.com.vn



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19 -21 Dong Khoi, D1 / 8am - 1am
6291 3686 / 0917 111 921

may.restaurant19@gmail.com

Facebook: "may.restaurant.bar"



Portofino

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

15 Dong Du, D1



Saffron

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

51 Hai Ba Trung, D1
382 48358



Tnt BBQ

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

0166 666 7858

11am - 10pm

facebook.com/tntbbqvietnam



Zombie BBQ

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

4 Thao Dien, D2
6685 3756 / 09 1851 0139
4pm - 11pm

Facebook: [ZombieBarbequesaigon](https://facebook.com/ZombieBarbequesaigon)



Also Try...

Boomarang Bistro

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

107 Ton Dat Tien, D7
3841 3883

www.boomarang.com.vn

Chit Chat

Daily menu change for their breakfast and dinner buffets, served in a relaxing atmosphere with eight live cooking stations with over 60 varieties of domestic and international dishes. A meeting place to enjoy a cup of coffee from selected premium blends and delicious homemade pastries and cakes.

Hotel Equatorial

242 Tran Binh Trong, D5
3839 7777

info@hcm.equatorial.com
www.equatorial.com

Corso Steakhouse & Bar

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

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

Deutsches Eck / German Corner

The restaurant is fast becoming known for its sausage, beers, and their Schweins Haxe or pork knuckles (served with white cabbage and mashed potatoes). A number of German beers to select from including König Pilsener, Bitburger, Koestritzer Black Beer, Benediktiner Weisse, HB-Hofbrau Weisse, Schwarzbrau Exquisit, and Schwarzbrau Weisse. A001 Nguyen Van Linh St., Phu My Hung, D7
54106695

Hog's Breath

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

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

Khoi Thom

Khoi Thom has evolved into an authentic Mexican-style cantina serving home-style dishes, many from the Mexican chef's family. With bright colors, a large breezy outdoor deck with an open bar and a long street frontage, Khoi Thom has earned respect for its adventurous hues and style since opening.

29 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3
www.khoithom.com

La Fenetre Soleil

Literally 'window to the sun', LFS showcases a fusion of old-world fittings (exposed bricks, antique furniture and chandeliers) with new-

world elements (fur cushions, mosaic tiles and glass tables). Serves a range of cocktails, imported beer, coffee and smoothies together with a Japanese-Vietnamese fusion menu.

4 Ly Tu Trong, D1

Market 39

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

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

Scott & Binh's

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

15-17 Cao Trieu Phat, D7

Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY JIMMY VAN DER KLOET





Cusco Cathedral
Peru

How Bizarre

The weird and wacky side of Thailand

TEXT AND IMAGES BY CHRIS BACKE

COMING TO THAILAND means different things to different people. For some, it's an opportunity to delve deep into Bangkok's emerging food scene. For others, it's a chance to break away from the crowds and hit up some of southern Thailand's still gorgeous beaches. For my wife and I, our last two years in Thailand have been filled with the offbeat and bizarre destinations. These are our five favorites amongst a 100 plus destinations explored - many of which require your own wheels or a negotiated *tuk tuk* ride.

Black House

Home to the most skulls and horns in northern Thailand

About three hours northeast of the better-known Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai features two must-see destinations: the popular 'White Temple' replete with sparkles, and the Black House, a collection of skulls and horns worked into artistic forms. There's little question to the skulls' authenticity, and it almost feels like a collection somehow smuggled out of the *Game of Thrones* props department.

Called *Baan Dam* in Thai, it's a destination that has managed to go from a private artist's house to a can't-miss stop in northern Thailand. First used as Thawan Duchanee's private home, it became a private museum in 1986 and was later opened to the public. Beyond the skulls and bones, meander the grounds and take in a building that looks like a UFO from one angle and a dolphin's open mouth from another.

While there's no guided tour available, some staff are around to ensure tourists don't get into private buildings. The souvenir shop by the parking lot is worth a short visit.

IF YOU GO:

From Chiang Rai's Central Plaza or the Princess Mother's Garden, head north on route 1 (Phaholyothin Road). After crossing the Kok River (just north of the Princess Mother's Garden), go 8.4 kilometers - you're looking for a brown wooden sign and a brown wooden awning on the left. This will have three lines of Thai text and the number 13 (for Moo 13, the side street number). Take the left just before the sign, then go about 450 meters - you're looking for the first left turn that isn't someone's driveway. Next, go 300 meters - you'll see some of the sights on the left and a parking lot on the right.

GPS: 19.992088, 99.860255

Puek Tian Beach

A naked ascetic, a dragon ridden like a horse, and a six-meter she-demon in the sea

Out of a Thai fairy tale rise these three characters. The six-meter tall she-demon is Pee Seua Samut, the giant that turned into a woman and bore a child with Aphai Mani, a flute-playing prince. The man to thank is Phra Sunthorn Vohara (1786-1855), Thailand's most famous poet. His famous epic poem, *Phra Aphai Mani* (Prince Aphai Mani) runs 30,000 lines long. It follows Prince Aphai Mani, who plays a magic flute that causes people to sleep and eventually die. Aphai was later kidnapped by a giant that transformed himself into a beautiful girl...



Black House



Puek Tian Beach

Siriraj Medical Museum

then the plot gets weird and long-winded.

The statues date back to 1982, a few years before UNESCO honored him as a great poet on the 200th anniversary of his birthday. Today, a giant turtle sits on the beach; ready to be climbed, while the she-demon is somewhat further out - best photographed from the shore. Look also for a statue of the author, who looks as though he was sitting on something sharp as he was being sculpted, and a family of mermaids. Make a daytrip of it from Hua Hin by visiting the peaceful Cha-am beach (20 kilometers north of Hua Hin) and Puek Tian beach (46 kilometers north of Hua Hin).

IF YOU GO:

From the Cha-am beach area in south-central Thailand, head north on route 4033 for about 20 kilometers. Follow the signs to Hat Puek Tian. From Hua Hin's beach area, head north on route 4 (which turns into route 4033) for about 46 kilometers.

