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Image by James Pham

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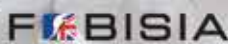
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TROI OI!

The country in numbers



USD570 MILLION

WAS SPENT IMPORTING PHARMACEUTICALS INTO VIETNAM

in the first quarter of this year, marking a year-on-year increase of 16.7 percent, according to the latest statistics from the General Department of Customs. Imports have come from dozens of countries and territories in Asia, North America, Europe and Oceania. In particular, many major markets in Europe are supplying pharmaceuticals to Vietnam. By the end of February 2019, France was the largest drug exporter to Vietnam, reaching nearly USD55 million, up 40.3 percent over the same period last year. It was followed by Germany, India, the US, the Republic of Korea, the UK and Belgium with USD44.5 million, USD37 million, USD34.2 million, USD22.7 million, USD18 million and USD14 million, respectively.

The poor ability to develop new drugs and the few businesses with access to high standards are the main reasons for the rapid increase in pharmaceutical imports over recent years. Nearly 55 percent of domestic pharmaceutical needs must be met by imported sources, including a large number of patented drugs, which are expensive because they are unable to be produced domestically. The drug spending per capita in Vietnam in 2017 was about USD56. This figure is expected to increase to USD85 in 2020 and USD163 in 2025.

USD2 MILLION

IS THE TOTAL WORTH OF VIETNAM'S NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM, ACCORDING TO FIGURES PUBLISHED

by Transfermarkt.com, a football statistics site. Transfermarkt.com's calculation was made on lineups that played for Vietnam at the Asian Cup 2019, their most recent international tournament. The most valuable player in the team was goal keeper Dang Van Lam, who currently plays for Thailand's Muangthong United, with a worth of USD336,039. Midfielder Luong Xuan Truong, who plays for Thailand's Buriram FC, came second at USD223,987. Nguyen Cong Phuong, a striker for South Korea's Incheon United, and midfielder Nguyen Quang Hai and defender Doan Van Hau, both playing for Hanoi FC, were ranked at the same worth of USD168,075.

Hanoi-based Viettel FC midfielder Nguyen Trong Hoang was valued at USD140,052, while defender Do Duy Manh of Hanoi FC and Viettel's Que Ngoc Hai both had the market value of USD84,031. This is the first time the entire lineups of Vietnam's national football team have made Transfermarkt.com's value list.

Before the 2019 Asian Cup, Vietnam's squad was modestly valued at USD360,000, as only four players—Xuan Truong, Cong Phuong, Trong Hoang and Van Lam—appeared in the football transfer site's data. The latest update of Team Vietnam on Transfermarkt apparently came after a string of successful tournaments of the Golden Stars. Vietnam finished second at the 2018 AFC U-23 Championship and sealed the fourth position at the 2018 Asian Games. They also won the 2018 AFF Cup and advanced to the 2019 Asian Cup's quarterfinals.





1ST 5D-EFFECT GLASS BRIDGE OPENED LAST MONTH IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF SON LA.

The Vietnam-made structure, measuring nearly 100 meters long, two meters wide and standing 22 meters tall, boasts the world's state-of-the-art 5D technology with 30 special effects—including nerve-jangling glass cracking, heart forming, flower opening and fish swimming—and a photoelectric sensor system, according to the developer. The bridge alone costs VND32-35 billion to build and the total expense could amount to VND40 billion if additional structures are to be taken into account, Pha Luong deputy director Dinh Hong Phuc said. The idea of the structure was conceived over two years ago but the project's contractor—Queen Viet Company—only had four months to assemble it from steel and bullet-proof glass, according to the company's general director Nguyen Manh Cuong. Particularly, the bridge, called 'Love Glass Bridge,' has ten towering heart-shaped structures on a pillar with ten lotus petals. Its bridge piers are made from 54,000 colored glass pieces, symbolizing 54 Vietnamese ethnic groups. The walkway is formed by three 15mm reinforced glass panels, each of which can bear a strength of eight metric tons per square meter, attached together from two glue layers. The total loading capacity of the bridge is about 60 metric tons, or the combined weight of 50-70 people, and its safety is guaranteed given considerations from geological surveys and the walkway's weight, according to Cuong. "We chose Moc Chau to build this bridge for its mountainous landscape with great potential for tourism development," he said. Tickets reportedly fetch VND100,000 per person.

1 TON OF METH, WHICH WERE STASHED IN LOUDSPEAKERS, WERE SEIZED BY THE POLICE.

Officers discovered two trucks and a parked car, driven by two Taiwanese men, showing signs of carrying illegal goods in HCMC. The trucks held "extremely heavy" loudspeakers, which prompted suspicion when police found that the drivers lacked legal papers to transport the equipment. Stashed in the speakers were 600 gold-colored Chinese tea packets, carrying 606 kilograms of meth. The police traced the trucks' route, which led them to a Vietnamese man who had more loudspeakers filled with meth and ketamine. In total, the city police confiscated 103 loudspeakers. News of the bust comes on the heels of two massive drug hauls in central Nghe An province, where 600 kilograms of meth was discovered stuffed in speaker boxes in the home of an elderly couple and 900 kilograms was found abandoned on the side of a road earlier this week. Vietnam is both a hub for drug use and a popular thoroughfare for shipments of illicit narcotics, with the number of large-scale hauls increasing in frequency and volume. Much of the country's illegal supply floods in from the lawless "Golden Triangle" zone that straddles Laos, Thailand and Myanmar. Though older users in Vietnam have long preferred opium and heroin as their narcotic of choice, younger people are increasingly turning to party drugs such as meth, ketamine and ecstasy.



VND196 CREDIT CARD DEBT AND A LATE PAYMENT FINE OF VND5 WERE ISSUED TO TUNG BY HIS FORMER BANK.

Tung said he opened a credit card at a local lender years ago during a promotional event, but never got round to using it. About two years after opening the credit card, Tung received a call from the bank asking him to pay more than VND1 million in outstanding maintenance fees. He complied and transferred his payment to the bank's account, thinking it was the end of the trouble. However, in early April, Tung received an email from a debt collection agency informing him that he still had VND196 in outstanding credit card debt that had been overdue for 968 days as of March 31. The agency requested that Tung finish paying off the debt as soon as possible "to avoid unnecessary inconvenience". Tung said he had to scramble for two VND200 banknotes to make the payment in person, as the amount was too small to be transferred electronically. The smallest denomination of the Vietnamese currency is VND100, although banknotes smaller than VND500 are rarely seen in circulation. As clerks couldn't find any smaller notes to give Tung his change, they agreed to reduce his debt and fine to VND200 in total.



Pet of the Month



Titan, The Gentle Giant

Images by **Sawano Newell**

TITAN WAS FOUND WANDERING the streets of Thao Dien alone and scared in late January 2019. We knew, given his breed, that he must belong to someone, however, after an exhaustive search no one came forward to claim this handsome boy.

Titan has all the features of a Belgian Malinois but we think he may also be crossbred. He displays many characteristics of a Belgian Malinois, which are known for their high intelligence and as such live for brain games. Titan loves to do training, he immediately, even though still young, picked up basic commands like sit, shake and stay. He is an intense dog that is play orientated and sensitive. The right adopter should understand that he will need training that is fun, consistent and positive. Although he's a big boy, he is very people oriented and loves being included in his foster family's busy life.

About Belgian Malinois

Originally developed in Malines, Belgium, Malinois have a great deal of stamina and truly enjoy working. They are intelligent and very active dogs that excel at many tasks. In addition to herding, they also do well with police work, search and rescue, and in performance events, such as agility. They're also very sensitive dogs that don't respond well to harsh training methods. Malinois are quick learners and eager to do whatever their people ask of them. They excel at obedience, tracking, agility, flyball, herding, showing, Schutzhund and other protection sports, search and rescue, and police work. Trainers describe them as having a high "play drive," which means that they love to play, and about anything you ask them to do is play to them.

Belgian Malinois can do well in small quarters if they receive enough exercise. They prefer cool climates but adapt well to warmer environments.

The ideal adopter loves to exercise and lives in a house with a garden, they would want to have Titan as a family member. If you would like to meet this sweet, gentle big boy, please contact arcpets@gmail.com. ■





Happy Dog, Happy Life

Giving a dog a second chance can mean advantages for humans, too

Text by **Alli Ruttger**
Images by **Veronica Linh**

WE MET HAPPY IN DECEMBER at a local Vietnamese-run shelter. He was a mess. He was covered in ticks and fleas, very skinny, unable to walk, but when I went over to him, he was so happy to be approached and pet that he wagged his tail and tried his hardest to get up. He had been found suffering from canine distemper, which is a virus that attacks the brain. They had cured him of it, but not before it had done permanent damage to parts of his system. It broke my heart and I knew he'd never get healthy or adopted if he stayed in the shelter. So we offered to pay for his medical care. He had seven percent white blood cell count, low red blood cell count, and low iron, amongst

other things. Again, he was a mess. A friend's dog donated blood for him and his prognosis shifted considerably.

Since Tet, we have been fostering Happy at our place, getting him used to living in a home, walking on a leash and overall positive behaviors. In turn, he has gotten stronger, more playful and began his transition to being a great pet. Happy is also neutered.

Happy is great with people and other dogs. He is very low maintenance, only needing a short walk in the morning and night. He is completely apartment trained and has had no accidents at all. Happy doesn't chew anything other than his rope and sleeps through the night.

He does still limp (and will permanently), but we have developed a shoe to protect his foot. Other than that, Happy is 100 percent healthy. ■

To adopt Happy, contact his foster parents Vaughan at 0965314894 or Alli at 0377135971.



Scan to see Happy's journey

Fierce Voices



The power of storytelling and the potential of women's networks

Text by **Jesus Lopez-Gomez**
Images by **Vy Lam**

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN FIVE years since Joelle Hawes, a UK national living in Saigon, stopped on a bridge with a partner and challenged him with a critical question.

"I was by a bridge with this guy and I asked him for a reason to live," Hawes told a mostly female audience attending the Leading Women storytelling event in March. She sought an affirming answer from the partner whose needs had superseded her own.

His answer: "I can't give you that," his way of saying "he didn't think I should be alive," she surmised. She told the group that the events described ended a point of extreme depression and emotional abuse. Hawes would go on to remake herself and rise again in a period of self discovery and personal growth, but that day one of the options on the table was to not realize this future. "That day could have ended in two ways, and I'm very thankful that it ended the way it did," Hawes said. Her speech ended with rousing applause and hugs from

audience members.

Hawes handed the microphone off to Leading Women (www.facebook.com/leadingwomenSG) chief Catriona Lygate who brought on the next storyteller from a lineup of speakers who told personally meaningful and sometimes difficult stories, like comic Vu Minh Tu's story about how her mom told her she was ugly as a child. Or artist and designer Sophia Holt's feelings of being constricted that lead the industrial designer to create her drawings of nude women.

"I think we're lacking in places where you can be real... and where you can just talk about serious s**t," Lygate said. The need for that space is in part what drove her to create the speaking engagements offered through her group Leading Women. The group's name is a double entendre; the first word acts as adjective and verb. The group's mission is to create a space where women can both be led through trainings and skill-building sessions as well as cultivate their own executive and communication



Lygate said. About 50 people showed up to the inaugural Leading Women meeting. Despite Lygate's fears, those who showed up seemed to know what she was doing right away. People showed up, they shared, they were listened to. The only part Lygate hadn't budgeted for was the audience's desire to participate. Spectators who came who wanted their turn to share their stories in their space. "I see the audience wanted to get involved. It was going to be something that people were engaged with," she said.

Leading Women's speaking events now include speakers who've been selected to share their stories, but Lygate takes audience comments between speakers where they can share their experiences too. Not all the stories are negative, but most are extremely personal and sensitive, things you wouldn't think people want to share with strangers, yet here they are doing just that.

"People don't think that people want to hear about that," Lygate explained. "There may be a lot of situations where it's maybe not the right time to bring something serious up. But we need to be able to have people and a support network around us; that's a massive part of life."

Lygate is not a trained clinician. She stopped after her first year as a psychology major and selected architecture as her discipline instead. Her facility with serious stuff comes from the wealth of it in her personal history. Before she entered university, her family had weathered a divorce and she acted as her dad's caretaker as he succumbed to dementia. He died when she was 18.

"Of course I missed him... but it freed my whole family," she said. His death occurred after she moved away from home, and "I had to forgive myself." It's helped her keep her life in perspective as she moved through her master's degree work and left Scotland to relocate to Ho Chi Minh City. "You have to realize that



even though there are days and nights where you're like 'f*** this'... You also have to realize how lucky you are."

Lygate she she'd originally wanted to create an explicitly feminist group that would include the f-word in its name. "But I know feminism has a bad name sometimes," she said. "I just needed to give women a voice and a place to have a voice. It's not about me, it's just about giving a platform to tell about how they feel," she said.

The speaking engagements are what Lygate sees as a the beginning of a greater project that will include education projects made to empower Vietnam's female population, both local and expat. The future of the project is to offer training for girls and women across the country through staff that will work through Leading Women.

The first pieces of this vision are coming together. Leading Women has executed a series of workshops on public speaking and, this summer, will offer a Ruby on Rails coding course.

Leading Women is not only about teaching others, but about teaching herself. "I'm so sure of myself sometimes," Lygate said. "I'm a bit egotistical." The stories have "just humbled me," she said. "I love to see how much that gives the speaker."

For Hawes, telling her story of making the right choice at the bridge was enabled by who Lygate is and what she represents to her. "Cat gives a really comfortable space for people to talk. You almost go up there thinking you're going to share a specific story and you end up telling everything," she said. Hawes explained that there's a special kind of power that emanates from women-led spaces.

"The secret? Women have ruled the world since day one, we just haven't realized it yet because we don't speak as loudly as men," she said. ■

skills. Leading Women's activity portfolio contains workshops and networking events Lygate calls "speed friending" alongside its speaking engagements. The events draw a sprinkling of men, but the overwhelming majority of those attending are female.

Lygate said she was originally inspired by a teaching experience she'd had last fall. The young women she was teaching were self-selecting education topics that centered around women's advocacy. It awakened a desire in Lygate to move beyond teaching that in the classroom, but to create something outside in the world of women. It was at the beginning of this year when Catriona Lygate put out her trial balloon, just an idea she was throwing out there. Would anyone be interested in meeting as part of a women's speaking and storytelling group? She guessed maybe 25 people would show up to something like this. But with the first event created on Facebook, some 500 people RSVP'd.

"And I was like 's**t, s**t, s**t,'"



Catriona

A photograph of Ares Wong, a man with glasses and a dark sweater over a collared shirt, sitting on a dark blue couch. Behind him is a large, light-colored wooden bookshelf filled with various books. The scene is brightly lit, likely from a window on the left.

Book Now

Meet Ares Wong, an entrepreneur, a librarian and a reading advocate

Text by **Jesus Lopez-Gomez**
Images by **Vy Lam**

Ares Wong

IF IT'S NOT THE FIRST QUESTION

Ares Wong gets when he tells people he opened the Reading Habit International Library in Thao Dien (27 Nguyen Ba Huan, D2), it's not far in to the conversation. "It's not about is the service good or [is] the product good," the 24-year-old Singaporean librarian said. They don't ask what kind of books are in his collection of 1,500 or what kinds of drinks are served in the café on the second floor. "I hear... how can you earn a profit, how to survive," Wong said.

"Even you, you just asked now," he adds after having been presented the question in the course the interview for this story. It was maybe a more fair question when the library opened and Wong was lending books for free like a real public library. He charges a membership fee now, but it's the core business—sharing books for the reading public—that isn't a blockbuster industry, shall we say. Books aren't a typical pick for those doing something entrepreneurial.

Similarly, Wong himself is a self-described outlier. "I'm a college dropout," he said. "The only thing I like is reading." In Ho Chi Minh City, the only places dedicated to reading are the General Science Library of Ho Chi Minh City in District 1—"which you have to pay a fee for," Wong pointed out—and book retailer Fahasa. He remembers going there one day and seeing children



reading on the floor. The reader in Wong appreciated seeing young bibliophiles reading for pleasure, but the businessman in him was sensitive to the fact that customers were often re-shelving books that have been damaged or were otherwise no longer new.

"That's the only way to freely access

books," he reasoned. "That's when I'm thinking why aren't there libraries in Vietnam." The sensitivities Wong has for readers and his own passion for books are features he sees as exceptional in his culture. "I need to say that Asians... they fail in reading," he said. Wong doesn't mean that the reading comprehension

is poor. He means that the passion for reading and interest in literature as leisure isn't as common in his culture than for the Westerners he knows.

In his analysis, the difference starts from how books are introduced to early readers.

Asians "treat reading as a skill. Read 5 to 10 pages a day," he said. "Once you treat it as compulsory... as a job, (children) feel it's a job." Children who read to complete their homework and don't see their parents reading will never be curious about it themselves, Wong argued.

"Reading and academics are two different things," he asserted. But Wong understands that schools and educators play an important role in shaping young readers. During the weekday, the Reading Habit International Library hosts school



tours, group visits from Thao Dien's schools. The other piece of that is actual reading. On weekend mornings, the library hosts reading sessions where patrons and can read to their children. An extensive collection of children's books sits on the first floor from which to choose. On the second floor, the teen and adult book collections are housed next to a small coffee shop that serves the coffees and juices to keep readers hydrated, focused in midst of a good, deep read.

