



VIETNAM

01&02-2018

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This Month's Cover

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FOOD EXCHANGE AT NOVOTEL PHU QUOC / IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

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Datebook

What's on this month...

JANUARY 17

What: Creative Sessions

6 With Mimi Vu

Where: The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre (15 Nguyen U Di, D2); 7pm-9pm

About: Mimi will share her personal commitment and passion for the disenfranchised, believing in the innovative power of culture and collective human action in the revealing and solving of human injustice. Mimi Vu joined Pacific Links Foundation in 2013 as the Director of Advocacy & Partnerships.

She spearheads the organization's global and grassroots advocacy, fundraising and communication activities, as well as the development of strategic partnerships and new programs with stakeholders such as international and Vietnamese governments, law enforcement, private foundations, corporations, and NGOs. Mimi has over 15 years of nonprofit experience in communications, policy, development, and advocacy for organizations in New York City, Paris, and Vietnam, including the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, Council of Fashion Designers of America, Fund for Public Health in New York, Robin Hood Foundation, and East Meets West Foundation.

Contact: Visit factoryartscentre.com for more info



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JANUARY 20

What: Digital Marketing Conference 2018

Where: UEF - Institute of International Education (276 Dien Bien Phu, Binh Thanh)

About: The conference provides a platform for industry leaders to deliver case studies, expertise and share unique insight into the rapidly emerging movement: the power to forecast the future with today's digital marketing trend. Attend and hear how top practitioners deploy predictive modeling, and what kind of business impact it delivers.

Contact: Visit codecampvn.me for more info



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JANUARY 24



What: Artist Talk By Edgar Leciejewski / Ghosts & Flowers
Where: Salon Saigon (6d Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3); 6:30pm-8pm
About: Edgar Leciejewski will focus on his practice of creating conceptual series of portrait works. Edgar explores the various social and scientific uses of photography. His work employs an experimental, analytic approach to the medium of photography by using various techniques and media. Besides content-related issues and the reflection of his own work, he is interested in issues such as the rhetoric of the photographic series, the photographic genre, the composition, and how as much time as possible can fit in a single photographic image. His pictures are repositories of time that allow for the slowing down of the act of seeing.
Contact: Visit www.salonsaigon.com for more info

JANUARY 27

WHAT: Free do-it-yourself bathing service for pet

Where: Bed & Pet-first Dog Villa (14A6 Thao Dien, D2), 8am-6pm

About: This activity is not only an occasion in which you & your pets can increase understanding with each other, but it's also an event for many owners to meet and share their pet-care experience.

Contact: bedandpetfirst.com or 0934 080 186



FEBRUARY 3 & 4

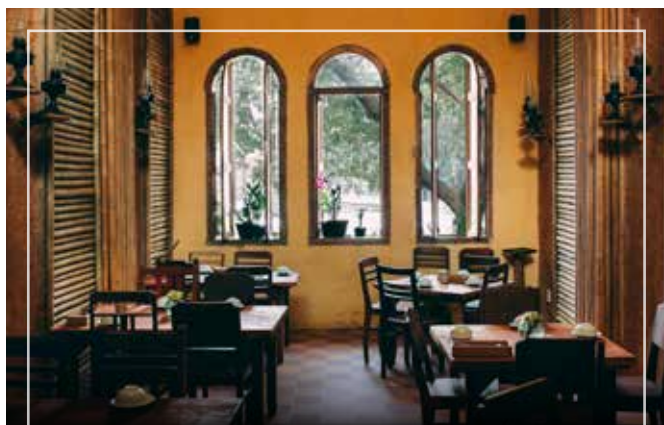
What: Tet Art Market

Where: The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre (15 Nguyen U Di, D2); 10am-6pm

About: To say farewell to a delighted year and welcome a cheerful, artistic new year, The Factory, in collaboration with Inpages, brings you a gathering of unique hand-crafted products, decorations for Tet and affordable artwork. Each vendor is carefully selected to offer you many quality choices to celebrate a happy holiday. Coins out, go shopping and art up your Tet.

Contact: Visit factoryartscentre.com for more info





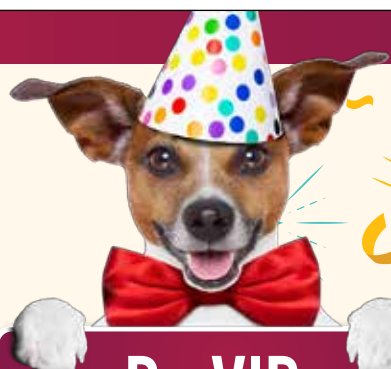
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MARCH 7 & 8

What: Vietnam Blockchain Week
Where: Riverside Palace (360D Ben Van Don, D4); tickets start at VND2,277,000

About: Are you ready for the first major Blockchain conference in Vietnam? Vietnam Blockchain Week 2018 brings over 50 speakers from world-acclaimed institutions and the most emerging startups to Ho Chi Minh City. Join 50+ major media, 100+ investors and 1,000+ attendees for two days of professional networking. Over 300 professionals in finance, marketing and tech are here to expand their knowledge and networks. What you can find here are not only good drinks, but also valuable connections. Regardless if you are a savvy developer, or are currently as a marketer, specializing on finance industry, looking for others to launch a cool new tech idea or simply want to meet other professionals, this networking party is where you need to be.

Contact: Visit www.vietnamblockchainweek.com for more info



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THE BULLETIN

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

The Big 20

Victoria Hotels & Resorts recently celebrated its 20th anniversary with a festive bash at Salon Saigon. More than 150 guests were on hand to relive highlights from the group's two decade-long history which has seen the opening of 7 properties across Vietnam and Laos. As part of the celebrations, Victoria Hotels & Resorts partnered with Hai Au Aviation in December to launch the company's fourth seaplane, emblazoned with the Victoria logo. Evidenced by the commemorative design, Victoria affirms its intentions to develop the brand even further, looking to expand into more locations throughout Southeast Asia as well as launch Victoria Voyages, all-inclusive packages introducing guests to the beauty and authenticity of Vietnam and Laos in Victoria style from beginning to end. Guests will be able to take advantage of the entire Victoria network, including hotel properties, transportation options and other in-house services while enjoying special perks including a one-time check-in for the entire journey, complimentary services, free upgrades and more.

For more info, visit www.victoriahotels.asia

The advertisement features a woman with her hair in a bun, wearing sunglasses and a black backpack, standing in front of a large, golden, textured wall. To her right is a close-up of a brown leather bag with a gold-colored metal clasp. Overlaid on the right side of the image is a dark grey box containing the Marrakesh Handmade Leather logo and text.

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The country in numbers



10 YEARS AFTER A LAW WAS PASSED REQUIRING THE USE OF helmets while riding motorbikes, concerns remain over their proper use and quality, as well as the law's extension to children. Helmeted motorcyclists now account for more than 90 percent of all motorcycle users in Vietnam. In contrast to this, a mere 35 to 40 percent of child passengers wore helmets during a ride in 2017, compared to above 50 percent in 2013, according to the World Health Organization. Thanks to helmet use, as many as 500,000 brain traumas and 15,000 deaths were averted, according to a study by the AIP (Asia Injury Prevention) and FIA Foundation. As for helmet quality, the WHO highlighted stats that said the percentage of riders utilizing helmets compliant with safety standards was now 70 percent in Vietnam, but this was offset by a 2013 study, which said that only 40 percent of new, certified helmets actually passed impact absorption tests. In addition, the vast majority—90 percent—of students who rode e-bicycles failed to wear a helmet of any kind.

VND590 BILLION

IN FALSIFIED VAT RECEIPTS WERE SEIZED BY authorities in Hanoi. The illegal crime ring operated through 17 shell companies. An initial investigation uncovered that 35-year-old Dao had bought 17 local businesses since early 2017 to aid her expanding operation, but none were able to turn a profit. After their purchase, the firms had no specific field of business and were used primarily for trading fraudulent VAT receipts. Dao claimed her operation sold the fake sales slips at VND200,000 for purchase values under VND20million. VAT receipts for purchase values over VND20 million were sold at .5 percent of their value. Police also confiscated seals, sales slips, and other related items. Businesses buy fake VAT receipts to increase the input cost, thus leading to possible tax cuts when their profit declines, and benefit from VAT tax refund for input costs.



3,000 CARS HAVE BEEN CUT FROM HCMC'S TAXI companies since the arrival of Uber and Grab, according to the city's Taxi Association. The number of cars registered for Uber and Grab have risen to 28,000 in Ho Chi Minh City. In their latest report, the association said that four companies have been dissolved and merged over the past three years since Uber and Grab began operations. According to the association, the city had around 12,000 taxis in 2010, however, the number of vehicles managed by local taxi firms have been slashed to only 8,900, while the number registered for Uber and Grab have steadily increased. The association insisted that the pilot projects, which permit transport companies to use applications to connect and manage customer transport activities, should not be renewed. They specified that under the Law on Road Transport and Government Decree 86, taxi services were a conditional business model so vehicles need a badge, logo and meter; however, Uber and Grab cars do not have these.

115 NEW SPECIES FOUND IN INDO-CHINA.
A beautifully colored frog found in the limestone mountains of Vietnam, two mole species found by a team of Vietnamese and Russian scientists, and the Vietnamese crocodile lizard are among the new species discovered. The report, *Stranger Species*, documents the work of hundreds of scientists from around the world who discovered 11 amphibians, two fishes, 11 reptiles, 88 plants and three mammals in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. It brought the number of new species of plants and animals discovered in the region between 1997 and 2016 to 2,524. The new discoveries come at a critical time: The Greater Mekong region is under intense development pressure from mines to roads to dams, threatening the survival of the natural landscapes that make it so unique. Poaching for meat or the multi-billion dollar illegal wildlife trade puts additional pressure on the region's wildlife, meaning many species could be lost before they are even discovered by science.



USD4 BILLION

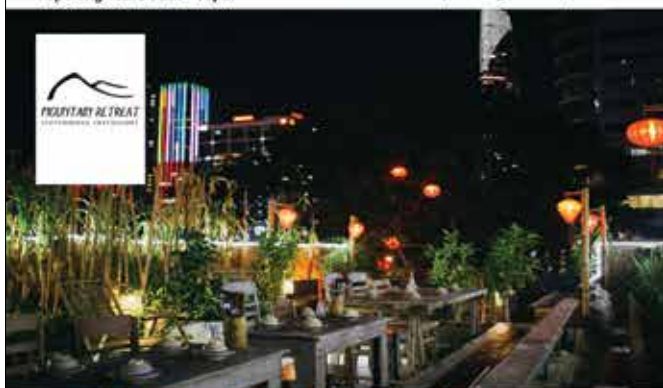
“SMART CITY” IS SCHEDULED TO BE DEVELOPED in the outlying district of Dong Anh, Hanoi this year. A consortium between Japan's Sumitomo and Vietnam's BRG will develop the “smart city” on a 272 hectare plot in Dong Anh District in five separate phases. The project will feature a modern traffic system along the Nhat Tan-Noi Bai route using Japanese technology and will connect with the No.2 urban railway route in Hanoi.



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That's What *She* Said

A documentary film
featuring three transgender
women that explores the
male-to-female transition
within themselves and
Vietnamese society

Text by **Michael Arnold**
Images Provided by **Hon Boum**



AS A FORCE THAT HAS BEEN gathering in momentum for the past decade, the movement to address LGBT issues in Vietnam is undergoing a historic transition. While there have been distinct signs of a thawing in the legal framework that discriminates against LGBT people in this country—even glimmers of hope that gay marriage might be on the cards at some point in the near future here—conservative attitudes still prevail both in the administration and within the Vietnamese culture itself. Faced with the potential for real change and the

massive inertia of public opinion, one of the community's highest priorities at this point remains the need to change people's hearts and minds.

Director Kim Khanh's first cinematic release *Hon Buom (Butterfly Soul)*, which had its first test screenings in December, is a somewhat hopeful attempt to accomplish exactly that change on behalf of the Vietnamese transgender community. Beautifully crafted for optimal cinematic experience, the movie is a tightly focused interview-based documentary—replete with colorful

fantasy sequences representing the yearning of TG folk to realize their inner feminine beauty—that follows the stories of three women (Jessica Nguyen, Yen My and Nha An) whose transgender status poses great challenges in their personal and professional lives. The film centers on the psychological dynamics of pre- and post-op transgender mentality, the legislative barriers that they face, and the weight of the public discrimination that stands almost uniformly against them.

In contrast to 2014's *Madam Phung's Last Journey*, a reality piece by director

Nguyen Thi Tham that followed a troupe of beleaguered Vietnamese transvestite fairground performers, Kim Khanh's story contextualizes the transgender experience by investigating its impact on families, friends and social status, an effort that is substantially supported by emotional face-to-face interviews with those affected. The film has been structured organically in reaction to the material as naturally presented to the lens, resisting a programmatic approach that Khanh dismisses as what would have been an inauthentic attempt to "direct the life" of her subjects.

Production for the film was funded by PEPFAR Vietnam (The US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) as a means to shed light on the transgender community here given its singular exposure to HIV: it is the group with the statistically highest rate of infectivity in the country. Jessica Nguyen was introduced to Khanh as a preferred interview subject; already a well-known transgender figure in Ho Chi Minh City (she incidentally featured on the cover of our May 2016 issue of *Oi Vietnam*), Jessica runs a costume hire business and both shelters and advises transgender people in need, helping them to establish a means to make a living, prepare themselves for sexual reassignment surgery, and remain protected from hate and discrimination. Hon Boum is actually Kim Khanh's second project for PEPFAR; a few years ago she directed a theater piece for the organization entitled *Cau Vong Khuyet (The Incomplete Rainbow)* that dealt with gay issues and HIV, which was performed in Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho and An Giang.



"I wanted to capture the beauty, the energy of the story," says Kim Khanh about her approach to the material. "Before a butterfly emerges, it has to go through a phase of being an ugly caterpillar. The women in my film are born in the wrong bodies. In the movie, they all say that they hate the male body. This is the first Vietnamese movie that talks about how people hurt them, their suffering while growing up, and their relationships with their mothers. And framing everything is their dream to unfold their feminine souls, with all the color of a butterfly's wings."

Openly featuring the mothers of transgender subjects is a first in Vietnamese cinema. "There were over 250 people at the screenings in Saigon," says Kim Khanh. "It was the first time that people heard the mothers talking about it, not just the kids. I had to convince the mothers to appear in front of the camera and tell their story; they didn't want to talk, but I told them that if they spoke out, it would help millions of other mothers and families. Jessica wanted to kill herself so many times as a teenager after her mother kicked her out of home—it's lucky that she didn't die. So if she didn't tell her story, a lot of parents may do the same to their kids, and not stand by their side, help their son to make his dream come true, to become a transgender woman. If they kick them out on the street, it's so easy for them to turn to crime, prostitution, drugs, and be at great risk of getting HIV. That's not just a family issue, it affects the whole of society."

As the movie points out, legislative LGBT discrimination in Vietnam is amplified against the transgender community in that their medical needs are very specific and sometimes urgent. It's still illegal in Vietnam to undergo surgical gender reassignment except in cases of hermaphroditism; the hormone treatments taken prior to surgery are also against the law here. Transgenders wanting a sex change are usually left to

seeking risky procedures in Thailand, and complications are sometimes life-threatening.

"There is a fourth story in the movie about a girl who couldn't urinate a month after the operation," explains Kim Khanh. "She had to wait several days to be taken back to Thailand again to fix that problem. She survived, but if she'd had to get treatment in Vietnam, she would have been kicked out of the hospital. None of them would want to take responsibility. The treatment is illegal, so social insurance won't cover it. Who would take the blame if she died here?"

Despite the film's primary purpose being to inform those at risk of HIV, the overall message of the film is an exposure and assessment of discrimination. There are no medical professionals interviewed in the film; transgender people are shown plainly in their struggle to find acceptance, unable to marry, unable to find employment.

"I don't want anything in particular to happen because of this movie," says Kim Khanh. "I just hope people have a better attitude towards transgender people. Many of those who attended the screenings admitted to me that they didn't really have a good opinion of transgender and gay people before, but said that the movie changed their view. They said that they felt lucky to be born as their true gender, and felt an empathy for people who don't experience that sense of normality."

"I want to show their beauty as women, the body and the face, as beautiful as any girl," she adds. "Why should we always have to look at people with a question in our minds, 'who is she, lesbian, gay, whatever?' We should see people's value in their humanity. I think the true story about Jessica and Yen My and the others is that they are very normal people. They're strong, brave, and every day they're not afraid to try to be better. They try to be good people, to live well. I think that's just the natural human attitude." ■



A Lady in the Mix

Text by Johnny Tran

DJ KingLady is making strides in Southeast Asia's male-dominated world of electronic dance music

A WINTER MOON BRIGHTLY lights up the clear night sky. The dull roar of the ocean waves against the shore can be heard in the background. There is a crisp, cool breeze—this is winter, yet most of the crowd are wearing shorts and are bare-feet. Some are even shirtless. Ah, this is winter in Vietnam. The crowd is restless, but their focus is keenly on the stage. The lights dim into darkness, and scattered hoots and hollers increase in anticipation. A minute passes, nothing happens. Another minute goes by. Then another. Still, nothing. It feels like an eternity. Suddenly, all the lights flare on to maximum intensity.

Cheers erupt. The countdown ball start in motion: Ten... nine... eight... seven... the excitement builds... six... five... four... the crowd noise crescendos... three... two... one. Zero. This is not just winter in Vietnam, this is Happy New Year! A volatile mix of cheers, electronic dance music (EDM) and fireworks explode into a frenzied chorus of sound and celebration. And at the center of it all, up alone on the main stage, master of ceremonies, is a mighty figure all of 49 kilograms. A musical entity known as a DJ. But not just any DJ - this is one of Vietnam's most popular female DJ. This is KingLady.

By the time you read this, DJ KingLady will have had finished headlining the New Year's Eve countdown party in the beach city of Danang. This is a normal night in the life of KingLady, but there is nothing normal about her. When she is onstage, everyone knows her. She captures her audience, and leaves them in raptures. She performs to please her fans, but make no mistake about it—when she is on stage, she is their sovereign, and they are her subjects. KingLady (or 'KL' to her friends) performs more than a handful of events each month, many internationally. She has been to over 20 countries (so far). She has been paid as much as VND50 million. Life is busy, business is good, life is good.

