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08-2019

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The *Finer Things*



Autumn

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Offshore Versus Onshore

Weighing the best options when it comes to where to stash your cash

THE FIRST THING MOST PEOPLE do when moving into a new country is to look for a bank account that suits them and offers the services they require. For some, that requirement can be tricky to navigate.

At the beginning of July, several big changes were applied to expats looking to bank in Vietnam. Some have reported it as a relaxation of banking regulations while others have reported it as a tightening of banking rules. It is most definitely the latter, not the former. But it also heavily depends on your perspective.

Here are the main points that have come out of the new banking directive and need to be considered if you plan to move to Vietnam or are already a resident here:

- You will need to provide certain documentation as would be expected to open an account in Vietnam and to use bankcards.

- Expats will need to provide documents confirming their residential status in Vietnam for at least 12 months and only then will you be eligible to open a bank account. The basics are required, such as a valid passport for identification, but you will need a valid visa for 1 year or longer and has been issued in the last 12 months. Or one of the following valid documents with a validity of 1 year or longer, issued in the last 12 months: a temporary residence confirmation issued by the police, a temporary resident card, a permanent residency card or a work permit.

The State Bank of Vietnam also recently modified the conditions for expats to hold savings and deposits with banks in Vietnam, which does make it accessible but not to all.

For term deposits from July 5, 2019, expats with a valid document proving

residential status in Vietnam with at least 6 months validity will be eligible to open Term Deposit Accounts with a term *not* greater than the remaining of its validity. Any existing Term Deposits opened before July 5, 2019 can and will be continued until their maturity.

However, there are and always have been offshore savings solutions and in many ways these might be beneficial for tax purposes. Many offshore accounts are not subject to taxes depending on the individual's nationality. Private banking offshore has become more and more difficult with restrictions on anti-money laundering rules adopted around the world. But for regular monthly savings structures it is still quite simple to open and manage an account in a well-regulated jurisdiction such as the Isle of Man, Luxembourg and Singapore. Since the recent changes, I have been inundated with calls asking for clarification and how to take advantage of offshore structures. Many may find it surprising that you don't have to be a millionaire to open an offshore savings structure. An offshore account can be opened with as little as USD250 per month as a regular monthly premium.

But once you have met all of the above and opened your bank account, how will you bank? The world is changing to an ever-increasing digital world. According to PWC's 2018 Global Digital Banking Survey, there has been a 5% increase in online banking transactions made from mobile devices, 15% in total of users. That can be further substantiated by the State Bank of Vietnam who concluded in an additional survey that mobile users increased by 81% when making financial transactions in 2017. The trend is continuing as people become more comfortable with mobile security measures.

But, what about the actual security of your money? In Vietnam there exists a deposit insurance protection scheme but it is very limited in size. Currently, if a bank or credit institution goes into default and bankruptcy, the DIV (Deposit Insurance of Vietnam) will cover VND75 million as protected. To put that into perspective at today's exchange rate that is around USD3,264. Whereas in the UK (even if they leave Europe) it is currently and will remain GBP85,000 (about VND2.5 billion so a bit of a difference) protected. Europe has a currency equivalent of EUR100,000. The US has USD250,000 in FDIC insured banks. Substantially offering more peace of mind.

It has been known for banks to go into default in Vietnam in recent years. However, that has changed in 2017 with a bill passing that allows for any insolvent bank to now go fully bust. In other countries, there has been support through bailouts, rightly or wrongly, when banks get into trouble but that will not be the case going forward for the Vietnam banking sector.

The big questions are: What jurisdiction do you trust the most? What banking system can you rely on and what protection are you afforded? I know where my money goes but to find out you will have to contact me directly. The risk against reward suggests that offshore banking and savings structures are absolutely the better option for short, medium and longer term investment savings strategies, as the same level of returns and better can be achieved, but with a much higher level of protection afforded to you. Vietnam banks for everyday banking are satisfactory for paying bills but again, Vietnam is in its early stages of growth and reform. ■

Shared Experiences,

Part 3

Text by Jesus Lopez-Gomez

Images by Vy Lam and Sake Central

Sneaky Drinks

You're an adult, so you may have forgotten by now what the thrill of playing secret agent was like. Just so you know, it's still really cool.

You'll do plenty of slinking in this Landed Vibe experience aptly titled "Let's Sneak in some Hidden Rooftops and have Drinks." As the name implies, there's a lot of sneaking around involved. Go up darkened stairs by the light of a cell phone. Get up a rooftop by ladder. Worry if you're supposed to go there, but then just do it anyway.