Wong's District 2 library is what he hopes to be the first installment in a larger community center literally built up from the ground. The library is inside a five-storey building. In the future, he hopes to use the upper levels to deliver workshops, yoga classes and a coworking space.

A Singapore native, Wong moved to Vietnam two years ago with his wife. He describes himself as entrepreneurial but didn't feel like he had the business opportunity that fit his interests in his home country. "I like to read and I like to work," he said. "I'm not a person who likes to idle."

Wong intends to expand the library's collection through a fundraiser with European International School HCMC. A funding targeting of VND150 million ought to be enough to double the library's book collection. ■



Building Electric Dreams

On Vietnam's crazy roads, "If you can't beat them, scare them"

Text by Rebecca Jones

Images by Vy Lam



THERE ARE TIMES AN IDEA

so seemingly preposterous is aired that only the kindest among us do not smirk meanly into our coffees. If the advocate is a close friend or family member, we might offer some reserved, amused encouragement; however, on hearing about a foreigner building an electric car in his basement intended to rival the ubiquitous Saigon scooter, few would of us would pull out our wallet.

This is exactly the type of opposition that 40-year-old entrepreneur Doru Tudose faced in August 2017 when



the DJ and bar owner first floated his current project—Vietnam’s first ever electric car. However, “Quanta” is now attracting growing attention from a diverse community of investors that have pledged close to USD4,000 through his gofundme page.

Tudose says: “One of the original triggers for Quanta was hearing about a model of scooter that costs USD15,000—the Honda SH 300. I just thought that was a ridiculous price for a scooter and started wondering whether you could build a small car for the same amount of money, and whether that car could be electric.

“In Ho Chi Minh City people are either on scooters—which are dangerous and offer no weather protection at all—or in these enormous 4x4’s that usually only have two people in, clog up the roads and the air and are also actually really poorly built. I just thought that there must be a much better solution.”

Having designed and overseen the construction of his own bar, Bootleg DJ Cafe on Le Thanh Ton in 2011, Tudose was no stranger to a complex build project. A long time car enthusiast, he also had a good idea where to start. Taking a classic v12 engine as his starting point, the entrepreneur considered the parts he might need, and how they might be replaced by electric alternatives.

This led him to thinking about a long board (or big skateboard for the uninitiated) which he imagined attaching a supersized battery-pack to. To assess whether or not this was a viable idea,

he posted an ad on Freelancer.com for a design team. Much to his surprise, Tudose was inundated with responses—and found a team based in India within days.

He says: “There is so much innovation going on in India right now around transport and energy that I wasn’t surprised to find people interested in this idea. We started hashing out some blueprints pretty quickly and I was actually really pleased that the parts I had thought I would need—as well as the battery idea—were largely correct.”

Design Over Doubt

The entrepreneur has put a staggering amount of time, effort and money into Quanta, surmounting numerous obstacles. These include sourcing parts, which he says can be a frustrating mime act with local mechanics and—most recently—completing the frame for his prototype. Arguably, though, the most difficult part has been the barrage of objections raised by many, many doubters.

“I get a lot of questions from people about whether this could ever really be popular in Vietnam, where people love their motorbikes and then go for the biggest car they can find when they make some money. But I’ve actually had really positive feedback from Vietnamese friends I have shared the design with, as well as from

my Vietnamese wife. Most, in fact, want to know when they can buy one.”

The design is, to most tastes, highly attractive. Quirky and esoteric, the Quanta is a two person vehicle (driver and rear passenger) that looks something akin to a classic Aston Martin crossed with a Bugatti Veyron. Sleek, smooth and sharp with an Italian/Japanese feel, Tudose wants the car to appeal to Vietnam’s fashion conscious youth, and so has spent considerable time on its look.

This is important because, as a small electric vehicle, the car is anything but fast—capable of 80 kilometres an hour at a push, which is also about as far as it can go between charges. It’s tagline: “If you can’t beat them, scare them” hints at this, while speaking to the devilish look of the headlights and front grill that would attract more than the odd interested glance at any stop light.

In terms of its carbon footprint, the entrepreneur says the Quanta will have around 75 percent of the impact on the environment that a Toyota Innova (the most popular gas guzzler in Vietnam) has, while also being far more pleasurable, efficient and economic to drive.

Fake It Till You Make It

With the frame now built, the aspiring designer is hoping to raise a further USD6,000 through his gofundme to complete the prototype, which he hopes will be in the testing phase within four months and ready to pitch for further investment by the end of the year. As an initial marketing strategy he plans to give away up to 20 models to key influencers across the country—handpicked from a growing entourage of social media and TV stars.

Of course, the biggest hurdle—bigger even than finding the investment to produce 20 cars to give away to a gaggle of bright young things—is yet to come: convincing the Vietnamese authorities to allow him to put the car on the road. However, much like the prototype, Tudose is of the mind that it is better to cross such bridges when you come to them.

“If I had tried to solve every possible problem before I began, I would never have started this project. Often you just have to do it and trust it will work out. If it doesn’t—ok—I’ve got an amazing little car to play with. But I’m actually confident that this is going to be popular. I really think the demand is there among young Vietnamese. This is a sexy, safe and affordable mode of transport that is perfect for Asian roads.”

Whether the plucky entrepreneur is correct in his assessment of Quanta’s potential market remains to be seen. His passion and dedication are, however, infectious and lead one to suspect he might just be right. This summer, we’ll be keeping our eyes peeled on the road. ■

To find out more about Quanta, and/or to help build Vietnam’s first-ever electric car, see Doru’s gofundme page: “Help me to build my dream car.”



The Wandering Water Puppet Project



Behind the scenes of the making of a children's picture book

Text and Illustrations by **Tran Dac Trung**

VIETNAMESE WATER PUPPETRY is renowned for its unique atmosphere that features friendly yet mystical settings and characters. Even viewers not familiar with the folklore portrayed by the water puppet performances are still drawn to the world this fascinating traditional art creates. However, water puppetry is rarely seen by the Vietnamese and is usually touted mostly as a tourist attraction. Given the incredible sense of imagination and creativity that exist in their performances, it is a regret that locals,

especially children, rarely take an interest in this art form.

Through my illustrations for the Wandering Water Puppet project, I hope to raise awareness of the art. Together with me on this journey, providing the scriptwriting, was Tran Thi Minh Hieu, an experienced translator with Kim Dong

Publishing House. A children's picture book was chosen as the format to meet the project's objectives, as it was the most suitable because it gives readers a sense of tranquility and wonder that is so unique to Vietnamese water puppetry.

Conceptualization

Initially, various options were considered for the concept of the children's picture book. One initial idea was to create a Vietnamese version of Pinocchio, telling the story of a puppet master and his desire to bring puppets to life. Another idea involved a little prince and his water puppet friends. Such story-heavy approaches, however, were deemed not suitable for this project, as they focus too heavily on the non-water puppet aspect. In these original ideas, most characters live, breath and work outside of the water puppet world, which lessen the sense of wonder for water puppet that the book is trying to create. A more thematic and mood-based approach was chosen instead.



Character Design

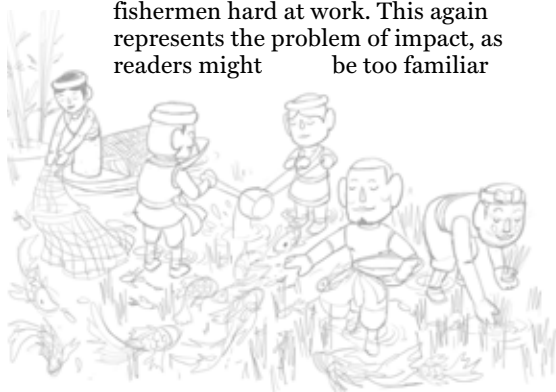
With a more thematic approach, it was logical that all characters in the book should be part of the water puppet world to fully draw in the readers. The characters were designed to take on the form of water puppets themselves and share puppet-like characteristics to distinguish them as wooden puppets while still being visibly alive with varying expressions. Using actual water puppets as reference, characters in the book were created to resemble the Vietnamese of

old, such as farmers, village girls, kings and nobles. The main character was set as a simple young wooden puppet boy with no special characteristic to shift the focus of the readers to the water puppet world surrounding the main character. In this sense, the protagonist of the book is a representation for the readers themselves, and his journey through the water puppet world is the reader's journey. To emphasize the sense of wonder, the protagonist was set to be a lost puppet, wondering about this mythical world.



Early Scene Exploration

Influenced by traditional character designs, early scene concepts depict typical village life with farmers and fishermen hard at work. This again represents the problem of impact, as readers might be too familiar



with such scenes and settings. Without a touch of something outside of the ordinary, the scene would fail to evoke curiosity and interest, which are vital components of a mood-based story. This is even more important as the primary target audience is children, who are whimsical and easily bored. To address this problem, the story would need to incorporate more fantastical elements. Fortunately, Vietnamese folklores are rich with such inspirations.



Taking cue from Vietnamese folklore characters such as the Four Mythical Beasts and the common water buffalo, the philosophy guiding the composition of the book focuses on showcasing

dream-like, magical characters that baffle the protagonist and create a sense of otherworldliness. This in turn aims to create a sense of being lost in another world for the readers as well.

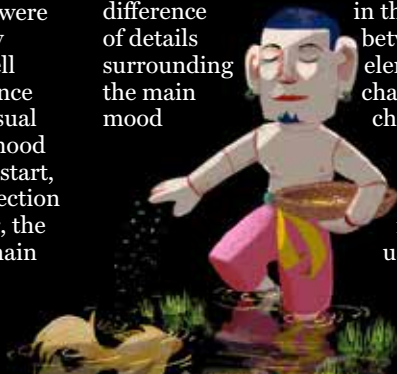
Another key decision is the use of water in the illustrations because water is a defining element in water puppetry. Every scene in the book is meant to be filled with water, which is a very conducive tool for establishing light and colors due to its reflective nature. While strange to the readers, walking in water is as normal as breathing air to the inhabitants of the water puppet world. Such subtle yet major differences further immerse the readers in the book.

Mood Exploration

The tranquil aspect of water, which evokes a feeling of calm and stillness, heavily influences the initial mood of the book. Pitch-black background was also initially considered to draw the reader's eyes to core visual elements on the page. Such art directions were decided against due to the overly subdued mood that do not fit well with young readers, especially since children tend to prefer strong visual stimulation. However, one key mood element was identified from the start, which is reflection. By using reflection to indicate the presence of water, the scenes could simultaneously remain colorful and vibrant, while not losing the sense of tranquility.

The final mood selection for

the book was decided based on three key characteristics that were shared by all scenes in the book: dark background with a blueish hue to invoke the feeling of a water puppet stage, bright and warm colors to create contrast, and the stark difference of details surrounding the main mood



in the level between the elements and character. The choice is also heavily influenced by the masterful usage of light, shadow and smoke in actual



Water Puppet performance to draw in the audience.

Final Illustration

With the core elements of character, scene and mood decided, final illustrations were sketched and colored in Photoshop, using pastel-based brushes. Each artwork took an average of eight hours to complete. ■

For more of Tran Dac Trung's works, visit (www.dactrungart.com) and (www.behance.net/dactrungart).



The Wandering

Writer: Tran Thi Minh Hieu

Illustrator: Tran Dac Trung



There was this place,
The only place In the whole world
Where you could watch
Puppets dancing in water
The place was called
Water Puppet Theater

This was a water puppet.
His name was Teu,
As in Teh-ooh.
He seemed to wonder
How he came to be here.



As Teu walked around,
He noticed a boy
On the back of a water buffalo.
He asked, "How come I am here?"
The boy answered, "No clue.
I'm just watching
My master's water buffalo."

Water Puppet

Teu went on, and he saw
A green rice paddy field.
He asked a farmer there,
“Why did I come here?”
The farmer just smiled,
“Sweet boy, are you lost?
This is no place for a child.”



Teu was so surprised
When he passed by some maidens
Holding flowers in their hands.
He stood quietly for a moment,
Without asking a question.

He was about to give up
All hope to find the answer,
When he saw four giant animals.
“Dear Dragon and Qilin,
And Turtle and Phoenix,
Do you happen to know
The reason why I’m here?”



Hooked on Craft



Flo and Cami

Crafting together for a better community

Text by **Katie Kinnon**

Images by **Vy Lam**

GIRLS ON CRAFT FOUNDERS

Flo and Cami became friends just over a year ago when they attended a punch needle workshop together, and since then they have added embroidery, macramé and origami to this growing, talented friendship.

Flo is originally from the French Alps and has always been involved in crafts, as a young girl she was taught embroidery and as an adult she saw crafts like punch needle and origami as a way to relax. Cami is a fashion designer and originally comes from Italy. She has an adorable little girl who inspired her along with her love of crafts to start her own kids clothing line which she hopes to expand into an adult clothing line in the future.

The Girls on Craft (www.facebook.com/girlsoncraft)

workshops are held in a stunning apartment in the middle of Thao Dien, with a large open plan living room, crafters have a great view of the Saigon River while they work on their designs.

For the punch needle workshop, each crafter receives punch needle tools, which are difficult to find in Vietnam, that they can take home afterwards. “We have to order the punch needle tools on Amazon, get them delivered to the UK and then we have someone who will bring them to Saigon for us,” says Flo.

The lesson begins with crafters picking out their designs. Flo and Cami provide simple sketches of avocados, strawberries and lollipops or crafters can use designs they have found online. Next is choosing the yarn. Placed on



the table is a large bowl of yarn with a large assortment of colors, their yarn is sourced locally in District 5. By catering to only six to eight people at a time, the workshops are small meaning Flo and Cami can spend time with each person.

Everyone then begins to sketch their designs onto the material they will be punch needling. This is where crafters have to decide if they want their designs to be fluffy—by punch needling on both sides it can create a 3D effect—which can make shapes or text pop. This requires sketching the part of the design that will be fluffy on to the back of the material, however, lettering can be tricky to get right because if they are too close together they can merge and become nonsensical.

Cami and Flo show the crafters how to thread the yarn on to the punch needle tool and how to start the designs. Actually, working with the punch needle tool can be tricky at first especially when the freshly punched yarn comes loose but Flo and Cami were great at helping everyone get the technique right and it becomes very easy to find a rhythm. The trick is to punch the needle all the way through and twist it a little before pulling it out again.

Throughout the workshop Flo and Cami check in with everyone, helping them to rethread their yarn, start a new section of their design or correct a mistake. Cami explains that punch needling is quicker and easier to do than embroidery because you don't need to thread the material through



every hole, in punch needle you can thread it through every other hole.

After the three hours, and with Flo and Cami's encouragement and guidance, the crafters are pleased with the final results. Flo and Cami are extremely happy with how the workshops are going and they have had a huge amount of interest so far, including a group of students at the weekend, Cami explains why crafts like punch needling are important for young people, "We feel it is a great way for kids to get off their phones, do something with their hands and be creative." In the future, Flo and Cami would like to partner with fashion brands to customize accessories, handbags and clothes. ■



Life and Limb

The future of the prosthetic workforce



Text by Jesus Lopez-Gomez
Images by Carolyn Chee

PROSTHETICS HAVE COME

a long way, but it would still be very difficult for someone using many of the artificial arms available to them to do some basic things, like carry a tray.

It's a simple enough task done by many in restaurant and service-oriented jobs, but if you have an artificial extremity made out of plastic or metal, this is going to be a challenge. If the goal is to recreate a human body for wearers of prosthetics, then this is an intractable one.

"There's no point in trying to copy the human hand," Rafael Masters, Vulcan Augmetics (www.facebook.com/vulcanaugmetics) CEO, said explaining the design decisions around its specialty prosthetic made for real world testing at The Coffee House.

The prosthetics company has set a goal of delivering prosthetic arms to 30 staff members working at the cafés. Instead of giving recipients conventional arm replacements, Vulcan Augmetics is testing out its new modular prosthetic, one with a detachable handpiece that can be replaced with something like a special, magnetic tray holder.

It's not quite a hand, but Masters argues that freeing prosthetic design from anatomical recreation is key to realizing full potential of both the prosthetic and the wearer. This partnership project is called UpLift and is part of a larger project to enhance

the capacities of prosthetics wearers.

"We believe that amputees have a huge opportunity and they can be considered as 'upgraded' instead of 'broken,'" he said.

Rafael Masters grew up right next to a school for children with disabilities in the South England town of Alton and would visit the students regularly. Shared interests, like the tabletop fantasy board game Warhammer, bound him early and fast with the special needs-focused school's population. This gave him an early exposure to people born with birth defects and chronic illnesses like muscular dystrophy. But the first time he saw a prosthetic that really made him take notice was somewhere much different, on the other side of the world. It was Detroit, Michigan. It was in the future.

"It was *Robocop*, actually," Masters said remembering the film. A sci-fi enthusiast since youth, the film—a futuristic tale of a police officer rebuilt as a cyborg after a horrible accident—fit neatly into his interests then.

One scene hangs with him specifically. "There's a brilliant moment in one of the films where they go to the shooting range and... his leg just opens and the gun comes out of it in to his hand," said Masters. "That was just the coolest thing I'd ever seen in my life."

He remembers realizing then that "prosthetics can be much more than a copy of a body." This is what a prosthesis

could and should be, he reasoned, an upgrade on the human form.

"You step back," Masters explained. "You don't think 'oh, that poor amputee.' You think 'oh, that person's badass.'"