But this wasn't always the case. Being the eldest child in a traditional Vietnamese household, a job as a DJ would have never entered her mind. But one serendipitous night in 2012 changed everything. "I attended a music festival in Singapore called ZoukOut. I knew right there and then exactly what I wanted to do with my life," KL fondly recalls. Returning home, she remembered her mother's reaction when, "Hey, Mom, I'm going to be a DJ!" was the first thing that popped out of her mouth. "It actually wasn't anger, she was more worried thinking about the late-night, alcohol-infused culture of night clubs and events," KL continues. But knowing she had raised a good daughter, her mother decided to give her a chance (and hoping she would quickly grow out of it). Besides, "I am very responsible with my money, almost a tightwad!" she laughs.

Being responsible with money when you have it is one thing, but getting it in the first place as a DJ is another as she soon found out. "I started out from nowhere, so of course no one knew about me. In the beginning, that was the hardest part." Social networking in Vietnam in 2012 was minimal, and it was a struggle to find paid work. Even when there was paid work, most clubs back then did not pay much. But when you do something you love, you keep doing it. She decided to stick with it, and her dedication and persistence paid off when she caught her big break in 2015. "I found my calling card as 'KingLady' in 2013," but it wasn't until 2015 that the world of DJing in Vietnam grew from underground to mainstream. It was in many ways from the impact of the TV show *The Remix*—a competition program that combined DJs with singers and bands, and each team would be judged for the song they performed together. While KL's teams in 2015 and 2016 only got first runner spots, it was enough to catapult her into stardom.

So what exactly is a professional DJ? In a nutshell, being a DJ is about "stitching music," answers KL. "You have to know all the popular songs and you sequence them together." You have to feel what a particular audience would like, "and be able to adapt and change on the spot if you are wrong." To KL, "feeling the vibe and energy of the crowd" is a cardinal rule of being a good DJ. "When I first started I had a playlist of all the songs that I loved. But I didn't know how to adapt to the crowd and adjust. I just played what I loved, which wasn't always what the audience loved." What was in that playlist? She would not tell me specific names, but she does admit nowadays she plays more mainstream songs. Some of her favorite artists and influences are the Black Eyed Peas, Rihanna and the DJs Skrillex and Armin. A good DJ must possess a vast knowledge of songs, as many as possible, and from as far back as possible. Sometimes a particular audience might feel 'old-school' and want to travel back to the 1980s.

Not all DJs are created equal: Some just play music while some go further to "adjust the sound output and add effects, or remix." Where does DJ KingLady want to be? She doesn't create her own music right... yet. Does she think her looks, sexy outfits and style have helped her become famous? "Yes, I will not lie. But that is not what I want to be known for," she is quick to add. "What do you want to be known for?" I ask. "I want to create my own music from scratch. That is the ultimate ambition and evolution of a DJ," she replies. To that end, she is currently taking music production classes and hopes to be able to share her original compositions with her fans later this year. Although she has no musical background that won't stop her from her ultimate ambition: To have an original track become an international hit. "Write this down: I want to take over the world one day." ■



Guerilla Tactics

MoT+++ and Sàn Art present the first solo exhibition of ceramics by Vietnamese artist Nguyen Quoc Chanh

Text and Image Provided by MoT++

NGUYEN QUOC CHANH IS AN acclaimed poet, admired by his peers and audiences in Vietnam and overseas. His first collection of poems was published in 1990 and his work has been translated into many languages.

His lesser-known ceramic work caught the eyes of Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Le for its play between traditional techniques and materials and contemporary form. Attentive to the position of Bien Hoa ceramics in global and nationalist imaginings, Chanh writes in his artist's statement: "Rather than nostalgic reproductions or subcontracted production, I make use of local clay, glazes, and techniques to evoke Bien Hoa's eclectic tendencies blurring the boundaries between artisanal craft and art, between sentiment and concept."

For Chanh to align his latest series of ceramic sculptures with the idea of a 'guerrilla' mentality is to place them firmly within Vietnamese history and cultural memory. To understand this process, just swap the image of a jungle soldier, living opportunistically within their environment and replace it with an artist whose materials are found and requisitioned. What emerges are assemblages that fuse multiple symbols, removing them of their positions in conventions that produce individual hegemonic meanings. At a glance, it seems chaotic, but the Guerrilla is always forced to deal in chaos until balance is reached. As Chanh himself suggests, balance is the mouse that skitters between conventional lines and the cat is yet to swallow it.

If the pieces tell a story, then it is one that transcends the confinements of genre and style. We can see that the moulds have diverse influences: folkloric symbols in Dong Ho woodcut paintings, the serene faces of The Bayon at Angkor Thom and Easter Island. Often, they are not made by Chanh himself, but were found—gathering dust in his adopted studio in Bien Hoa. In this way, the pieces proceed from multiple histories and are shaped by generations of artisans in different cultural and political contexts. In Chanh's Guerrilla operation, they now become material for new purposes, positioned alongside more contemporary symbols on a shared substrate: casts of credit cards, face molds of football-playing children and images borrowed from the facets of Ben Thanh Market. In collecting these tools, he acts as a gatherer and a disruptor. The recognizable motifs must exist in relation to each other and are rendered unfamiliar in a state of disorder and uncertainty. A surreal and alluring effect is achieved.

The pieces take on two main structural forms. Many of them have an outline we can discern easily: a large pot, a car's tire or Cham Lingus. These stand in contrast to more surrealist shapes. Bulging and unrecognizable, they express a powerful conception of poetry whereby internal flow is more important than outward conventional beauty. Here, Chanh chooses a symbol and allows it to form the basis of the next, like stanzas building on one another. Indeed, he is a

recognized poet and in this series, swaps language for the living form of earth and fire. Like a bird building a nest, he rounds off the final shape in a way that hides the process. It is unclear which part eventually forms the whole. Look again at the more conventional shapes in the series and they appear prosaic by comparison. It is unique for the pieces in a collection to play off each other to enhance the impact of both styles.

What shapes the destiny of a clay sculpture if not an awareness of its beginnings and the story of its continued existence? Chanh's rejection of unblemished white clay in favor of natural earth ensures that he is more of a collaborator in the lifespan of his sculptures rather than sole creator. His clay is produced by years of natural mixing, capturing the soul of the soil along with its collected debris of trees and bones. Chanh's hands act as just another step of each piece's journey into the eventual fire of the furnace. Rarely do you see ceramic art rooted so deeply in abstraction.

Here, at 1,200 degrees Celsius, they take their final shape and color among the chaotic licks of the flames. The clay glows red and it gives off a translucency reminiscent of a baby scan, achieving new life and balance in a fixed form. ■

Guerrilla Tactics—a solo by Nguyen Quoc Chanh is on exhibit until February 28, 2018 at MoT+++ (Saigon Domaine, Ground Floor, 1057 Binh Quoi, Binh Thanh). Visit motplus.xyz for more info





Pampered Pooches

Julian Fabian, co-owner of Dogroom Saigon, discusses responsible pet care, customized accessories and international-standard grooming

What inspired you and your business partner, Hai Ngoc Le, to open Dogroom Saigon?

We opened **Dogroom Saigon** (8 Tan Vinh, D4, 090 821 7371) simply because we were not content with the quality of grooming and provisions available in HCMC for our own dogs. We felt that with the right training and sourcing of quality accessories and foods we could cater properly for our own dogs' needs without having to go abroad to buy things or accept expensive and indifferent grooming at best. We believe that we have truly raised the bar in the quality, price and range of dog products we provide. Our collection of handcrafted collars, leashes, beds and, most recently, sofas came simply from Hai's creativity and skills rather than the need to fill the gap in the market or to make us unique. Our homestay is on a small scale and is thereby a personalized and compassionate service for small and friendly indoor dogs only as we do not walk dogs. Our guests must be healthy, and they are treated as if they're part of our pack of ten dogs.

Hai is a certified groomer and was trained at the prestigious Starwood Arts of Grooming in Bangkok; describe the training process he went through.

Although his grooming ability was on a par with the existing grooming shops in HCMC, Hai wasn't satisfied with his knowledge and skill level, so last year he decided to totally retrain at a vital part of the training course in this part of the world—Starwood Arts of Grooming Bangkok. I believe that we are the only professional dog-groomers certified by The Royal Thailand Ministry of Education as a result of his training at the highly prestigious Starwood Arts of Grooming in Bangkok.

Initially, after a lot of research in grooming school options in Hanoi, HCMC, Hong Kong and Thailand, Hai chose Bangkok. Hai was informed that he must forget all his previous training and to start absolutely from scratch again following a training course which began with learning, again, how to wash dogs, clip nails, clean ears, etc. He had to successfully do this for a large number of dogs prior to moving on to the actual grooming school. A vital part of the grooming school was



Hai

to successfully groom a range of breeds in various styles, attend tutorials and practicals on the anatomy of breeds and the correct cutting lines. This process took about five months for Hai to complete and he is now a skilled, international-standard dog-groomer. However, he does believe in continuous professional development and he intends to gain further training in the art of creative coloring later in the year. We now offer our own grooming school based on 'methodology' from Starwood Arts of Grooming.

Tell us about your customized dog beds and accessories.

Our handcrafted, one-of-a-kind beds and sofas are inspired by Hai's creativity rather than a desire to be unique. We have had interest from a number of companies in Europe, but at this stage we are concentrating on the domestic market clientele who wish to pamper their pooches. Customers range from all types of people, both Vietnamese and expats. We also sell them wholesale, along with our collars and leashes, to other pet stores in HCMC. We can make them to the specifications and designs of our customers, as well. However, Hai only makes them when he has the time, so it is very much a small-scale domestic industry at the moment.

There will be critics who say that these luxury dog accessories are frivolous and wasteful, especially in a developing country like Vietnam, and that they're animals not children. How do you respond to that?

Many would agree that Vietnam is a difficult and sometimes dangerous place for our pets. Sadly, we've had one of our dogs kidnapped and ransomed two years ago. As in all countries, there is a dire need for education on pet care, especially at a time when the immense joy of dog ownership is increasingly being realized by an increasingly diverse range of people

Interview by *Oi*
Images by **Ngoc Tran**

in Vietnam. Our unique beds, sofas, collars and leashes are sold at remarkably competitive prices and as such cannot be considered frivolous. Frivolity is not necessarily a vice but a pleasure for both pet-owners and their pampered pooches. We do not judge customers for wanting what they consider to be the best for their dogs and as individuals we can draw the lines on how far we wish to go.

Many of the clothes we provide for dogs tend to be bought to give warmth to shaved dogs and the pet clothes we sell are especially designed for dogs. Hai has very recently started to design and produce his own range. We prefer to make judgement on those who neglect their dogs and harm dogs in any way. Again, education is the key to raising awareness on the needs of dogs and on responsible ownership.

The key point is that the dog is being loved and well looked after. Anything that raises the level of care for our dogs is a good thing, even if it might seem decadent to some. We cater to a wide range of consumers in a responsible and professional way, in a society in which there is a need for greater social welfare for all.

Have you observed any changes in attitude and perception towards dogs in Vietnam?

I have been in and out of Ho Chi Minh City since 2007 and have seen a positive change in attitude to dog-ownership. As people have increased their disposable income, more and more people are becoming dog-owners. However, it is not for us to judge on the suitability of certain breeds for the climate or home. All we can do is play a role in educating new owners on the dogs' needs as well as their short and long term needs. We will not sell a dog to someone who clearly has not thought through the decision to own a dog. Obviously, there is a great deal to be done to improve the lives of so many dogs in Vietnam where many generations chain them up as guard dogs for the dog's entire life. I sincerely hope that we, at Dogroom Saigon, are educating responsible ownership and providing a caring service that in turn is raising the standard in the provision for our dogs. ■

An Illustrated Guide to Tet Superstitions

Illustrations by Duc Tran and Tu Bui

Along with Tet celebrations come a litany of superstitions that can either make the incoming year a success or a disaster. Here are some of the most common superstitions, playfully illustrated in a short animated film entitled *10 Things Not to Do in Lunar New Year* by Tu Bui and Duc Tran.



1. Don't sweep the house during the first three days of Tet because you'll also sweep your luck and good fortune away. On the eve of Tet, no matter how busy everyone gets, Vietnamese families will take the time to clean the house, garden and altar and during Tet, be extra careful to keep everything nice and tidy.



2. Be careful not to break anything because it symbolizes damage or loss, possibly to family or societal ties. Grownups will caution kids to be extra careful with bowls and plates.



3. Don't hold funerals during the first three days of Tet. Tet is cause for national celebration, so grieving families are expected to put aside their sorrows for the time being. If someone dies on the eve of Tet, the family will try to hold the funeral that day. If it's on the first day of Tet, they'll delay to the second day. Grieving families usually don't go well-wishing; instead others should come to their home.



4. Avoid wearing white or black. White and black clothing are associated with death and grieving, so people will opt for colorful clothes befitting of celebration.



5. Don't swear or fight. Everyone should be on their best behavior during Tet towards neighbors, friends and family. Losing your temper or shouting will bring bad luck for the year.

Duc Tran and Tu Bui collaborated on this animated short entitled **10 Things Not to Do in Lunar New Year**, with Tu Bui supplying the graphics and Duc Tuan adding animation, sound and text. "We made the viral clip for a Tet-themed viral clip competition," explains Duc. "We brainstormed whether to illustrate what to do or what **not** to do during Tet and found that the taboos were more

interesting." As for a Hanoi vs. Saigon Tet, Duc prefers Hanoi. "Because of the cold weather, Tet in Hanoi somehow just feels warmer. The city is alive, whereas in Saigon, everyone goes back to their hometown because many people aren't actually from here. For me, Tet means being at home with family, watching movies and cooking together as a family."

For more of their work, including animated clips on what to do during Tet and the history behind the Tet envelopes, visit www.behance.net/ducktran and www.behance.net/xoyoyo0x.



6. Don't give away water or fire. Both water and fire, essential elements, are viewed as auspicious: fire because it's red, the color of luck, and water because an urn full of water symbolizes fortune and bounty. The Vietnamese also say that "money flows like water," so homes will make sure they have plenty of water and stoke their fires so as not to run out.



7. Don't be the first caller on the first day of Tet. For Vietnamese, the first person to visit their home in the new year will affect the family's fortunes for the whole year. Lots of thought will go into finding someone very successful or otherwise fortunate to invite as the first caller. If unsure, only visit very close friends or family.



8. Don't borrow money. Vietnamese will avoid borrowing or lending during Tet. Borrowing means you'll be poor all year whereas lending (money or other items) means you're giving away your luck.



9. Avoid taboo foods. Certain foods, like duck or dog, are traditionally viewed as bad luck during Tet. Other food might be considered unlucky because of its nature (eg. shrimp, because they swim backwards meaning your plans for the year will stall) or because of its name (eg. bitter melon in Vietnamese is *kho qua*, and *kho* can also mean "suffering").



10. Be happy! No one wants to be around a downer during the happiest time of the year. So put your worries aside and join in the fun!

In addition to things to avoid, Vietnamese will surround themselves with auspicious omens - heavily flowering trees and shrubs that signal prosperity; blooming yellow and red flowers, the colors of gold and luck; and visits to the pagoda. ■



Bistro SÔNG VIE

Bistro Song Vie is our all day dining restaurant located by the picturesque Saigon River. We serve Vietnamese and Asian culinary favorites, and delicious Modern cuisine, paired with a thoughtful selection of wines and beverage choices.

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Dr. Van Anh, a member of Animal Doctors International team, has a special interest in veterinary internal medicine and hematology. She graduated from Nong Lam University, her graduation research has been conducted at a veterinary referral hospital in Brisbane, Australia.

Emergency Or Not Emergency

Perhaps it was the accidental tumble down the stairs that your puppy took, or the bag of chocolate candy that your Chihuahua ate in the middle of the night, know when to rush to the vet

KNOWING WHEN YOUR FURRY friends are suffering from a severe health problem can be a tough call. It's not uncommon for symptoms to occur in the middle of the night, however, there are signs that can help pet-owners decide whether to call the 24-hour emergency number or wait until the clinic opens in the morning. These are the five big emergencies that require veterinary care right away.

1. Difficult With Breathing

This is one of the main reasons dogs visit the emergency room. If your dog has breathing



problems, or the breathing seems or sounds "funny," like alarming noises when they breathe, or puffing lips when breathing, you need to take them to the vet as soon as possible.

2. Seizure

In some cases, seizures are not likely to be fatal, but it can come in clusters, which is progressive. However, sometimes seizures are caused by toxics that can cause fatal reactions so best to visit the vet immediately to rule out the latter.

3. Collapse or Intense Weakness

These can be symptoms of bigger health problems such as internal bleeding, cardiac compromise, anaphylactic shock, certain poisonings or some type of organ failure. All of these conditions always require urgent veterinary attention.

4. Bloating

Uncomfortable panting, whimpering, attempting to vomit and abdominal distention are symptoms of bloating. Bloating is a life-threatening situation. Some dogs can exhibit all of these symptoms while others show only one or two, therefore bloating is an emergency situation and they need to go to the nearest veterinarian.

5. Internal Hemorrhage or Trauma

Dogs who fallen from great heights, have been struck by cars/motorbikes, or have been in a fight with much larger dogs can appear unharmed at first, but there may be internal bleeding or damages that you can't see just by looking. If you're not sure what to look for, bring them for a check-up before something more serious develops.

Here are some small tips to check up on your dogs at home, which is to observe their tongue or gums. Gums give a great deal of information about circulation, blood oxygenation and hemorrhage. Normal gums should look pink and moist; and if you press it gently with your finger, the press area should flash white and then turn pink again within one or two seconds. Gums with abnormal colors such as pale, blue, gray or red gums signs of trouble. You can check your dog's gum regularly when they are not in distress and see how it looks like normal.

Finally, it doesn't hurt if you don't take your dog to the vet immediately whenever you see them suffering from a mild tummy ache. But if they are suffering from bloating, don't ignore it because it may be fatal. ■

The Duel for Duality

Tackling the issue of dual citizenship for foreigners



A member of the Paris Bar, **Antoine Logeay** has been practicing law first in France, mainly in litigation and arbitration, then in Vietnam for three years as an associate of Audier & Partners based at its Hanoi office. Audier & Partners is an international law firm with presence in Vietnam, Myanmar and Mongolia, providing advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

Dear Antoine,

I'm an Australian citizen and would like to become a Vietnamese citizen because I'll be marrying a Vietnamese woman and have decided to settle down here permanently. Can I apply for Vietnamese citizenship right after our marriage without having lived in Vietnam for the past several years? Also please shed light on how I can keep my Australian citizenship?

FIRST OF ALL, LET ME

congratulate you on your upcoming nuptials. Becoming a Vietnamese citizen isn't a bad idea if you decide to settle down in Vietnam because it may offer you some advantages. However, it is not a common practice, and most foreigners who marry locals and end up settling down here don't often pursue Vietnamese citizenship. It is certainly due to the complexity of the procedure, in particular the procedure to be exempted from renouncing your foreign nationality.