This Landed Vibe experience involves visits to a range of elevated city sites, like Hung Hoa Beer, a charming rooftop bar that's got that yellowed, paisley, vintage look like memories remembered from a generation ago. Take in neighboring Districts 3 and 5 from this homey, warm pub.

Next, hosts will spirit you away on taxi to the next destination, which is definitely a rooftop but maybe isn't a bar. That's why they've bought drinks beforehand and ride dirty to the next place.

How is this experience different than just going out for drinks to the usual place, like OMG Rooftop and the glitzy Chill SkyBar? For one, this is a lot quieter. The only sounds that reach



you on Saigon's rooftops is whatever music or noise seeps up from the world's surface below. The rooftops you'll see on these excursions—some quaint drinking areas with a stocked bar, and some just literally the tops of building—feature less production overall than the typical rooftop bar. There are so few places to put your attention rather than the moment itself. Look at where we are.

Check out the artfully written message sprayed on to the side of this hidden wall. Conversation is made easy by alcohol and the shared thrill of being in a place where maybe you're not supposed to be. It's funny though, being in restricted spaces is a powerful bonding element to the counter strangeness of strangers who are, physically and otherwise perhaps, with you now.



Neat, Please

Landed Vibe's whisky tasting host Jesse Selvagn's credentials are nothing to sneeze at.

Sake Central general manager's decade-plus long career in food and drink has included a post at a Michelin two-star restaurant and roles as a sommelier of both whiskey and sake. He's professionally certified as a sake sommelier. But it's his particular manner as a storyteller that stands out in the Landed Vibe workshop he leads called "Explore the Craft and Culture of Japanese Whisky," an event that centers around a storied drink.

Take his telling of Japan's decision to liberalize trade and end isolationism in the mid 19th century. "The US was like, we want to trade or we'll just shoot you with our cannons," he explained to a group drinking Suntory whisky highballs. "And they were like, okay," he continued. "One of the first things to come off the harbor was a big barrel of whisky."

Selvagn spends little time coaching in the etiquette of drinking. He advises

not to bury your nose in the neat pour, a gentle sniff will do before a light sip that coats the whole mouth, and to kind of chew it. He spends most of the session talking about the story of the whiskies, the Hakushu distillery's decision to scale down their production to explore new, interesting blends; the road to producing award-winning Japanese whiskys today that started with very bad recipes at first chapters of the nation's history; and so on.

Ask Selvagn to tell you the story of how the man who founded Nikka whisky who, while on a research trip to Scotland, fell in love with a foreign woman prompting an international scandal. His Japanese corporate handlers were sent to break them up. Parents were incensed. It was a whole thing. The Nikka whisky itself? It's got a nice, honey-peat feel on it that finishes clean. But enjoyment of the drink is certainly greater hearing Selvagn tell you the whole story in his animated and rousing manner as if he witnessed it first hand. ■

Landed Vibe is a platform that helps millennials turn shareable values of their profession, skill or hobby into on-demand payable activities, either for entertainment, skill learning or travel experience purposes, to be booked by millennial locals, expats and travelers alike. To explore the 80+ experiences that are available, visit landedvibe.com.

TROI OI!

The country in numbers



863

WERE BOOKED FOR DRIVING AND RIDING UNDER THE

influence of alcohol during the first three days of a month-long crackdown on traffic violations carried out by Vietnamese police throughout the country. Traffic police officers inspected more than 61,000 vehicles nationwide, including approximately 17,300 motorcycles, 2,600 passenger buses, and 2,100 trailer trucks, and made reports of over 22,000 offenses between July 15 and 17.

More than VND10 billion worth of fines was issued, while about 1,500 driver's licenses were revoked and 3,000 vehicles impounded. Among the offenders, a total of 863 road users were booked for driving drunk, while 17 others tested positive for drugs. The most common violations during this period were failure to wear a crash helmet and lack of legitimate driver's licenses.

390,000

CHILDREN MISSING OUT ON LIFESAVING VACCINES AGAINST MEASLES, DIPHTHERIA AND TETANUS IN 2018, ACCORDING TO NEW DATA FROM WHO AND UNICEF.

Ten countries account for 60 percent of 20 million unprotected children worldwide, including Indonesia (one million), the Philippines (750,000) and Vietnam (390,000), the two organizations said. Vaccination coverage with three doses of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP3) and one shot of the measles vaccine has stalled at around 86 percent globally since 2010.