The concept that became Vulcan Augmetics dates back to at least 2012 when he was exploring the possibility of creating a 3D printing lab where folks could make and buy their own individual prosthetics. Over time, the concept grew to become what it is today: an enhanced, low-cost prosthetics service specifically serving beneficiaries with tools designed to help them rejoin the workforce. It's a big concept with what is potentially a huge impact. Only around a third of Vietnam's population with disabilities is employed. At least 600,000 Vietnamese would benefit from a prosthetic.

The prosthetic is only one part of it, the other is "making poor people rich people," as Masters phrases it. If amputees are no longer indigent, they can develop buying power to cover their basic needs to even have disposable income. Vulcan Augmetics' prosthetics are modular as a competitive advantage: the users will have the ability to customize their prosthetics with changes that make it functionally different for different tasks or even cosmetically different, like a more skin-like outer cover.



Self-made Man

Vulcan Augmentics is similar to a social enterprise in that the company will offer a certain quantity of prosthetics as donations to amputees who are waitlisted. It will also sell to those waitlisted who can pay the prosthetic USD1,000 price tag and be the sole vendor for the device's hardware upgrades. The average prosthetic available today is priced around USD30,000, Masters said. This amount would fund the entire initial UpLift project through crowdfunding and private donors, half this amount has been generated already. UpLift calls for 30 prosthetic arms to be deployed by July. After that, Vulcan Augmentics plans to deliver 250 by the close of 2019. The company intends to bring 10 percent of the disabled population that is not working back into the job economy.

Masters said the device owners who receive a prosthetic would be encouraged to sponsor the next person's arm as a way of empowering them. Rather than just charity—"I'm not a huge fan of charity... but in long-term work, you need something more sustainable," Masters said—the devices would be a way for those with disabilities to regain independence by creating value for themselves and potentially the next person who will get a prosthetic. "We want to say, 'they've absolutely earned their product,'" he said. "You don't make people proud with pity."



The Vulcan alluded to in the company name appears in Greek mythology as the son of Jupiter, the king of Gods. In the tale, the deity is angry at having been promised a beautiful child but received an ugly one instead. The gods cast the baby Vulcan out of heaven into the sea. He breaks his legs upon arriving to earth. On earth Vulcan becomes a celebrated blacksmith and jewelry maker. Learning of his talented cast off son, Juno calls him back to heaven and Vulcan refuses choosing to remain a veritable self-made man.

"I think that's awesome," Masters

said. To him, the story is about the power of technology to create new value rather than replace what was lost. "We do this with hearts already," Masters said citing the electronic pacemaker as an example.

As a sci-fi fan, Masters said he's pleased to see much of the fantasy worlds he grew up seeing realized with advances in technology. How are we not in "Robocop" territory yet, he muses still.

"I just didn't get why with the technology we're not doing that now," he said. "We've got maker technology, we've got 3-D printers... all the technology and the ingredients are there." ■



Mic Drop

In conversation with Thanh
Thanh Huyen, a DJ, a model,
a musician and Vietnam's
sought-after master of
ceremonies

Text by **Michael Arnold**
Image by **Vy Lam**

HOSTING THE COUNTRY'S MOST glamorous international fashion event would be a big deal for any MC, but to stand in front of that kind of audience before you've even graduated from university is something quite remarkable.

It would seem, however, that the distinction of her role hasn't struck Vietnam International Fashion Week's longest-standing female host and English-language presenter Thanh Huyen as being in any way out of order. An ultra-confident early bloomer who has been in the public eye since she was 11 years old, Huyen has already cycled through a range of performance careers—she's been a radio host, a DJ, a professional model, a beauty pageant contestant, and is a talented traditional musician—before focusing on becoming one of Vietnam's most visible fashion event MCs.

"The first time I was the MC for a big event—and they even forced me to speak in English—I was grade 10, which is about 16 years old," remembers Huyen. "I looked older than my age, so I told them I was 20." The ruse worked, and after three days of frantic preparation going over the beats she'd need to pull off in a language she could barely speak at the time, the event went off without a hitch—immediately putting her on the map as one of Nha Trang's only English-capable MCs.

She was already a recognizable face in her hometown by that stage—presenting a television series teaching kids to sing while she was still a child herself, she had gone on to host a teenage magazine program as she blossomed as a presenter, before fronting travel shows to promote Vietnam's coastal destinations. By the time she scored her first MC role, however, she had already mapped out her next big steps.

The first was to compete in Miss Universe Vietnam—it cost all of her savings thus far to prepare for the event, and she placed in the top 15. It was an entirely positive experience for the young performer, gifting her with a sense of confidence she's since been able to apply to bigger things.

The second was to be the host of a big Vietnamese entertainment show, a dream that seemed to inevitably entail switching universities so she could base herself in Ho Chi Minh City. It was here that she started to develop an interest in presenting for fashion showcases.

"I tried a lot, and after moving to Saigon, I had the connections," says

Huyen. I went to some fashion events, and realized I wished I could be there as a part of the show, to introduce it and tell people about the designers' ideas, to help people understand more about fashion."

Huyen immediately began to petition the organizers of Vietnam's biggest fashion event to be considered for the number one MC role alongside veteran presenter Tung Leo—and through sheer persistence (and her by-then fluency in English) she beat out other more established MCs for the job—and has managed to hold her seat over three seasons.

A Voice for Fashion

Having successfully pursued the Fashion Week MC spot, Huyen found herself in a front-seat role that entailed some distance between her and the other cast and crew, which has given her a unique perspective of the event and how it has developed over the seasons in which she's been involved.

"It's growing," she observes, "I think more international fashion designers are getting involved, and they're legends. That gives the Vietnamese designers more of a chance to learn from them."

To Huyen, the designs are what necessarily drive the show. "Fashion is still something very new to Vietnamese people," she says. "They don't have a clear concept of it. So at the events, they focus on the models and the performance. Actually they have to focus on the designs, right? So everybody asks me now, does Fashion Week have anything new? I always tell them, whatever's 'new' comes from the designers, the creators. Not from the show. Not the performance. Not the dance."

She has also been well-placed to gain some perspective on which aspects of the fashion industry Vietnamese designers still have some ground to cover.

"I think that Vietnamese designers have creative designs, they have a lot of ideas, but not every designer has access to the best materials," she says. "We also have a lot to learn about garment techniques from international designers. Lie Sang Bong from Korea and Kit Woo from Malaysia did well this season, every design in their collections looked totally different. There's a lot for our designers to be inspired by."

To be consistent, Huyen also views her own role as necessarily secondary to the designs that should take center-stage. "I want to be a design that can speak," she quips. "I don't really notice the models, I only care about whether they

can show off the designs or not."

"There's a high demand for the MC," she adds, "not just in terms of the English, the coordination on stage, but also the image. The MC needs to have a look that is itself trendy and modern. Vietnamese people prefer gentle looks, cute like a beauty queen. So I tried to start out like that, and I got more confident the second time. But in this last season, I wanted to explore myself, and try something really new. At first I tried different styles on the stage, and then I found something really suitable for me. Even after I finished the makeup, I stood in front of my assistant and he couldn't recognize me. Not many shows in Vietnam allow the host to dress like that."

Different Versions

While Thanh Huyen's career has already covered more ground than most artists might look at in the span of a lifetime, Huyen has firmly settled on the MC path for the time being—while her other creative pursuits have allowed her various degrees of self-expression, nothing but the immediacy and dignity of the role of "Master of Ceremonies" gives her quite the vehicle for her trademark wit, presence of mind and rapid-fire comebacks.

For all that, her own inspiration remains firmly at home. "My parents love art," she says brightly, recognizing their unwavering support for her creative exploration, even when least expected.

"When I wanted to be a DJ, I didn't dare tell my parents. They're really traditional in their thinking, but they love everything about the arts. So I just decided to take my mother to the Sailing Club, and when she saw the DJ on stage she turned around and said 'I think you're good at art, you could do that too, why don't you try?' I was so happy that I asked her to lend me the USD1000 study fee then and there, and she did!"

"Learning traditional music was like that too. We were watching TV, there was a girl playing the zither, and I told my mom, 'she's so beautiful and I love the sound of that instrument', and she immediately said 'I'll take you to learn it'."

Huyen studied the traditional Vietnamese 16-chord zither for nine years, and continued playing even alongside her DJ gigs. She most likely couldn't have sat still for long enough to keep it up otherwise. "Traditional music makes me too slow and gentle," she sighs. "I feel like I have more versions of myself. That's why I decided to be an MC." ■

SÔNG

As legend has it, at the dawn of life, in the waters of Halong Bay, there lived a dragon whose height reached the sky and size covered the seen earth.

It was told that when the dragon stretched out and unfolded its wings, its body lined the entire central coast, its heart rested where Hue now lies, and its limbs and tail extended to the tops of northern mountains and the bottom of southern deltas.



metiseko



The new Metiseko silk collection is inspired by Vietnam, the Land of the Dragon, through such legends. From design to the color palette, all was conceived using elements found in legends that are retold in traditional folk paintings. It results in a collection that is richly flavored with the local culture. It is Metiseko's way of paying tribute to the culture and traditions of the country that gave birth to the brand.

The print collection takes its main inspirations from Air, Water, and Fire – some of the elements that make the universe, as we believe in the East.

The collection honors the image of the Dragon, the most emblematic animal in Asian cultures. This imagery, in turn, breathes into the designs elegance, strength and vitality.

The new collection comes in intense colors and bold contrasts. The combination of Persian Blue and Tangerine accentuates the various shades of black.

With this new collection, Metiseko focuses on showcasing its fabrics through the simplicity of the cuts. The silk is fluid and light. The designs draw attention to the minimalistic and elegant looks, with roomy shapes and straight cuts. Meticulousness and attention to details of our craftsmen are the last touches to create a contemporary collection that carries genuine resonance and fresh inspirations.

Metiseko's new fashion collection is interpreted in a range of silk satins, twills, and crepes.

SHOP ONLINE: www.metiseko.com













Coastal Cambodia





The Rise of the Cambodian Riviera

A bittersweet memoir of Cambodia's southern coast

Text and Images by **James Pham**

SOMETIMES THE IDEA OF something is more real than the reality. Just knowing that beauty and purity exist somewhere in the world is enough to soothe the soul. Like the stained glass majesty of Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral. The regalness of the world's most famous princess even when no longer married to a prince. But when that beauty is suddenly stripped away, in a tragic fire or a horrific accident, a part of you mourns, not necessarily for the loss itself, but because the idea of it can no longer bring you joy.

For me, living in hot, sweaty Phnom Penh nearly two decades ago, that perfect idea was Sihanoukville, a sleepy beach getaway on Cambodia's southern coast. Just the thought that at any given moment, I was only a four-

hour bus ride away from its wide, pretty beaches sipping dollar coconut shakes and nibbling on freshly grilled squid somehow made the unbearableness of Phnom Penh's muddy roads and oppressive heat just a little bit more bearable.

Originally called Kampong Som, Cambodia's only deepwater port was renamed Sihanoukville in the early 1960s after beloved King Norodom Sihanouk, considered the father of modern Cambodia. But to many of us Phnom Penh'ites, it was simply and affectionately known as "Snooky". After many years away, I recently returned to Sihanoukville hoping to relive the sun-drenched memories of my youth. But instead of stained glass windows and a pretty people's princess, I found a heap

of smoldering ashes, wrapped up in a mangled shell of a car.

Standing at the iconic Golden Lions roundabout, the very heart of Sihanoukville, I find my circa 2001 inner compass hopelessly spinning in circles. The night market should've been to my left, Pub Street straight ahead with Serendipity Beach just beyond, and the windy road to my favorite seafood restaurant to the right. Instead, there are three dozen construction cranes in every direction, busily putting up massive casinos and hotels as far as the eye can see. My "Snooky" was gone, and in its place was a noisy, dusty imposter, a war zone of a construction site I didn't recognize. It even goes by new names now: "Westport" as it's known to the Chinese, and "Macau *ti pi*" or "Second



Macau” by the Khmers.

“Counting just the legal ones, there are about 150 casinos already operating and probably about 500 when all the construction is done,” says Stuart Johnstone, a member of the Sihanoukville Chapter of the Cambodia Hotel Association. Just to put those numbers into perspective, Macau has 41 casinos and Las Vegas has 104.

On our dark tour of Chinese-invested casinos, restaurants, and hotels that have taken over Sihanoukville, every other sentence from Stuart starts with “This used to be...” followed by a name I hadn’t thought of in over a decade, and with it, a flood of pleasantly patinated memories suffocated in a cloud of lime and dust. We drive by one casino sign written in stilted Chinglish. “Make Memories Alive”, it proclaims. It would’ve been humorous had it not cut to the quick.

In recent years, China has become Cambodia’s number one ally, investing more money into the country than Cambodia’s own government. In 2008, a tax-free special economic zone was established in Sihanoukville as part of China’s Belt and Road infrastructure development initiative with plans to upgrade the 11sq km area to eventually accommodate 300 companies and up to 100,000 workers. Back then, the Chinese influence was hardly noticeable, mostly confined to out-of-the-way factories featuring Chinese names and cheap Cambodian labor. Today, though, what began as an imperceptible trickle has turned into a tsunami of Chinese investments (more than USD1.1 billion in 2017 alone), completely washing over this once sleepy town with a speed few could have predicted.

Boom or Doom?

“When I moved to Sihanoukville in 2017, there were absolutely no signs of the changes to come,” says Paul, a British expat who custom-built what he hoped would be his dream retirement home. In just two years, the city has morphed from backwater resort town to booming casino mecca—by the Chinese, for the Chinese.



Ream Beach



Naia Resort beach

“I know someone who had a villa near the center of town,” Paul relates. “One day, a Chinese man knocked on the door offering to pay USD10,000 monthly rent, and would even add a swimming pool for free. How do you say ‘no’ to that kind of money?”

For landowners, skyrocketing rents and property values have been a boon, but for ordinary people, not so much. “My oldest friend in the world ran a restaurant for 20 years,” says Stuart. “One day, the owners came to raise the rent from USD2,000 a month to USD16,000. It was bulldozed within a day. For the average worker, things have not worked out. Rents have gone up. Food has gone up. City beaches have evaporated. It’s all new high-rise buildings now.”

But it’s more than just the physical landscape of the city that’s changed. The whole essence of Sihanoukville’s laid-back charm has vanished, where expats and Khmers once cohabited in an easy alliance fueled by foreign backpackers and families from Phnom Penh looking for a chill getaway. “Japanese restaurants, steakhouses, Khmer restaurants, expat restaurants, they’re all gone now,” sighs Stuart. “And when the expats left, they took their stuff with them, their boats and dune buggies. It’s hard to find things for people to do.

The payoff for all the upheaval was supposed to be prosperity all around in the form of more and better-paying jobs and improved infrastructure. In fact, work has started on a USD2 billion, Chinese-built four-lane expressway between Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville and the airport is being expanded to accommodate even more international tourists. Chinese travelers top the list of visitors to Sihanoukville, with a 10 percent rise in the first half of 2018. The year before that, 120,000 Chinese tourists came, which itself was four times as many as the previous year.

“The trouble with Chinese guests is they don’t like Khmer food so they don’t support Khmer restaurants. They



Otres 2

like their Chinese hotels where they can smoke in their rooms. It’s all just casinos and bedrooms now, but without the entertainment aspect like Vegas or Macau.”

In the meantime, however, residents are having to put up with congestion caused by an endless procession of construction trucks along with daily power and water outages, a result of resources being funneled to the building sites and casinos.

“Look on the bright side. At least having all these Chinese restaurants must be some consolation,” I jokingly say to Paul, seeing the rows of restaurants serving up dishes from Sichuan to Shanxi and everywhere in between. “It would be if they weren’t downright hostile to non-Chinese guests,” he retorts.

Unable to give up on my quest for the Snooky I once knew, I make my way to Naia Resort on Otres 2, the farthest beach from town. Despite telltale construction along the way, it’s one of the last holdouts of Old Sihanoukville where sun-seekers can still happily throw back tropical drinks and feast on Western comfort food while getting massages on the beach by smiling Khmer ladies.

“This stretch of beach is thankfully still quite untouched,” says Stuart who manages the 32-room boutique property with a retro 1950s Palm Springs vibe. “Otres 2 has always been known for being a secluded, quiet getaway, with good food and a family-oriented atmosphere.”

While the high-rises of Sihanoukville are just visible in the distance, this stretch of tranquil beach at least feels like a world away, a distinction Stuart is eager to make. “The poor reviews that people leave about the city of Sihanoukville are killing our scores,” he laments. “Why should people be describing a city that’s 7 km from here?”

Over a plate of tender BBQ ribs and a couple of cold beers, I share with Stuart that this scene right here, right now, reminds me of the Sihanoukville I used to love, before paradise got paved over. “It’s beautiful and relaxing,” he agrees. “You’re here in Otres, not Sihanoukville. This place retains what was great about the outer beaches. Not all is lost.”

Ream Dreams

Wondering how far the building frenzy has spread, I travel another 10 kms east, to Ream National Park, 21,000 hectares of land and marine habitats that are home to several rare and endangered animal species. Way back when, Ream was where travelers in the know went to feel comatose compared to simply sleepy in Sihanoukville. I remember sleeping on a simple wooden platform with just a pillow and a mosquito net, the sound of waves washing up on shore, carrying not just a saltiness in the air but an actual, natural fishiness.

“Ream National Park in Cambodia is one of the most beautiful places you will ever find,” proclaims its official website, “because up until recently this was a land that was virtually untouched. The national park had existed for years, but no man made intervention was spoiling the location... The Ream National Park in Cambodia is a place that words cannot do justice to.”