The 2008 Law on Vietnamese Nationality sets the general conditions that a foreign national must satisfy to become a Vietnamese citizen: he or she must 1) have resided in Vietnam for five years or more; 2) be capable of making a living in Vietnam; 3) understand the Vietnamese language well enough to integrate into the Vietnamese community; 4) have full civil capacity to act; 5) obey the laws of Vietnam and respect its traditions, customs and practices.

You should probably have frowned as you read the first condition, as I understand from your question that you did not actually live in Vietnam until recently. However, the law also allows foreign nationals, in certain specific situations, exemption from one or all of the first three conditions mentioned above. These specific situations are: 1) foreign nationals being a spouse, a natural parent or natural offspring of a Vietnamese citizen; 2) foreigners having made meritorious contributions to Vietnam's national construction and defense; and 3) foreign nationals whose acquisition of Vietnamese citizenship would be helpful to the State of Vietnam.

You will have to submit an application to the local department of

justice. This file must contain specific documents such as 1) a standard application form; 2) a copy of your birth certificate, passport or a valid substitute document; 3) a curriculum vitae made in a standard format as issued by the Ministry of Justice; and 4) recent judicial records. You must also provide papers proving your Vietnamese language skills, your place and period of residence in Vietnam and your ability to earn an income in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the law specifies that these documents are not required for persons exempted from several conditions on naturalization in Vietnam (foreign nationals being a spouse of a Vietnamese citizen, among others).

If you claim to fall within one of the three exempted categories, you will need to prove you satisfy the relevant condition by providing, for instance, a copy of the marriage certificate or orders and medals, to evidence special meritorious contributions to Vietnam's national construction and defense.

Regarding the procedure itself, your application file will go through various state authorities for verification and review before it will be handed over to the Ministry of Justice. If your application is complete and all requirements are satisfied, it will be sent to the Prime Minister to finally end up on the desk of the President of Vietnam for his final decision.

Also, if your application is successful, you must bear a Vietnamese name. But don't worry, you can choose the name and it has to be noted in your application file.

Concerning your other question about the right to keep your Australian nationality, that one might be tougher to answer, and you will understand why. Dual nationality remains a very interesting topic for lawyers here in

Vietnam.

Until 2008, the Vietnamese authorities were strictly preventing foreigners to acquire Vietnamese nationality while keeping their home nationality. Interestingly, post-war refugees and other overseas Vietnamese who have become citizens of second countries could not reclaim their lapsed Vietnamese nationality without losing their new citizenship. The approach taken did not prescribe at this time resolution of conflicts related to dual citizenship, giving rise to disputes over the protection of citizens between Vietnam and other countries.

A 2008 law has brought a real change on this issue, allowing post-war refugees and other overseas Vietnamese who have become citizens of second countries to reclaim their Vietnamese nationality without losing their new citizenship.

But what changes has this law brought for foreigners and dual citizenship? According to the law, foreigners applying for Vietnamese citizenship must still give up their current citizenship. *But*, the law allows you to apply for dual citizenship *if* the President of the Republic of Vietnam allows you to retain your foreign nationality. The President will only issue such exemption in "special cases," and this remains unclear as no guidelines are given regarding these "special cases."

What should you do then? I am not certain that your application has a great chance of success, except if you have enough connections inside (or if you are ready to renounce your Australian nationality). Consider keeping your Australian nationality and live as a foreigner in Vietnam with a residence card, almost all foreigners in Vietnam do that and it hasn't prevented them from enjoying this beautiful country! ■



The
Iconic
Dress



A lasting impression for any visitor to Vietnam is the beauty of the women dressed in their ao dais. Girls dressed in white pick their way through muddy streets going home from school or sail by in a graceful chatter on their bikes. Secretaries in delicate pastels greet you at an office door and older ladies in deep shades of purple, green or blue cut a striking pose eating dinner at a restaurant. Its body-hugging top flows over wide trousers that brush the floor. Splits in the gown extend well above waist height and make it comfortable and easy to move in.



Although virtually the whole body is swathed in soft flowing fabric, these splits give the odd glimpse of a bare midriff, making the outfit very sensual. How can the Vietnamese national costume, the ao dai, introduced nearly 250 years ago remain a common fixture at upscale events as well as in daily life? Because the ao dai has the remarkable ability to evolve in response to the time.



Designer
Duong Ngoc (Katty)
for **The Kat House**
(14 Nguyen Huu Cau, DI)







Back

Vietnam barely had any IT companies 15 years ago, but now there are close to 14,000 IT businesses spanning hardware, software and digital content. The country's tech scene is thriving, with local and expat entrepreneurs launching successful businesses and plans for a Silicon Valley-style tech hub taking shape. Youth, innovation and investment are coming together in Ho Chi Minh City to foster a vibrant startup scene that the government hopes will help modernize Vietnam's fast-growing economy.

TECH for *Jet*



VISUALIZE THE FUTURE

USING 3D VISUALIZATION AND SIMULATION IN URBAN PLANNING

Text by Johnny Tran
Images by Ngoc Tran and Rolling Ant

AH, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL SUNDAY!

I walked outside to Nguyen Hue Boulevard for some *ca phe da* and *banh mi op la*. Since I was nearby, I decided to take some photos at the garden by Uncle Ho's statue. With Uncle Ho fresh on my mind, I decided to visit the man himself at the mausoleum in Hanoi, but instead I took a detour to the links and played a round of golf at the EcoPark golf course in Aqua Bay, Hung Yen Province. I chose Aqua Bay because I also wanted to check the progress on the construction of my new luxury condo there, to remind myself of the breathtaking balcony view from my soon-to-be new home. I was quite famished after golf, so I stopped by Los Angeles for some good ol' LA burritos—yes, LA has some of the best burritos. I was in the mood for some world-class art, so I checked Google and it showed that the Hermitage Museum has a new art exhibit, so off to St. Petersburg, Russia I went. Am I some globetrotting billionaire with his own private G6 jet? Sadly, no. I am a starving



artist, full of dreams but empty pockets. However, regardless of the numbers of zeros in your bank account you can still experience life as a jetsetter with the help of virtual reality (VR).

I know as much about VR as the average consumer — enough to enjoy it, but not enough to fully understand it and how it apply it to the real world. So I paid a visit to Rolling Ant's (rollingant.com), the company that designed the Nguyen Hue Pedestrian Street area using a set of 3D interactive visualization tools, to find about more about VR. As I stepped into their office the first thing that struck my attention was the cocktail bar at the far corner, where the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooked the Saigon River. I knew then that this was not a regular company doing normal, everyday things. As I met and talked with CEO Nam Nguyen, I quickly came to understand the vision behind the company. Nam started out doing

computer coding with an outsourced company called Glass Egg, which did video game projects for huge multinational companies such as Microsoft and Electronic Arts. With this background, it was natural for Nam to progress into the VR industry.

The Nguyen Hue Boulevard project was a VR interpretation of the entire boulevard area after a renovation project to make it more modern and beautiful. It allowed the government's Urban Planning Department (UPD) to see their vision in 3D and make any unforeseen changes if needed before even actually breaking ground. The UPD did not want to spend two years (or possibly more) drawing sketches, planning, building and rebuilding, which what would have been needed if the 3D interactive software had not been invented. The interactive platform allowed the UPD to not only discuss amongst each other, but to other necessary departments and



agencies, such as the Department of Transportation, Tourism, Construction and the People's Committee, and to make changes in real time with immediate results. The final outcome took seven months, finished in November 2014, and is 95 percent accurate to the VR version.

Without VR, such a monumental task involving so many departments and agencies would need a tremendous amount of discussions and protocols. With VR, everyone can see exactly what they want to see, what they want to do, and all the changes can be made in real time, without having to make changes to the blueprints and other tangible dynamics, because everything is done through software. Also, everyone can be present at one time while all the changes are being made, so everything can be done twice or thrice as fast.

The Nguyen Hue Project was an integral undertaking for Rolling Ant, but it has since expanded to bigger projects, such as the aforementioned EcoPark Project, which, once finished (it is an ongoing project which will take a total of two years), will cover the entire 510-hectare area of Aqua Bay. Nam gave me a virtual tour and it had me awestruck. It was like being inside a beautiful fantasy video game. I flew around the luxury condominium area of skyscrapers, parks, lakes and the most beautiful virtual scenery in Vietnam. I was able to watch the sunrise and sunset, lounge around at the tropical garden pool, and I was even able see the viewpoint of my luxury penthouse suite, to see what my view would be from my balcony and living room. Rolling Ant's other notable VR projects include commissions for the interiors of the Hermitage Museum and the CBRE headquarters in Los Angeles, California.

Finally, Rolling Ant is also expanding into augmented reality applications, or AR for short. Being able to commercialize their software platform is the next logical, and practical, step. For example, you wanted to buy a sofa for your house, but don't want to drive to store. Even if you did brave the traffic and bought a sofa, you might not like how it looks with the rest of your décor once you have it home, and now you have to return it. What if there was a way to save time and eliminate the guesswork without leaving home? Well, this is possible with AR. With Rolling Ant's software, you can use your phone or tablet, choose the furniture and see how it would look placed anywhere in your home. The augmented virtual image will look exactly like the real life furniture, and the dimensions are to scale, so you would know exactly how it would fit in the space that you want.

The future of modern living is intriguing, virtual reality and augmented reality present options to make our lives easier, inform us better, and, perhaps most importantly, save us time and money. ■



CUR COFE

WOULD YOU LIKE TO
ESCAPE INTO
ANOTHER REALITY
WITH YOUR COFFEE,
MA'AM?

Text by Kaitlan Spencer
Images Provided by Nguyen Quoc Khanh

CAFÉ THUC TE AO IN BINH

Thanh District (8 Hoang Hoa Tham, Binh Thanh) has been open for two years. Impressively, the café's owner, Nguyen Quoc Khanh, is only 23 years old. With a background in event technology, he integrated his experience in tech and his passion for gaming in the opening of the café: "I love VR. I love technology. I love coffee."

The distinguishing feature of the place is a large carpeted stage dominating one end of the room. Bordered by large windows on two sides and a mirror on the third, the platform serves as the focal point and main attraction. It's here that customers can put on a headset, grab controllers and be transported to the realm of virtual reality gaming.

Virtual reality gaming is a unique experience where the player is able to enter into and interact with a three-dimensional space. The equipment includes a tethered headset that connects to a PC as well as two controllers that loop around the wrists. VR games range from classic adventure and puzzle games to new challenges that come alive in three dimensions: Explore space, oceans, racing, painting, escape rooms and more.

There are several gaming options at Café Thuc Te Ao. Customers interested in VR have their choice of two different VR systems: the HTC Vive (retailing at USD600) and the Oculus Rift (retailing at USD400). There are also two PlayStations and

wireless VR headsets compatible with any iPhone or Android smartphone. With over 700 games to choose from, including the latest and top-rated in VR gaming, repeat customers always having something new to play. Most importantly, the use of the all systems is free as long as you buy a drink.

Khanh's love for tech is evident in the café's decor. There are large collages of Google and Windows icons as well as a giant clock with pictures of different VR games in place of numbers. A friendly barista offers a menu of coffee, juice, smoothies and snacks.

During our late morning interview, the café is quiet except for two men with laptops and paperwork spread across one of the tables. As we talked, school ended for the morning and high school students trickled in and ordered drinks. Most patrons are students and developers, and their peak hours are 6pm to 9pm when school and work have finished for the day.

"It makes me so happy when I see the customers play," says Khanh.

As we talked, a few students stepped onto the platform. The barista, who doubles as the game guide, ventured out from behind the counter to assist. The first gamer donned the HTC Vive tethered headset, grabbed controllers and was soon shooting a laser gun and avoiding meteors in *Space War*. His friends sat and stood around the platform watching the monitor and yelling encouragement.

Khanh offers me a VR headset for use



with a smartphone. "These are 3D," he says as he pulls out his cellphone and opens YouTube. A quick search of 'Video 3D sbs' produced endless options for 3D videos. He chooses one of a snake, places his phone inside the headset and snaps it shut. He hands it across the table and I slip it over my head. My vision is now filled with a jungle scene with a large snake hanging from a tree branch swaying back and forth before lunging towards me. Other YouTube searches produce videos of animals, rollercoasters, skydiving, zombies and more.

When I ask Khanh about his competition, he shakes his head. The only other venue in Ho Chi Minh City offering VR gaming is a pay-to-play establishment that lacks the atmosphere and food and drink options of a coffee shop. The casual and friendly vibe at his café welcomes even the most novice of gamers to learn about VR technology, watch others play, and try their luck at a new three-dimensional adventure.

"This is my favorite game," says Khanh motioning to the stage, "*Fruit Ninja*."

A teenage boy leaps around the platform swinging his arm wildly through the air. His friends laughs as watermelons and pineapples are sliced open on the screen. Having seen this game played on cellphones and tablets, it was both familiar and exciting to see it played on a VR platform. Customers throughout the café turn to watch the player as he whips his 'sword' back and forth.

Khanh has big plans for the future, hoping to expand to seven different locations and bring his unique café-for-gamers all over Saigon. ■





ADD THE APP

**PEOPLE LOVE
FAIRYTALE STORIES
OF SUCCESSFUL APP
DEVELOPERS, HERE'S
ANOTHER ONE FROM
BARBARA XIMENEZ,
CO-FOUNDER OF
SHUTTA**

Text by **Barbara Ximenez**
Images Provided by **Shutta Ltd.**

HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR VIETNAM, it's very possible that the idea for Shutta would never have been born. When James Shimell, my co-founder and the original creator of the Shutta app, and I visited Vietnam for the first time in December 2012 something magical happened.

For the past five and eight years, respectively, we had been working in the south of Spain, in an area of Europe that was particularly badly affected by the economic downturn. James was working as an IT manager for a real estate application software company, one of the very few companies that, in fact, benefited from the crisis. I had, somehow, managed to keep my own company, specialized in strategic management software solutions, afloat through the worst of things, but business was tough, and the general atmosphere around us was depressed and worried.

In stark contrast, Vietnam was vibrant and alive, buzzing with possibilities and filled with people with both dreams and the passion to pursue them. Three weeks

exposure to this palpable energy was like therapy; first it revived us, and then it inspired us. Within three months of our first visit, we returned for a second dose of Vietnamese inspiration, and by September 2013 we were both knee-deep in all sorts of projects outside of our regular day jobs. Looking back, I feel that Vietnam showed us that, regardless of the hardship that surrounds you, staying active is the best way to stay passionate. What's more, this constant activity, having the drive to continuously develop, will naturally create the right conditions for a eureka moment to strike.

For Shutta, that moment happened on a beautiful, sunny day on a beach, at the first ever Festival of Colours beach concert in Tarifa, Spain. The blindingly blue sky and pearly white sand provided the perfect contrast for the bright-colored chalk plumes that the audience would throw up every hour, but it proved impossible to capture the perfect moment in a photograph. And so, the idea for a photo-from-video app was born.

It took James a few months of weekend and evening work to develop the app, which, at that time, was just a tool to extract a photo from a video without compromising the resolution compared to the original videoframe. The software company that James was still working for was considering options for an offshore development house and by the time the app was first released to the App Store, we were settling into our new home in An Phu An Khanh.

Shutta remained a side project for another year, as James got busy establishing the software development house for his employer, and I set about winding down my Spanish company after another year of stagnant growth. The working day in Spain did not start until mid-afternoon in Vietnam, providing the perfect opportunity to spend the mornings attending intensive Vietnamese language lessons at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities. I signed up for the classes because I believed that living in Vietnam would be more interesting if I could understand what was going on around me. In hindsight, being able to understand all the Vietnamese paperwork that I have to sign every day, makes the time invested in learning the language even more valuable.

During that year, the behavior of the small userbase of 7,000 Shutta users around the world taught us a lot about how we could refine the app, how to make it more useful and, most importantly, more fun. Several iterations later, Shutta had evolved from a mere tool into a full-blown app with photo-editing functionality and an integrated social network. Spurred on by the enthusiastic support of family and friends, we decided to take the plunge, put our app to the test and find out whether there was a future for Shutta beyond the fun side project it was.

I'm not sure if we were insanely ambitious or just endearingly naïve, but we picked the first tech conference that was coming up as our launching ground:

TechCrunch Disrupt New York 2015, one of the biggest tech conferences in the world. I think that once the booth tickets were bought and the trip was booked, the prospect of spending this much money to launch a bootstrapped app, just to go unnoticed in a sea of other start-ups, some with serious funding or celebrity backing behind them, frightened us so much that it kicked our preparations into full overdrive. We researched everything about the event, we approached every attending member of the press for a meeting or interview weeks beforehand, we had press releases ready for every possible outcome of the conference, we set up all our social media, populated it and got lots of interaction going with our ever-supportive friends, we made a promo video, we had stickers and t-shirts made for give-aways. By the time the conference opened on May 4, 2015, we knew more about the who's who and what's what of the event than the event crew.

The Irish say that luck is nothing more than preparation meets opportunity, and this certainly has been true for Shutta. The conference led to a little press attention, our social media amplified the little buzz that this press attention created; this led to what was then significant user growth, which in turn led to a feature as Best New App in the Apple App Store and ultimately to receiving investment offers. I had been working full-time on Shutta since a couple of months before the conference, and in January 2016, having received funding and set up our headquarters in Hong Kong, James was also able to leave his day job. About a month later, we opened the doors to Shutta Vietnam, where all our tech development takes place, and we have been based in our office-with-a-garden in District 2 ever since.

Today, the app itself is unrecognizable compared to the original version. Our team of developers has turned Shutta into a slick modern app with a smart content delivery network that ensures our users can use the app as smoothly as possible. The popular photo contests that we used to run through our social media pages have been integrated into the app, and these Shutta Missions have become an important feature for a significant part of our userbase. Unlike the Instagrams and Snapchats of this world, you can't survive as a start-up in Asia without a clear path to revenue, and through missions we have been able to create a revenue model that doesn't depend on bothering our users

with unsolicited advertising in the app. Brands pay us to organize photo contests that generate content that fits their brand image, and our users get the opportunity to win high-value prizes—everybody wins.

When we first saw one of our users refer to themselves as a Shutta Missionary, it sparked the whole creative chain of events that is leading us to the next evolution of the app, due to be released any day now—in Vietnam only for the moment, although the roll-out to the region will follow before too long. Knowing we had users who would eagerly await the Friday announcement of newly-opened missions, to then plan their weekend around hunting for the perfect winning photograph, we realized that we could offer these missionaries many more ways of making the real world around them a fun playground. We could literally gamify reality in such a way that fit naturally into the existing app. In the process we could also offer our brands one of the most sought-after marketing goals: to measurably connect the online and offline customer journeys.