GPS: 12.946533, 100.034058

Siriraj Medical Museum

Some awesome gruesomeness

Few trips to Bangkok are truly complete

without a requisite stop here. Sometimes called the Museum of Death, what's called the Siriraj Medical Museum is actually the amalgamation of six permanent exhibitions. The exhibitions are organized into several rooms across a single floor, which often includes a temporary exhibition.

After the unfortunate cases have passed from the land of the living, the more unusual cases get dissected and preserved for their eventual museum exhibition. Look for the slices from different hearts - more than a few of the exhibitions serve as warnings to turn your unhealthy habits around. Seeing an alcoholic's liver, or what happens to your heart when you have high cholesterol might just do the trick. While they're not always explained, it becomes a game to figure out what body part it is and what the person might have died from.

The most famous resident here is Si Ouey Sae Urng. Convicted and executed for cannibalizing and eating children during the 1950s, his withered mummified remains are perhaps the most gruesome thing here. The story's scarier than what you see - especially when there are a lot of other seriously odd things around. While here, ask around

for Congdon's Anatomical Museum. First established in 1947, it's an old-school look at how specimens were preserved for further study.

IF YOU GO:

Jump on one of the ferries that traverses the Chao Phraya River in western Bangkok. The easiest way to arrive is to get to the Saphan Taksin BTS station - it's a short walk from subway to ferry. Get off at Wang Lang pier, and then walk west on Thanon Wang Lang (away from the river) for about 250 meters. Turn right, then walk about 300 meters and look for the Adulyadejvikrom Building on your right.

GPS: 13.758956, 100.485031

Swiss sheep farm

Complete with country music and a Hulk
This kid-friendly sheep farm is a bit of a journey, but upon arrival the journey is soon forgotten. Admission comes with a complimentary handful of grass to feed the sheep, but some milk is available as well. The sheep may be the first tourist attraction, but there are also dozens of opportunities for selfies amongst the facades and backdrops.

It has the look and feel of a place thrown together for the local *hi-sos*, yet works nicely for the foreign tourists that venture to these parts.

Other sheep farms in Thailand are worthy visits as well: the Hug You Sheep Farm (Lampang, northern Thailand), the Dairy Hut Sheep Farm (Phang Nga, southern Thailand), and the Chokchai farm (a daytrip from Bangkok). This 'Swiss' sheep farm takes the cake for being the weirdest of them, however - the larger-than-life Hulk made of mechanical parts is but one visible piece. Some graffiti decorating a facade and a mechanical bull help to complete the ensemble of oddities.

IF YOU GO:

Rent a scooter or car in Cha-am, then make your way northwest on route 4 until you see the signs for Prachuap Khiri Khan. Get in the left lane and follow the sharp curve around the left to eventually head north on the expressway. Go about 700 meters and you'll see the Swiss Sheep Farm on the right - take the next U-turn and double back to it.

GPS: 8.421917, 98.532750



Swiss Sheep Farm

Wat Mae Kaet Noi

The creepiest, scariest Buddhist hell temple around

There's little sign of what's to come from the outside - in fact, it's far too easy to pass it and assume there's nothing unusual about the place. Walk by some bowling chairs cast off from the Western world while approaching the inner circle of hell - each person suffering from the fate of their karma being worked out in *naraka*, a sort of purgatory or hell.

Hell temples, by the way, are Thailand's truly unseen gems - dozens are scattered throughout the country, but all aim to show Buddhists what awaits them in the afterlife. Failing to make merit or not heeding to Buddhism's precepts all result in punishments, often graphically portrayed with gallons of red paint. Here (and elsewhere), punishments are shown to fit the crimes - a thief gets his hands cut off, an alcoholic is forced to drink boiling oil, and the unfaithful are forced to climb a spiky tree while nude. Some temples (like this one) go beyond concrete statues - insert a 10 baht coin into the metal box and watch the scene come to life. They're not for kids or the squeamish, but for anyone seeking an otherworldly scare, it's worth the trip.

IF YOU GO:

From the northern part of the Chiang Mai-Lampang super highway, head north onto route 1001. This is about 800 meters from where you cross the Ping River. Once on 1001, go 9.3 kilometers to an intersection (Maejo University is across the street). Take the sharp right, go 3.3 kilometers, and look left for the temple.

GPS: 18.877943, 99.03681

BIO: Chris Backe is the author of *Thailand: a One Weird Globe* guide, a guidebook to over 100 of Thailand's bizarre and off-the-path destinations. It's available on Amazon as a print and e-book, or as a PDF for any device. He blogs about the world's weirder destinations at www.oneweirdglobe.com. ■



Wat Mae Kaet Noi

A Budding Friendship

The irresistible charms of the capital



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIDGET MARCH

I HAVE TRAVELED to Hanoi more often than usual this year and I feel the city is becoming a friend to me. I used to believe that Hanoi and I were destined to be forever strangers but I confess I am warming to its charms.

My first visit in 2011 was during my first trip to Vietnam. I was overwhelmed by the seeming chaos of narrow streets, traffic, unwalkable pavements and the cultural gap that loomed between this inexperienced

European and the ancient mysteries of this exotic, enigmatic city. I felt very out of place.

Last summer, I had occasion to spend two short periods in Hanoi to collect materials, images and sketches for a future project that involved drawing ten ornamental gates that form entrances to villages, the ancient citadel and some of the inner city neighborhoods. This was a fascinating journey of discovery. To



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

the untrained eye, the difference between village gates and temple gates is not readily apparent but I soon learned that village gates are seldom decorated with any of the four sacred creatures of Vietnam: the dragon, tortoise, unicorn and phoenix. Village gates are plainer and, sometimes, they will even have the village name on the pediment. The city and old citadel gates are fortified and have gorgeous Chinese lines and proportions with their tapering walls and pagoda-style pavilions on top.

But, to date, my favorite gate is one of the simplest. The gate to Yen Phu Village is just off Yen Phu Street on the southwestern shore of beautiful West Lake. Yen Phu is a bustling, trading street where you could probably buy almost anything imaginable. Shaded by tropical trees and bougainvillea, it is typical of the vibrant neighborhoods around Hanoi. I passed through the village gate and dropped down a winding street towards the ancient pagoda sitting on a land bridge connecting the island to the shore.