Kampot Salt Fields

Driving through the park, those last few words from a woefully out-of-date website ring eerily true. There are no words and certainly no justice to be found in the giant tracts of upturned red earth, the billowing smoke from land-clearing fires, the charred remains of tree trunks behind “Coming soon!” signs picturing glitzy casino resorts.

“This is fake, not a real park,” says Putsa, my guide for the morning, his voice heavy with disbelief upon seeing what were forests just weeks ago. I question how even the sanctity of a national park could fall casualty to development. “When the money flow into the pocket, they close their eye,” he answers quietly. It turns out that at least 3,300 hectares of the park, including 28 kms of coastline, have already been slated for development.

Later in the morning, we do manage to find pockets of blessed solitude. A deserted beach with frayed swings swaying in the breeze. A row of hammock cafes overlooking brilliant blue water. A hilltop pagoda with Angkor Wat-like stone carvings surrounded by the deafening sound of birds and cicadas,



Alila Villas Koh Russey



Ream Pagoda





Durian Roundabout in Kampot

a welcome alternative to the cacophony of heavy machinery.

In search of some kind of redemption, I board a speedboat for Alila Villas on the island of Koh Russey, literally putting the disturbing scenes of the past few days in my wake. Although barely six months old, the 63-villa resort is already EarthCheck certified for its sustainable planning and design. Over the next few days, I walk the spacious grounds including the perfect 1.5km-long crescent beach, past a water bottling plant, a waste incinerator, and the beginnings of an organic garden. “What we’re seeing with the islands is the Cambodian government being a bit more picky,” says Marketing & Communications Manager Christophe Parault over a plate of delicious fish tacos. “There’s an eye towards preserving more of the identity of the islands by keeping development on a small scale, focusing on ecological resorts versus big casinos”.

“These islands are like their own little ecosystem, relatively untouched, that benefit from easy accessibility but that are remote at the same time,”

notes Christophe. “To that end, we’re aiming for a very low footprint where we’ve only developed 15 percent of the island, leaving the rest in its natural state.” Instead of changing the natural topography, the resort works with it, building seating areas into its slopes and collecting rainwater for irrigation.

As a brand, Alila is working towards a Zero Waste to Landfill policy, acting as an innkeeper of conservation, not just of natural resources, but of cultural ones as well. I find subtle elements of Khmer culture throughout the resort—the crosshatch motif of the ubiquitous Khmer krama (scarf) in the design of the Welcome Pavilion and the headboard of my bed while the beachfront infinity pool cleverly incorporates the geometric layout of Angkor Wat into its cascading water feature.

“The development of these beaches and these lands is inevitable,” says Christophe. “The little bungalow on the beach will only be there for so long until it appears on someone’s Instagram and a hundred people show up. But because these islands are limited by space, it’s a natural antithesis to places like Sihanoukville which are filled to the brim with tourists.”

The next day I island hop over to neighboring Koh Krabey, the site of the brand new Six Senses Resort. Similar to Alila, the landscape is made part of the resort where its 40 free-standing pool villas are built right into the hillsides making them almost invisible from afar. Whereas Alila’s long stretch of beach invites guests to be social, Six Senses’ beautifully finished villas encourage privacy. I only tear myself away for meals and the odd outing—a walk along the boardwalk to the ice cream parlor for complimentary sorbet, a wellness screening and massage at the stunning 2,000 sqm spa, or a lie in on the pretty cove beach. I borrow snorkeling gear and aqua boots and wade out into the calm, clear waters to find construction of a different kind—parrotfish nibbling away at the colorful hard coral and turning

it into sand, the distinctive crunching sound ringing in my ears.

Six Senses Koh Krabey is also doing its part as a luxury eco resort. Careful thought has gone into materials, from using wooden toys in the Kids’ Club and recycled plastic for design elements to metal straws and refusing any plastic from their vendors. Located on an island, being as self-sufficient as possible isn’t just Earth-friendly, it’s also practical. There’s an on-island desalination plant where drinking water is infused with minerals before being put into reusable glass bottles while the kitchen makes everything from jams and sorbets to its own almond milk and pumpkin seed chai. “Being sustainable costs more,” explains Resort Manager Mart Trinidad, “but it’s our passion. We’re aiming to be a plastic-free company within the next two years.”

Hoping to avoid the fate of Sihanoukville and Ream for future generations, the resort also organizes environmental education. “Just last month, we went into the local school and talked about World Water Day and taking care of the environment. The kids drew their interpretation of conservation and we showcased the drawings in our spa,” says Mart. “But more than anything, I’m proud that we’re seeing a change in our staff. Sustainability wasn’t in their DNA but we’ve infused it into them to the point where they’ve spread the message to family and friends to help with rubbish cleanup and to stop using single-use plastics.”

The Spice of Life

Reluctantly returning to reality from the intoxicating escape provided by the twin island paradises, I next follow the expat exodus east, towards Kep and Kampot. Shielded by a government-struck monopoly with megacasino NagaCorp prohibiting any other casinos within 200 kms of Phnom Penh, these two towns have become the new homes of choice for those priced out of the market in Sihanoukville.

I arrive in dusty Kampot, with its quiet tree-lined streets and picturesque riverfront. Once Cambodia’s main port before the creation of Sihanoukville, Kampot feels like a town frozen in time. The Old Quarter just alongside the Praek Tuek Chhu River is a lovely mix of faded French colonial buildings next to colorful Chinese shophouses. “There are four reasons to come to Kampot,” says Chenda from Butterfly Tours as we sit by a ginormous lotus pond, sipping on sugar cane juice. “The countryside has pepper plantations and salt fields, the river that runs through town is really peaceful, we’re close to the beaches of Kep, and Kampot is one of three Cambodian towns that’s kept its heritage identity.”

We spend the afternoon admiring some of Kampot’s more than 500 colonial-era buildings—an Art Deco theater in lovely shades of pastel, a historic fish market turned trendy



Six Senses Koh Krabey



Kampot's Royal Cinema

restaurant, and several buildings impressively restored to their original glory, including the former Governor's Mansion, now the Kampot Provincial Museum.

As we walk, I also notice the street art found at each roundabout, many featuring Kampot's famed products of durian, fish sauce, and pepper, the latter so unique as to have EU-protected status. To find out more, we head out for a tour of the Kampot countryside. We pass picturesque salt fields where workers flood the shallow pools with sea water, wait 2-3 days for the water to evaporate, and rake up the resultant crystals. We also visit a pepper plantation producing green, black, white, and red pepper. It's said that Kampot pepper gets its intense flavor from a unique combination of quartz found in the soil as well as the warm, humid air rolling in from the sea and trapped by the surrounding mountains.

It's little wonder that these serene surroundings have attracted a community of expats searching for a quiet, laid-back lifestyle. "Kampot is for families, people who aren't into girlie bars," says James, originally from Iran, but moved to Kampot nearly four years ago to open up a Middle Eastern restaurant. "The town attracts people with an alternative lifestyle – hippies, artists, people who do yoga," he says,

sporting a t-shirt that reads "Why have abs when you can have kebabs?" Right on cue, a customer pulls up with an empty container to be filled with baba ganoush. "I'll come by and pick it up tomorrow?" he asks.

A happy by-product of this recent wave of expats is a surprisingly robust food scene. After using Iranian lavash bread to wipe up a wonderfully pungent

garlic dip that accompanies my USD6 chicken shawarma, I walk the Old Quarter chock full of ethnic restaurants that span the globe, including French and Italian, but also Israeli and Portuguese. "The food here is really authentic," says Kananda, originally from Phnom Penh. "In Phnom Penh, most of the Western-style restaurants are actually owned by Khmers, but here, it's the expats themselves who own and operate them." Three years ago, lured by Kampot's timeless charm, Kananda and his wife decided to open up a luxe boutique hotel here. "Kampot is a great place to live," he says. "It's quiet. It's easy to get from Point A to Point B and the people are much friendlier."

St. Tropez of the Far East

The next day, I make my way a little over half an hour from Kampot to the quiet seaside town of Kep, originally known as "Kep-sur-Mer" when the French made it into a sunny, coastal escape for colonists and Khmer elites. Even after independence, Kep continued to host the monied crowd as the jewel of the Cambodian Riviera. In the 50s and 60s, then-Prince Sihanouk started construction of a summer palace here, and many wealthy Khmers followed suit



Mending nets at Angkul Beach

If You Go...

From Saigon, Cambodia's southern beaches are accessible by going overland either via Phnom Penh or Ha Tien on the Vietnamese side. The total trip of two bus rides will take around 9 hours. Alternatively, Cambodia Angkor Air has daily flights to Sihanoukville. If you time it right, a one-way flight can be as little as USD70 with just carry-on.

Naia Otres Beach Resort (www.naiacambodia.com) offers a slice of what Sihanoukville used to be with a lovely stretch of shaded beach and clean, comfortable rooms accented by

bright pops of color. There's an excellent beachfront restaurant on-site (the BBQ ribs are especially good) and the resort organizes boat trips to the islands.

Just opened mid-March, Six Senses Krabey Island (www.sixsenses.com) is all about a secluded island getaway with focus on health and wellness. The generously-sized pool villas meld into the lush island surrounds, each with en-suite spa-style bathroom and sun-drenched indoor and outdoor living spaces. Doubles start at USD 530 per night, including breakfast, airport and boat transfers. Enjoy 20 percent off and

a Khmer set dinner with the current Green Season offer.

A 10-minute speedboat ride from Ream, Alila Villas Koh Russey (www.alilahotels.com) invites guests to live the Alila lifestyle, a contemporary interpretation of luxury. Choose from pavilions with garden or ocean views or spectacular 1-, 2-, or 4-bedroom villas. Outside the resort, with its 1.5km-long crescent beach, the island is refreshingly lightly developed. Garden Pavilion Rooms start at USD315++ per night. A Stay 4, Pay 2 offer through October 31 includes breakfast and

with their own stylish villas.

One morning, we drive around Kep to see some of the more than 100 remaining houses built in the New Khmer Architectural style, a boxy, minimalist marriage of the modernist movement and traditional Khmer elements. They've mostly been abandoned now, decaying shells tagged with graffiti, a casualty of the Khmer Rouge era which descended especially heavily on this area for its sin of living a lavish lifestyle corrupted by Western capitalist ideas.

But even their half-century of neglect comes as an oddly soothing reminder that perhaps not all change is good. We continue driving through the Kep countryside, along its blissfully quiet coastline, past a woman shelling tiny crabs by the beach while her toddler snoozes in the shade. At Angkul Beach, a little girl swings carefree in a hammock while a woman reluctantly fixes me a cup of the dankest black coffee I've ever had. "Do you have any milk?" I ask her in my rusty Khmer. She shakes her head and goes back to mending her fishing nets. Seeing what I've seen, I can't help but smile at her insouciance to cater to tourists. How is it possible that this quiet corner of the Cambodian coast has managed to escape the frenzy of development?

"Kep isn't really a beach destination," says Jonathan Manstein of Samanea Resort. "The water isn't great for swimming because the Kep coastline is mostly mangrove marshes and black rock." That said, the luxe 12-villa resort has carved out a pretty sweet mirage, with its shimmering blue swimming pool and palm-fringed sandy beach bookended by lush mangroves, all backed by Kep National park. "The beauty of Kep is its quiet, relaxed vibe. It's not for people who want to party. You can go to Kampot for that. Here, you can do lots—take a trip to the islands, visit the countryside, head to the Crab Market—or do nothing at all."

I take up Jonathan's recommendation and head down to the Crab Market where women wade out and haul up bamboo traps filled with live crab over which much pinching, fondling and haggling is done. It's said that Kep crabs are especially

flavorful due to favorable breeding conditions in the mangroves and the availability of a particular kind of seaweed the crabs feed on. The seafood can then be brought home, cooked up on the spot with a few strands of Kampot peppercorns, or eaten in the adjacent row of seafood restaurants built over the water.

Made its own province in 2008, Cambodia's smallest in size and population, there's a quiet prosperity in the salty Kep air. "The government of Kep is using their money wisely," notes Jonathan. "The highway here is probably the best road in Cambodia with street lights powered by solar and wind energy. There are also lots of places to work so there's very little poverty. If Kep were its own country, it certainly wouldn't be third-world."

While Kep has nothing of the overt opulence of Sihanoukville, I notice subtle signs of a town that's comfortable in its own skin—public beach tents and portajohns that line the main boardwalk blissfully free of any advertising and a town beach with a fresh new layer of golden sand, a significant improvement on the dark, grimy beach of my memories. Looking out over the pretty blue-green water towards Phu Quoc, the sky alight with flaming reds and oranges



of sunset, happy hour drink(s) in hand, I decide here and now that it's time to create new memories.

"Kep was once the St. Tropez of the Far East," says Jonathan. "It was a place where people, both Westerners and locals, could come and just relax and be happy. Now, it's come full circle."

Welcome to the new Cambodian Riviera. ■



Kep Crab Market

return island transfers.

The Boutique Kampot Hotel (www.boutiquekampot.com) celebrates Kampot's unique heritage with its beautiful, French colonial-inspired façade and tastefully vintage décor. Just a five-minute walk to the riverside, the 18 rooms in cool shades of blue and grey are uncommonly spacious while the cheery ground floor restaurant is a welcoming place to enjoy the included breakfast.

Butterfly Tours (www.butterflytours.asia) offer insightful tours led by student guides in Battambang, Siem

Reap, and Kampot. Locally-operated, many of the tours are by bicycle for more intimate, close-up views. My walking tour of Kampot's heritage buildings as well as a motorbike tour of the area's rural pepper farms and salt fields were both very good.

Samanea Beach Resort & Spa (www.samanea-resort.com) offers Kep's most spacious accommodations in 12 bungalows spread out over the resort's lush gardens. The private beach is the site of spectacular sunsets and the longest pier in the region. An infinity pool, spa, panoramic

rooftop bar, and excellent restaurant round out the facilities. Doubles start at USD165 including breakfast. Oi readers receive up to 50 percent off when booking direct.

Adventure sports enthusiast and all-around good guy, Didier Rexach, runs half- and full-day activity tours around Kep (Facebook: Kep Activity) including climbing, trekking and motorbike tours. Our full-day jaunt around the Kep countryside was filled with fun forays down barely-there paths for an authentic look at this beautiful region.



Escaping to Six Senses Krabey Island

Text by **James Pham**
Images Provided by **Six Senses Krabey Island**

MOST OF US CAN ONLY imagine what owning our own island getaway would feel like. Walking deserted beaches. Letting the sun and the tides tell time. Literally leaving the world in your wake.

For a taste of an island escape, we head to the brand-new Six Senses Krabey Island, located on its own 30-acre island just off the Cambodian coastline. We land at the Sihanouk Airport where a waiting van whisks us to the Six Senses Jetty in nearby Ream. A 10-minute speedboat ride is all it takes to leave reality behind.

Once on the island, an electric buggy zips us to our waiting villa, a gorgeous 120 sq.m Ocean Pool Villa Suite. We walk down the steps to our villa, a contemporary gem with floor-to-ceiling windows to best frame the beautiful views of the deep blue water of the Gulf of Thailand.

With a press of a button, two sets of electric shades offer immediate privacy, but we never feel like we need it. The resort's 40 free-standing villas are built

into the natural topography of the island, cocooning each villa in a cloak of lush jungle. Even when nearby villas are occupied, it feels like blessed seclusion.

Our days are spent lounging by the plunge pool, reading on the outdoor terrace or soaking in the bathtub with views out over the sea. In the mornings, we quickly settle into a routine of walking down to the ocean boardwalk as it wraps its way around boulders and trees to Aha Restaurant (meaning "food" in Khmer, and not a term of surprise, although the gourmet breakfast items are delightful). Breakfast is a mix of buffet items (think smoked salmon from the cold room, freshly baked pastries and a bevy of homemade beverages like pumpkin seed chai) and a rotating a la carte menu with items like Scrambled eggs with meaty chunks of handpicked mud crab or a Savory turmeric coconut crepe with free-range pork and flowering chives.

Later in the morning, we head down to the pretty cove beach and have our choice of seating: fun bean bags by the

water's edge, comfy, overstuffed sofas partly hidden in the trees or eminently Instagrammable cabanas with flowing curtains. In addition to stand-up paddle boarding and kayaking, we take up the invitation by the staff to explore the colorful coral reef right off shore, home to a variety of tropical fish darting through the clear, shallow water.

We've also taken to visiting the spa. At an enormous 2,000 sq. m, it's a meditative space inspired by the sacred Kbal Spean River in its water features and soothing design elements. One afternoon we join another couple for a complimentary coconut oil-making workshop, and another day, we sign up for wellness screenings followed by blissful deep-tissue massages. The wellness screening makes use of a wide variety of instruments including galvanic skin readings, a finger pulse oximeter and a bioimpedance analysis for a completely non-invasive yet informative set of results, followed by a personal consultation with helpful recommendations on lifestyle changes

for improved well-being. We leave the spa feeling rejuvenated and recharged and immediately reward ourselves for doing absolutely nothing with some homemade gelato at the complimentary ice cream parlor overlooking the scenic horizon-edge pool.