We are only just approaching our second anniversary, but it feels like we have lived several lifetimes over the past two years, and there are too many lessons learnt to recount, but here are some of my favorite realizations:

Allow your well-laid out plans to unfold organically; being open to being wrong about your assumptions and willing to change accordingly allows you to continuously have mini-eureka moments. Surround yourself with a core crew of people that are as bought in as you are, that share your passion, and encourage them to bring their own talents to the table; you will depend on them when the going gets tough. And pitch to clients more than you pitch to investors; they are the safer and often quicker route to a positive cash flow and longevity as a business.

The work is never finished, you are never done. Your users want constant renovation, your clients have ever-changing demands, and tech itself changes so fast that you are on a constant quest to stay on top of the game. You have to be some sort of crazy to get into this start-up life, but, if you are going to do it, I still believe that there is no more magical place than Vietnam to keep that fire in your belly alive. And trust me, you're going to need a lot of fire. ■



BLOCKCHAIN REACTION

WHETHER YOU'RE A PARENT, A CONSUMER, A LISTENER OF MUSIC, AN EMPLOYEE, A VOTER, A CITIZEN - BLOCKCHAIN AFFECTS YOU IN EVERY WAY

Text by **Aliesha Duffin**
Image by **Ngoc Tran**

AT JUST 24, JOUTAROU MATSUI boosts an impressive résumé and is making waves within the emerging blockchain technology industry here in Vietnam. Originally from Japan, Joutarou has worked throughout Southeast Asia in a wide range of industries, from real estate to market entry and business development roles to integrated marketing positions for software companies. But now he wants to be known as the founder and CEO of Proteusion Research and Development (PRD, proteusion.com), a blockchain technology research and development company based in Saigon. Established in 2016 with just three employees, including himself, PRD has grown to over 40 employees in a short time and is well on its way of achieving its main goal of making blockchain technology accessible to everyone.

"Vietnam is a country that embraces startups, its tech talents are constantly being recognized and even the government has declared its vision of making Vietnam a "startup nation," says Joutarou when asked about why he chose to base his company here.

Blockchain Explained

Blockchain technology is perhaps best known as the technology that is behind bitcoin. This technology is predicted to be massive and has already made waves in the Fintech industry. It is also being used in a number of different fields, such as social networks, supply chain management and the food industry to name a few. But what is it exactly?

Simply put, a blockchain is a shared and trusted public ledger. Essentially, it is a record of transactions that are not on a centralized server. The decentralized applications, or Dapps, that are run on a peer-to-peer network are not controlled by any single party. An unchangeable record of transactions, each one is time-stamped and linked to the previous one. Each digital record or transaction in the thread is called a block (thus the name), and it allows either an open or controlled set of users to participate in the electronic ledger. Each block is linked to a specific participant thus it makes a "blockchain."

Why does this make blockchain so

remarkable? Because it is a shared public ledger, there are thousands of copies. The network is shared across multiple sites, geographical locations and institutions, which means that it's resilient to attacks and virtually unhackable, although there are several examples of hacking when it comes to the Ethereum network. This is because the thousands of ledgers are controlled by independent actors (miners) who are financially incentivised to keep their ledgers accurate. The miners are usually rewarded with a percentage of the currency they are mining—Bitcoin, Ethereum etc.

For example, let's say you want to sell your house. You can register it on a blockchain-operated platform for free. Your house will become visible to all users connected to the network. Once a buyer agrees on a price for your house, an escrow account is created on the blockchain that requires two out of three people (the buyer, the seller and a potential third-party arbitrator) to agree for the funds to be released. Once the buyer has sent the payment to the account, you hand over the keys. After receiving the keys, the buyer releases the funds from the escrow account. Only if there is an issue between the two does the system require the intervention of a third party (a randomly selected arbitrator) to decide whether to release the payment to the seller or whether to return the money to the buyer. There are no banks, no real estate agents and basically no middleperson that you have to put your trust (and your money) in.

PRD and Blockchain

What exactly is PRD doing with this technology that many are calling the biggest thing since the internet? They have several different projects happening right now, with a main focus to re-design and re-define their existing business model by utilizing an original blockchain. This is quite a big undertaking as the company is working on creating their own original network blockchain. Many Dapps that are released use the Ethereum blockchain. "The problem with using Ethereum's blockchain is that it can become blocked and quite slow. The popular game Cryptokitties is a perfect example of this; the massive popularity of the virtual pet app caused transactions to slow down significantly," explains Joutarou when asked why they were not just using Ethereum like so many other startups. Currently they are in the research stage, with the company's blockchain experts hard at work to bring PRD into the next stage of development.

With problems existing in the original networks that haven't been solved yet, PRD is trying to figure out the best way to resolve these. By taking the time to



address current issues, such as slow transactions and security gaps within the system, they hope to be able to develop products that not only utilize blockchain technology but also have long-term stay. In such a competitive industry this is a crucial focal point for the company, well aware that most startups fail. So what are some potential use cases for blockchain technology? "The possibilities are broad and the technology can be applied in many different ways, such as data sharing in the medical industry, voting systems and the use in supply chains in particular," says Joutarou.

They hope to be market leaders in this emerging industry in Vietnam. Another project that the company is working on is developing a social networking systems (SNS) application called Wrappy. Wrappy will not only be a chat app but also a crowdsourcing tool that utilizes the blockchain in the form of smart contracts.

When it comes to the Vietnamese market, they are aiming to be a business incubator for other blockchain startups by providing startups with advice on business development, starting a new business enterprise and guiding them on the best way to move forward in Vietnam. Although Vietnam is friendly to startups, blockchain technology is still uncharted waters and many companies are waiting to see where the government stands on blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies. The verdict on cryptocurrencies should be out soon.

PRD recently sponsored Blockathon, Vietnam's first and largest blockchain hackathon, which was attended by thousands of students and techies from across the country. As Vietnam's economy continues to grow there will be opportunities for blockchain to be utilized in some of the country's key industries. "Innovation by blockchain can happen anywhere," adds Joutarou. "Vietnam is the ideal place for it to happen, especially with a young population and an immense amount of tech talent." ■

FREELANCER IDENTITY THEFT

IT HAPPENED TO ME
- HERE'S WHAT YOU
SHOULD KNOW

Text by Relja Damjanovic

Several weeks ago, I was thinking about hiring myself for a project I had in mind. Sounds crazy, right? That's because it is, and I wouldn't be doing it had I not been a victim of identity theft!

I'm sharing my experience with fellow freelancers because there is nothing crazy or funny about what I learned along the way. I learned my lesson the hard way, so you don't have to. That's why I'm writing this article and why you should read it.

It All Began With A Skype Chat

I was contacted by someone on Skype, claiming he hired me through a freelancing network and after some time working on a project, he figured out that that person was not as skilled as he claimed to be, leading the client to discover that the freelancer, in fact, was not me. The client shared every detail, contact and profile with me, and as I reviewed the information, I was shocked.

This impostor was intensely posing as me. His profile was filled with all of my personal information: My profile picture, stolen from Facebook, the portfolio and skills section, lifted from my Toptal profile, along with content taken from sites, namely LinkedIn.

How Does This Happen?

After further digging, I realized that this doesn't just happen to a few random people here and there. It's quite commonplace, and it's become a significant problem. As in many other industries, this is considered stealing intellectual property in order to gain a competitive advantage, and it is particularly evident in the world of freelancing. Unethical people create profiles on open freelance networks, pretending to be someone with much more experience and expertise than themselves. They use the stolen profile to poach jobs, and set higher prices than they're worth. Open freelance networks do not run thorough background checks on applicants, which means they have little control over the content their members put up online. In failing to vet their members, they create a platform that can be abused by identity thieves.

Clients looking for freelancers often take what is written in their portfolio at face value. They conduct interviews without visual contact, or simply place too much trust in people on the basis of online communication. This makes them easy targets for unethical people to



take advantage of. They use fake profiles to land real jobs, and make real money.

How Do You Know If You're A Victim?

For the most part, this is pretty straightforward. Simply Google your name, and search for yourself on the biggest freelance platforms. However, keep in mind that some platforms allow their users to remain invisible to the public, meaning you might have to create a profile on the platform, and log in before you can search. Again, this might not be enough, especially for people with common first or last names, since a search could yield many results. Identity thieves also use alternate spellings and make other changes to keep their fake identity under wraps.

How Do I Prevent This From Happening?

You can't. At least not with 100 percent efficiency. So, what can you do? Well, you can and should take steps to protect your privacy.

No solution is bulletproof, but it doesn't have to be. Your solution just needs to make every step of identity theft tricky and time consuming, in order to deter the attacker. In short, by improving your security, you're forcing attackers to look for softer targets.

Here are a few simple solutions.

- Consider cross-pollinating links to your profiles on all public networks you use, email and email signature, Skype account, and so on. If you have your

own website, link your Skype account, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and any other network you use.

- On each of these sites, clearly state that these are the only accounts you are using. If someone does a background check and realizes they're communicating with a different account, it should raise an alarm and compel potential clients to request additional information (hopefully, from one of your real accounts).

- To further protect yourself, take some time to create accounts on various freelance networks, even if you don't plan on using them. Making a duplicate profile on a network that already has your legitimate profile is difficult, and fraud is easier to detect. In the end, if a fake profile actually appears on a network, you'll have your original profile with which to file a complaint.

Think of it this way: If you install a cutting edge alarm system in your car, that doesn't guarantee it won't get stolen. But it does mean that a car thief is more likely choose a soft, unsecured target instead, thus reducing their exposure to risk and increasing their chances of success.

The same principle of deterrence applies to online security. You don't have to create a bulletproof way of protecting your professional identity; you merely need to take precautions that will make it harder to steal and therefore not worth the trouble.

All freelancers work hard for their reputation. Having someone pretending to be you can put all this at risk, and potentially cause serious and long-lasting damage to your professional reputation. Clients, who hire identity thieves, are victims of fraud, too, and once they realize that, they are likely to turn to you, because they don't know who else to turn to.

You don't want a stranger contacting you out of blue to ask about money sent to you for a job you never finished. But, sometimes it happens, and sometimes, the client will turn to you for help.

The immediate financial impact of identity theft on freelancing platforms might not seem that great, but the reputational risks are, and in the long run, they can cost you dearly. That's why the industry needs to take this issue seriously, and take additional steps to prevent identity theft on their platforms.

We're all in the same boat, and it's about time we start acting like it.

Why My Lessons May Apply To You

Well, the answer is obvious—because it happened to me! At first, I laughed.

But after two weeks of back-and-forth emails with the freelance network support team, I got really frustrated. I kept receiving generic responses, claiming the platform was working on my case and thanking me for bringing this to its attention. At one point I asked to send them an ID scan so they could actually verify that I was who I claimed I was.

So, they verified my account, but it still didn't help. I still received messages from support, stating that it couldn't inform me about the outcome of the investigation because it needed to protect the member's privacy.

This was downright wrong on many levels since I was the person whose privacy was violated. In the end, I had to dig deeper myself.

I found something called a Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) Takedown Notice. The DMCA notice is essentially a complaint any person can file if their copyrighted material is being used without their consent.

How do you file a DMCA takedown notice? There are some services that will navigate the entire process on your behalf, but these services aren't free. If you're not comfortable handing off your DMCA claim to a third-party, you can do it yourself, but you need to be patient and do some due diligence.

Step one: Locate the correct person to send the notice to. To do this, find out who the legal representative is at the company that owns the site with the infringing material, and also check where the site is hosted.

Next, see if the company/ISP has an online form for submitting DMCA takedown requests, and use those if possible.

If not, then you can file it in the email form. Companies have

legal@ email addresses for this sort of communication and you can use Headreach or Email Hunter if you need help. If you are asked to file it in a different format, or send it to a different email, comply with the request promptly since it's the fastest way of getting it resolved. You will have your homework before you shoot off a DMCA notice:

- Take plenty of time to prepare your DMCA notice letter.
- Be pleasant: Do not argue. It will not get you anywhere.
- The notice should be signed by you, and it should contain details about the copyrighted material, such as who wrote it.
- Set aside time to prepare an additional document that details everything stolen from you.
- Include links and screenshots, such as links to your original work.

The more comprehensive you are, the faster the entire situation goes away. Remember to include all of your contact information, and an additional statement explaining the problem and attesting to the legitimacy of your notice

Should You Take Legal Action?

This is a tricky question.

Open freelance networks usually protect themselves through their Terms of Service (TOS), meaning that they are not responsible for the content uploaded by their users. Therefore they cannot be held liable, just like you can't sue Facebook when someone creates a fake profile in your name.

However, you can take on the individual, who used your material and stole your identity. This leads us to an obvious predicament: Because the thief is pretending to be you, you don't know his or her real identity.

While open freelancing platforms can help, it doesn't mean they will help. In my case, the network probably knew who the impostor was—at the very least through his or her IP address and payment gateway account. But it wouldn't share the information with me because “they need to protect their user's privacy,” per their TOS. This means the burden of proof falls solely on you. I did consider a less conventional option.

I wanted to create a fake profile for myself, and offer a job to the identity thief, in hopes of learning more about their actual identity. I decided against it because that would make me unethical as well.

Here's how clients can protect themselves from impostors:

1. Do the following every time you hire someone:
 - Research the candidate. Google them, and look at all their online profiles. See what you can learn about their professional skills and experience. Further, check if any of the profiles you find link to the website/platform you found the candidate on. You can also

consider using Headreach and Email Hunter to check the email they are using.

- Check the portfolio. Click on all the links provided by the freelancer. Don't just look, check! See if those are live and functional websites. A broken link may suggest that the site went down at one point in the past, but also that it never existed. Therefore, if there's not a link to a live website, then chances are it's just made up. Or perhaps the developer cannot provide a link to some of her work due to NDA restrictions. Nevertheless, you can always ask her about it, without requiring the candidate to reveal anything that's covered in the NDA.

- Schedule a video interview. If you schedule an interview, make sure it's in the form of a video chat. Today, it's considered common courtesy to use your webcam when speaking with someone online for the first time. It's a way of getting to know each other, which is always important, because it builds trust. It's just like you would get to know the candidate in person if they were applying for a non-remote job

2. Try the following, if you can:

- Get an expert opinion. If you're an expert in the field you're hiring for, you can properly vet the candidate, and gauge their knowledge and previous experience yourself. It's not easy to screen technical candidates when you're not an engineer yourself so get someone else to do it for you.

- Contact their former employers. Ask for a reference. If you contact four or five of their references, at least one person is likely to respond. You should be able to get a general feeling from their responses.

- Consider adding additional steps to your hiring process. When vetting “unvetted” freelancers, try to come up with open-ended interview questions designed to expose potential fraudsters. You could also try a more personal approach, and ask questions based on the freelancer's bio: personal stuff that a fraudster might not have picked up.

My advice to clients hiring online talent is simple: Pay attention, especially when you recruit from an open network. If your friend recommends a freelancer, then you can be sure you're going to be fine, but if you pick someone you found online, please make sure to set aside time for research and background checks. I am aware that this is a tall order, as every hour spent vetting candidates is an hour you could have spent on something more productive. To make matters worse, many clients turn to online hiring at the worst possible moment—when they realize they won't be able to meet their targets and need fresh blood on short notice. However, the potential risk of hiring a fraudster outweighs the time spent on a reasonable background check.

Online identity theft happens all the time. In fact, someone's likely had their identity stolen as you read this article. Let's hope it wasn't you. ■

A computer science engineering graduate from the University of Belgrade with both corporate and freelance experience, Relja also runs his own web development company. He is great at algorithm design/analysis as well as database design/architecture. He is an expert at Magento, for which he is certified for both front-end and back-end.

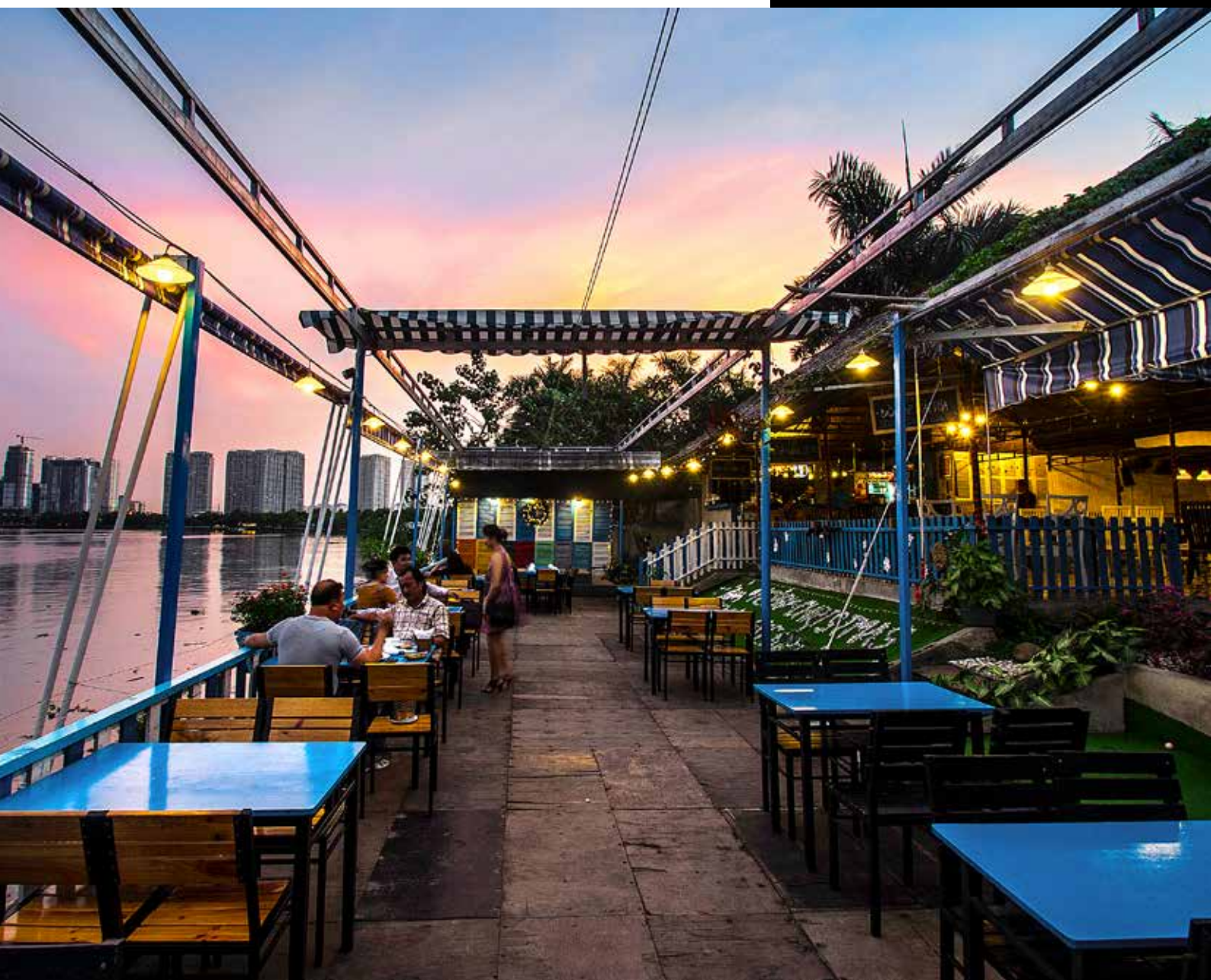


Wine & Dine

THE RIVER RESTAURANT
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN







Dine by the Waterside

A rustic riverside restaurant that majors
in delicious Vietnamese barbecue

Text by **Grant Hawkins**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**



PERCHED CONVENIENTLY ON

the northeastern shore of the Thao Dien peninsula, **The River Restaurant** (199 Nguyen Van Huong, D2) is District 2's newest Vietnamese riverside eatery. With a fully-stocked bar and an expansive menu of Vietnamese classics (along with some new favorites), The River Restaurant is a beautiful place to catch the sunset while sharing a cold drink and delicious food with friends, or take a date to for a romantic evening.