The WHO and UNICEF said this is high but not sufficient, as 95 percent coverage is needed – globally, across countries, and communities – to protect against outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. Most unvaccinated children live in the poorest countries, and are disproportionately in fragile or conflict-affected states. If these children do get sick, they are at risk of the severest health consequences, and least likely to access lifesaving treatment and care.



~4,000

NAVAL SOLDIERS AND ABOUT 100 VOLUNTEER YOUTHS JOINED HANDS TO PICK UP GARBAGE AND PLANT NEW TREES ALONG LOCAL BEACHES IN THE SOUTH-CENTRAL PROVINCE OF KHANH HOA LAST MONTH.

The activity was part of a program meant to encourage young naval officers to protect coastal environments, which is within the framework of a sea cleanup campaign initiated by the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union.

After collecting trash along local beaches stretching tens of kilometers, the soldiers began planting more than 2,000 trees along the coast of Cam Ranh Bay to minimize the effect of coastal erosion. According to Colonel Nguyen Huu Minh, chief of political affairs at the 4th Naval Region, protecting marine life and combating climate change are important missions carried out regularly at the naval command. Certain measures have also been taken to raise awareness of environmental protection among local residents and fishermen, he added.



2 WHITE RHINOS HAVE SAFELY DELIVERED THEIR CALVES, ONE MALE AND ONE FEMALE, IN THE NATURE RESERVE OF VINPEARL SAFARI ON PHU QUOC ISLAND.

The two newborns, weighing 40-50kg each, came out after a year and a half in their mothers' wombs.

According to Bui Phi Hoang, head of animal care at Vinpearl Safari on Phu Quoc Island, various scenarios had been discussed before the rhinos went into labor, including difficult birth or the mother refusing to nurse her calves. The zookeepers here prepared anesthetics, stretchers, ambulances and an emergency unit at a nearby animal hospital, with two vets and an officer continuously observing the labor process via CCTV.

The April 3 delivery came about smoothly, with the calf breastfed only two hours after birth. The other one proved quite a challenge, as the mother started to assault the calf instead of nursing it. According to Hoang's team, the mother and her calf would have to be separated if nursing did not occur until 9:00 am of the next day. They anxiously observed the animals, and it was 30 minutes before the deadline when they could finally give a sigh of relief. At 8:30 am, the calf started to breastfeed.



2025

WILL SEE ALL OF HCMC'S OVERHEAD ELECTRICAL CABLES BE BURIED UNDERGROUND. BETWEEN 2011 AND 2015, AS MANY AS 358KM OF MEDIUM-VOLTAGE AND 620KM OF LOW-VOLTAGE CABLES WERE BURIED UNDERGROUND ON 62 STREETS.

By 2020, about 650km of medium-voltage and 1,150km of low-voltage power lines are expected to be buried, according to the HCM City Power Corporation under Electricity of Viet Nam (EVN HCM City).

In suburban areas, the work will be carried out first in crowded areas near administrative centers and shopping malls. By 2025, electrical cables will no longer be above ground in central districts, administrative centers in suburban districts, new urban zones, and industrial zones. Locally referred to as "spider webs", the overhead intertwined electrical and telecom cables have been a characteristic of big cities like Hanoi and HCM City for years.

40

PUBLIC BICYCLE STATIONS PILOT PROJECT WILL BE PROPOSED IN DANANG.

In the first phase, there will be 30 to 40 stations installed with five to 10 bicycles each depending on demand. The stations will be placed on key roads and near bus stations to better connect with the city's public transit system and popular destinations.

Bike-exclusive lanes will be designated and users can download a mobile app and use QR code to unlock the bicycle. Users can pay for the service by hour, day or month, with cash or online payments at the stations. They will have to pay extra fees if they do not return the bicycles to the stations. The number of personal vehicles in Danang has grown at 12% per year on average for cars and 10.5% per year for motorbikes. It is forecasted that from 2016 to 2020, Danang will have to face more severe traffic jams and the situation will worsen if the authorities do not have urgent management measures.



Skin cancer in dogs

Despite being covered in fur, dogs can get skin cancer too



Nevena Stefanovic studied at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Belgrade, Serbia and Wroclaw, Poland. Her primary interest are companion animals internal medicine and surgery. Nevena is now working as a veterinary surgeon at Animal Doctors International Clinic, HCMC.