After sundowners at the Sunset Bar, we make our way to Tree, the resort's dinner-only restaurant specializing in Khmer flavors with a modern take. One night, we try the Khmer Tasting Menu of one stunning dish after the other. The Roasted duck with Kampot green pepper was perfectly cooked while the Crab amok, the famed Khmer-style curry softened by the flavors of turmeric, palm sugar and coconut milk and then steamed, was a culinary revelation in its delicate lightness.

Too soon, we find ourselves back on the speedboat, returning to reality. Our Cambodian island escape may be over, but the sun-drenched memories will last long after the tans have faded. ■



From now to September 30, 2019, take advantage of the Green Season offer which includes 20 percent savings off seasonal rates and a Khmer dinner (food only) for two persons at the signature restaurant 'Tree' plus complimentary roundtrip van and boat transfers from Sihanouk Airport when staying one or two nights and a choice of the following experiences from the menu offerings when staying three nights or more:

- 60-minute Khmer massage at the Six Senses Spa
- 60-minute private yoga session for two
- 60-minute Coffee & coconut scrub at the Spa
- 60-minute Mixology session using local herbs at the Sunset Bar
- 50-minute Alchemy Bar Workshop
- Khmer cookery class and lunch

The rate for this offer starts from USD530 per night in a Hideaway Pool Villa Suite.

For more, visit www.sixsenses.com



Nurtured by Nature at Alila Villas Koh Russey

Text by **James Pham**
Images Provided by **Alila Villas Koh Russey**



ALILA VILLAS KOH RUSSEY

isn't just about the destination, spectacular as it is, a pristine island playground just minutes off Cambodia's southern coast. It's equally about the Alila lifestyle, effortlessly chic yet casual, where luxury isn't defined by the odd perk here and there but rather is a state of being.

We touch down at Sihanoukville International Airport and are immediately swept up into the luxe Alila life. We spritz our travel-worn faces with an Alila face mist smelling of refreshing lemongrass and ylang ylang while nibbling on homemade chocolate chip cookies. A 10-minute drive takes us to the spa-like Alila Jetty on the edge of Ream National Park, elegantly minimalistic, a tantalizing glimpse of what's to come.

Meaning "surprise" in Sanskrit, an Alila stay is all about serendipitous moments, and another soon materializes in the form of chilled champagne aboard the 10-minute speedboat ride to Russey Island. Once there, we check in at the Welcome Sala with its clean, geometric lines, a contemporary interpretation of the uber-utile Khmer krama scarf, which we also receive as a keepsake.

We settle in to our Garden Pavilion, one of 63 low-rise villas and pavilions that make up the environmentally-





friendly resort. No higher than the trees, Alila Villas Koh Russey seamlessly blends in with its surrounds. Just opened in November 2018, the resort is already EarthCheck certified for its impressive efforts to minimize its environmental footprint while maximizing the guest experience. Earth-friendly initiatives include everything from working alongside the local navy to clean up the beach and raising awareness with schoolchildren to constructing a water bottling plant, collecting and reusing gray and rainwater for irrigation, and using reclaimed materials.

Our lovely pavilion is done up in earthy materials such as rattan, stone, and dark wood, while the floor-to-ceiling windows allow Nature to be a part of the décor. Here, Nature isn't an embellishment, it's the centerpiece, with a scant 15 percent of the property planned for development and the rest left to Nature.

A symbiotic marriage of Man and Nature finds its way into the design of almost every space here, as in the recycled timber feature wall and woven textured panels of Horizon, the resort's main restaurant. We enjoy breakfast here, selecting from a gourmet la carte menu that changes daily, offering delightful items like Mexican-style egg

molletes with authentic refried beans.

Breakfast is a leisurely affair as we enjoy the ocean breezes let in by the floor-to-ceiling doors, overlooking the infinity pool with its terraces modeled after the layout of Angkor Wat. We return one evening for jovial Chef Christoph's special menu, and are taken pleasantly by surprise by the delicate presentation of the German chef's starter—a garden of thinly sliced avocado wrapped around shrimp carpaccio and shiitake mushrooms for a bit of earthiness. The plating is beautiful and whimsical with slivers of mango around tiny edible flower bouquets. The resort's new Executive Chef is putting his own spin on the menu, embracing locally-sourced ingredients as much as possible. We see this in the main, a lovely grouper from the surrounding Gulf of Thailand served atop a local fennel risotto with a bite provided by radish and watercress. Dessert is “pinechee”, a refreshing granita of tropical pineapple and lychee flavors over a crunchy chocolate cookie base, that offers a lovely chill against the warm evening air.

We also see Mother Nature's hand in the Beach Shack, the resort's contemporary casual restaurant overlooking the sea. Here, you're not only steps from the beach, you're actually still on the beach. Covered from the elements by a chic wooden overhang, the sand reaches up all the way to the tables and the comfy upholstered chairs. It's the very definition of indoor-outdoor living, co-designed by the elements. We spend a lazy lunchtime here, soft lounge music and ocean breezes rustling through the leaves providing the soundtrack for a plate of gorgeous fish tacos.

We experience Mother Nature in her full glory one afternoon on a destination picnic on the far end of the resort's spectacular 1.5km-long crescent beach. Under the shade of a large umbrella, we sip chilled wine and feast on delicious wraps and sandwiches. With no one else around, the crystalline water lapping softly on the shore, it's an Alila moment in an island getaway full of unforgettable surprises. ■

Rates start from USD315 ++ per night, including breakfast and return island transfers. Now through October 31, 2019, enjoy the Stay 4 Pay 2 offer based on two people sharing a Garden Pavilion. For more, visit www.alilahotels.com



"BETTER THAN HOME"

AT

SAMANEA BEACH RESORT

Text by **James Pham**
Images Provided by **Samanea Beach Resort**



COUNTLESS HOTELS bill themselves as a “home away from home”. But every now and then, you come across one that might be even better than home. Welcome to Samanea Beach Resort, a luxe all-villa property on the tranquil shores of Kep, on Cambodia’s southern coast.

Just 30 minutes from the Vietnamese border, Kep was once the Saint-Tropez of the Far East, known for its pretty people and stylish villas during Cambodia’s modern “Golden Age” of the 1950s and 60s. Samanea embodies that carefree, sun-kissed spirit in its 12 spacious villas set amongst two hectares of neatly landscaped grounds, all of which are colossal at 75-150 sqm including Family, Junior Suite and Connecting villas. Villas also come with outdoor soaking tubs and showers in a gorgeous garden setting.

A destination unto itself, Samanea is all about doing everything, or nothing. Take a complimentary tuk-tuk to the nearby crab market (“We don’t want our guests having to fumble around for loose money,” explains the personable Hotel Director, Jonathan Manstein) and feast on seafood cooked-to-order with strands of Kep peppercorns, cruise the quiet countryside, or take a day trip

to the nearby island of Koh Tonsay. Or simply relax by the sparkling 300 sq. m infinity pool, laze on the palm-fringed, private beach bookended by lush mangroves and watch the legendary sunsets, or walk out on the area's longest sea pier and take in spectacular 360-degree views out to Phu Quoc on one side and Bokor Mountain and Kep National Park on the other.

Another reason you won't want to leave Samanea is its signature Chankiri Restaurant, putting a modern twist on French and Cambodian flavors. The included breakfast is a mix of buffet items like fresh juices and delectable pastries along with gourmet a la carte items. Our selections were consistently excellent, including an Eggs Florentine and a scrumptious Breakfast Burrito.

In addition to being good to guests, Samanea is good to the environment, committed to a host of sustainable initiatives, including 70 sq. m of solar panels, biodegradable water bottles, rubbish bags and metal straws, and 100 percent locally-made bio-friendly bathroom amenities. And with 30 staff to look after just 12 villas, Samanea might very well be "better than home". ■

Book directly with the resort and mention "Oi Vietnam publication" to receive up to 50 percent off your stay. Now through October 15, 2019, stay in a Deluxe Double or Twin Villa (usually USD165), for only USD 99 (if staying one or two nights) and only USD82.50 if staying three nights or more. A gourmet breakfast at the lovely Chankiri Restaurant is included. For more, see www.samanea-resort.com





A Taste of Kep-sur-Mer at La Maison de Domi

Text by **James Pham**



KNOWN AS KEP-SUR-MER

when it hosted French colonists and Khmer elites in the early 20th century, the breezy seaside retreat of Kep was the equivalent of Saint Tropez on the Cambodian Riviera. While most of its stylish summer villas are gone, the spirit of Indochine lives on at La Maison de Domi.

Built in 2012 by Philippe and Dominique Serene on 5,720 sqm of beautifully forested land backed by Kep National Park and overlooking the Bay of Kep, La Maison de Domi is a throwback to the effortlessly elegant days of yesteryear.

The main house has four spacious bedrooms with a fully-equipped kitchen

and large living room while a stand-alone studio houses a fifth bedroom. There are period-inspired furnishings throughout with generous use of wood in the design offering a glimpse of life during Cambodia's Golden Age.

Less than 10 minutes from Kep's famed Crab Market and town beach, La Maison de Domi makes an excellent base from which to explore the Kep countryside with its pepper plantations and salt fields. The nearby town of Kampot is just a 30-minute drive away, and makes for an excellent day trip with its

quiet riverfront and many colonial-era buildings. Alternatively, while away the day at La Maison de Domi looking out over the sea from the expansive 140 sqm veranda or working on your tan by the swimming pool. ■

La Maison de Domi comfortably accommodates 10-15 guests and is available for rent at USD 350 (green season from May-October with the exception of certain weekends) or USD 440 (high season), including breakfast. There is also the possibility of renting individual rooms. For more, email: philippe.serene4@gmail.com

Vintage Sihanoukville Lives On at Naia Resort

Text by James Pham

AS THE SEASIDE RESORT TOWN of Sihanoukville expanded, travelers in the know searched out its outer beaches, each more idyllic than the last. The spirit of Old Sihanoukville lives on at Naia Otres Beach Resort, on the town's southernmost beach and a world away from the bright lights of the mega casino-hotels.

Gateway to Cambodia's islands, Naia offers a family-friendly retreat with its two swimming pools (including a kids' pool), beachfront location boasting clear, shallow waters, and host of room categories ideal for families and groups, including Family Suites and Rooms with mountain, garden, or sea views.

The on-site beach restaurant serves up Khmer and Western favorites, including a falling-off-the-bone tender portion of BBQ ribs we enjoyed one evening, washed down with ice cold local beer. The included breakfast is also very good, with a cold buffet to go along with hot a la carte items.

With daily flights connecting Sihanoukville to Ho Chi Minh City, why not combine your next visa run or long weekend with a beach getaway at Naia Resort? Interacting with a different culture and language in an idyllic setting is simply a bonus. ■

For more, see www.naiacambodia.com

the hotel with its 18 spacious rooms are a true labor of love, from intricate, custom-designed molding on the hotel's European-inspired façade to the vintage artefacts that adorn the sun-drenched lobby and restaurant where the included breakfast is served.

The uncommonly spacious rooms, however, are ultra-contemporary with emphasis on comfort and convenience in the cool slate floors, vintage-tiled bathrooms, and high-speed Internet.

Tucked away on a quiet side street, the Boutique Kampot Hotel is just a 5-minute walk to the eclectic Old Quarter featuring superb international eats and the picturesque riverside where boats await to take guests on sunset cruises. ■

For more, visit www.boutiquekampot.com

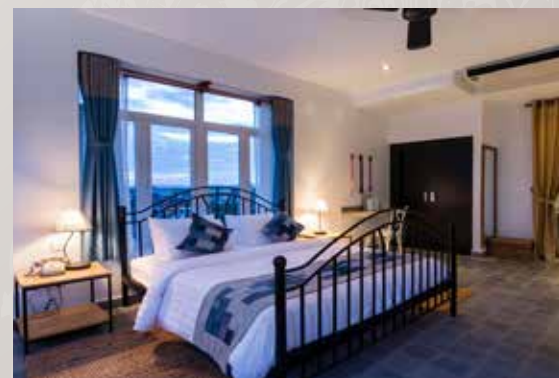


Reviving Indochina at the Boutique Kampot Hotel

Text by James Pham

THERE'S MUCH TO LOVE ABOUT sleepy Kampot, situated along the Praek Tuek Chhu River southeast of the Elephant Mountains and just 5 km from the Gulf of Thailand. The town embodies its French colonial history with hundreds of pretty, faded heritage buildings seemingly frozen in time.

Showcasing the magic of Kampot is the Boutique Kampot Hotel, the town's first high-end boutique property to open in 2016. Owned and managed by a young professional couple from Phnom Penh,



Tropical Vibes

Inspired by nature's vibrant wonders, REINA released its Tropical Vibes Spring/Summer Collection 2019 with fresh combinations of impressive monochrome palettes and textures. Eye-catching animal prints are daringly paired with plaid and soft florals while puffy sleeves, square necks, twisted ties and pleats accentuate each piece.











REINA

264 Pho Hue, Hai Ba Trung, Hanoi
www.facebook.com/reinabylade

Wine & Dine

Café Marcel / Image by HUDEN DANG





Morning Delight

Here's where to start a day off right



Text by **Grant Hawkins**
Images by **Huden Dang**

Avocado Tartines

EIGHTEEN MONTHS AFTER opening Saigon's first gourmet French burger bistro, the team behind Marcel Gourmet is back—this time for brunch and happy hour. **Café Marcel** (96 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, D1) is serving a new menu of homemade and fresh breakfast favorites, as well as *petite assiettes* (small plates). Taking inspiration from the sun-filled, breezy cafés of southern France, Café Marcel is set to attract a crowd of foodies and photographers from sunrise to sunset.

The café occupies a refurbished triangle-shaped building steps away from the planned Le Loi subway station. Guests are welcomed past a ground-floor kitchen, up a whitewashed staircase and into the first floor dining room. Light pastels and terrazzo tables, beach-towel striped red cushions and plenty of plants make a top contender for Saigon's most

Instagram-worthy gathering place. Twenty-one seats are bathed in soft, natural light by double-height windows looking over one of the city's busiest intersections. Above the main dining room is a small bar area with eight additional seats, and a rooftop terrace has seating for about 30 more.

For breakfast, Café Marcel has created a menu of classics with small twists and meticulous execution, while also somehow remaining affordable. If Instagram is any indication, the star of the show is the Avocado Tartines (VND150,000). Start with fresh, crispy, sourdough bread; add smashed avocados, Marcel's signature Eggs 65° and tahini yogurt; garnish with sprouts and dukkah; snap a pic and dig in. On the lighter side of the menu are the French Toast & Raspberries (VND120,000) with a Kusmi tea-

infused mascarpone cream, and the vegan-friendly Coconut Smoothie Bowl (VND120,000), which neatly balances savory granola, coconut and bananas with tart raspberries and lime leaves. For those who aren't content to choose from a menu, Marcel offers a build-your-own breakfast: start with your preferred style of eggs and bread, add sides from sautéed mushrooms to smoked salmon, and choose one of four sauces.

As with Marcel Gourmet Burger, the team has stopped at nothing to source the highest-quality local ingredients. If they can't find something to standard, their first choice is to make it themselves, as is the case with their bacon and sausage. In some cases they've chosen to partner with other local companies, like La Boulangerie Francaise, a French NGO bakery that supplies all the bread and pastries.

Where these two come together is the Croque-Marcel (VND180,000), a gourmet and decadent ham-and-cheese sandwich on sourdough.

And what brunch is complete without cocktails? Marcel's got you covered with their unique take on two brunch staples: The Indian Mary (VND120,000) and the Strawberry & Rose Mimosa (VND180,000). They also have a few signature drinks of their own: the Tyme Tonic (VND140,000), a subtle gin and tonic with a hint of thyme, elderflower and orange, or the Tennessee Sour (VND180,000), Marcel's version of a Whisky Sour.

The Marcel brand was first conceived in 2017 by a small team of French food connoisseurs who had opened a Bar à Manger in Paris, and saw an opportunity to bring their talents to Vietnam. With Marcel Gourmet Burger, their focus on homemade, fresh ingredients and top-notch design created an instant success—they regularly sell out the humble Calmette dining room and hard at work expanding. Café Marcel builds on the homemade, fresh philosophy with a new menu and design concept, and is sure to receive similar recognition.

One of the most significant carry-overs from Marcel Gourmet is chef Brian Chu: a young, Vietnamese chef who has apprenticed under the top local French Chefs, and behind whom the Marcel team has thrown their full support. After hours, the café transforms into a “bar à manger” with *petites assiettes* and signature cocktails. The cocktail-hour menu, currently in soft opening, will be designed entirely by the chef. Expect gourmet French plates with the occasional Vietnamese twist.

Café Marcel is bringing fresh and homemade to brunch and small plates, with fine food, a gorgeous environment and affordable prices. Building on their strengths, “La Marcel Family” has created another hit that's sure to fill up quickly—so get a seat while you can. ■



Coconut Smoothie Bowl



Croque Marcel



Nota Banh Mi



Eggs and Sides



French Toast



Hiding Out in D7

A little off the beaten path in District 7 is an oasis for foodies and sports fans

Text by **Daniel Spero**
Images by **Vy Lam**

LOST BOYS HIDEOUT

(147, 2B-3C Le Van Luong, D7, www.facebook.com/lostboyshideout) is indeed hiding out down a corridor set back from the main street. Walking into the spacious sports bar, Lost Boys Hideout is an open, airy space with multiple levels of seating, with cushioned chairs and benches around tables in nooks and crannies that allow for more privacy. In the center of this large seating area is a pond with a fountain and beside it a full-grown tree weaving its way up into the night sky. It's as if Lost Boys Hideout has fused together the concept of a garden coffee with a sports bar, a juxtaposition that creates an inviting place. The venue also houses a stage where comedy open mic night happens every other Wednesday and live music plays every Thursday and Saturday night. The main bar runs the length of the room where the head bartender, who comes from years of experience at high-end hotels,

creates signature cocktails. At the back is a large, closed off, air-conditioned room with two well-manicured pool tables and more seating. Here they host pool tournaments. Also in the main area is a massive projector screen that comes down for big sporting events. They will even open on special mornings when there is demand for viewing events like UFC cards or football matches. Above it all is a movable canopy to cover the area during inclement weather.