What sets The River apart from other Vietnamese restaurants are the special details and charming bits of character scattered throughout. Upon arrival, guests are welcomed into a grass-roofed tiki bar and dining room. Greeted by friendly staff and festive music, they are then led out to the deck, which more closely resembles a lake wide wharf, complete with wooden floor and a picket fence right next to the water. Also available are a few open-air tables and a separate dining room for private events. The facilities are clean and well-appointed, and (for our visit) Christmas



Grilled shrimp in Chili Salt



Grilled Bacon Ha Noi Style

(VND180,000). Hanoi style means thick slices of crispy-edged bacon are served steaming hot with a spicy green dipping-sauce and a portion of green veggies.

Our last dish, also a house favorite, was the Grilled Chicken in Green Chili Salt (VND180,000). The Vietnamese have a special name - *ga ta* - for chicken that is raised locally, rather than in a factory. Literally "backyard chicken," it's served in small bits and the meat is lean and sticks closely to the bone. While they are likely to include more traditional chicken in the future to accommodate Western customers, we

appreciated the genuine Vietnamese dish and the story that goes with it.

At the end of the night, The River Restaurant offers a beautiful and peaceful setting. With a unique and inviting atmosphere, specialty dishes and a convenient location, it's sure to be a favorite place for introducing newcomers to Vietnamese cuisine, meeting friends for an after-work dinner, or even spending a peaceful hour alone next to the gentle burble of the Saigon River. If you're fed up with the traffic and movement of the city, The River Restaurant is a delightful escape. ■

decorations were sprinkled throughout. One's first impression is that of a lively local bar frequented by expats, where you're likely to find a famous old writer and be treated to delightful stories of his adventures in the countryside.

Our dinner began with a glass of the Berri Estates Cabernet Sauvignon (VND80,000), a full-bodied Australian wine nicely chilled and promptly delivered. The rich fruity smell of the wine mixed with the fresh river air and caught the light of the newest An Phu developments, just within view but blissfully silent. Boats and birds meandered past as we took a moment to enjoy the calm atmosphere and look at the menu. The fare is mainly Vietnamese classics specializing in grilled meats and seafood. Our first dish was the Grilled Shrimp in Chili Salt (VND180,000), which was grilled to perfection, amply seasoned and delivered steaming hot with chili salt and lime on the side.

At the chef's suggestion, we were next treated to the Grilled Bacon Hanoi Style



Grilled Chicken in Green Chili Salt



Taste in Travel

Discovering the flavors of Phu Quoc at
Novotel's Food Exchange

Text by **James Pham**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**

BEACH VACATIONS ARE MEANT TO be relaxed affairs, a free-and-easy spirit perfectly embodied by **Novotel Phu Quoc Resort's** (www.novotelphuquoc.com) all-day dining restaurant, **Food Exchange**.

Situated off the resort's main lobby and completely enclosed by floor-to-ceiling glass, Food Exchange with its spacious open kitchen, is a cheery, bustling space any time of day, overlooking the resort's central infinity pool and water fountains. There's also alfresco seating for those looking to catch the salubrious ocean breezes or to better appreciate Phu Quoc's legendary sunsets.

While Food Exchange hits all the expected marks with its gorgeous buffet breakfast spread including no less than 16 hot items, along with the requisite live egg station, soups, salads and traditional breakfast foods, it truly shines when it comes to freshly made items. The kitchen turns out decadent homemade baked goods and jams along with freshly squeezed juices including watermelon,



Herring fish salad



Caramelized snake fish in clay pot

pineapple and tomato. Large food islands make the already large space even more navigable, strategically placed for easy access with no crowding.

It's hard to judge a restaurant on breakfast alone as practically any decent destination will have at least a handful of great breakfast buffets with scant little to differentiate between them once you get to the 4- and 5-star level hotels. However, like most discerning travelers, I look for more than an Instagram-ready plate with good flavors. When I travel, what I want is for my food to reflect the uniqueness of my destination, and do the virtually impossible: be memorable among the more than a thousand meals I consume a year.

In Vietnam, my culinary shibboleth of authenticity is typically *pho*, sadly all-too-often subjected to a dish-watered down version by international chains who include it just so that tourists can check it off their food bucket list. Here, though, the *pho* served at breakfast was full-bodied

and fragrant, and would give any Saigon eatery a run for its money. But to really put Food Exchange through its paces, we would have to come back for its a la carte offerings.

Despite being a small island (roughly the size of Hong Kong), Phu Quoc has a surprising number of specialties, and Food Exchange doesn't shy away from introducing them to diners the way they were meant to be eaten.

Herring fish salad (VND140,000) is one of the island's best-known specialties, a delightfully mild-tasting fish, halved, bones removed and given the ceviche-style lime juice treatment. The small fish are then tossed in a salad of finely grated coconut with sliced onions and shallots, and the whole mixture is rolled in rice paper with fresh herbs and dipped in a fish sauce. The result is a refreshingly light bite, not at all fishy, and with beautifully contrasting textures and flavors provided by the crunchy vegetables, tender fish and ever-so-sweet shredded coconut.

Another ingredient Phu Quoc is famous for is *tram* mushrooms, a slightly bitter, woody fungus typically found under the shade of acacia trees ("*tram*" in Vietnamese). *Tram* mushrooms are especially plentiful around May, after the first rains of the season, but can be found in smaller quantities throughout the year. At Food Exchange, they find their way into a hearty soup, thickened with egg, and with the natural sweetness of shrimp and squid to balance out the slight bitterness of the mushrooms. The combination of flavors is at once intriguing and delicious. The soup isn't on the menu, but ask your server for it. In fact, expect servers at Food Exchange to be refreshingly interactive and knowledgeable about the menu. On another occasion, we ordered a seafood spaghetti and were immediately informed that the mussels weren't up to standard that day, and would be substituted with shrimp and squid.



Black currant and pepper ice cream



Tropical seafood in coconut curry



We chose mains that again highlighted Phu Quoc's local bounty, including the Pan-fried crispy seabass (VND200,000), served atop a bed of rice pilaf. It's easy to dry out white fish, especially as a filet, but here the dish remained meaty and moist, enhanced by a house-made teriyaki sauce with hints of ginger and scallions, making it an all-around favorite. The Caramelized snake fish in clay pot (VND180,000) also had a pleasingly spicy kick that made it stand out, thanks to a strand of Phu Quoc peppercorn. When in Phu Quoc, seafood is king and so the Tropical seafood in coconut curry (VND280,000) was a beautiful vehicle to showcase the day's catch, incorporating mussels, calamari, cobia filets, and jumbo shrimp in a thick, rich Vietnamese curry sauce.

For a sweet ending, the Vietnamese-style Coconut layer cake (VND140,000) had a pleasantly chewy texture (made from glutinous rice, rather than flour) and the fresh passion fruit cut through the richness of the coconut cream. The hands-down winner, though, was the homemade black currant ice cream with flecks of Phu Quoc pepper. The addition of fresh pepper creates a wonderful alchemy with a kick, bringing out the natural sweetness of the black currant rather than overwhelming it. At just VND35,000 per scoop, we found ourselves coming back again and again for a cool taste of heaven on this earthly paradise. ■

Northern Comfort Food

Rice Fields brings regional Red River Delta dishes to Saigon

Text by Grant Hawkins



Deep-Fried Maxkerel with Green Mango & Fish Sauce

ACROSS THE STREET FROM

Bitexco Tower, up two flights of stairs and behind a curtain of hanging beads is **Rice Fields - Homecooked Vietnamese Cuisine** (75-77 Ho Tung Mau, D1). Here, in the heart of the city, hides a peaceful countryside oasis complete with murals of pre-1975 Vietnam and bordered by literal terraces of rice plants. But Rice Fields isn't about escaping to the past; it's crafting a narrative of traditional Vietnam that complements its stunning views of downtown skyscrapers, and presenting classic Vietnamese food to an international standard.

Rice Fields is the latest creation from Tran Dinh Huy, the visionary restaurateur behind other popular eateries that include Secret Garden, Mountain Retreat and Hue House. At 34 years old, Huy has a reputation for combining enchanting atmospheres with world-class Vietnamese cuisine. Rice Fields, his seventh restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City, continues the theme, this time drawing on the rural scenery and society of the northern countryside province of Nam Dinh, Huy's home.

Entering the restaurant, guests are greeted by friendly and helpful staff. We started with a glass of the house red, a medium-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon (VND120,000). The beautiful, fully-illustrated menu includes popular Vietnamese dishes from all regions of the country. The portions are kept on the small side so guests are urged to share and sample many varieties. All food is served family-style and presented on picturesque banana-leaf trays.

At our server's suggestion, we started with the Fried Shrimp Spring Rolls (VND85,000), which came in a sesame-seed rice paper wrap with a sweet, tangy and spicy dipping sauce. Four bite-sized spring rolls, with bright red shrimp tails sticking out the back, piqued our appetite for what came next, the Banana Flower Salad with Deep Fried Eels (VND85,000). This



Fried Shrimp Spring Rolls

common Vietnamese salad is comprised of stringy banana flowers, peanuts, cilantro, carrots and onions, and is served with fresh lime fish sauce. With crispy, salty eels on top, it makes a fresh, summery dish and our instant favorite.

Next up was Deep-Fried Mackerel with Green Mango Flowers & Fish Sauce (VND75,000). It's served with a chili-garlic fish sauce and we couldn't get enough of the sweet and tangy shredded mango. Our final dish was the Fried Salted Bacon (VND75,000). Several pieces of thick, tender bacon with crispy fried edges are served with a chili soy sauce and garnish of tomatoes and cucumbers. The textures are impeccably balanced and the salty soy sauce brings out the savory sweetness of the bacon.

After our meal, we took our wine up to the rooftop for a stunning view of downtown. There's a banana boat filled with beanbags for lounging and benches/

tables for eating. Rice Fields will soon add additional seating and tables on the rooftop as well as an area to accommodate groups. The gentle breeze and soft peaceful music make it an easy place to get stuck chatting long into the night.

What Huy has done with all of his restaurants is create an image of traditional Vietnamese culture that's refined and stylized enough to stand on a global stage while still remaining authentic. He's selected the best traditional dishes that represent different regions of the country, all while maintaining an impeccable level of quality, cleanliness and service. If rice fields were the original inspiration for Huy's entrepreneurial spirit, Rice Fields may be the launchpad for bringing Vietnamese culture and cuisine to a global audience. ■



Banana flower with deep-fried eels



Good Look, Fine Food

Go in with high
expectations; you won't
be disappointed

Text by **Aliesha Duffin**
Images Provided by **Park Hyatt Saigon**

SQUARE ONE SITS PROUDLY on the mezzanine floor of the **Park Hyatt Saigon** (2 Lam Son Square, D1), just seconds away from the famous Saigon Opera House and the Nguyen Hue Pedestrian Walking Street, located right in the heart of Saigon. The two fantastic food menus are packed with Vietnamese specialities and French classics. The wine menu is just as impressive, which is no surprise as the wines are personally selected by the hotel's Sommelier Marie, and are exclusively stocked at the establishment.

The restaurant is beautiful, spacious and modern. The walls are adorned with large



contemporary Vietnamese artworks, warm lacquer and oil paintings, and the custom made light installations in the main dining room create a very intimate dining experience despite the large space. As we weaved between guests at their smartly dressed tables, our host walked us past the three kitchens: seafood, Vietnamese and French. Between the mouthwateringly fresh seafood that was on display and the biggest bowl of dried chiles I've ever seen, I was immediately looking forward to our dinner.

Our waiter Loc recommended two of their signature cocktails, a sweet French Martini (VND290,000) and a Vietnamese Ginger Cocktail. Both drinks were elegantly presented with delicate flavors, a perfect beginning to our meal. Freshly baked bread was also brought to the table with a generous portion of house-made salted butter.

For our starter, we had the Vietnamese Tasting Platter (VND550,000), which was composed of the chef's four favorite starters. We began with one of my personal favorites, the crispy soft shell crab with a sour dipping sauce, and it did not disappoint. The batter was light and the crabmeat was sweet, and the sauce that came with it was the right balance of sweet, sour and salty, perfectly complementing the crab. There were also fried spicy salmon spring rolls, crunchy and flavorful, accompanied by a zingy fish sauce. Next on the plate was grilled US prime beef mince served in *la lot* (betel leaves) with an amazing peanut, anchovy and pineapple dipping sauce. The beef was seasoned and cooked beautifully and the sauce was tangy and sweet, balancing the betel leaves' bitterness. Finally, the green papaya salad

filled with dried shrimps, peanuts and laksa leaf was sweet and refreshing, an auspicious sign to the evening.

We decided to order a main from both menus; a Grilled Whole Live Sea Bass (VND750,000) marinated in lemongrass xo sauce and served with steamed rice from the Vietnamese menu, and a Confit Lamb Shoulder Provençal Vegetables (VND750,000) and an herb jus from the French. To say that the sea bass portion size was very generous would be an understatement. The two enormous fillets, which filled an entire platter, were cooked to perfection, and were beautifully dressed with a fragrant sauce. As a Kiwi I can tend to be a bit of a snob when it comes to lamb, however, the meat fell easily off the bone, and was blushing in the middle, tender and rich. It was on a bed of



beautiful vegetables and a delicate herb jus. To enhance our dishes, we began with a *vin a la ficelle* of Château Mont Redon Côtes Du Rhône, Rhône Valley, France, Grenache/Syrah (VND550,000), a soft red wine that was light enough to accompany the fish, while the Syrah undertones made it bold enough for the lamb. The sommelier then suggested we switch to a Le Petit Clos By Henri Bourgeois Marlborough, Pinot Noir (VND650,000), which also matched well with both mains.

Because we were both full when the dessert menu was presented, we decided to split one. We opted for the Crunchy Choux Profiteroles (VND200,000) filled with bourbon vanilla ice cream and smothered in hot chocolate sauce. The profiteroles were rich and decadent, with all the elements of the dish working harmoniously together. The fabulous evening ended with complimentary petit fours and homemade seasonal spiced rum.

Square One carefully avoids the feeling of 'stepping out of Vietnam' as so many District 1 restaurants try to achieve. Instead, the quality of the food and the standard of service serve as a reminder as to why we came to Vietnam in the first place. ■





Sweet Beginnings

A guide to the Lunar New Year candy tray

Text by **Nancy Liu**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**

“EAT SWEET THINGS AND THINK sweet thoughts to ensure a fabulous year lies ahead” is a popular Vietnamese adage that locals live by, especially during Tet. Visit any Vietnamese home during the holiday and a colorful tray full of candies sits in the middle of the living room table. The candy trays are also used as offerings at the altars to ancestors and deities, little snacks for children, tea confections for adults and vegan treats for those who refrain from eating meat

at the year’s beginning. These candied fruits are unique to Tet but despite its ubiquity, the *mut tet* can look a little confusing between the dusty swirls, wrapped colored sticks and miniature dried fruits.

A *mut tet* tray consists of candied fruits, candied vegetables, custard candy, seeds of different varieties and candied nuts. Generally, preparation for each *mut tet* candy is similar and simple. Fruits and vegetables, like coconut and ginger,

are boiled, quickly preserved, and cooked with oil and sweetening agents such as pectin, sugar and honey – sometimes all three ingredients.

Mut can be divided into two types: wet and dry. Visit any beef jerky (*kho bo*) and salted plums (*xi muoi*) stalls at any market during the holiday and you’ll see a swarm of *mut* in glass jars, the wet kinds wrapped in crunchy paper and the dry kind laying bare. The two most common wet *mut* are tamarind (*me*) and soursop



(*mang cau*). The former is kept in its scrawny form, with a few rope-like fibrous strings along the fruit's length, which is to be discarded when eating, of course. Tamarind *mut* should be amber brown, chewy, and a little more sour than sweet. Tamarind is notorious for its medicinal effect, so be careful not to consume too many sticks at once. A similar chewy wet *mut* is the soursop, but it's always milkish white, doesn't retain the fruit's shape, and people tend to put too much sugar in the churning process.

On the dry side you can find some 20 common kinds, spanning both fruits and non-fruits (nuts and roots): coconut, persimmon, lotus seed, tomato, ginger slice, carrot, winter melon, apple, lemon, guava, water chestnut, etc. I'm particularly fond of the crunchy, aromatic coconut ribbons which as a kid I liked to hold in my mouth for hours to melt off all but the coconut itself; but this year I refrained from buying them to try the

other kinds instead.

If you don't want to look confused the next time you're in a Vietnamese house? We've got you covered, from the candied coconut to the sugar-glazed peanuts.

Candied Veggies

Sweet Potato, Ginger, Potato

Combining veggies with sugar sounds like an awful idea, but when boiled and cooked with sweetening agents, the end products are pretty damn good. Among the entire tray, the candied veggies offer the greatest elements of surprise. Candied sweet potatoes are sweet potatoes that are even sweeter than sweet. Candied ginger actually makes ginger look really good. And, in the case of candied potatoes, we get to witness potatoes trying real hard to become sweet potatoes.

Candied Nuts

Peanuts, Water Chestnuts

Unlike candied vegetables, candied nuts offer the least elements of surprise: they are just as good as they sound. Sugar-glazed peanuts,



which taste a lot like Cracker Jacks, are blocks of peanuts bonded together with sugar. Candied water chestnuts are similar to candied fruits and vegetables, except that when you bite into them, you get a softer, moister texture.