THE SKIN IS THE LARGEST

organ of a dog, and tumors affecting this structure are common. Despite the fact that dogs are typically covered in fur it doesn't mean that they are more protected than people. Skin cancer can have a variety of causes. Just like with people, genetics (breed predisposition for dogs) play a large role in which dogs are more likely to get skin cancer. Skin cancer in dogs is often caused by exposure to the sun, but not all cases are linked to this. Dogs with light skin, a thin coat or a lack of fur are most at risk, especially if they have suffered sunburn at any point. Some studies show that compulsive licking of certain areas can also damage the skin and increase the chance of skin cancer.

A few different forms of skin cancer can, unfortunately, affect dogs and it's important for dog-owners to recognize the potential signs of the disease in order to treat it as quickly as possible.

Top Signs of Skin Cancer:

- Lumps and bumps on the skin: Not all lumps are cancerous on dogs. Some lumps are simply pimples, skin tags, nipples, warts, or consist of fat and do not necessarily pose a health concern to a dog, but it's always better to play safe and take your dog to the vet for testing.
- A bleeding or oozing area on the skin: Smaller or larger "wounds" on your dog that are not healing properly. The reason for this is presence of cancerous cells.
- Dog excessively itches or licks at one area on the skin: Usually bleeding and oozing wounds are irritating your pet to additionally scratch the affected area, causing more trauma and subsequent bleeding.

How is Skin Cancer in Dogs Diagnosed?

If your vet suspects skin cancer, they will often carry out a fine needle aspiration or biopsy so that the cells can be examined under a microscope and determine whether or not the lump is cancerous. If the sample cannot establish a diagnosis (and they sometimes can't as they are

very small) the vet will discuss whether a surgical biopsy is appropriate for your pet.

Some of the more common types of skin cancer in dogs are:

- Malignant melanoma
- Mast cell tumors
- Squamous cell carcinoma
- Histiocytic cell tumors

How Skin Cancer is Treated?

Thankfully, most skin cancers can be treated and cured successfully, often with an operation to remove the lump if caught at an early stage. Sometimes chemotherapy may also be offered. In many cases, the prognosis is very positive for dogs; most go on to make a full recovery and lead a normal lifespan without any further problems. Recovery will depend on the type of cancer and how advanced or aggressive it is. ■



Pet of the Month



Meet Spotty!



SHE IS A VERY NICE OLDER GIRL that is looking for a forever home. Spotty is a mixed breed, small dog that is believed to be around eight years old. She is quite shy at first but warms up very quickly when she gets to know you better.

She was found left to starve outside

a building in District 2 and rescued. At the moment she lives with her foster family together with a couple of other dogs. She can be playful with other dogs once she gets to know them, but her favorite thing to do is relaxing on her pillow and watching what's going on around her. Even though

she's older she is smart and has picked up very quickly on the leash training. She likes her daily walks but since she is older she does not require extensive exercise. ■

If you are interested to provide a loving home for Spotty please contact ARC at arcpets@gmail.com.

ATTENTION VIETNAM ANIMAL LOVERS!



ARC is looking for dedicated, pet-loving volunteers. What is ARC? ARC is a non-profit volunteer group founded in 2010 to help abused and abandoned animals in Ho Chi Minh City. ARC is 100% run by donations of time and money. What does ARC do? ARC volunteers provide care, socialization and rehabilitation for rescued animals and help to find loving adopters and forever homes. What are volunteer opportunities? ARC is currently seeking long-term volunteers in the following areas:

• **Coordinator and support roles:**

- * Fundraising and events
- * Cat and dog intake and rehoming - administration and practical tasks
- * Emails and social media enquiries

• **Hands on:**

- * Meeting with fosters and adopters
- * Fostering cats and dogs
- * Trap-Neuter-Return cat program

How can you help? If you are over 18 and able to make a regular, long-term (6 months +) commitment, or to make a donation, please send an email to arcpets@gmail.com. ARC has cared for and rehomed hundreds of animals, but volunteers are needed to keep these efforts going strong. ARC looks forward to hearing from you!

Borderless Cash





Expats and digital nomads are ditching banks and turning to fintech

Text by **Rebecca Jones**

LIFE AS AN EXPAT IS NOT ALWAYS easy, especially when it comes to managing money. Balancing multiple currencies and accounts in different countries can be challenging - especially in a country where the government may not mind the money coming in, but is less keen on it going out. Thankfully, while things are not yet as financially fluid as in other more developed countries, the rise of global fintech is bringing an ever-expanding range of handy money tools. We round up some of the best below.