I chose to sit in the room at the back with the air-con. While the main area had many fans and was relatively cool, based on the heat wave currently afflicting Saigon we were in search of maximum coolness. Once seated, a bubbly, affable server came over and introduced herself and explained the menu.

I started with the Dinner Salad (VND70,000). This was a bowl of fresh greens with radicchio, onion, tomatoes, carrot, cucumber, a handful of



Chili Salt Squid



croutons and tossed in tangy balsamic vinaigrette. The bitterness of the radicchio and the bold acidity of the raw onion were the dominant flavors complementing the balsamic.

For appetizer I went with Chili Salt Squid (VND120,000), fresh pieces of squid battered and fried to a golden brown and served with sweet chili mayonnaise. The squid was tender and flaky, cooked to perfection. And even better washed that down with a bottle of Heart of Darkness Loose Rivet IPA (VND105,000), a New England style IPA with a subtle fruity aftertaste. Beyond the long list of spirits and wine, Lost Boys Hideout features Heart of Darkness craft beers.

For main I chose the Chicken & Pork Burger (VND150,000). It was a good sized patty of mixed ground pork and chicken that was lightly seasoned and cooked through, sitting on a soft, warm bun and topped with shallots, sautéed onion, sliced cornichons, melted cheddar and Dijon mustard. The burger was served with thick, home-cut fries and zesty, homemade citrus coleslaw. Between the seasoned meat, the toppings and the sharp cheddar, this was a succulent burger loaded with flavor that hit the spot. It was the right choice, though I do plan on going back to try Kila's Killer Pizza (VND240,000), a wood-fired homemade pizza topped with Italian sausage, pepperoni, onion and jalapeno and chili peppers.

For dessert I picked the Tinker's Homemade Apple Crumble (VND95,000). The stewed apples were sprinkled with cinnamon, coated with crunchy crumbles and dashed with crispy shavings of piquant orange and ginger, and served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and drizzled with caramel sauce—what a sweet sensation.

Lost Boys Hideout is a great D7 oasis with a wonderful atmosphere, friendly staff, great food and drinks and lots of activities for singles, couples and families (and dog friendly too). ■



Apple Crumble





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.

BEACH TIME WINES

The perfect beach wine is refreshing, thirst quenching and drinkable

THERE ARE NO SUCH THINGS

as “wines to drink on the beach,” or, at least, not yet. If you live by the beach you are likely to have similar, while different, wine drinking patterns than those living in the countryside or city.

However, most of us, when we go to the beach, it's usually because we're on holiday and our mind, body and almost everything else changes, and so does our wine drinking soul.

As I write these lines from the beach in beautiful Da Nang, I remember a few days ago when I was thinking what wines to bring with me to enjoy. In case you are wondering, yes the hotel I am staying in has a wine list, but as most resorts do, it is very limited and aims at the occasional tourist looking for something cheap and cheerful.

While most people on holiday don't mind a simple cheap wine, the same reason that they don't mind watered down simple cocktails, because they are on holiday and are willing to relax, I still keep my standards high when on holiday because I want to make the most of it.

My plan was to have a few glasses on the balcony every afternoon when relaxing, watching the waves come and go. So I was looking for something not too powerful, and definitely for a wine that would not lose a lot when it is taken a couple of degrees or so too hot, because unless I gulp it, even if served cold, it will warm up pretty fast.

Hence I eliminated from my list almost every white wine, especially Sauvignon Blanc and the like, which when warm, their acidity is not welcomed anymore; so a chardonnay with a little bit of minerality turned out to be great, even when it reached a few degrees too warm, it did not become an undrinkable soup. Chardonnay, Viura, Chenin Blanc would work great.

I also wanted a bottle of red, so I had to forget the heavy Shiraz, and

almost most full body wines, which when drunk a bit too warm will give you their worst, including the alcohol. So I chose a nice Rioja Crianza, which I served a bit too cold. With alcohol levels between 13 and 14%, the Rioja still have the body for you to enjoy, and I insist in the Crianza part because that guarantees the minimum 12 months barrel aging, which will bring the complexity and finesse that I was looking for; and it worked perfectly.

Therefore, for reds, Rioja Crianza, young Grenache (but look out for low alcohol level), Chianti and some young Sangiovese, a Pinot Noir if you want something fruitier, Mencia, Pinotage and young Tempranillo will please you. ■





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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

MICROBREWERIES & CRAFT BEER BARS



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



East West Brewery

Saigon's Local microbrewery located in the heart of District 1, HCMC. Offering a taproom, restaurant, and rooftop beer garden where customers can enjoy local brews and food crafted with ingredients from the East to the West.

181-185 Ly Tu Trong St. District 1, HCMC **091 306 07 28**
booking@eastwestbrewing.vn www.eastwestbrewing.vn
facebook.com/eastwestbrewery



Rehab Station

Gastropub in a lovely quiet alley, serves Asian fusion food, 15 kind of different craft beer from most of the popular breweries in Vietnam, along with 60+ imported bottle beers, mostly from Belgium.

02839118229 hello@rehabstation.com.vn
facebook.com/rehabstationsg/

Also Try...

Winking Seal

Winking Seal offers a revolving selection of craft beers brewed by the bar. Enjoy their Happy Hour from 7pm to 9pm or come by on a Saturday night to join the beer pong tournament on the rooftop terrace.

50 Dang Thi Nhu, Nguyen Thai Binh Ward, D.1

Tap & Tap Craft Beer

Tap & Tap is the first bar of its kind in Thao Dien. This is a self-serve craft beer bar using the 'Pour My Beer' digital tap system. You can pour as much or as little as you like and sample 20 different kinds of beers in their open air bar and courtyard.

94 Xuan Thuy, Thao Dien, D.2

Heart of Darkness Craft Brewery

Heart of Darkness are prolific brewers - having brewed over 170 different styles of craft beer since they opened in October 2016.

31D Ly Tu Trong, Ben Nghe Ward, D.1

Belgo Belgian Craft Beer Brewery

Inspired by the beer culture of Belgium and Vietnam, Belgo built a unique place inspired by Belgium architecture with its own brewery, offering typical Belgian dishes combined with a local twist.

159A, Nguyen Van Thu, Da Kao Ward, D.1

Pasteur Street Brewing Company

They opened their first Tap Room 'The Original' in January 2015 and now have 5 tap rooms spread out in D.1, 2 and 7. Pasteur Street Brewing Company distributes its beers to approximately 150 locations in Vietnam.

Address 1: 144 Pasteur Street, Ben Nghe Ward, D.1
Address 3: 29 Thao Dien, Thao Dien Ward, D.2
Address 4: 120 Xuan Thuy, Thao Dien Ward, D.2
Address 5: 67 Le Van Thiem, Tan Phong Ward, D.7



Lê La Saigon

Set in a vintage-retro style décor, this open-air oasis on city's liveliest corridor offers coffee in the morning, vietnamese and western cuisine from a renowned local chef in the evening, and live music welcoming guests from around the world nightly. Cafe-Restaurant starts 10AM, everyday live music starts at 9PM.

138 Le Lai street, D1, HCMC.
090 816 61 38
FB: Lelabarpage



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, Café RuNam is now embarking on the road to becoming a successful franchise. The venue's first floor is particularly enchanting in the late evening.

96 Mac Thi Bui, D1
www.caferunam.com

Chat

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

85 Nguyen Truong To, 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, D.4 - 38253316/090 142 3103

La Rotonde Saigon

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

77B Ham Nghi, 1st Floor, D1

The Workshop

The cafe is located on the top floor and resembles an inner city warehouse. The best seats are by the windows where you can watch the traffic. 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



French Restaurant

Daily Set Lunch
at **VND180.000**

2 courses + 1 soft drink
Le Bacoulos french bistro,
13 Tong Huu Dinh
Thao Dien. Q2. HCMC

02835194058



The open-air premises include a bar and terrace and there is an air-conditioned dining room.



FRENCH



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



L'Escale by Thierry Drapeau

Chef Thierry Drapeau a 2 star Michelin chef in France takes his inspiration from the surrounding countryside and its top-quality ingredients, then adding an artistic flourish to his fine regional cuisine.

90 Quoc Huong, Thao Dien, D.2 - 028 3636 0160
manager@restaurant-thierrydrapeau.asia
www.restaurant-thierrydrapeau.asia

Also Try...

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



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ITALIAN



Ciao Bella

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11 Dong Du, D1
028 3822 3329

tonyfox56@hotmail.com
www.ciaobellavietnam.com

Ciao Bella



Italian Trattoria Oggi

Italian Trattoria Oggi is a perfect place for either a dinner, night out or special party in the breathtaking resort setting and distinctive interior, where you can enjoy the best that American and Australian beef has to offer together with premium wines.

2A-4A Ton Duc Thang Street District 1
(0)28 3823 3333

www.lottehotel.com/saigon

Oggi

Also Try...

Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1
028 3824 4286

Carpaccio

Rebranded "Carpaccio" after many years under the name Pomodoro, this Italian restaurant still has a simple, unpretentious European decor, sociable ambiance and friendly welcome. A small corner of Italy in Saigon.

79 Hai Ba Trung Street, D1
+84 90 338 78 38

La Forchetta

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

24 Hung Gia, PMH, D7
028 3541 1006

Opera

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

2 Lam Son Square, D1

Pasta Fresca

Hidden on a rooftop in District 1, in a secret garden in District 2 and now also found in District 3, Pasta Fresca offer vegetarian friendly pastas.

Address 1: 28 Thao Dien Street, Thao Dien, District 2
Address 2: 13/1 Le Thanh Ton, Ben Nghe Ward, District 1

Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1
028 3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

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

8/15 Le Thanh Ton, D1
012 0789 4444

www.pizza4ps.com



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

Chaya



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

Gyumaru

Also Try...

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

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

VIETNAMESE



Five Oysters

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



Ngoc Chau Garden

Serving up fresh and traditional Vietnamese fare since 2015, Ngoc Chau Garden is a centrally located gem in District 1, just a stone's throw from Nguyen Hue. The menu has local favorites, such as Vietnamese Grilled Pork Patties with Citronella and Pork Ribs. The menu and decor reflect Viet Nam's countryside with vintage window shutters and walls made from mud and straw with oil lamps - giving the restaurant a charming, homely atmosphere.

116 Ho Tung Mau, District 1, HCM City
(028) 6687 3838
ngocchaugarden116@gmail.com



Red Door

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

400/8 Le Van Sy, D3
012 0880 5905
Facebook: Reddoorrestaurant



Ben Thanh Streetfood Market

Located in the city center there is a food court filled with dishes from all over the world, cooked by indigenous people, at affordable prices. Open most of the day and night, Ben Thanh Street Food Market offers live music on Tuesdays and Saturday night.

26 - 28 - 30 Thu Khoa Huan, Ben Thanh Dist, W 1, HCMC
0901 26 28 30 Open Time: 09:00 AM - 01:00 AM
FB: BenThanhstreetfoodmarket
Instagram: benthanhstreetfoodmarket

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 Hanoi 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

Cue Cach 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

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

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

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

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

INTERNATIONAL



Madcow Wine & Grill

Mad Cow combines the feel of an edgy grill with the casual tone of an urban wine bar to create a stylish, laid-back atmosphere. Guests can enjoy a delicious meal on the 30th floor of the award winning 5 star Hotel, Pullman Saigon Centre, and look out over vibrant Ho Chi Minh City. Mad Cow's expert culinary team brings each cut of meat to flavorful perfection on handmade charcoal grill. Aside from grilled delights, delicious tapas are on offer – sourced locally and created fresh every day.

30th Floor, Pullman Saigon Centre
(0)28 3838 8686



Tomatito Saigon

Tomatito won the award for Best Restaurant of Saigon 2018. 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.

1st Floor, 171 Calmette, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

www.tomatito.vn

www.facebook.com/tomatitosaiigon

+84 869 388 864



twenty21one

A new casual dining venue with an innovative tapas menu divided into two categories: Looking East, and Looking West, with dishes such as

Crispy shredded duck spring

rolls and Bacon-wrapped

dates stuffed with Roquefort

blue cheese There are two

dining levels: an upstairs mezzanine and downstairs

are tables with both private and exposed positioning

(open-air streetside; and a terrace by the pool out back).

21 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3

TWENTY21ONE



Saffron

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

51 Hai Ba Trung, D1
(0)28 3824 8358

Also Try...

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, D1

02862663535

www.blancrestaurant.vn

Butcher MANZO & Craft Beer Bar

Manzo means "Beef" in Italian and as the name implies, it's a "Meat Bar". Manzo also offers several different dishes matched with local craft beer and selected wines, set in a classic European bar atmosphere.

Butcher MANZO & Craft Beer Bar was established in the heart of HCMC on Le Thanh Ton Street in District 1.

17/13 and 17/14 Le Thanh Ton street, District 1, HCMC

028-2253-8825

www.butcher-manzo.com

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, D1

028 3823 3597

info@forksaigon.com

www.forksaigon.com

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, D1

02862632525

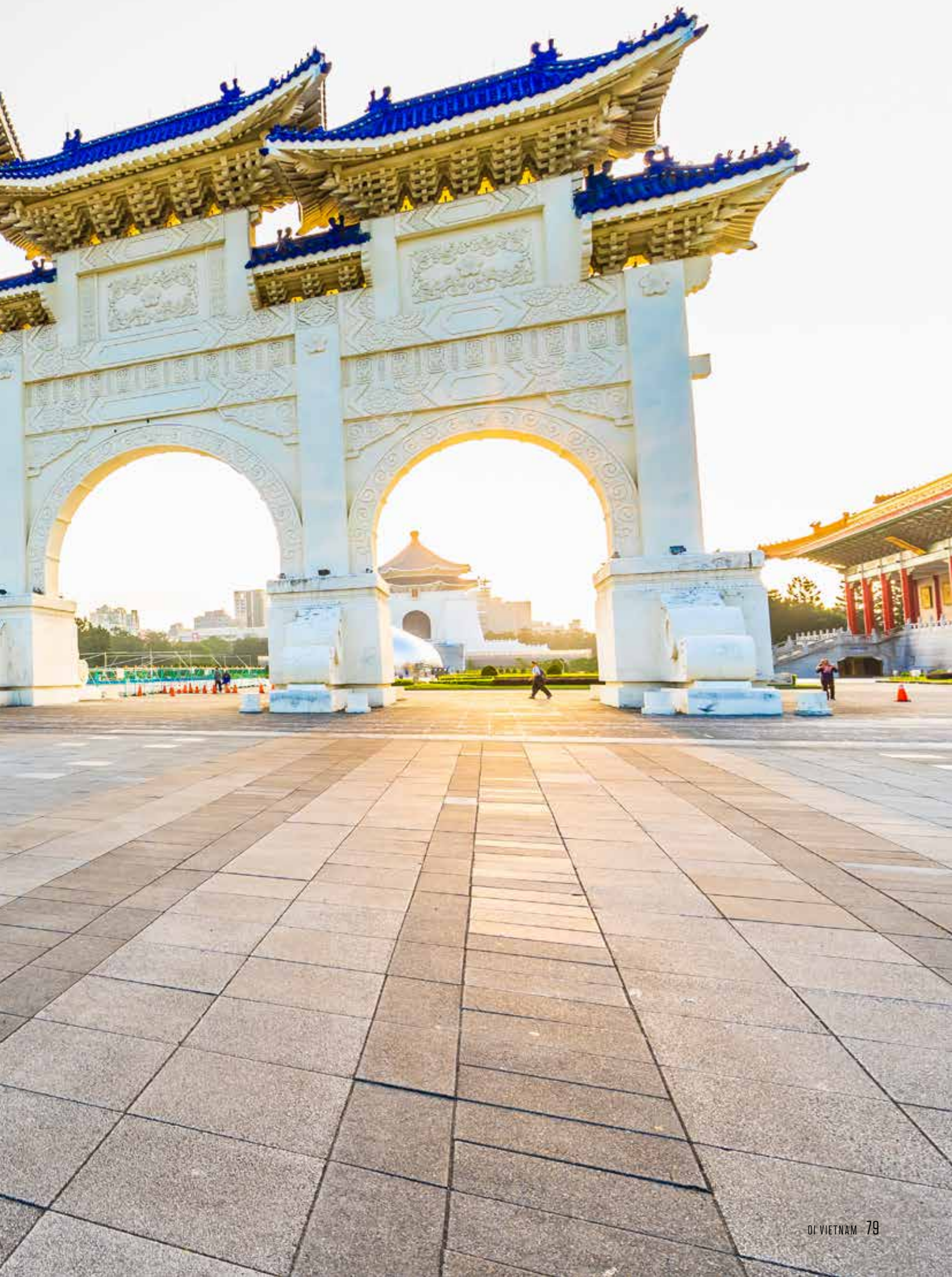
www.noirdininginthedark.com



Travel & Wellness

TAIWAN







Spend time without sight, sound, and feeling again since leaving the womb

Text by **Bodei Brouwer**

Images by **Vy Lam**

BEING USED TO LIVING IN A crazy, busy city, I don't even notice the noise that comes with it for weeks on end. And then suddenly I do. Out of nowhere every loud sound is too much. I feel it gnawing away at my mental health. So when I was offered the opportunity to experience complete sensory deprivation, I jumped at it.