Here, in Yen Phu, they are known for breeding brightly colored ornamental fish. You can take your pick from the tanks of the dealers dotted along the perimeter road. The village is also known for its 1,000-year-old tradition of manufacturing incense sticks that is said to have come from China. It was a gorgeous day when I went in hope of seeing thousands of colored sticks drying on the shore in the sunshine. On this occasion, however, I was unlucky so I consoled myself by taking a table at one of the pretty waterside cafes to rest in the quiet, dappled shade of some cherry trees to enjoy the atmosphere that had a distinctly French flavor.

This quiet little enclave, hidden away behind the towering Hanoi Club is such a delightful retreat from the noise of Hanoi and the perfect place for an artist to be inspired by the tranquil lake, the pretty houses, an ancient pagoda and a few fishermen. So, I guess it's not necessarily the gate's style, nor its plain lines that makes it my favorite, but maybe the romantic and peaceful neighborhood beyond that makes it special to me. ■

Fusion Suites Da Nang Beach

Bringing a new beach lifestyle to the central coast



SITUATED ON A prime beach location on the central coast of Vietnam, Fusion Suites Da Nang Beach is a significant modern establishment on Da Nang boulevard. Based on the Fusion philosophy of providing ultimate relaxation with a heart-based hospitality approach, Fusion Suites Da Nang Beach brings a new beach lifestyle with trendsetting holistic concepts to the hospitality industry.

Fusion Suites Da Nang Beach's wellness approach encourages healthy living, and brings guests one daily in-room designer foot reflexology that is included in the rate.

The all-inclusive reflexology is based on programmes developed from the principles of Fusion reflexology science, and uses special custom-formulated massage balms for ailment specific therapy. Wellness also includes aerial yoga, meditation, customized fitness, nutritional programmes, wellness apps support and even programmes for kids.

At Fusion Suites Da Nang Beach, a range of 123 suites and 6 penthouses provide a home away from home experience, perfect for young families, couples, or groups of friends. Designed for the modern traveller, Fusion Suites Da Nang Beach provides all the in-room facilities required for your next beach holiday. Using fresh pale green and white tones with wood, this 23-storey hotel captures gorgeous ocean views through its expansive windows that also offer plenty of natural light.

Chic Studios are intimate accommodations for couples or solo travellers. The 2-bedroom Ocean Suites and Signature Fusion Suites have a second bedroom with a functional single-over-double bunk bed, making them the ideal choice for small families with 2 children. The Penthouses, Duplex Penthouses and Grand Penthouse cater for friends or families. These have a master bedroom and a twin bedroom. For comfortable boutique living, suites and penthouses have integrated living areas and well-equipped kitchenettes with French Press coffee maker, full-sized fridge, induction hob, microwave, and a NutriBullet extractor (accompanied with fresh fruit basket) for making supercharged smoothies. Other aspects include complimentary Wi-Fi, bluetooth speakers, cable TV and bathroom amenities.

Dining options at Fusion Suites Da Nang Beach includes Fresh, the all-day cafe with a fun grab-and-go service. Here you can enjoy natural Fusion style cuisine using fresh ingredients. Fun and relaxation is ultimate at the Pool Lounge. It's a great socializing spot to enjoy the coolest music while sipping creative mixes. Enjoy chic elegance at Zen, the rooftop lounge exclusive to hotel guests, where sundown cocktails and fine dining is served with extravagant views.

FUSION SUITES DA NANG BEACH
An Cu 5 Residential Area, Vo Nguyen Giap Street, Man Thai Ward, Son Tra District, Da Nang

0511 3 919 777

reservations@fusionsuitesdanangbeach.com
www.fusionsuitesdanangbeach.com





FROM TOP: Bamboo Hero and Tai Chi



Alma Courtyard Hoi An

My Chi Spa Journey Wins 2015 Spa Award
from Harper's Bazaar Singapore

WHAT AN ACHIEVEMENT for ALMA COURTYARD HOI AN! My Chi Spa Journey, Fable of the Hundred Knot Tree, won the Harper's Bazaar Singapore Spa Awards 2015 for Holistic Health just four months after opening.

Fable of the Hundred Knot Tree is Journey II of the 3 distinctive Spa Journeys offered at My Chi Spa. Each holistic journey is a unique blend of easy wellness with a signature massage ritual that draws inspiration from ancient remedies and local legends, to provide different benefits. The signature ritual in Fable of the Hundred Knot Tree journey is inspired by a story of a peasant who manifests a

hundred-knot bamboo tree with help from a powerful ancient herbalist in order to marry a wealthy landowner's daughter. The Bamboo Hero ritual combines shiatsu pressure point with a bamboo-roll technique. It is enhanced with a deep penetrating balm based on an age-old recipe pre-dating Tiger Balm, customized exclusively for this treatment.

My Chi Spa Journeys offer spa enthusiasts a completely new and exciting experience. The Hundred Knot Tree re-interprets charming ancient Hoi An and old Vietnam through a mythical wellness concept. It incorporates shiatsu, reflecting the historical impact the Japanese had in the region,

making this journey an authentic Hoi An spa experience that visitors should not miss.

At ALMA COURTYARD HOI AN, wellness is a part of everyday living, hence one daily 90-minute Spa Journey is already included in the room rate. Oils and balms used for each journey are customized formulations that complement and enhance the specific benefits of each journey. Using natural local ingredients and traditional well-being recipes, the oils and balms themselves are truly unique products.

Each journey includes a gentle tai chi session or quiet meditation, steam or sauna, a 50-minute signature massage ritual, and ends with relaxation in the Silent Sanctuary. Where there is also a lovely indoor hot pool. Non-resort guests can also discover the signature rituals and other treatments that are available in the My Chi Day Spa menu, including facials, manicure and pedicure. Wellness offerings include Kundalini yoga and tai chi, based on a scheduled timetable.

My Chi Spa, impressive with its 40 treatment rooms, is supported by intuitive therapists that are professionally trained in-house, and by specialized consultants for specific added skills (yogis, shiatsu and reiki masters). In support of the local industry, spa products are all locally manufactured using natural ingredients.