Custard Candy

Tamarind Candy, Custard Apple

Custard tamarind candy and custard apple candy are sweet, gushy candies with a consistency similar to Gushers. Each custard candy tastes respectively close to the fruits they were made with. Unwrap a custard candy and you will notice immediately that they're bodiless: without their wrappers, they're so gushy they lose form. But that's all part of the fun. Be careful, because they can be kind of sticky. But they're oh so good.

Candied Fruits

Coconut, Flower-Shaped Candied Kumquat

Candied coconut comes in white, light green and light pink varieties and tastes like dried, sweetened coconut (surprise!). The candied kumquat, on the other hand, is simultaneously bitter and sweet, with a tart-citrusy and hints of sugar from the coating. Candied kumquat is usually shaped into a flower for Tet, reflecting the traditional usage of flowers as decoration for the New Year.

Seeds

Candied Lotus Seeds, Melon Seeds, Pumpkin Seeds

It may be because seeds represent growth that they make an appearance of seeds in *mut* tet. Whatever the significance though, one thing is for sure: start with one or two and you will be addicted soon enough.

Both melon seeds and pumpkin seeds taste like you would expect, but candied lotus seeds, because of their texture and coats of sugar, taste more like a candied fruit or vegetable than anything else.

To even out the sweetness, take *mut tet* with either black or green tea. ■

Chúc Mừng Nam Moi And Happy Eating!



Chao Ca

CONGEE IS USUALLY THE FIRST non-milk food given to babies. It is also something eaten by the elderly (particularly in cases of dental trouble). It is comfort food, eaten when one is feeling under the weather, particularly with stomach trouble. In some contexts, it has a reputation as suitable for eating when one has a hangover.

Most people think of congee as a rice porridge, but the term generally refers to almost any watery gruel. Depending on where you lived in Asia, your congee might have been prepared with millet, barley, corn or even a legume such as mung beans, mixed with or without rice.

There are many different versions of chao, but the most common are chao ga (chicken), chao long (pig offal/innards) and chao ca (fish). Just as there are many varieties, there are just as many ways to make chao. Some make a plain thick bland porridge and then add different types of broth and toppings. ■

INGREDIENTS SERVES: 3

- Rice 100 g
- Snakehead fish 500 g
- Shallot 2
- Dill, spring onion, ginger 50 g
- Salt, seasoning, pepper enough
- Cooking oil 2 tbsp



5 Rub the fish fillet with salt, seasoning and pepper, marinate for 10'.



1 Wash the fish with salted water, cut into fillet slices, and reserve the fish head and bones. Boil 1 liter of water, add ginger, salt, fish head and bones. Boil for 20' over low heat. Remove the bones and fish head and reserve stock.



3 Pound rice.



6 In a pan over low heat, heat the oil and fry thinly sliced shallots. Add fish fillet and fry for 5'.

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



2 Wash rice, drain for 20', and set aside to dry.



4 Place pounded rice in the fish stock. Bring to a boil and stir constantly. Cover, cooking over low heat for 20'.



7 In a serving bowl, add the porridge then the fried fish fillet and top with fresh dill. Serve hot.

Sip Spain

Rias Baixas is located in the Galicia region of Northwestern Spain and enjoys a cool, coastal climate and is best known for producing Albariño



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



UNLESS YOU'RE A FANATIC FOR special great wine, and you like doing research, you may not be familiar with wine from Rias Baixas. Well, that's actually good because one of the characteristics of Rias Baixas wine is its low yield and production count. Yes, there is very little wine from Rias Baixas, so ssssh... keep it a secret.

Rias Baixas is located in Galicia, Northwestern Spain, just on the tip of Portugal, a region surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and characterized by terrible weather and great wines. The entire area is approximately 4.00 hectares of vines and less than 200 wineries, so don't be surprised if you have never heard of the place and its wine. However, you'll be pleasantly surprised with what you will discover.

Albariño is the main grape in Rias Baixas and it shares the same mineral-rich soils and cool climate as France's Loire Valley, New Zealand's Marlborough, and the Rhine region of Germany—all producing amazing wine.

Almost all wine produced in Rias Baixas are white. Although 12 different grape varieties are allowed in winemaking in this region, around 96 percent of the wine are made from Alvarinho grapes, and this particular grape seems to thrive in this region.

Even though Rias Baixas is a small geographical area, and that the same grapes are virtually used to make all wine, expect some distinctive differences in the wine because of microclimate and terroir variations. You will find earthier wine in Tea; more crispy and aromatic in

the Val de Salnes; with softer wine made in O Rosal.

Having said that, when you open a bottle of Alvarinho, regardless of who made it, expect a delicious pale gold lemon wine—crisp, elegant and fresh—it will astonish your guests.

Wine from Rias Baixas is great on their own, thanks to their freshness and complexity. But they really excel paired with fresh oysters, lobster, crab, white fish, and seafood, in general. Not into seafood? Try any salad with a Rias Baixas Alvarinho and you will be amazed.

Because they're so niche, it will be a challenge to find Rias Baixas wines in Vietnam, my favorite Atlantis Alvarino, and one of the very few available, make sure you try it if you see it around. ■

Wine & Dine

ROOFTOP BARS



Liquid Sky Bar

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

21F - Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon
8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1 / 028 3822 0033



Rex Hotel Rooftop Bar

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

141 Nguyen Hue, D1



Social Club Rooftop Bar

Part of the Hôtel des Arts Saigon, Social Club Rooftop Bar is a great place to overlook Saigon's glittering skyline sipping on a cocktail and unwinding. Things become more vibrant with the ambient music and DJs at sunset. Social Club Rooftop Bar has the highest rooftop infinity pool in the city.

76 - 78 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, Dist.3
Tel: (+84) 28 3989 8888

SUNDAY BRUNCHES



Indulgent Sundays @ Nineteen

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

19-23 Lam Son Square, D1
hotel@caravellehotel.com / 028 3823 4999



Le Meridien

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

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1
028 6263 6688 - ext.6930
www.lemeridiensaigon.com



BARS & CRAFT BEER BREWERIES



Acoustic Bar

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

E1 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3



Aperitivo

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

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



BiaCraft

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

90 Xuan Thuy, D2

CAFÉS



Bach Dang

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

26-28 Le Loi, D1



Café RuNam

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

96 Mac Thi Bui, D1

www.caferrunam.com



Chat

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

85 Nguyen Truong To, D4



K.Coffee

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

Opening time: 7AM- 10PM (Sunday closed)

86 Hoang Dieu, D4

38253316 / 090 142 3103



La Rotonde Saigon

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

77B Ham Nghi, 1st Floor, D1



The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1



ARC Pet Rescue

Rescuing HO Chi Minh's abandoned animals



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FRENCH



Le Terroir

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

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



Le Bacoulos

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

13 Tong Huu Dinh, D2
028 3519 4058
www.bacoulos.com



Le Jardin

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

31 Thai Van Lung, D1



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1
www.tycozsaigon.com



Also Try...

La Cuisine

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

48 Le Thanh Ton
028 2229 8882

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
028 3898 2082
www.lavilla-restaurant.com.vn

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
028 3821 3056

Trois Gourmands

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

39 Tran Ngoc Dien, D2
028 3744 4585



INDIAN



Ashoka

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

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



Ganesh

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

38 Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com



Natraj

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

41 Bui Thi Xuan, D1
028 6679 5267 - 028 6686 3168
www.facebook.com/natrajindiancuisine



Saigon Indian

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

1st Floor, 73 Mac Thi Bui, D1



Tandoor [®]

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

39A - 39B Ngo Duc Ke, D1
028 3930 4839 / tandoor@tandoorvietnam.com



The Punjabi

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

40/3 Bui Vien, D1



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DURATION: FROM 01-02-2018 TO 18-02-2018

JAPANESE



Chaya Restaurant

Chaya, a new small Japanese Cafe is coming to town. We are here to bring the best Japanese atmosphere to Saigon customer. At Chaya, customer can relax on the Tatami, taste some delicious Sushi Roll, Japanese sweets or local cuisine while enjoying Japan historically decorated space. Most of our ingredients are imported directly from Japan, especially Kyoto Matcha. Welcome!

35 Ngo Quang Huy Street, Thao Dien, District 2
0938 996 408 (Vietnamese)
0939 877 403 (Japanese)
chayavietnam.com
Facebook: chayavietnam



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
028 3827 1618
gyumaru.LTT@gmail.com



Ichiban Sushi

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

204 Le Lai, D1
www.ichibansushi.vn



Kesera Bar & Restaurant

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

26/3 Le Thanh Ton, Ben Nghe Ward, Dist 1
028 38 270 443



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
028 3930 0039
www.sushidiningaoi.com



Yoshino

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

2A-4A Ton Duc Thang, D1
028 3823 3333



KOREAN



Galbi Brothers

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

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



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



THAI



Koh Thai

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

Kumho Link, Hai Ba Trung, D1
028 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
028 3823 7506

Thai Street

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

26 Thao Dien Road, Thao Dien, D2
028 6654 9525

The Racha Room

Brand new fine & funky Thai venue with rooky 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 1412

Tuk Tuk Thai Bistro

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

17/11 Le Thanh Ton, D1
028 3521 8513 / 090 688 6180

VIETNAMESE



Five Oysters R

Five Oysters serves authentic and excellent Seafood & Vietnamese food with 5G Green beer at VND12,000 as well as a promo of VND10,000 per fresh oyster daily. There's also a rooftop, a great place to start or end the night! Recipient of Certificate of Excellence 2014-16 from Tripadvisor and Top Choice 2015 by Lianorg.com. Recommended by VNexpress.net, Lonely Planet, Utopia and Saigoneers.

234 Bui Vien, D1



Mountain Retreat

Home style cooking from the Vietnamese north in a quiet alley off Le Loi, Mountain Retreat brings a rural vibe to busy central D1. The breezy and unassuming décor nicely contrasts the intense northern flavors ideally suited for the international palate.

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



Ngoc Chau Garden

Generally, Ngoc Chau Garden is genuine authentic Vietnamese Restaurant with simply beautiful food. They concentrate on traditional food of South Viet Nam, especially home-cooked, value for money. There for, the food, drink and the atmosphere make you comfortable during family's meal time. It's a really nice blend as you're setting into Ho Chi Minh City and Viet Nam.

116 Ho Tung Mau, phuong Ben Nghe, quan 1, Tp.HCM.
028 6687 3838

<https://facebook.com/ngochchaugarden.hotungmau>



Red Door R

Red Door offers traditional Vietnamese food with a contemporary twist. The restaurant is also a platform for art talk, science talk, and social talk; where ideas and passions are shared.

400/8 Le Van Sy, D3
012 0880 5905

Facebook: Reddoorrestaurant



River Restaurant

Tasty Vietnamese food by Saigon River side. The River Restaurant has its' own vegetable garden and a play area for kids. There is a pool table and a futsal table.

199bis Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien Ward, D2, HCMC
Tel: 0907 65 66 67



The Hue House

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

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



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
028 3821 1631

Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Com Nieu

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

59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3
028 3932 6363
comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com
comnieusaigon.com.vn

Cuc Gach Quan

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

10 Dang Tat, D1
028 3848 0144

Hum R

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

2 Thi Sach, D1
028 3823 8920
www.hum-vegetarian.vn

May

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

19-21 Dong Khoi, D1
028 3910 1277

Nha Hang Ngon

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

160 Pasteur, D1
028 3827 7131
www.quananngon.com.vn
8am - 10pm

Temple Club

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

29-31 Ton That Thiep, D1
028 3829 9244
templeclub.com.vn

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

INTERNATIONAL



Bamboo Chic

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

Level 9, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel
3C Ton Duc Thang, DI
028 6263 6688
www.lemeridien.com/saigon
 For restaurant promotions go to fest.vn or Call 1900636997



Blanc Restaurant

How to listen with your eyes? Blanc Restaurant employs a team of deaf/hearing impaired waiters. Try a new dining experience and order your dishes from the a la carte menu in sign language; communication will take on a new form.

178/180D Hai Ba Trung, Da Kao, DI
02862663535
www.blancrestaurant.vn



FORK Restaurant

Open from 11 am till 11 pm everyday, Fork Saigon gathers Spanish tapas and asian one going from 50.000 VND to 160.000 VND. It offers an expensive list of international wine and 16 available by the glass. A mixologist corner is also present with Gin and Vodka base in addition to local craft beers and seasonal white or red sangria. A set lunch at 190.000 VND served Monday to Friday from 11 am to 3 pm is also available. It allows you to pick any 3 three items between a large selection (Montaditos, meat, fish and vegetable), iced tea and dessert of the day included.

15 Dong Du, DI **028 3823 3597**
info@forksaigon.com www.forksaigon.com



Hotel Equatorial HCMC

New Vietnamese Bistro & European Grill Menu At "Chit Chat at the Café" The new menu features the Chefs' flair for creativity with international inspiration from Europe and Asia. This special execution can be experienced in the new a la carte menu which includes imported steaks, meats, and seafood.

242 Tran Binh Trong St, Dist. 5
028 3839 7777
<https://hochiminhcity.equatorial.com/>



Hungry Bunny

Hungry Bunny is a new American Bistro situated in the heart of Thi Nghe neighborhood in Binh Thanh district. The restaurant's main focus is gourmet Burgers such as the Bacon Clubhouse and Bacon & Blue burger. Other offers include breakfast, soups, salads, sandwiches and pastas. There is one main dining area downstairs with two smaller rooms upstairs that offer guests with more privacy and great views. Come enjoy our great selection of American diner food with a glass of cold beer.

8am-10pm / Tel 028 2229 0011
01 Nguyen Cuu Van street, Binh Thanh district
www.hungrybunnybistro.com
www.facebook.com/hungrybunnybistro



Noir - Dining in the Dark

Can you differentiate beef from duck? Mystery meals are served in complete darkness by blind/visually impaired waiters. Select from one of the three-course set menus from the East, West or Vegetarian. Mystery wine pairing available too. Discover with taste and smell, embark on a culinary journey of the senses.

178/180D Hai Ba Trung, Da Kao, DI
02862632525
www.noirdininginthedark.com



Poke Saigon

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

Tue-Sun 11am-8pm
2nd Floor, 42 Nguyen Hue, DI
0902474388
<https://www.facebook.com/pokesaigon/>



Tomatito Saigon

This sexy tapas bar is Chef Willy's casual interpretation of the prêt-à-porter concept. Willy has a very personal perception of style, that is reflected in all his creations. His universe is colorful, funky and eclectic.

171 Calmette, Dist 1, Ho Chi Minh City
www.crhcmc.com/tomatito
www.facebook.com/crhcmc
+84 (0) 2862 881717



twenty21one

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

21 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3



Travel & Wellness

RIOMAGGIORE - ITALIA







OLD BUILDINGS STORIES

Text and Images by **Ngoc Tran**

As a child I often dreamt of living in an apartment complex like my friends. I would get so excited when a friend invited me to over to play in their apartment, where you can sit for hours staring at the clothes hanging to dry and chatting about life, money, fashion, careers and even making up stories about the owners of those dresses and pants hanging to dry.



OLD STAIRS

These old stairs aren't just for getting from one floor to the next, the older folks walk up and down them to get a bit of exercise in while children play and chase each other in the hallways. Sometimes at the foot of the steps, people sell snacks, coffee and toys to earn a bit of extra cash.

They often decorate the staircase railings with patterned bricks so that when the afternoon sun shines on them it would create these wonderful sunflower-shaped shadows.

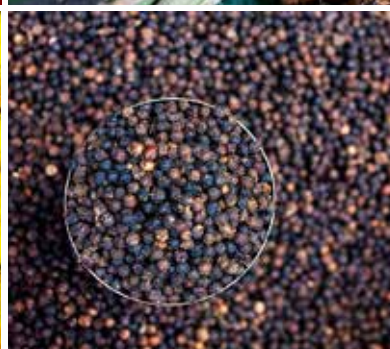




GROUND FLOOR MARKET



The utility of the apartment complex is a self-contained market located just below on the ground floor. Residents don't have to go far to do their day's shopping for groceries - dressing up isn't even a requirement - most go down in their pajamas and slippers.





Honeymoon Italiano Style

Text and Images by David Muller

From the soaring, spectacular Amalfi Coast to the rolling, vineyard-blanketed hills of Tuscany, newly-wedded Mr. and Mrs. Muller shared their honeymoon with a group of strangers and had a fabulous time

TWO YEARS AGO WE CHOSE

Milan, the fashion capital, as the starting point of our 10-day honeymoon tour of Italy. After traveling solo for so many years it was my first time joining a tour group, and not just any tour as my wife sold it, but an exclusive honeymoon couples tour of the greatest tourist towns and sites of Italy. As my practical Asian wife put it, this way we wouldn't be fighting in a hire car, lost somewhere in the Tuscany hills, but instead enjoying every carefree moment of a fully-guided honeymoon experience.

On hearing the plan I changed the arrival schedule and my wife and I flew in the night before, rested up in the airport hotel and then met the tour group on their arrival (after 16 hours of flying time) at Milan airport at 9am the following morning. Feeling 100 percent refreshed, unlike my new tour compatriots, we were ready for the full-day tour schedule, which would see us spend the morning in Milan,

have lunch in Verona, and arrive in Venice around 10pm the same evening.

A few hours of window-shopping the luxury brands of Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, which then led out to the Piazza del Duomo and the Milan cathedral. We traversed the gothic spires, gargoyles and upper ramparts of the fourth largest cathedral in the world. Then we were off to our next stop, the tour bus, of course, featured high-speed wi-fi so we could all upload every stage of our trip to Facebook. Remember in this technological age if it isn't posted on Facebook it never happened.

"Verona, what light breaks on yonder window," I imagined as I stood in the Cappelletti's courtyard and got a glimpse of Juliet (actually a tourist) on the balcony above. In the bazaar around the corner was a local musician playing on a full-sized grand piano, each keystroke resonated through the market square and I purchased his CD for 10 euro so I could

listen to the sounds of Verona on what would be the only train ride on our trip through the Italian countryside to Venice.

It was late in the evening when we reached the Venice train station and walked to the wharf to take the boat on our final leg of the day's journey. Our fellow honeymooners were nigh on exhausted and could barely keep their eyes open on the trip through the canals to the Ca' Dei Conti luxury boutique hotel.

We spent two days in Venice; the tour was especially timed so that we would be there during the moon's lower tidal phase. Venice, especially between autumn and spring, is prone to *Acqua alta*, severe flooding on the moon's monthly high tides. It's best to plan your Venice trip taking this phenomenon into consideration otherwise you'll be knee deep in water at the St Mark's Square.