To achieve this sensory deprivation, floating therapy was developed. It's been around since 1954 and hasn't changed much since. It's a simple formula: a 10-inch layer of skin-temperature water filled with 900 lbs of Epsom salt in a sound and light proof environment. Lie down in the water and the salt makes you float effortlessly. You're not touching anything and barely feel the water, you don't hear or see anything either. A place to let your mind be still. Float Saigon offers such a place.

Float Saigon (47/1/1 Quoc Huong, Thao Dien, D2) is located off the busy streets. Pass the roasted goat hanging off the ceiling on your left and the chicken

on your right and you've found the right street. I was greeted by Duc, a man with an ASMR-worthy voice. In a wonderfully calm and comforting manner he told me all about the benefits of floating and what to expect during my session. A session of 90 minutes no less.

Float Saigon offers two different floating experiences: the tank and the room. The tank, Duc explained, is a more intimate and personal experience. Some people say it makes them feel like they're back in the womb. The room, on the other hand, is more suitable for people who are uncomfortable in small spaces. Floating in the room is often compared to floating in space. I was quite happy to hear that they had reserved the room for my very first floating experience. I might not be claustrophobic, but I'm still human.

Floating therapy is said to have a long list of both mental and physical benefits. Stress reduction through intense relaxation and a boost in creativity are the main psychological

results. While it can take 30-45 minutes before the brain allows itself to quiet down, once it does you find yourself in a state somewhere between waking and sleeping. Which is even better than sleeping, according to Duc.

The physical benefits include: pain relieve, increased blood circulation and magnesium absorption thanks to the Epson salt. It does, however, turn your hair into a matted mess, but that is a small price to pay.

Duc also addressed some common concerns. The air in the room is a little thick, but there is no reason to be concerned about oxygen. He himself spent five hours in the room last week and there was plenty of oxygen. Five hours! No wonder this man seems so utterly and completely calm and at peace. He also ensured me that the salt in the water will keep you from rolling over or hitting the walls in any way.

My bag was placed in a locker and Duc led me upstairs to the room. I had brought my bathing suit for nothing; this was a naked event. We stepped into a lockable changing room with shower and an ensuite floating room. I would have 10 minutes to use the bathroom, take a shower and get comfortable in the water. Then music would play to signal the 90 minutes were starting. At the end of the session the music would start playing again and the water would start swirling. I was given a pair of ear plugs and Duc left me to it.



As can be expected, the thoughts were racing through my mind. “Am I doing this right?”, “Is it supposed to feel like this?” and “How should I describe this in the article?” were playing on loop for I don’t know how long. I had no idea how long because time does not exist in that little room.

After a while, my brain started to relax more. I found myself in the state Duc had mentioned, somewhere between waking and sleeping. I certainly still had thoughts but I felt more distant from them. As if they were playing like a movie in my mind. I realized all of this because muscle spasms in my left arm would jerk me out of it every now and again.

Full disclosure, I did not make it all the way till the end. I had made the rookie mistake of drinking four cups of tea that morning so even though I had visited the bathroom before I went in, my bladder was screaming for my attention. When I could not ignore it anymore I got out, took a shower and ran to the bathroom.

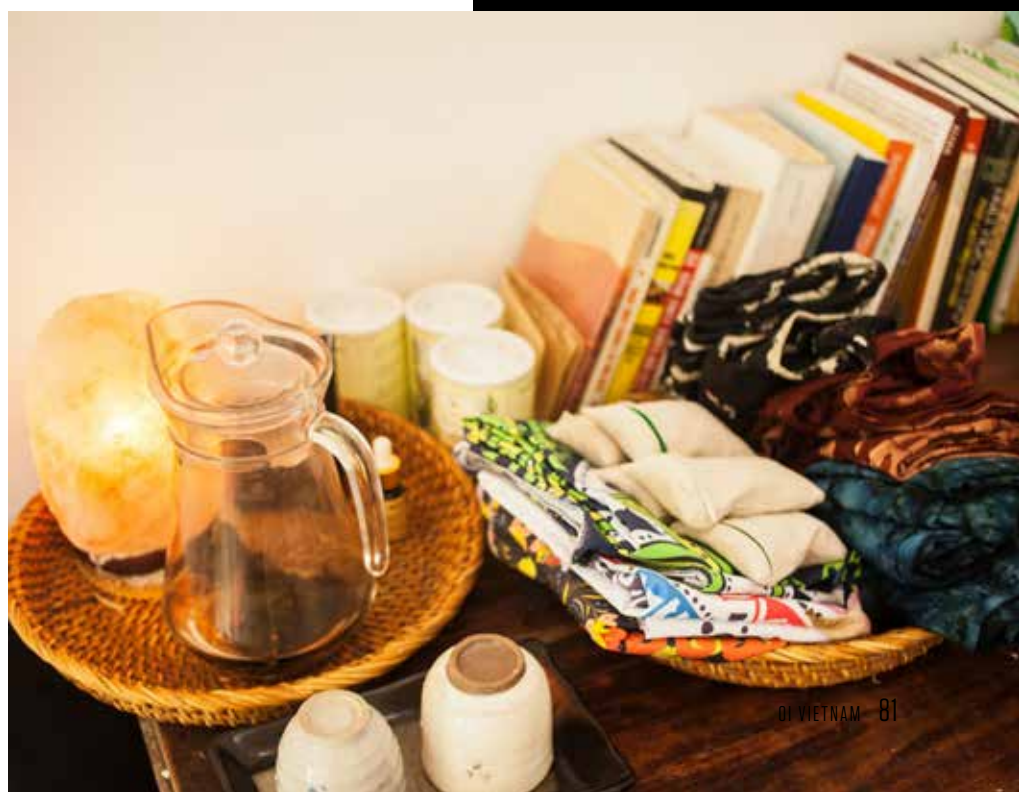
I made my way downstairs, curious to find out how long I had lasted. Only three minutes left on the clock. Just short of 90 minutes, not too bad. I was served a nice cup of tea and talked the whole thing over with Duc. He showed me a sketch book filled with colorful drawings by people trying to relay their own interpretation of the floating experience. There was a portrait of someone whose mind seemed to be filled with color and another who seemed to have had an out-of-body experience.

If Duc is any indication of what regular floating sessions can do for a human being, it should probably be mandatory. For now I’ll just have to float along on that one session. ■

Visit, www.facebook.com/floatsaigon for more info



The water was very comfortable but the complete darkness took me a little while to get used to. Duc had also warned me about neck and shoulder pain, which are common occurrences. After a while I found that putting my head back further than I had instinctively done, helped get rid of that.



Time For Taiwan

Uncover the secret beauty of Taiwan with its surprising blend of modernity and tradition

Text by Sarah Owens

OUR WEEK IN TAIWAN SEEMED to come and go in a flash. Both Vince and I have been excited to visit the country for a while, having heard great things from friends who had already been. As it was a holiday, we decided to take it slow and focus on just a few places, rather than rushing around trying to see the whole country. As Taiwan is relatively small, it's easy (and cheap) to see a lot of in a short amount of time. You can go from tropical beach to mountain range to huge, bustling city in just a couple of hours. For us, though, we just stuck to three main areas and left the rest for another trip. Here is how we spent our short time there!

Day 1

Historic Areas – Ximen – Shida Night Market

Our first day in Taiwan was spent in Taipei. We woke up late and, with no plan in mind, got ourselves acquainted with the city. We stayed at Eight Elephants and Dreaming Dragons Hostel in the Guting area of Taipei. This is a cute, student area with loads of cheap, local eateries and independent shops nearby. It's conveniently located just a few stops away from Taipei Main Station, so it's the perfect choice for budget travellers with itchy feet.

Our hostel was within walking distance from Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall so the first thing we did



was take a walk up there to see one of the most famous buildings in Taipei. We wanted to explore the city on foot and get a feel for our surroundings so we spent most of the afternoon wandering around until we ended up in the Ximen neighborhood. Ximen is one of the most central commercial areas and has lots of Western shops and restaurants. I loved this area for its bright lights, which reminded me of Shinjuku in Tokyo. I was also happy to find a few street food stands dotted about so I could get my first taste of Taiwan's famous food.

Later in the evening, we explored Shida Night Market since it was right next to our hostel. This is a great place to pick up cheap clothes and accessories. Even if shopping isn't on the cards for you, it's a fun place for a bit of window shopping, especially since it's pretty much full to the brim with cuteness. I dare you not to buy anything! Shopping is the main focus of this night market, though there are still a lot of places to enjoy some street food. Since this night market is more popular with locals and not really aimed at tourists, English signage is sparse.

Day 2

Songshan Culture Park – Elephant Mountain – Shilin Night Market

Having heard so much about the culture parks in Taipei, we decided to head to Songshan on our second day in the city. Although we did enjoy it, it did

feel a bit like a big shopping center with a background of art. I compared it to a cross between Seoul's Insadong and Berlin, which is a weird but kind of an accurate comparison. You'll find abandoned, repurposed buildings and warehouses transformed into art spaces, you'll see people break dancing and skateboarding. But you'll also find overpriced upmarket craft shops. I didn't really know how to feel about it.

To be honest, this can be easily skipped if you don't have a lot of time in the city as we didn't feel like there was much to see. A lot of things are aimed towards kids although the garden areas are lovely.

What you definitely should not miss, however, is a trip to Elephant Mountain. This is the absolute best place to get iconic shots of Taipei 101. We went around sunset time and got some great night shots of what was once the tallest building in the world. Don't miss this on your trip.

After your hike, you'll have worked up quite an appetite. There's no better place in Taipei for hungry tummies than Shilin Night Market, the city's largest night market. Shilin is huge and it can be overwhelming. Just follow the crowds and see what tickles your fancy. There was so much

yumminess that we pretty much ate until we popped. #noregrets

Day 3

Ooh Cha Cha – Maokong Gondola – Huashin Culture Park – Rahoe Night Market – Taipei 101

Have I mentioned how much we loved the area around our hostel? Little local areas in the hearts of big cities always win me over and Guting was no different. I particularly loved the variety of veggie food restaurants around and wish we'd had the chance to try more. After clogging our arteries with deep-fried food, we wanted some nutrients back in our bodies so we headed for Ooh Cha Cha and, oh man, it was good. I especially loved their raw vegan cheesecakes. So hipster, so delicious.

After filling ourselves up at Ooh Cha Cha, we made our way south to the Taipei Zoo area and took a cable car to Maokong. Maokong is an area famous for tea cultivation and, although you're close enough to the city to see the iconic Taipei 101, you feel like you're hours away. Talk about the best of both worlds. Although the cable car is a bit touristy, it's still worth doing on your trip.

We had some local Taiwanese tea at the most adorable teahouse perched on the end of a mountain with amazing views over Taipei. At 200 NTD for a pot, it wasn't the cheapest tea I've ever drunk but it was worth every penny, even if just for the experience. I thoroughly recommend it.

We decided to give Taipei's culture





Shida Night Market

filling up on things just because they don't contain meat.

Day 5

Travel to Taroko Gorge

Day 5 was a bit of an off-day for us. We arrived at our hotel around lunchtime and, after our journey from Jiufen, thought it would be best to just rest and dedicate a full day to hiking in Taroko Gorge. This day was mostly spent relaxing around our hotel, drinking whisky highballs in our room, watching Chinese rom-coms and catching up on work. It's easy to get burnt out when you travel, particularly when you base yourself in big cities. I think it's important not to deny yourself lazy days like these.

Day 6

Taroko Gorge

Taroko Gorge is a place that you have to visit on your trip to Taiwan. We both

villages another go and head for Huashain. Again, it was a cute area with a lovely park and I think I would enjoy it if I lived in the city. However, I felt for adults with no interest in shopping there wasn't a whole lot to do. Since the culture parks are so centrally located, I would definitely visit one on your trip but don't dedicate too much time to them.

When the sun went down we headed back to (yup, you guessed it,) another night market. In a city with so much awesome street food, it'd be a shame to ever eat in a restaurant. This time, we had our sights set on Rahoe, which is the oldest night market in Taipei. This market was smaller and a bit more intimate than Shilin. I found it a lot less overwhelming and with a much more condensed variety of food.

From Rahoe, it's not too far to walk to Taipei 101. We really needed to sweat off all the food that we had eaten so decided just to wander in its direction. I love skyscrapers, especially at night, so I was glad to see it one more time from ground level.

Day 4

Jiufen – Keelung Night Market

Just an hour away from Taipei is Jiufen, a charming old colonial seaside town. Studio Ghibli fans will recognize it as the backdrop for *Spirited Away* and this is the main reason that we wanted to visit. I'll be honest and say that we were a bit let down by Jiufen. We were expecting to be blown away by it, but I think our expectations were too high. I should point out that most people love Jiufen and cite it as the highlight of their trip. We're glad that we went and saw it for ourselves.

Looking back, I do think that I might have done Jiufen wrong. I recently found out about a new tour company called Round Taiwan Round with an innovative approach to group travel. You're picked up in Taipei by either a Mandarin- or



Huashin Culture Park

English-speaking guide and taken to the five attractions of your choice. At the end of Taipei, you can get dropped off in Taipei again. I love this idea because it combines carpooling with the benefits of both group travel and independent travel.

Although Jiufen can easily be visited in a day from Taipei, we decided to stay in that area for the night. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that our hotel was a short train trip away from Keelung; an area famous for its foodie-focused night market that's a hit with the locals.

We loved the atmosphere and authenticity of this place. Ironically, this night market had the most English signage out of all the ones that we visited, which is weird since it attracts a lot less foreign tourists than the likes of Shilin and Rahoe. We also found an amazing vegetarian stand. It was so nice to finally get a good feed rather than



Taroko Gorge

wish that we had spent a bit more time there as the national park is stunning (and we spent a lot of time getting lost and missed a lot of it—oops.) I have so much to say about Taroko Gorge that it deserves its own article highlighting how to navigate this monster national park. Later in the evening, we took the train back to Taipei and checked into Meander hostel.

Meander is based in the Ximen area of Taipei so it's right in the heart of the action. Staying true to character, we spent the evening hunting down more street food. Vince was desperate to try something that he had saw advertised as a “face big”—basically a chicken cutlet the same size as his face. I was more interested in finding Taiwan's main culinary hero—stinky tofu!

When we got the stinky tofu we realized that I had actually eaten a weaker version of it a few times but hadn't realized what it was. I guess all the kimchi I've been eating in Korea has gotten me used to fermented flavors. I expected it to be a lot worse but it just tasted like tofu with a weird stilton-esque aftertaste. Not as bad as it smells.

Day 7

Chinese Breakfast – Dadoecheng – Beitou Hot Springs – Vege Creek- Longshan Temple – Huaxi Night Market

Our last day in Taiwan came around far too quickly. And, although we spent a total of five days in the capital city, there are just so many things to do in Taipei, that we felt like we barely scratched the surface.

Following the recommendation from the guys at Meander, we started the day in style with a traditional Taiwanese breakfast. I can't actually believe that it took us so long to try this. Breakfast in Taipei is basically deep fried carbs inside deep fried carbs washed down with a glass of soy milk. We headed to a place in Ximen, which seemed to be really popular with locals and tourists alike. It was so good that we headed again the following morning before our flight.

After getting all carbed up, we took a walk up to Dadoecheng to burn off our calorie-packed breakfast. My Taiwanese friend Jasmine, who I met in India, had recommended we check out Dadoecheng; a more traditional part of the city where we could experience old Taipei. We visited her mum's puppet theatre museum and witnessed a proper local market.

The Puppet Theatre museum was a great find that we might not have bothered about if it weren't for Jasmine. We loved being kids again and getting some pics with the puppets. It's always great to see the more local side of a city so big thanks to Jasmine for her recommendations.

Next, it was up to Beitou Hot Springs. Taiwan is famous for its hot springs and these are the closest ones you'll find to Taipei. As you can imagine, a good soak was exactly what we needed



Beitou Hot Springs



The Puppet Theatre museum

after a jam-packed week of sightseeing and we were pretty buzzing to chill out. Annoyingly, though, when we got there, we got turned away from the public baths. Turns out that swimming shorts with pockets aren't suitable public bathwear, so Vince couldn't get in. After this major annoyance, I was in no mood for bathing. (I'm pretty stubborn and grumpy when I want to be.) Plus, I would rather have been eating anyway so we went on a quest for food.

As you might know, Taipei is a great city (as far as Asian cities seem to go) for vegetarians. I had been reading so many good things about a restaurant called Vege Creek online and wanted to experience it for myself. Vege Creek is a Taiwanese hot pot restaurant—you take a basket and fill it with all the vegetables that you like and then it's cooked up for you. After eating so much deep fried food, it was great to actually fill my body with nutrients again. Plus, it was pretty cheap. I'd recommend this place to any vegetarians visiting Taipei needing some greens in their life.