As one of Alma Courtyard's guests remarked, *"The journey at the spa is definitely a gorgeous experience. I am convinced clients will be amazed by having such journey in their room package."*

ALMA COURTYARD HOI AN
326 Ly Thuong Kiet Street, Ward Tan An, Hoi An City, Quang Nam Province
0510 3666 888
reservation@almacourtyardhoian.com
www.almacourtyardhoian.com ■



Alma Courtyard Hoi An is a tranquil resort offering a lifestyle experience - a journey of self-discovery. Guests immerse themselves in Hoi An charm, enjoy daily 90-minute spa journey (included in the room rate), and receive caring local hospitality. All 145 rooms are set around a stunning courtyard, relaxing pools and tropical gardens.



Alma Oasis Long Hai

An oasis only 90 minutes away from Saigon

ALMA OASIS LONG HAI is destined to be the perfect idyllic resort for anyone wishing to spend a peaceful beach holiday whilst being surrounded by lush greenery and a gorgeous hilltop panoramic view. Just 90 minutes away from Ho Chi Minh City, its accessibility makes it even more inviting. With a low-density built-up area and only low rise structures, you'll find an open freshness at ALMA OASIS LONG HAI that is uplifting and truly relaxing.

Double or twin rooms, quaintly housed in bungalows scattered over the undulating hill slopes, offer a lovely range of accommodation. Rooms are spacious, with patios or balconies for outdoor lounging with garden and ocean views. The Ocean Family Pavilions are ideal for families with 2 young children, as a twin room is cleverly integrated into the main double room. Rooms are well-appointed

with modern décor and fresh colour schemes that bring the calm ocean feeling indoors. Bathrooms are ensembles, most with seductive outdoor bathtubs. Espresso machines, bluetooth speakers, comfy beds with fluffy pillows and ambient adjustable lighting are just part of what makes a stay at ALMA OASIS LONG HAI such a wonderful treat.

For luxurious living, there are the 5 villas located on a more secluded part of the hilltop. Each villa has a private swimming pool set in a garden-surrounded courtyard, with a delightful outdoor lounge area, and absolutely stunning views. Choose either 2-bedroom or 3-bedroom villas, all with ensuite bathrooms, walk-in showers and outdoor bathtubs. Separate living-dining areas, and well-equipped kitchenettes provide additional comfort. The largest villa has 4 bedrooms and is right on the beachfront – step out of

your pool into the ocean! Not quite, but the Beachfront Pool Villa is on a prime spot.

Whether rooms or villas, ALMA OASIS LONG HAI with its beautiful gardens and pathways that lead you down to quiet white sandy beaches is an idyllic must-stay resort. Historically a site for the private residence of Bao Dai, Vietnam's last emperor, ALMA OASIS LONG HAI is all about discovering yourself in a charming local culture of simplicity, with heartwarming people sharing local hospitality and quaint journeys to traditional fishing villages and surrounding markets.

ALMA OASIS LONG HAI
Tinh Lo 44A Long Hai, Long Dien, Ba Ria -
Vung Tau
064 366 2222
reservations@almaoasislonghai.com
www.almaoasislonghai.com





Peru

IMAGES BY JIMMY VAN DER KLOET



TOP: 15th-century Inca site
Machu Picchu is located
2,430 metres above sea level

BOTTOM: *no caption*







LEFT: Stairs leading to the Temples in the upper town of Machu Picchu

TOP: Beachside town Huanchaco approved as a World Surfing Reserve in 2012

BOTTOM: Lake Titicaca, located in the Andes on the border of Peru and Bolivia



Urban Oasis

Life is simpler in Thanh Da

SET ON MORE than 500 hectares, Thanh Da is actually an island in Binh Thanh District to the northeast of the city, with Thu Duc across the river to the north and Thao Dien to the south.

Currently connected to the rest of the city by a singular, newly constructed bridge, the island, sometimes called the “lung of the city” is an anomaly. The four lane road lined with the usual restaurants (including duck rice porridge for which Thanh Da is known), beauty salons and the one lonely KFC, quickly turns into two narrow lanes where shops are just as likely to sell simple bamboo poles, hooks and floats as they are more traditional household goods. Other than the apartment blocks to either side as you cross over into Thanh Da, most of the houses are only one or two-story, in contrast to the high-rises visible on the other side of the river that hugs three sides of the island.

Maps usually show the one main road, Binh Quoi, but only a small fraction of the labyrinthine unnamed paths that make up the interior of the island, some concreted to about the size of a large sidewalk, where

traffic jams are most likely caused by pigs and ducks, but most still dirt paths leading to simple dwellings surrounded by lush green fields. To the uninitiated, it’s mind bending to find rice paddies and fish ponds just five miles from the city center.

It is in fact this surreal bilocation that brings the locals to Thanh Da. There is a small Cao Dai temple about halfway down the main road that has served the area’s faithful for more than 40 years. Men and women take separate winding staircases up to see the colorful room dedicated to God the Father, or pay homage to the Mother Buddha in an adjoining building. Visitors are welcome to any of the four daily services, but especially on the first of January, July and October, when a vegetarian feast is prepared and up to 200 local devotees show up.

But the most obvious comparisons are drawn between Thanh Da and the Mekong Delta. Besides carpets of rice fields that checker the island, many houses maintain ponds stocked with fish for home use or for pleasure fishing. Some of the canals are even wide enough to accommodate large

boats. Area businesses have been quick to jump on the eco bandwagon, many with variations of *nha la* (grass hut) in their names. The real beauty of Thanh Da lies off the main road and in the many unmarked paths towards the island’s interior.

It shouldn’t come as a surprise that fishing is Thanh Da’s most popular pastime. On both sides of the main road, man-made ponds and pools beckon anglers looking to catch butterfly, tilapia and carp. Shrimp fishing in oxygenated one-meter deep pools, surrounded by plastic chairs with poles at the ready, is also popular. Customers are allowed to keep whatever they catch, either to be brought home or cooked to order on site. Deeper into the island are larger fishing ponds in more natural surrounds. One of the biggest is A Xay, four acres of pond ringed by thatched huts and hammocks.