We walked in the soft light of dawn, weaving through the laneways along the canals in search of perfect Venice spots for



pictures, such as the ornate Rialto Bridge that spanned the grand canal. Nothing could be more romantic than boarding a gondola in Venice, the gondolier singing sonnets like Pavarotti while steering down small canals and out into larger waterways. This was one of those places that sees a thousand tourists yet you can still imagine yourself somehow lost in another time in history.

Tickets for all venues on our tour were pre-booked group tickets and the great thing about this was that we had priority, jumping the long queues at every tourist attraction. It was no exception at St Mark's Basilica, my Asian compatriots filed through the turnstile no problem, but as I came through last I was stopped by the ticket inspector and told flatly that my white face wasn't part of this group. I yelled out to Kiki our tour leader and she came back to save me from the gatekeeper. He continued to eye me suspiciously and grudgingly relented to allow me through. While everyone in our group was laughing, I got a slap from the wife, who said I shouldn't be at the back of the group and should stick to the front of our Asian bubble or be left behind in the western world.

One Tall, Hot Italian Coffee Please

In Florence we spent the afternoon in the Uffizi museum, with over 2 million visitors a year it's the 25th most visited art museum in the world. The museum is said to house the largest single collection of Renaissance art anywhere, with priceless works by famous artists such as Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Raphael, Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci.

The next morning we traveled to the leaning tower of Pisa, where no Italian



trip would be complete without the corny, “keeping the tower from falling” travel snap.

As we moved into north central Tuscany, our bus wound its way up to the medieval town of San Gimignano, situated on a hilltop overlooking sweeping views of olive groves and farmlands. Legend has it that the best ice cream parlor in Italy can be found by following the cobbled streets to Piazza della Cisterna, the inner square inside the old town. Owner Sergio Dondoli, a member of Italy’s Ice Cream World Championship team, creates signature flavors such as saffron cream gelato and white wine Vernaccia sorbet.

We woke up early, our breath billowing in the crisp cool Tuscan air at hotel La Badia di Orvieto, and the group set out to the majestic town of Civita di Bagnoregio. Many years ago the area around the town collapsed and today it can only be reached by a manmade walkway. The town looks surreal as it sits isolated on a plateau overlooking the barren mountains and valleys of the Tiber River below.

When we reached the coastal city of Napoli we stopped for wood-fired pizza then caught the late night car ferry to

the picturesque island town of Capri. We traveled by cable car to visit the upper levels of hotels, restaurants and designer shops. We stopped by the Capri & Co. watch shop on Via Camerelle run by the Staiano family, where local affordable jewel encrusted designer watches can be purchased for as low as 60 euro.

The next morning we made our way back down to the harbor and took a vintage 1930s style wooden speedboat around the bay to a famous cave on the cliffs at water level called the Blue Grotto. We boarded onto a small two-person rowboat and had to duck down into the hull while the oarsman, using metal chains, pulled the boat inside the belly of the grotto. The water was a fiery electric blue color and all the rowboats circled inside for about five minutes as everyone tried to get a clear picture of the water in the lowlight of the cave.

Taking the ferry again from Capri, we traveled to the citadel town of Amalfi in search of high quality virgin olive oil, balsamic vinegar, limoncello candy and liquor. We stayed the night in the Villa San Michele cliff top hotel and the evening seafood meal over looking the sparkling lights of the Amalfi coast

was only rivalled by the daytime morning breakfast sea view. The bus picked us up in the morning and spirited us along the scenic Strada Statale 163, the only coastal road that travels out of the region. We descended down the other side of the mountain with a view of Mt Vesuvius and the ancient city of Pompeii below.

The last long bus ride ended in Rome, where we took two days to visit two capitals within a city—Rome and, of course, the Vatican City, the smallest country in the world.

As we entered the tight security of the Vatican Museum a sea of tourists propel the crowd through the halls, which were filled with countless masterpiece murals painted on every wall and ceiling. The crowning jewel of the museum journey ended at the Sistine Chapel with Michelangelo’s famous fresco painting, The Creation of Adam, one of the most widely-recognizable paintings ever created. Taking photos of it is banned and ushers furiously tell hordes of tourists to refrain from talking and snapping in the Sistine Chapel. The exit led out to St Peter’s Square with the Swiss Guard in colorful uniforms looking out across the square at the central Vatican Obelisk, which was taken from Egypt to Rome by Caligula in AD64.

Ancient tourist attractions in Rome leave you in awe at the history and sophistication of the former Roman Empire. The Colosseum, where gladiators fought to the death to please the Roman crowds is a monstrous arena complex, one can only marvel at what it must have looked like in its former glory days some 2,000 plus years ago. The Pantheon is another amazing structure, built in its present form around AD126; it is the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world. The dome’s apex has a central opening to the sky called an oculus; the diameter of the interior dome and the height to the oculus are the same at 43 meters, and a perfect sphere could fit in its interior. The only natural light in the Pantheon comes from the entry way and from the oculus, with its sunlight moving in a reverse sundial effect around the inside of the dome. We were told the best coffee in Italy can be purchased at the Tazza D’Oro coffee shop close to the Pantheon, but what I later learned was the real reason why we visited this coffee shop, Kiki was told it had the handsomest Italian barista in Italy. All the girls in our tour lined up to get a photo with him, including my wife!

A honeymoon should be a once-in-a-lifetime experience and I can honestly say the tour of Italy was a fantastic memory that will be cherished in my older years. Italy, with its vivid history, culture, amazing food and warm hospitality, is the perfect choice to experience an exotic polar opposite of the hustle and bustle of Asian life. And, of course, the wife was actually right about the tour experience because we never had one fight during the entire honeymoon Italiano adventure. ■



Spring in Ana Mandara Villas Dalat

With 17 ancient French Colonial Villas situated by a hill of pine trees and small romantic flower gardens, Ana Mandara Villas Dalat is the perfect place to enjoy the season

Text and Images Provided by **Ana Mandara Villas Dalat**



In the peaceful city of Dalat, Ana Mandara Villas will bring you back to a time when the French aristocracy lived in Vietnam during the early 20th century. Rooms are independently furnished and are true to their original design and décor. Each villa consists of three to six en-suite rooms, with expansive views of the hills and mountains.

At Ana Mandara Villas Dalat, you will find that time seems to stop as you forget your busy city life and get together with your loved ones beside a warm fire. Walk amongst the early morning fog to enjoy the fresh air, or simply relax with a meditation session by the lake. Mothers can indulge themselves with one of La Cochinchine Spa's massage therapies and beauty sessions to revitalize and refresh the body and soul, while the children enjoy playtime in the warm water of the outdoor swimming pool.

For dining, Ana Mandara Villas Dalat offers many choices. You can choose breakfast under a tree in the spring garden, with homemade yogurt, fresh fruit and French baked bread served with strawberry jam or instead enjoy a hot pho in the cool morning. At the fresh vegetable garden in the resort, you can prepare your own dishes for your family under instruction of a chef with 30 years of experience. If you choose to dine at Le petit Dalat, do not forget to try the mixed fresh vegetables, the special sturgeon dishes or the pig's leg stew with artichoke.

Ana Mandara Villas Dalat have launched a "Festive Break Package" for VND5,920,000/2 persons/2 nights, including the following benefits: stay at Villa Room included daily breakfast for two persons, one lunch set menu for two, one-way airport transfer, 60-minute foot massage for two, early check-in or late check-out (subject to availability). Surcharge may apply for weekend and peak season. ■

Ana Mandara Villas Dalat Resort & Spa

Le Lai Street, Da Lat City, Lam Dong Province

Tel: 063 3555 888 | reservation-dalat@anamandara-resort.com | Hotline: 0164 525 9977
www.anamandara-resort.com

>> The List Business

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(+84 24) 7308 6699



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21st Floor, 115 Nguyen Hue, D1

BaoViet Insurance Corporation

BaoViet is now the leading financial insurance group in Vietnam with more than 145 branches across 63 provinces.
23-25 Thai Van Lung, D1

IF Consulting

IF Consulting has for 20 years provided advice to individuals and businesses in assessing health/accident risk and finding the best suitable solution. The company is independent and Vietnam-based.
90-92 Dinh Tien Hoang D1
www.insuranceinvietnam.com

Liberty Mutual Insurance

Liberty Mutual is a 100% US-owned general insurer licensed to provide insurance services directly to Vietnamese individuals and state-owned enterprises as well as motor insurance.
15th Floor, Kumho Asiana Plaza,
39 Le Duan, D1
028 3812 5125

McLarens Young International

McLarens Young International is a global claims service provider that helps our clients achieve timely and equitable claims resolution.
9th Floor, Yoco Building
41 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D1
028 3821 3316

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>>The List Travel



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Kids & Education





Why did you choose a career in special education?

While working in the corporate world I became a Christian. As a Christian, I was exposed to different kinds of mission/charity works and part of it was teaching street children: going to orphanages and different provinces in the mountains to teach the tribes living there. I was encouraged by a friend to earn a Masters in Special Education so I can use it as well in the Ministry that I was actively involved in.

I also have a sister who has special needs and she was trained to do things like regular children. When I studied I realized that I can be of help not only to my sister but also to those who need help but don't know where to find it. I gave up my corporate career to become a teacher. Some people did not understand my decision but I wanted to learn more about children with special needs.

It's very rewarding to see your children growing and developing, and knowing that they can learn in their own special way. I spent years teaching and love working with children because I know there's hope for them despite their difficulties. I go the extra mile by teaching children with special needs life skills to benefit them in our society, and I know it is not an easy journey for my students and me. Being with them have taught me the real meaning of love, that love never fails no matter what challenges I'm going to face. I will be still because they are my pride and they are the ones who gives me joy every time they succeed.

Education is Special for Everyone

Interview by **Christine Van**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**

Di speaks with Mariecris Buenviaje, founder of STEPS Special School - Support Teach Encourage Person with Special Needs, Saigon's first international standard school dedicated to children with special needs

STEPS is the first special needs school in District 2, possibly in HCMC, why did you feel it was time to open STEPS now?

I saw there was a need because provisions for children with special educational needs and disabilities are poor in Vietnam. I've been in Vietnam for 13 years and have also volunteered at orphanages that cater to children with special needs and have seen children rejected by a school because they don't have the resources for them or they don't

have a specialist to help those children. What happened is that the children stay at home without receiving help and the parents was in pain knowing that their child does not have a place to grow and enhance their skills.

Can you explain the education programs and curriculum the school uses in its classroom?

At STEPS we base our curriculum foundations on the Montessori model

and have strong links with Wonderkids Montessori. As we are a specialized school for children with special educational needs, we tailor and adapt our curriculum accordingly to suit the needs of our children. At STEPS we have the knowledge to strip education and learning to its core, with the knowledge and experience from our lead teachers we believe in developing awareness in new skills needed for learning, once new skills are introduced we can then teach to ensure students master the required new skills and prepare them for adulthood in various settings that student will be suited for. We also have native Vietnamese speakers to support local students.

Our partnership with Wonderkids Montessori School will create a possibility for our students to be integrated to a regular education setting. Our close partnership developed as we have supported several students who currently attend this school. We also work closely with the staff at Wonderkids to promote an inclusive education for all students.

With the potential for several types of special needs in the same class (dyslexia, autism, Asperger's, etc...). How does STEPS addresses each individually at the school and in the classroom?

The students need an assessment from a clinical psychologist, pediatrician or any ancillary services. We will proceed to complete our own observation report to know their strengths and weaknesses.



Mariecris Buenviaje

We will then consolidate this information and work closely with the parents to develop Individualized Education Plans. After a close discussion with the parents and our team, we will then place them in a class best suited for their needs.

Tell us about the teaching staff.

Our teachers are well-trained and experienced educators for children with special needs. They have been teaching for many years in specialized education, they also passed the licensure

examination, have double degrees, and have a Masters in Special Education. Some of our staff are trained in various communication aides and strategies such as sign language, picture exchange communication and applied behavior analysis so they can be of help to those children who are non-verbal or have limited communication, including behavior difficulties.

Working with special needs students can present a challenge such as behavioral issues, besides the teachers and education faculty, are the other staff (security guards, cleaners, etc.) also trained to properly interact with the students?

Our school prides itself in streamlined communication amongst its staff. All staff interact and have regular contact with students to create a positive learning environment. The staff are regularly trained on site by our professional team. We also have behavior policies to ensure we are all following the correct procedures and strategies.

The importance of family cannot be understated or underestimated in Vietnamese culture. The family is regarded as a fundamental unit of respect and cohesion. Therefore, the good of the family takes precedence over an individual's welfare. In this context, a child or person with special needs or learning disability is regarded as marks of shame for the family, so they are commonly hidden at home in order to prevent familial disgrace.

What's your opinion on this and how can STEPS help bring awareness that having special needs is not a stigma and with support and the right help, children can thrive?

STEPS has struggled to reach out to some parents due to the cultural awareness and beliefs around special educational needs and disabilities. As a school, we believe we are pillars of support for the community. Unfortunately, we are aware that we cannot change the stigma around disabilities and special needs in Vietnam overnight. However, what we want to do is to educate people to break down barriers for children so they can integrate into the community and get the education they deserve for the life that they want. At STEPS we want to reach out to neighboring communities, charities and schools to work together, and regularly organize events to raise awareness about special needs and disabilities. ■

To learn more about STEPS, visit www.steps.edu.vn or 18A Vo Truong Toan, D2.





New Year, New Campus

Garth O'Donnell, the Academic Director & Principal of The American School, offers insights into the education industry and a preview of the school's newest, state-of-the-art campus



Interview by **Christine Van**
Images Provided by **TAS**

You've been in the international education field in Vietnam for over a decade, what positive, and negative, changes have you observed in the industry?

I think first of all the sheer number of schools offering an internationally-focused curriculum where English is the medium of instruction has skyrocketed since the mid-2000s. The industry really grew up quickly here in the past 10-15 years as opposed to a country like neighboring Thailand, for example, which has a history of international schools dating back to the late 1950s and early 1960s. The idea of international education is thus comparatively new in Vietnam.

Because of this recent growth in the industry in Vietnam, prospective students

and their families have a great breadth of choice these days when it comes to deciding on a school. The resulting competition in the market undoubtedly pushes schools to improve—whether that means vying for accreditation, updating facilities, employing more highly-qualified faculty members and personnel, or offering more co-curricular activities—in search of a larger share of the market. The downside to the increase in numbers of private schools is that many schools are not accredited by an internationally-recognized agency and are not overseen by any international regulatory authority. This means prospective students and their families really need to be diligent in choosing a school that is recognized

worldwide. It is this worldwide recognition that's an important first step in determining the quality of education offered. The American School (www.tas.edu.vn) is fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

What were the key factors in TAS's decision to build a new campus?

To put it succinctly, we have simply outgrown our current campus in that we are nearing our maximum capacity, which is not a bad problem to have. Our enrollment in this current year exceeds the previous year by more than 25 percent. As a fully accredited international school, we are confident to project a continuing growth trend.



We feel that as long as we continue to offer quality academic programs, coupled with enriching extra-curricular activities, we will continue to see our enrollment numbers increase. And with continued growth, we want to offer expanded facilities and tailored learning spaces in order to improve each student's educational experience. The new campus will have larger classrooms to allow for alternative seating arrangements, small group work and collaboration, and center-based activities. Science Labs are in the range of 70-80 m2. A 420-seat auditorium will serve as an event and performance hall. In addition, there will be sound-proof music rooms for practice and rehearsal, a total of 6 computer labs school-wide, maker spaces, and two libraries. Facilities will include a recreation center housing a regulation NBA-size basketball court, an indoor gym and fitness center, a six-lane 25-meter swimming pool, a full outdoor soccer pitch, a driving range, and two rooftop tennis courts.

Tell us about the latest technologies that students can expect to experience hands-on?

Preparing our students to live in an increasingly complex and technology-centered world is a stated goal of The American School. To that end, the new TAS campus will be a truly tech-forward facility and will include six computer labs; a Mac lab for graphic design, web design, and music composition classes; an elementary laboratory for our budding



scientists; fully-equipped and subject-specific science laboratories in the middle-high school for physics, chemistry, biology, and earth & planetary sciences; a Robotics center and maker spaces. We truly desire to provide our students with the tools necessary for future success.

How have you upgraded traditional facilities like libraries, classrooms, cafeterias and gyms into 21-century spaces?

The classrooms on the new campus will be cutting-edge technologically. With school-wide Wi-Fi and Interactive White Boards as well as projectors in each classroom, teachers will have the tools they need to inculcate our

students with 21st-century skill sets and the qualities of responsible global citizens. The library will in fact be a media and research center. A major investment recently was our purchase of annual subscriptions for all middle and high school students to an online digital library, Questia School. While our traditional brick-and-mortar library will remain, through our online digital resources, students now have access to a wide variety of academic journals, books, newspapers, and peer-reviewed articles across hundreds of disciplines. They have access to the most up-to-date information that has been thoroughly vetted and verified. Additionally, the libraries will house makerspaces where students can



collaborate on design, innovation, and manufacturing. The gymnasium will include a professional-size wood-panel basketball court with electronic digital scoreboards and time clocks, suitable for interscholastic competitions.

Environmentally-friendly and energy-saving buildings are crucial to combating global warming and preserving a better planet for future generations, how has TAS incorporated this into the new campus?

The campus has been designed with reducing energy consumption, and thus our carbon footprint, in mind. Externally, landscaping has been designed with trees and shrubbery to shade the building during the day. Energy-efficient windows will be installed to prevent the cooled air from escaping. Water-conserving fixtures such as low-flow faucets, toilets, and showerheads will cut down on water consumption throughout the building. In addition, a rainwater harvest system will collect rainwater that will be stored in a tank and filtered and then reused for landscaping. Eco-friendly lighting including LED and CFL lighting will mostly be used around campus, which use less energy than traditional incandescent and fluorescent lighting.

While having state-of-the-art facilities are important in schools, having green spaces (which Saigon lacks) for students to play in are also equally important. How has TAS balanced the two?

I certainly do not think the two are mutually exclusive. I think that both can and should exist in a school. I am excited and confident about how the school will come together technologically. We will have the facilities, the technological infrastructure, and the tech support team in place to make it a genuine 21st century institution. But that does not mean that traditional spaces like grass playing fields and playground structures should take a back seat. In the planning stages, there was a deliberate attempt to carve out adequate recreational spaces and places for relaxation in order to balance the academic rigor with athletic and mindful pursuits. The spaces in and around the Recreation Center, especially, will be center of outdoor activities and both informal and competitive play.