Following on from our much-needed health boost, we decided to end our week in Taiwan as we had started it and head to another night market to fill our bodies with even more junk. This time, we went to the Huaxi night market as it was the closest to our hostel. We enjoyed the amount of food on offer and managed to find some vegetarian dumplings so it was a successful trip. Huaxi night market is located close to Longshan temple and Bopilao Historic Block so you can fit in some sightseeing too.

Day 8

Hometime!

Taiwan is a country that we were sad to leave but can definitely see ourselves returning to in the future. Although my love affair with Korea is well and truly over, I still can't scratch the itch that I have for its neighboring countries. Taiwan has a lot of the charms that we love about Japan, plus loads of its own little quirks, too. We love the affordability and its proximity to other countries that we'd love to visit. ■



Longshan temple

>>The List Business

INSURANCE

OUR OFFICE LOCATIONS

Administration Office - Ho Chi Minh City
Ruby Tower | 81-83-85 Ham Nghi | Dist. 1

Sales Office - Ho Chi Minh City
Pax Sky | 159C De Tham | Dist. 1

Sales Office - Hanoi
VCCI Tower | 9 Dao Duy Anh | Dist. Dong Da

Pacific Cross Vietnam

Pacific Cross Vietnam is a specialist provider of global health and travel insurances, designed to provide not just basic cover, but also a wide range of benefits providing peace of mind for you, your family and your employees.

www.pacificcross.com.vn
inquiry@pacificcross.com.vn

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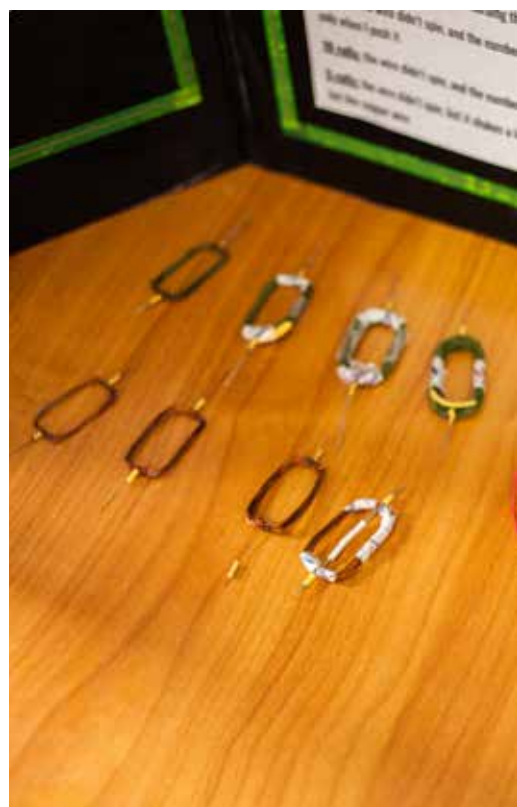
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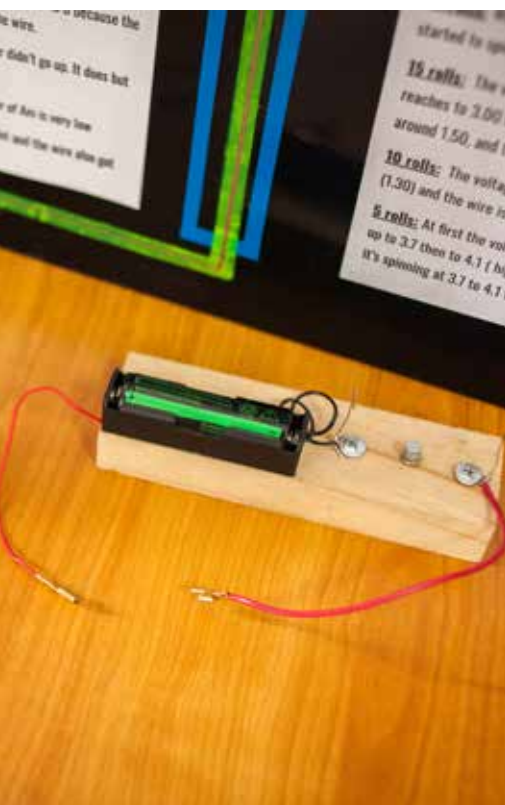
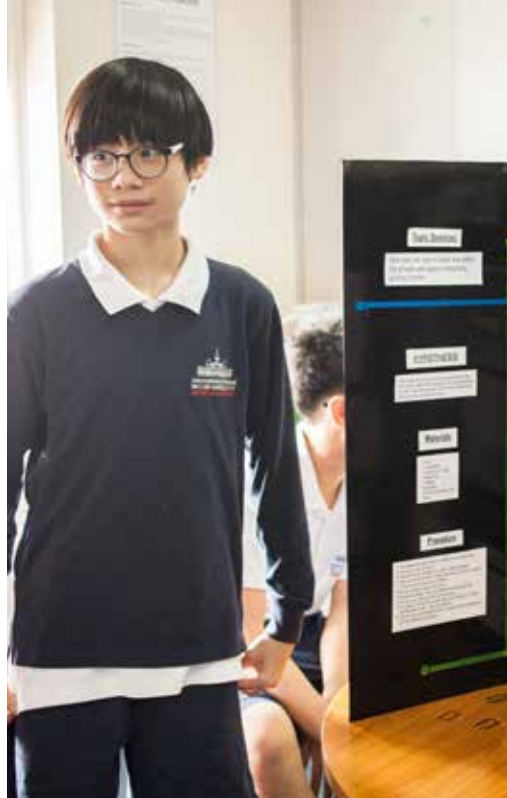
Text By **Dr. Alex Aristizabal** - Science Department Head
Images by **Vy Lam**

IS IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE AN environmentally-friendly toothpaste? Which brand of toilet paper can absorb the largest amount of water? What

causes global warming? Which soil (sand, clay or heavy soil) makes plant grow the best? These, and many other, questions are being answered by our

students through their Science Fair Project in its 2019 version.

Our science fair has become a tradition in our community, where



students from grades 6-10 have the opportunity to work on finding the answers to their own natural world questions using the same tools and mindset of top scientists. Inquiry, innovation, creativity, cooperation, responsibility and ethics are only some of the skills our students develop through the execution of their projects.

We know it is not always easy to stand in front of an audience to convey ideas and express emotions; however, this science fair provides an authentic scenario for our students to develop confidence, assertiveness and charisma. We do not simply expect a

show-and-tell exhibition, our students have invested several months working on their projects to provide answers to meaningful questions, many with a great deal of sophistication. It is important to understand that a project of this nature involves so much more than science, which makes it an enriching learning activity and even a family project. How many times do students ask parents or siblings for help with their projects? How many times do parents/siblings get together around an academic project where everybody learns and contributes? We do not mean to pose extra work on parents

or siblings, or make this a parents' or family project. Educational research has proven that parental involvement has a significant effect on student learning and the support, guidance and coaching from parents is an important motivational factor that contributes to meaningful learnings.

Our science fair is an invitation to a build community within our school; parents and peers from other local schools are invited as judges in order to interact and learn with and from our students. At the end, the process and all what happens through it is more important than the product itself. ■



Reading is Fun-Damental

Text and Images Provided by Tiffany Procter, Elementary Coordinator at ISSP

WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING your child ready to learn to read, research says that it's never too early. Parents and educators are the keys to a child's success in this endeavor.

Mr. Lester Stephens, Head of School at International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP), the only international elementary and early years' school in HCMC to have the prestigious accreditation from the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) gives some ideas about where to start developing children's communication and literacy skills from birth until age 11.

He says, "As soon as a baby is born, you can start to show them picture books. It makes a huge difference to a child's development if you can spare ten minutes a day to read to your child. The early years are key and 70 percent of a child's brain develops by the time he or she is three."

Learning to Read is Not a Race at ISSP

Although parents may be eager for their children to learn to read, they should know that there is no set formula or strict timetable, but instead, there are milestones. International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP) in HCMC has formulated this key message for their students: "Beyond academic excellence, we must nurture character." This motto means that both educators and parents should approach reading at the rate that is appropriate for the child and nurture the development rather than making it a race for academic milestones. The key is making sure that reading is fun and not something that feels like a chore or an obligation. Studies have found that young readers that are most likely to read above their age appropriate level are the ones who actually enjoy reading.

Libraries can Make Reading Accessible and Exciting

Access to reading materials is also key to a child's development. Libraries can be valuable resources for children, as well as for parents who either don't have the resources to buy their children books or simply want a more clutter-free household. ISSP is one place that children can have access to these early literacy materials. The school features two libraries for their Early Years and Elementary programs with over 16,000 available books.

The internet and online books can also be valuable resources for getting children acclimated to reading words and sentences. Online reading has now surpassed reading in print for children ages 8-16 according to a study by Literacy Trust. Although he believes that having options for reading in all formats is an overall a good thing, Lester notes that younger children rely on the sensory stimulation that is derived from flipping the pages of an actual book. "What we

know is that children who only read online generally do not read as well. Also, a real book has textures, sounds and even smells that all contribute to the reading experience,” he says.

Regular trips to the libraries at ISSP are a way for teachers to help students connect to books. The libraries feel special and exciting to the children, especially while surrounded by other classmates who enjoy the experience of browsing through the selections, turning the pages of the books and listening to teachers read aloud. This positive peer influence can inspire lower level learners to take interest in reading.

What’s important is to get the child excited about reading by hooking them in with subjects they’re excited about. If, for example, they love learning about dinosaurs (as many children tend to) start out by getting them books which prominently feature dinosaurs so that they’ll be inclined to read the books or ask someone to read it to them. Reading aloud to children is also beneficial for them. Good readers read a lot and modeling this for children is important to their development as lovers of reading. Your child can independently look through picture books and “tell their own story,” while you can read books with higher content to them on the same subject(s) they are interested in. Soon they will be reading for themselves and so engrossed in their books that they’ll barely notice they’re being taught to read.

If children are struggling with reading it is important to remember two very important things. 1. They may not be ready to read as some children take longer than others, and that’s okay. Forcing children into reading practices they are not ready for can cause them to lose confidence in themselves and their abilities as a young reader. 2. A child may have a learning disability. For example, dyslexia, defined as: a general term for disorders that involve difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters, and other symbols, but that do not affect general intelligence. These children can still learn to take joy in reading and given the proper support and strategies they too can have success with reading. According to Lester, “Reading is for everyone and it makes a huge difference to their quality of life and even their future success.”

ISSP, which provides a caring, student-centered environment where the values of *honesty*, *caring*, *respect*, *responsibility* and *wisdom* are highly prized, offers some quick tips for making reading fun for your child:

Make Reading Active

Often, children have an overabundance of kinetic energy.

You can turn this into a benefit to their learning by having them “act out” what they’ve been reading. They can pretend to be characters in books, or if they are artistically inclined, draw or make puppets inspired by the story. This is a form of re-telling which is an essential skill for young readers.

Get the Entire Family/Classroom Involved

As the African proverb goes, “It takes a village.” Get the entire family on board by having the older children encourage the younger ones. In the classroom, the students are also influenced by both younger and older classmates, and early readers can help inspire others. At ISSP, where there are 28 nationalities represented in the student population, it is also fun for the children to read stories about the different countries that each child comes from. Personalizing the education for each learner is a great way to get them involved in the experience.

Genre-Hopping

It might take a bit of experimentation before you find the genre of books that will hook your child and help them to discover the joy of reading. If they are not interested in fantasy, maybe try a mystery book or a sing-along book of nursery rhymes. As stated earlier, acquiring books for them about subjects

in which they are already interested is always a safe bet! Don’t give up because one book lost their attention. There will be something that sparks your child’s imagination with a bit of perseverance. This leads us to our next tip below:

Let Your Child Be the Master of His or Her Reading Journey

Often, our own choices for our children’s reading selections can be clouded by our desire to share specific information that may or may not resonate with them. Let your child take the wheel and decide for themselves what they’d like to read. Remember that reading is a form of self-discovery so try to give them the space to make their own choices, as they will be most likely to read the books that they have selected for themselves.

ISSP Believes that Praise Leads to Growth

Children are sensitive and just as the smallest failure can undermine a child’s confidence, small catalysts can also be springboards for tremendous growth. Praise your child’s efforts. At ISSP, nurturing characters means building up the interests that are already present in each child to draw forth their inner potential. Be sure to uplift your child as they are taking their first steps on this journey! ■



Scar Over

From pesky reminders of your youth (we don't miss you, acne) to more major surgical wounds, these scar treatments can help diminish them

OUR SKIN HAS AN ABILITY

to heal itself after sustaining damage that is almost miraculous. If only that healing process were perfect—it's quite unfortunate that it generally results in scars. Burns, acne, and stretch marks can all push the skin's regenerative capacity to the extreme, leaving moderate to substantial scarring in their wake.

Modern medicine is becoming more and more skilled at making up for the shortcomings of the skin's self-healing properties. It's now possible to treat scars with special techniques that come very close to restoring the original look of the skin.

There are lots of approaches to scar treatment used today, involving a whole range of devices and techniques from chemical “peelers” to lasers. Most of those methods involve applying a controlled injury to the skin, which will then heal more smoothly than the original scar. The injuries can be inflicted very precisely—as when tiny chemical burns are administered by needle point—while others are “field treatments” that effectively sear off a layer of skin, allowing for a more perfect regrowth.

TCA (trichloroacetic acid) is a common chemical peeler that can be spread on an affected area to destroy the superficial skin layers, prompting new, unblemished skin to grow in its place. Mechanical dermabrasion is another technique, where a rough surface on rotating heads is used to brush off the scarring, inducing skin regrowth. The trick is usually not to go too deep—otherwise the downtime for recovery for these procedures can be very long.

Focused light and heat from fractional lasers can also be used to selectively destroy small areas of scarred skin to stimulate regrowth. A more intense version of this treatment uses CO₂ to induce a burning effect at the same time. This is a better treatment, but it involves a period of recovery from one to two weeks, and has some risk of complications and infections.



Dr. Ruben Martinez-Castejon has been the referral point for skin-related conditions at FMP since 2012. He obtained a postgraduate diploma in dermatology at Cardiff University and studied dermoscopy with the finest experts in the field—a technique that aids in the early detection of skin cancer. He is now establishing a scar care unit at our medical center featuring the best of modern treatments.

A Cut Beneath The Surface

Scarring involves the disappearance of collagen and elastin fibers that make up part of the skin's hypodermis layer. Sometimes there can also be bridges, or adhesions, between the surface of the skin and its deeper layers. In these cases, subcision can be an effective treatment.

Subcision means "to cut under the surface." It's a technique that is now being tried not only for scars but also for localized cellulitis. It usually involves inserting a tiny blade under the skin to cut through the scar tissue, like cutting grass with a sickle. As this is an aggressive and potentially painful form of treatment, it is usually performed under local anesthetic.

There are less aggressive solutions—one of them being to insufflate gas under the skin, as we do in carboxytherapy. In this technique, a small measure of CO₂ is forced between two layers of skin.

CO₂ has been used in medicine for many years, although its use in scar treatments is quite recent. It was discovered not so long ago that when you inject CO₂ under the skin, it produces an enrichment of oxygen and an increased blood flow. This is because the body

interprets the presence of CO₂ as a signal that this part of the body needs more oxygen. The body tries to remove the excess CO₂ by increasing the blood supply to the area concerned.

Blood flow is like water in a field—it gives life. Many scars are poorly vascularized, so increasing the blood flow can significantly improve those tissues. The gas is preheated, so you can increase the temperature and stimulate the blood flow at the same time.

We can achieve two main effects by insufflating gas under scars. There is a mechanical effect, because you detach the scar tissue from the surface; and there is a chemical effect because of this reaction to the CO₂ generating a hyperflow of blood.

A related technique involves performing small punctures in the skin with a dermaroller, which is a cylinder covered in tiny spikes of different lengths, rolled across the skin to create pores. These pores are a mild trauma that prompt a controlled healing process to reinitiate and reverse the scarification, prompting the surrounding cells connected with the reparation of skin to release growth factors.

Another benefit is that the pores created in the skin are not permanent; they last at most one or two hours. They can thus be used to put regenerative substances into the skin—such as PRP, which is a serum of platelets extracted from the patient's own blood. When massaged into the face, they can reach deeper levels in the skin for more effective healing.

In my practice, I focus on treating stretch marks and acne scars via dermaroller (and a similar precision device called the dermapen) supported by carboxytherapy. The procedure normally takes between 10–30 minutes. First, a numbing cream is applied before either the dermapen or the carboxy treatment (or both) are administered. Commonly, we will use one form of treatment in the first week, followed by the other a week later, and so on over the course of the therapy. We can expect progressive improvement within a few weeks to a couple of months. The peak of the expected improvement will be between three and six months, at which point the most visible features of the scar tissue should have all but vanished. ■

>>The List Education

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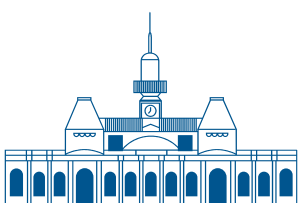
Mr. Michael Haddad
SU Math Adjunct Professor

Students benefit from SUPA classes because they get to experience the rigors of a college-level course. They will become familiar with the amount of work required and the level of difficulty of a university course before they even go to college. This will be one less adjustment that students need to make when they are living on their own for the first time.



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Depends on how it's cooked. Done right, on a charcoal or pan-seared, it should be smokey, and a bit earthy like a mushroom with a different texture. It's like this: It's juicy, with striated texture, hopefully some fat, crispy on the outside with a tenderness that melts in your mouth.

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