Discover a new side of Ho Chi Minh City, a hidden corner where very few tourists go. Enjoy a half-day tour cycling around Thanh Da Island and try some tasty local dishes. The flat road makes this ride accessible to everybody. Riding in Thanh Da is a real pleasure as traffic is smooth and roads are lovely, bordered with small local houses and big shady trees. A perfect tour mixing cycling, local discoveries and food tasting can be booked through Exo Travel by visiting:

Exo Travel Agency

41 Thao Dien, D2

3519 4111

www.exotravel.com/travel/vietnam/daytrips/thanh-da-island-biking-tour ■

>>The List Travel



Ana Mandara Villas Dalat

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

www.anamandara-resort.com



BEST WESTERN PREMIER Havana Nha Trang Hotel

Situated in the center of Nha Trang, the biggest five star hotel in Vietnam – Best Western Premier Havana Nha Trang will leave you an unforgettable experience. Spacious suites with breathtaking ocean-view, massive outdoor pool 3-faced to the sea, underground tunnel connecting to the beach from the hotel, Sky Bar on the roof of the City and more. Come and enjoy your time!

38 Tran Phu Street, Loc Tho, Nha Trang
T: (058) 388 9999 / Fax: (058) 388 9900
www.havanahotel.vn
info@havanahotel.vn



Bhaya Cruises

Bhaya combines oriental style with contemporary luxury to create an unforgettable experience cruising Halong Bay. The Bhaya fleet (Bhaya Classic, Legend Halong and The Au Co) offers a total of 178 luxury cabins and suites accommodating more than 400 passengers for Ha Long Bay cruises or hosted events (weddings, corporate retreats, incentives, meetings, and more).

www.bhayacruises.com
093 344 6542



Fusion Maia Danang

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

maidanang.fusion-resorts.com



InterContinental Nha Trang

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

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



Novela Muine Resort & Spa

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

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



Princess d'Annam Phan Thiet

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

www.princessannam.com



Pullman Danang Beach Resort

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

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



The Island Lodge

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

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



Century Riverside Hue Hotel

An international four-star luxury hotel in the heart of Hue

TEXT AND IMAGES BY CENTURY RIVERSIDE HUE

AN INTERNATIONAL FOUR-STAR luxury hotel in the heart of Hue, the hotel features a harmonious blend of colonial elegance and traditional architecture, creating a relaxing vibe for visitors. The resort-like hotel features 135 deluxe rooms and suites, surrounded by flower gardens and lawns, next to the historic Truong Tien Bridge. There are different categories of rooms such as Deluxe River View facing the Perfume River, Deluxe Garden View with all the conveniences and amenities, and Century Suites Riverview that's high class and elegant. All the rooms are designed with all modern conveniences such as broadband

WIFI, cable TV, mini bar, safety box and more.

Restaurants& Bars

The riverfront Terrace restaurant holds 150 guests with views of the Perfume River. Diners can enjoy traditional Hue food, international dishes, and a buffet breakfast. Riverside restaurant holds 350 guests, surrounded by gardens, next to the swimming pool. The Imperial restaurant can hold 40 guests. The restaurant is sophisticatedly designed in Hue's Royal Court architecture, serving royal dishes that are unique to Hue's gastronomy. Full

House restaurant accommodates up to 800 guests.

Meeting Venues

Function rooms include conference halls with modern equipments linked together, which consists of a New Century Service Center for Holding Events and 5 conference halls inside the hotel with 1 large room, 1 medium room and 3 rooms for break-out sessions. New Century Service Center has just been built inside the yard. With its modern equipments, the Center is an ideal place to hold conferences for up to 800 participants. The Pagoda Conference room is the second largest room, together with 3 smaller conference rooms (the Imperial, the Citadel, and the VIP 3 room).

Entertainments

The Spa has 10 separate rooms that offer massages, a Jacuzzi, and a sauna with relaxing treatments, new equipments and professional therapists. Spa services will provide our guests relaxation and energy to start the day. The large outdoor tennis court is free for in-house guests. The swimming pool is by the river bank where guests can enjoy sunshine and relax in a quiet and peaceful space.

For further info, please contact Century Riverside Hue's Sales & Marketing Dept: 49 Le Loi Street, Hue
Tel: (054) 3 8 23390 / 3 8 23391
res@centuryriversidehue.com
www.centuryriversidehue.com ■



>>The List

Health & Beauty

DENTAL



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08 3925 7526
08 3925 7527
nhahoadhung@gmail.com
www.drhung01.com



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125 Le Thi Rieng, D1

Elite Dental Group

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

57A Tran Quoc Thao, D3

European Dental Clinic

Offering state of the art technology, competitive pricing,

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

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

German International Dentistry

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

1489 Nguyen Van Linh, D7

Saigon Smile

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

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cleaning, and orthodontic services. Japanese equipment and techniques.

173 Ton Dat Tien, D7

Starlight Dental Clinic

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2 Bis Cong Truong Quoc Te, D3

Westcoast International Dental Clinic

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

27 Nguyen Trung Truc, D1
3825 748

SPA



Maison Miko Boutique Salon

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Garden Plaza 2 Complex
8 Ton Dat Tien, D7
5412 4773



Sweet Spa

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As well as sport injury therapies. After hours of meetings or full days of working, treat yourself to a relaxing massage or soothing reflexotherapy.
204B / 12 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2
www.sweetspa.vn



Moc Hung Spa

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

9C Ton Duc Thang, D1
3911 7118



Villa Aesthetica Cosmedi Spa & Laser Center

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



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Facebook: Cherir.hcm



Orient Skincare & Laser Center

Founded in 2005, Orient is currently known as the leading center in laser treatment in Ho Chi Minh city. The center offers non-surgery aesthetic treatments by the certified dermatologists as well as pampering services for any type of problem skin. A variety of treatments includes: wrinkle removal, acne & scar treatment, rejuvenation & pigment augmenting treatment, slimming treatments, permanent hair removal and massage therapy.

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



Beauty Before Age

Nonsurgical ways to lift, tighten and tone skin

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

Orient Skincare and Laser Center

244A Cong Quynh, D1; 3926 0561/62/63/64
3 Phung Khac Khoan, D1; 3824 4650
64D Truong Dinh, D3; 3932 5781
945 Cach Mang Thang 8, Tan Binh; 3970 3674
www.orientskin.com

WITH THE ADVANCE of new high tech beauty solutions, the phrase “turn back the clock on your skin” is no longer just a saying. New nonsurgical treatments are claiming to reverse the natural aging process. *Oi* discusses new skin rejuvenation technology with Dr. Ho Xuan Vuong (Medical Practitioner License Number: 10112847 - SCT/BS).