Under your leadership, TAS has been approved as an official College Board-recognized SAT Test Center beginning May 5, 2018 test administration, walk us through the process of this achievement.

I firmly believe that students test better when they are in an environment with which they are familiar. Taking an all-important college or university admission test can be an unnerving experience. Now try taking such a test in an unfamiliar school far from your home and without the support of friendly faces around and the nerves can be exacerbated. Over the years as I have witnessed TAS students preparing for the SAT exam, it has bothered me that they could not sit for the exam in the very classrooms where they learn each day, in familiar surroundings. So, this has been a goal of mine since early on in my tenure at TAS. The first hurdle was gaining worldwide recognition as an accredited international school, which we achieved in 2015. This is a requirement of the College Board before being considered as an SAT Test Center. And over the years we cultivated a strong relationship with the College Board, winning approval to teach over a dozen Advanced Placement courses and administer AP exams each spring. In addition, we had successfully administered PSAT exams, the precursor to the SAT, on campus over the course of several years with no administration or security issues to

speak of. The College Board also sets our requirements regarding facilities, testing spaces and seating, and test storage and administration security. Once the exam administration prerequisites have been met, schools can petition the College Board for the right to administer SAT exams on site. I believe that our accreditation status in addition to the fact that we had successfully administered other College Board exams (PSAT and AP) over several consecutive years put us on good footing to be approved to administer the all-important Scholastic Aptitude Test.

Where do you see the future of education in Vietnam heading?

With international education becoming more competitive, it will only serve to push schools and teachers and students to achieve more. I think that Vietnamese students and expat students living in Vietnam are poised to benefit from the expansion and innovation in the educational sphere. Vietnam's participation in the recent APEC Future Education Forum serves to highlight the country's commitment to strengthening access to education for all its citizens. APEC's education strategy—to enhance and align competencies to the needs of individuals, societies, and economies, while accelerating innovation and increasing employability—should provide the vision for member countries, including Vietnam, and put the focus squarely on 21st-century skills and global competencies. Vietnam has stated that science and technology education are top priorities in its socio-economic development strategy, devoting nearly 20 percent of the State budget to education and training. This type of governmental leadership in the education sphere is refreshing and will help shape future generations and keep society developing apace with the economy. At TAS, we feel our journey has only just begun. We are eager to grow and develop in step as the country grows and develops. ■





Ly Nguyen is K-12 School Counselor at The American School. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Masters of Science in School Counseling.

How Can I Help?

Social-emotional counseling, a greater need within the school

“WHY COUNSELING?”

An honest question that is raised by many whenever I disclose my professional background. Growing up as a Vietnamese-American, the concept of choosing a career path that one is intrigued and passionate about is rather foreign. It's been engrained in the Vietnamese, and other Asian cultures, for children to follow their parents' footsteps, or endeavor to become successful by adhering to well-recognized jobs that often relate to the business world or medical field. However, my experience of “success” takes place in the school where I become the emotional support and voice of guidance for students as they make their daily choices or long-term decisions that can influence their future.

Throughout my work experience on counseling students from different ages and cultural backgrounds, I've found that most of them have dreams and ambitions at a very young age but as they grow older and enter into middle or high school, their motivation to succeed starts to crumble as they encounter certain obstacles. It may be family expectations, tragic accidents, peer conflicts or competitive academic standards that often result in high stress levels, students struggle to find a healthy balance between enjoying their classes and dreading school. On top of that, fear of failure or fear of being a disappointment can clog their vision of what a successful future may look like. When confronted with internal and external pressures, many of these students can start retracting from their parents, and even their teachers, leaving many caring adults perplexed.

When nothing seems to retain students' attention in class (even

academic counseling and extra tutoring), social-emotional counseling is needed to help re-engage students in their schooling. Students whose mental, social and emotional states are suffering will most likely struggle academically because these fundamental areas are interconnected. For example, when students have a physical illness, it is absolutely normal for them to go see a school nurse or take time off from school to recover. It would be unrealistic to expect those students to participate in class as though they are well. The same concept applies to a student's mental and emotional health. If their personal problems go untreated, the symptoms will become evident in their academic performance. Unfortunately, it is unlikely for some students and parents to voluntarily seek counseling for help due to possible stigmas or misconceptions of what the process involves.

The American Counseling Association defines counseling as “a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals.” It is a collaborative and transformative process where the counselors assist their clients to make necessary changes in how they think, feel and make decisions. One of the many false beliefs about counseling is that it is needed for “extreme” cases only, when in reality counseling is for anyone with mild to moderate problems. Some of the many life issues that counseling addresses can range from depression, self-esteem, adjustment problems (e.g. adjusting to a new school or college life), anxiety, to anger management, stress management, and relationship conflicts. The ultimate goal of social-emotional counseling is to help

students of all ages obtain wholeness in many areas of their life by enhancing their ability to cope in a positive manner.

When students' emotional needs or stress-inducing situations are being dismissed, manageable issues can escalate to problems out of their control, leaving students to have anger outbursts, panic attacks or potentially suicidal thoughts. It has been reported in an article called *Students Under Pressure* that students who struggle are more likely to give up or drop out of college. According to 2014 Novotney data, showed that 48.6 percent of students who sought counseling in colleges and universities were because of mental health-related concerns. This percentage reiterates the high need for non-academic counseling support within an educational environment. But why wait for students to enter into college to receive this valuable service? When social-emotional counseling is embedded in the K-12 education system, students can be better equipped in handling difficulties that may arise at any given time and at any given situation.

With both academic and social-emotional counseling available at The American School, parents and students can receive an in-depth and more holistic support. The benefit of receiving counseling on school campus is that students' personal and urgent needs can be identified immediately. Students who feel emotionally, socially, intellectually and mentally supported will find more motivation to excel academically. In return, parents, teachers, principals and school counselors can witness students' personal growth and their academic endeavors drawing them closer to their future goals. ■



A Countryside Tet at Grandma's

Illustrations by Yen Nhi Lu

FOR MANY VIETNAMESE,
Tet is synonymous with family.
Wherever you may be, it's the one, and
often the only, time during the year to
hop on a bus, boat, train or plane to
return to your hometown to spend time
with loved ones you haven't seen for far
too long, bearing gifts to make up for
time away.

Growing up in the rural Cape of
Ca Mau, Vietnam's southernmost
point, freelance illustrator Yen Nhi



came home earlier than usual and they both made ready for the trip back to the countryside. Com excitedly packed her best clothes. On the journey back to her grandma's, Com was thrilled to see the endless fields of green.

When they got to Grandma's, Com saw that everything was different than her home in the city. There were lots of shady green trees and she saw her cousin, Gao, swinging from a jackfruit tree. Grandma called Com and her cousins into the yard to grill rice paper until it puffed up, a tasty Tet treat. More and more delicious Tet foods were prepared. Grandma made sticky rice, beans and pork and everyone helped wrap Tet rice cakes. Com loved carrying great big bundles of them to the pot. The whole family sat around waiting for the cakes to cook.

The next morning, Com and her grandmother ferried watermelons to the market. Everyone was buying and selling and in just a little while, all the watermelons had been sold. Com and her grandmother bought some flowers and lots of other goodies.

On the eve before Tet, everything was ready, and Com and her cousins helped Grandma arrange all the food before the ancestral altar. On the first day of the new year, the children put on their new clothes and wished their grandmother a happy Tet. In turn, she gave them little red envelopes to ring in the new year! ■

Yen Nhi Lu is a Saigon-based freelance illustrator and graphic designer. She enjoys illustrating books and creating images for teens with a hint of romanticism. More of her work can be seen at www.behance.net/LUYENHI. Contact her at chuonchuondiboi@gmail.com.

Lu was inspired to capture the joy of homecoming in her children's book, *A Countryside Tet with Grandma*, dedicated to children of the city. Her fanciful multimedia illustrations were first drawn in pencil before being scanned and colored via computer. Her simple yet heartwarming tale is loosely based on her uncle's family who lives in the city. "One Tet, my little cousin came to the countryside and was mesmerized by the frenzy of Tet preparations. We didn't go out to buy Tet stuff like people do in the city; we made everything from scratch, from cakes to decorations. This simple story is about the joy of a city cousin who comes home to be with her country family during the holidays."

Tet was only a few days away, and Com's parents were busy working late. She was often at home alone, with her dog Milo as her only company. When she got hungry, Com would go into the kitchen and warm up the food her mother had made that morning. She always remembered to share some with Milo. One afternoon, Com's mother





The Legend of the Tet Pole

Illustrations by Thao Nguyen

ONCE UPON A TIME IN Vietnam, demons ruled the land. People had to work very hard for the Demon King, giving him a portion of their harvest every year. The Demon King noticed that the people were planting rice and eating the wonderful food at the tips. So one year, the Demon King said that he would take the tips of the rice plants and the humans could have the rest. When it came time to harvest, all the humans had left were the scraggly stalks and roots. The demons were fat and happy while the humans were reduced to skin and bones.





The kind Buddha wanted to help the humans against the cruel demons, so he told them to plant potatoes the next year. When the Demon King came to collect his tribute, all he got were the worthless vines and leaves while the humans feasted on the tubers below. The Demon King was furious, but a deal was a deal. He decreed that next year, the demons would take both the tips and the roots, thinking that whatever the humans planted, the demons were sure to get the best parts.



Again, the Buddha came to the humans and told them to plant corn instead. The humans listened to the Buddha and when harvest time came, they gave the Demon King the silky tips and the roots and kept the delicious hanging ears of corn for themselves. Seeing that he had been tricked again, the Demon King forbade the humans from planting anything the next year.

The Buddha appeared to the humans and told them to call the Demon King to negotiate another deal. The humans

gathered all the money they had and asked the Demon King to buy just the land under the shadow of a cloak hanging off a bamboo pole. Whatever was under the shadow would belong to the humans. The land outside the shadow would be the Demon King's. Thinking it was a good deal, the greedy Demon King agreed, and both sides signed an agreement.



The people planted a bamboo plant and the Buddha created magic. He made the bamboo grow higher and higher towards the sun and the cloak expanded wider and wider. As the bamboo grew close to the sun, the cloak cast an ever wider shadow until it covered all of Vietnam. The demons had to retreat further and further back until there was nowhere to go but into the sea.

Seeing that they were thwarted, the demons regrouped and returned to take back the land. The war was fierce. But the Buddha helped the humans and they won many battles. The demons then sought to find out what the Buddha was afraid of. The Buddha let it be known that he was afraid of fruits, rice cakes and bananas. The Buddha also discovered that the demons were afraid of dog's blood, pandan leaves, garlic and calcified lime.



In the next battle, the demons brought fruits, rice cakes and bananas and threw them at the Buddha. The Buddha instructed the humans to gather everything up as food and then chase the demons, sprinkling dog's blood and throwing lime at them while whipping them with pandan leaves. The demons were again chased into the sea. Accepting defeat, they begged the Buddha to allow them to return to the land a few days every year to visit the graves of their ancestors. The merciful Buddha agreed.

That is why, every year at Tet, people erect bamboo Tet poles with little bits of fabric, noisemakers and a few pandan leaves, to remind the demons not to encroach on the land of the humans. ■

"I like children's stories," says illustrator and web designer Thao Nguyen. "So I found a folktale that was cute but had a lot of meaning and was not well-known to most people." Thao sketched out her illustrations of the Legend of the Tet Pole in pencil before scanning and adding colors and texture via computer. Her dream is to become a children's book author and illustrator. "The world of children has so much color, fantasy and imagination," says the Saigon-based illustrator who grew up in Ca Mau. "These types of stories are important for children to learn about Vietnamese culture. The more they know, the more open-minded they'll be." For more of Thao's work, visit www.behance.net/ndpthao





Dr. Jonathan Halevy received his degree from the Sackler School of Medicine of Tel Aviv University, and then underwent his residency in the Pediatric Department of the Wolfson Medical Center in Israel, earning his certification as a specialist in pediatrics.

& Pain Needles

Yes, shots will always sting, but there are steps to take before, during and after a vaccine visit to ease a child's pain and stress.

I'LL BE HONEST WITH YOU.

I don't like needles. I don't like getting a shot myself, and I hate having to give one to a baby. It's one of the reasons why I think very carefully every time I need to do a blood test for my patients, making sure it's really necessary.

Of course, I'm not the only adult who doesn't like needles. Many parents are very anxious when it comes to giving vaccinations to their baby. They don't like causing pain, even though they know how important it is. Many parents are afraid of letting their child get several shots at the same time, and they try to postpone the vaccines and only give them just one at a time... but is that the smart way to go?

The Effect on the Immune System

From the moment a baby is born, his immune system is exposed to thousands of different types of germs, every hour of every day. Every time the baby breathes, eats or puts his hand in his mouth, bacteria and viruses enter his body, his nose, his mouth, his lungs and stomach. Yet while millions of germs are constantly inhabiting his skin, his immune system has no difficulty protecting him from any harm. Compared to that, a vaccine containing only a few particles of bacteria or viruses (and sometimes only in fragments) is no challenge to the immune system

at all. Giving multiple vaccinations at once doesn't make our immune system weaker; on the contrary, it's an excellent boost to immunity. And despite what parents may think, it doesn't increase the risk of any significant side effects.

The "Fear of Needles"

This is the main concern of most parents. They're afraid that giving a child several shots at the same time will cause more pain to their child. Actually, the major problem with getting a shot is the fear, the anxiety that comes with the knowledge that something painful is going to happen. The actual pain itself is very brief. It only lasts for a second or two.

From a psychological point of view, it's much better for the child to endure one stressful visit to the doctor, getting a few shots and being done with it, than having to go through this unpleasant experience again and again and again. If a parent decides to give a child only one shot at a time, he actually causes the child to experience even more stress and anxiety.

Missing the Opportunity

When a parent decides to postpone vaccinations, it means it will take a much longer time for the baby to reach protective levels of immunity. Occasionally, the baby will miss the vaccine altogether. It is much safer and much better for the baby's health

to receive all the vaccinations at the recommended scheduled time rather than delaying the inevitable.

What Can We Parents Do to Help Our Child?

There are a number of ways to reduce a child's anxiety and fear of needles.

One of the most important factors in a child's response to stress or pain is the parents' reaction. When a child runs and falls, his first reaction will be to look at one of his parents. If the parent is calm and relaxed, the baby will usually just stand up and keep on running. If the parent acts in an anxious way, the baby will become anxious and will start crying. If a parent stays calm while his child is getting a vaccination, the baby often won't cry or only cry for a very short time and quickly relax.

Distractions are another means of dealing with the stress and pain—including hugging the baby and singing him a quiet song; allowing the child to hug her favorite toy or comfort object; or playing a cartoon. These can be used depending on the child's age.

Anesthetic cream (EMLA) can be used to reduce pain, and sometimes putting ice on the location of the injection just before giving the vaccination can be helpful in minimizing a painful sensation. ■

>>The List Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



ABC International School (ABCIS)

Inspected and judged an outstanding school by British Government Inspectors (January 2017), 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
84 28 5431 1833/34/35/36
office@theabcis.com
www.theabcis.com



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Level 2, Somerset Vista, 628C Hanoi Highway, D.2, HCMC
028 6287 0804/ 0904 938 666
www.etonhouseanphu.com



International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

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



92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh
+84 (28) 2222 7788/99
admissions@issp.edu.vn
www.issp.edu.vn



Kinder Academy

Kinder Academy is a Reggio Emilia approach and STEM concept inspired preschool, where you can find the best integration of the above philosophies and practices. Our Vision: "Inspire and nurture your child to be a thinker with a global mindset."

Our Mission: "Passionate about the development of your child, we provide the right environment to play, learn and grow. Our team is child centric."

47/11/09 Quoc Huong, Thao Dien, District 2
093 878 00 76



STEPS Special School

STEPS (Support Teach Encourage Person with Special Needs) Special School caters to children with Autism, ADHD/ADD, Speech Delay, Intellectual Disability, Behavior Difficulty and Deaf. Our mission and vision is to nurture all children with Special needs in a safe inclusive and supportive environment through education, therapeutic interventions and community acceptance. We offer full - day, half - day, after school program, and school assistance.



18A Vo Trung Toan, An Phu Ward, D2, HCMC.
(028) 2253-4728
www.steps.edu.vn
Steps2017vn@gmail.com



The International School Ho Chi Minh City - American Academy

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



16 Vo Trung Toan, D2
+84 (28) 3898 9100
admissions@aaavn.edu.vn
www.aaavn.edu.vn



The International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)

ISHCMC is a leading school in HCMC with a rich history, yet is always innovating. Students from over 50 nationalities are taught in modern learning environments by trained IB educators specializing in inquiry-led teaching. This, paired with international-standard safeguarding policies ensures that all children are safe and supported to reach their potential. ISHCMC students develop a life-long passion for asking questions and searching beyond what is asked in the classroom ultimately becoming true 21st century citizens equipped for the future. The 2017/18 academic school year will see the new Secondary Campus open and the continued refurbishment in the Primary Campus.

28 Vo Truong Toan, D2
+84 (28) 3898 9100
admissions@ishcmc.edu.vn
www.ishcmc.com



The American School

The American School (TAS) is an international school that has been accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), representing 21 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. In 2018, The American School will open its new, sprawling mega-campus in District 2's An Phu Neighborhood. This purpose-built facility will house up to 1200 students from pre-nursery through grade 12. This is an exciting time in the growth of the school!

177A, 172-180 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2
028 3519 2223 / 0903 952 223
admissions@tas.edu.vn
www.tas.edu.vn



WONDERKIDS MONTESSORI SCHOOL (WMS)

School ages: 18 months to 9 years old. WMS is a standard international Montessori school offering nursery, kindergarten and lower elementary program by North America Montessori Curriculum covered with 100% English environment (for children from 18 months to 9 years old). Where the best integration of this philosophy and practices happen, we are proudly an active member of American Montessori Society. "Free the child's potential and you will transform him into the world." Maria Montessori

Campus 1:
3A Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2, HCMC
0938 909 268 / 028 22534999

montessori-office@wonderkids.edu.vn
www.wonderkidsmontessori.edu.vn

Campus 2:
4-6 Road No.20, My Gia 1, Tan Phu, D7, HCMC
0977299288 / 028 54141416
info@wms.edu.vn
www.wms.edu.vn



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13 Tran Ngoc Dien, D2
www.aurorareggio.com

Australian International School (AIS)

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

Xi Campus (Kindergarten)
www.aivietnam.com

British International School (BIS)

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

www.bisvietnam.com

Renaissance International School Saigon

Renaissance is an International British School offering the National Curriculum for England complemented by the International Primary

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

www.renaissance.edu.vn

Saigon South International School

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

www.ssis.edu.vn





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