What is skin rejuvenation exactly?

Sun, skin disorders, aging and even genes can all contribute to skin irregularities on the face and body, including textural irregularities like wrinkles and acne scars, pigmentation changes like freckles and sunspots, or visible blood vessels. In addition, skin may lose tone, feel less firm and certain areas of the body may develop cellulite. Skin rejuvenation involves therapies aimed at rectifying these skin conditions.

What kinds of skin rejuvenation technologies are available in Vietnam?

Whatever new technologies are available in America, Europe or South Korea, Vietnam is bound to have it too. However, there are

three therapies that are most popular now: Ultherapy, Trinity and Thermage.

What are the differences between these three?

In principle, they are very similar. All three involve using various radio frequencies, light or laser pulses to target problem areas deep inside the skin. Their differences lie in the particulars of each therapy.

Trinity is a treatment that utilizes three types of light pulses to treat skin problems such as wrinkles, discoloration or sagging. It is especially popular with office workers and younger people because it’s relatively inexpensive compared to the other two.

Thermage, on the other hand, is much more expensive since it is a one time, instant treatment that functions exactly like a facelift, one that the client won’t have to go on the surgical table for. It’s a treatment that curtails aged collagen strings and induces a generation of new strings, thus creating more youthful looking skin. You can see the effect within 30 minutes to an hour of treatment. The only reason why Thermage hasn’t already overtaken other procedures is that it requires an experienced specialist doctor to operate the machine.

Ultherapy is the newest treatment in the same radio frequency rejuvenation family. It functions very much like Thermage only the waves are created inside the skin and the effect follows a ripple-like movement to the outside. Ultherapy takes slightly longer

for the effects to really show, around two to three months, but speaking from personal experience, Ultherapy has shown better results than Thermage in facial areas whereas Thermage is more effective for the body.

Can they really reverse the aging process?

I’m sure the marketing people would very much like me to say yes, and in a way, all these treatments do reverse aging. They work on the same principle of curtailing aged skin cell and inducing the growth of new skin cells. So in truth, what they reverse is the signs of aging on the skin.

Who are suitable for each of these treatments?

Trinity is typically the best option for those in their 20s or 30s. The treatment is cheap and has little risk or side effect. It can be used as an exercise treatment for younger skin. The other two are better suited for those with aged skin - around late 30s and up - these treatments offer the best results then.

Do these treatments require renew, upkeep or further sessions?

They certainly do. You can turn the clock back but there’s no stopping it. The good thing about rejuvenation tech, however, is that it takes a long time until you need to do a checkup, around one or two years depending on the exact procedure.

Are there any risks associated with these procedures?

With new technology, there is always a small percentage of risk. However, all three treatments have been certified safe and effective by the American Food and Drug Administration. As long as you’re in the care of a capable specialist doctor, you have nothing to fear. ■



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Kids & Education



“The best way to avoid Influenza is by keeping strict and good hygiene. When you’re in public places, avoid touching rails and handles (e.g. escalator rails); avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Wash your hands thoroughly before eating or taking care of your baby. If you cough or sneeze – use a single use tissue.”



Flu Proof

Understanding and protecting kids against Influenza

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD**



I DOUBT THERE'S any parent in Saigon who doesn't at least know someone whose children were hit by this season's powerful flu virus. If your own kids got it (you'll probably have caught it too, if this was the case) you'll know that this was a bad one – a major hit at the beginning followed by weeks of chesty coughing, and no guarantee that the initial symptoms wouldn't recur.

Vietnam wasn't alone in going through the worst flu epidemic in years during recent months – in an article in the *Washington Post* entitled *Yes, this is one of the worst flu seasons in recent memory*, statistics showed an inordinate number of child deaths caused by influenza in the United States; a *CNN* report attributed the majority of the serious infections to strains of H3N2, which has been described by the CDC as “nastier” than other strains for causing far more hospitalizations. It's been the same story here in Asia – Hong Kong figures show that more people were killed by H3N2 in the first two months of this year than by any flu virus throughout the whole of 2014.

It was probably me who was responsible for infecting my own children. I'm still angry with myself; that day I just *knew* I had it, and while I was meeting with a colleague and doing my best not to pass out, I joked that perhaps I should avoid going home that night and just stay in a motel instead to avoid exposing the kids. I should have done just that – the following week, my one-year-old daughter was admitted to a hospital while my eldest was writhing on her bed with temperatures going off the scale.

I'm sure I'm not the only parent who has wondered what I could have done to avoid all this. A few months ago I was thinking about getting the flu vaccination, although recent medical reports have stated that it may not have been much use this season. A *BBC* health report calls this year's flu vaccine “barely effective,” with only three percent of people who were vaccinated with it showing any resistance to the virus – about as many as you'd expect in an unvaccinated population.

Rent a Room

Our own Dr. Jonathan Halevy, who practices as a pediatrician at Family Medical Practice Vietnam, concurs that the flu vaccine hasn't proved effective this year. Although known as a very ‘pro-vax’ physician, Dr. Jonathan is in fact highly skeptical of flu vaccinations. Citing a recent published medical review, he says “it takes 40 people to be vaccinated to

avoid one case of ‘the flu,’ which means that many of the people that did get the Influenza vaccine will still get sick. In babies below two years old, the vaccine seemed to be as useful as placebo (empty vaccine), which means none at all.”

There are good reasons why even those who are usually outspoken supporters of child vaccinations don't feel the same way about flu vaccines. “Influenza,” says Dr. Jonathan, “causes symptoms of ‘the flu’ – high fever, nasal congestion, cough, headaches, muscle pain, weakness. Unfortunately, these are not specific only to Influenza. There are over 200 viruses that can cause the same symptoms. Influenza A and B viruses actually cause only 10 percent of ‘flu’ cases. It's impossible to differentiate between ‘the flu’ and Influenza without testing.”

As for treatment of Influenza with Tamiflu, Dr. Jonathan also warns parents to take care: “There is an overuse of this medication, which may lead to fast-growing resistant viruses. The data we have so far shows that giving Tamiflu to otherwise healthy children and adults doesn't have much benefit beyond shortening the disease time by an average of 17 hours. There are specific guidelines indicating who should be treated with Tamiflu and when. So before taking Tamiflu, you should consult with your family doctor or pediatrician and be tested for Influenza.”

In cases like mine and most people's, there's no way to effectively set up quarantines between parent and child, and so Dr. Jonathan recommends that the only practical way to protect your family from spreading the flu virus around is to follow some basic hygiene measures.

“There is no 100 percent proven way to avoid viral infections,” he says. “The best way to avoid Influenza is by keeping strict and good hygiene. When you're in public places, avoid touching rails and handles (e.g. escalator rails); avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Wash your hands thoroughly before eating or taking care of your baby. If you cough or sneeze – use a single use tissue.”

Otherwise, if you want to be completely certain that you won't pass on your flu virus to your kids, then a night or two in a motel (presuming you have this option) may not be such a bad idea after all. You may have some explaining to do when you get home, but you'll never have a better excuse for staying in a private room and catching up on some neglected TV series while you recover. Anything for the kids. ■



Multiple Intelligences

Think differently about being smart



Brendan Hearne is a senior teacher at Saigon Star International School. He moved to Vietnam in 2013, having previously taught at two award-winning schools in the UK



AS ADULTS, WE all have a view about ourselves on whether or not we are intelligent. We reach this conclusion after years of being compared to and comparing ourselves against others.

Sadly, for many children, they reach a conclusion during their school years that they are not. This is understandable considering the amount of testing that is done. And what happens when children reach this conclusion? Well, there is a real danger that they can become 'turned off' from school and education.

For far too long we have been thinking about intelligence the wrong way. Even now, most people think that 'intelligence'

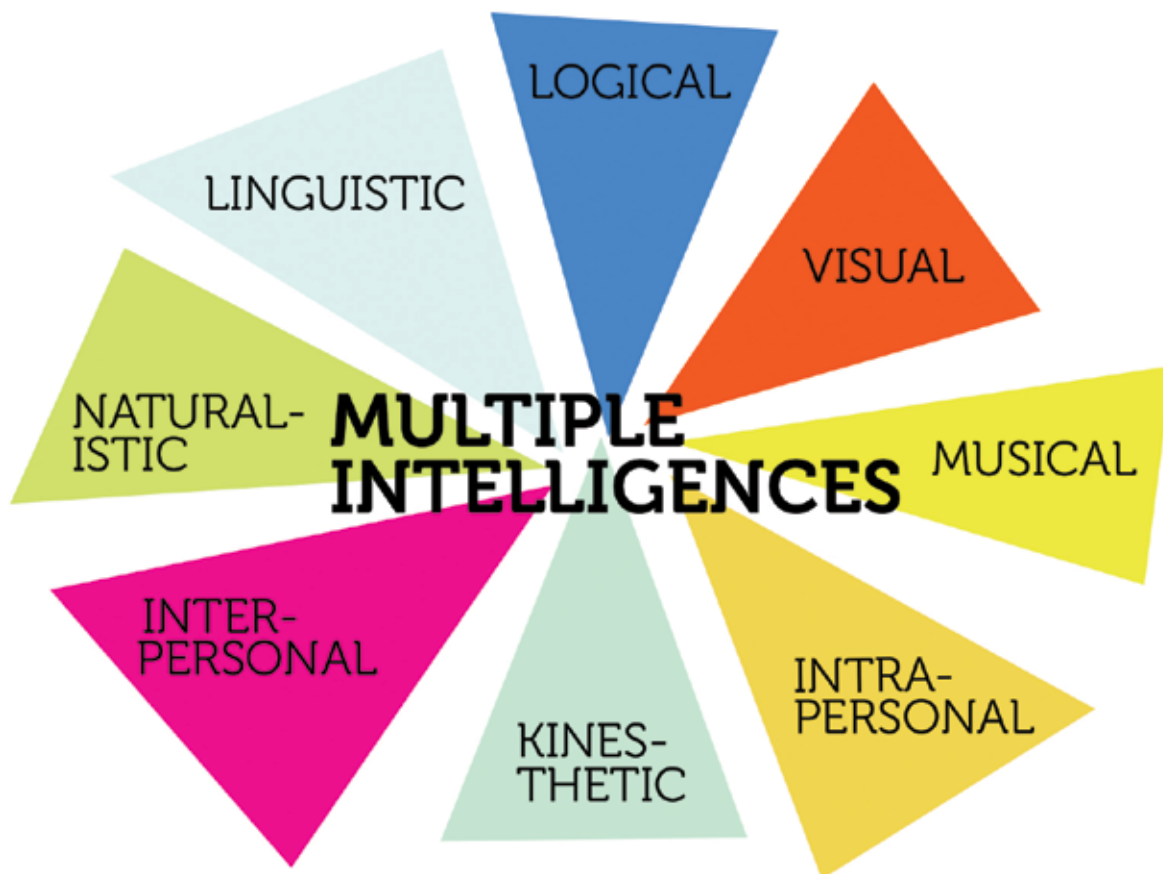
means being good in literacy and numeracy - the academic subjects. Regular, rigorous testing in reading, writing and maths gives the impression that intelligence is a unitary attribute that can be measured and summarized by these two areas alone, and if you don't excel in these areas you are not intelligent. This is simply not the case. For example, take a renowned artist that can't read, or a world-class footballer that doesn't know the times table. Does that mean they are not intelligent?

Developmental psychologist Dr. Howard Gardner stated: "We need to broaden our notion of what can be considered intelligence." He adds that there are eight

ways to be intelligent. We each have all eight but we have varying degrees of intelligence in each one - and maths and English only form two of the eight.

Fortunately, many online tests now exist allowing us to determine in which of the eight areas we are strongest. It is useful to imagine your multiple intelligences as a bar chart. If you were to stack all eight bars on top of each other, you would probably have a similar gross score to anyone else, however, we each have a unique blend. So it is no longer a question of 'How *intelligent* are you?' but 'How are you intelligent?'

While we tend to be stronger in areas that



While we tend to be stronger in areas that are of greater interest to us, it is important to remember that we can strengthen any intelligence. A test is meant to empower the learner, not label them. If we know we have a weak area, we can work on it.

are of greater interest to us, it is important to remember that we can strengthen any intelligence. A test is meant to empower the learner, not label them. If we know we have a weak area, we can work on it.

It makes sense then that the results of such a test are only a snapshot in time - they will change many times throughout our lifetime, depending on our changing interests and the time we spend in each area. It is also useful to know that people with strengths in particular areas often end up with careers in related fields. Therefore, if children know their strengths, they may also gain a better understanding of which careers they might be more suited towards.

Hopefully by now, you are beginning to think this makes a lot of sense. You may be surprised to hear then that this is not a new idea. Dr. Gardner first presented the theory

of Multiple Intelligences in 1983, yet it is still relatively unknown. If more children in schools were taught about this theory, and gained an understanding of their own personal intelligences, it would eradicate the possibility of children ever believing that they are not intelligent. For parents too it is important to understand that not every child will excel in literacy and numeracy, but that this is not the be all and end all.

Remember:

- We each have a unique blend of intelligences.
- We can strengthen each intelligence.
- An inventory is meant as a snapshot in time - it can change.
- A Multiple Intelligence test is meant to empower, not label learners. ■

THE EIGHT INTELLIGENCES

WHERE DO YOUR STRENGTHS LIE?

- 1) Verbal-Linguistic: People with linguistic intelligence are naturally good with writing or speaking and memorization.
- 2) Logical-Mathematical: People with logical intelligence are driven by logic and reasoning.
- 3) Visual-Spatial: People with visual intelligence are good at remembering images and are aware of surroundings.
- 4) Bodily-Kinesthetic: People with kinesthetic intelligence love movement, have good motor skills and are aware of their bodies.
- 5) Musical: People with musical intelligence are musically gifted and have a "good ear" for rhythm and composition.
- 6) Intrapersonal: People with intrapersonal intelligence are adept at looking inward.
- 7) Interpersonal: People with interpersonal intelligence are good with people and thrive in social interactions.
- 8) Naturalistic: People with naturalist intelligence have a sensitivity to and appreciation for nature.

>>The List Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



ABC International School (ABCIS)

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

Foundation & Early Primary Campus:

4, 1E Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC
Primary & Secondary Campus:
 2, 1E Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC
 5431 1833/34/35/36
 office@theabcis.com
 www.theabcis.com



British International School (BIS)

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

An Phu Primary Campus

225 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
 3744 4551
 apprimary@bisvietnam.com

An Phu Secondary Campus

246 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
 3744 2335
 apsecondary@bisvietnam.com

Tu Xuong Primary Campus

43-45 Tu Xuong Street, D3
 3932 0210
 txprimary@bisvietnam.com
 www.bisvietnam.com



Deutsche Schule Ho Chi Minh City International German School

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

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

12, Vo Truong Toan, An Phu

08 37 44 63 44
 info@igs-hcmc.de
 www.igs-hcmc.de



EtonHouse International Pre-School Ho Chi Minh City

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

1st and 2nd floor, Somerset Vista, Hanoi Highway, An Phu, D2
 08 6287 0804

www.etonhouse.vn/schools/hcmc
 info@etonhouse.vn



EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City

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

730 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, District 2, HCMC
 www.eishcmc.com



International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

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

92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh
 2222 7788 / 99
 www.issp.edu.vn



International School



The Montessori International School of Vietnam

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

Thao Dien Campus:

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

An Phu Campus:

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

3744 2639 / 0903 858659

montessorivn@gmail.com

www.montessori.edu.vn



Renaissance International School Saigon

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

74 Nguyen Thi Thap, D7
3773 3171 ext 120/121/122

www.renaissance.edu.vn



Saigon Star International School

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

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

www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



The American School

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

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

08 3519 2223 / 0903 952 223

admission@tasvietnam.edu.vn

www.tas.edu.vn



The French International School Saint Ange

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

188A2, Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2, HCMC

0120 304 8875

saintange2.vn@gmail.com

www.sa-saigon.com



The International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)

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

28 Vo Truong Toan, D2

(08) 3898 9100

admissions@ishcmc.edu.vn

www.ishcmc.com



Also...

American International School

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

Elementary School (102C Nguyen Van Cu, D1)

Middle School (35 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh)

High School (781/C1-C2 Le Hong Phong, D10)

Australian International School (AIS)

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

Xi Campus (Kindergarten)

190 Nguyen Van Huong, D2

Thao Dien Campus (Kindergarten & Primary School)

APSC Compound

36 Thao Dien, D2

Thu Thiem Campus (Kindergarten, Primary, Middle & Senior School)

East-West Highway, D2

3742 4040

www.aivietnam.com

Schools of North America

Offers a dual curriculum - instructing students in a Vietnamese program directed by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in tandem with an American program aligned with the State of California. Students graduate after accumulating 248 credits which is equivalent to high school graduates in the US.

Street 5A, Trung Son Residential Quarter,

Binh Chanh

402 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D3

www.sna.edu.vn

Saigon South International School

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

78 Nguyen Duc Canh, D7

www.ssis.edu.vn

Faces & Places



Running Rainbow

Color Me Run, a five-km run with color cannons blasting runners along the route. At the end was a music festival with T-Pain, GRL, Toc Tien, among others.

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



Up, Up and Away

Newly opened Up Station (2nd floor, 2B Thi Sach, DI) is Saigon's latest dance and meetup place with weekly music performances and themed dance nights.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY UP STATION



Paws for a Cause

The Asia Canine Protection Alliance launches "Ve Di Vàng Oi!" (Come Home Golden!) campaign to stop the Vietnamese dog meat trade.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY ACPA

A great BIS teacher is:

50% Innovator

50% Entertainer

50% Motivator

And is apparently able to defy the laws of mathematics.



Dedicated, skilled and well-qualified teachers, with relevant British curriculum experience, ensure that the education on offer is amongst the very best available anywhere in the world.

BIS teachers inspire students to make the best of their abilities – including solving impossible maths equations like the one above.

Where is your child going?

Hanoi: www.bishanoi.com

Ho Chi Minh City: www.bisvietnam.com



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