Timo

The first widely available digital bank account in Vietnam, Timo (timo.vn) has made life for expats infinitely easier. Before its launch in 2018, only those with cast iron employment contracts were able to get a bank account, which meant excruciatingly high fees to withdraw money on international credit and debt cards. Now, however, Timo plus Transferwise (see below) equals smooth, easy and affordable transfers in (not out, though).

The app is also excellent, making it a breeze to send money to other bank accounts in Vietnam, while instant mobile notifications let you know the moment any money goes in or out. The 'Timo Hangout' on Pasteur is also the model of modern fintech efficiency and convenience, allowing customers to open accounts and collect cash cards in no time at all—all while enjoying a complementary coffee.

Sadly, though, Timo is no longer available to expats with visas of less than 12 months validity and so things are back as they were, only worse. Unless you are American, only foreigners with employment contracts and accompanying work permits can have a bank account, with all business visas for everyone but the Americans reduced to three months maximum. If you are American, though, you can have whatever you like: either on a one-year tourist or business visa.

Transferwise

Transferwise (transferwise.com) is a godsend for the location independent, allowing account holders to transfer funds between bank accounts in over 50 countries—including Vietnam. Fees are very competitive, with charges up to 80 percent cheaper than those levied by the big banks. The firm charges USD17 to transfer USD1,000 to a Vietnamese account, for example—which it says is nearly USD30 less than typical bank

fees. It also offers a MasterCard linked to an online 'borderless' account in GBP, EUR, USD, Australian and New Zealand dollars that can be used all over the world with low fees. Again, though, you can't use it to transfer money out of Vietnam.

xCurrency

xCurrency, in this writer's humble opinion, is just about the most useful app ever for those living life in multiple currencies—and it is completely free (on the Apple app store)!! Not only does xCurrency allow you to convert any currency into any other currency in real time, but you can have up to four set up on your dashboard that updates hourly—and it will track where you are and add the local currency automatically. You can then use it like a calculator, switching between adding and subtracting different currencies, which all automatically convert as you go. Want to know what VND10,000,000 VND - USD100 + €70 is in GBP? Easy with xCurrency!

Holvi

Admittedly a little niche, Holvi (www.holvi.com) is a completely integrated solution for business nomads that have set up an e-residency in Estonia—providing multiple accounts, invoicing and bookkeeping services all in one place. This sounds odd until you learn that Estonia grants e-residency to international business owners online, who then pay a flat 20 percent income tax on all their earnings—highly attractive to those from expensive tax jurisdictions. It is also ideal for small and medium sized online retailers that want access to Europe. Do note, though, that only death or defection will completely free US residents of the taxman. They don't get it easy everywhere!

Expensify

Perfect for those traveling a lot for work, Expensify (www.expensify.com) helps freelancers and corporate globetrotters easily input their receipts by taking a picture from their phones. This is then automatically put into the Expensify system using 'SmartScan' technology. You can then track, run and send reports to your accountant or accounts department, or automate it. Those here in Vietnam can also connect their Grab business accounts to their Expensify accounts and trips will be automatically expensed! Anyone that has ever submitted expense report will know that this is nothing short of a dream come true. ■

A Climate Story

A web documentary that portrays five citizens who work towards a better future for the Mekong Delta

Interview by **Christine Van**
Images by **Thomas van den Berg**

EACH YEAR, INCREASINGLY intense weather events and floods cause fatalities and damage to infrastructure. The livelihoods of poor communities are especially affected by these natural disasters. Their schools get flooded, bamboo houses are washed away, and agricultural land becomes infertile.

Me and Mekong is a solution-driven film made with and for the local people in the Mekong Delta. It portrays five citizens who act now to strengthen their resilience to climate change. They take you on a virtual journey through their delta while showing you a wide range of issues, from salinization and subsidence to flooded streets and mangrove restoration. You'll discover unique local perspectives on climate change adaptation.

Joep Janssen, the director of *Me and Mekong*, speaks to Oi Vietnam about the project.

You previously worked in architecture, what made you shift your focus to the Mekong Delta and Vietnam?

I worked for an architectural firm and my main focus was on urban design and that was interesting because I learnt about the history of Dutch water cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam. These cities are based on the integration of spatial planning and water management. During my work as an architect I used water as a design tool to make these typical Dutch cities more attractive.

In 2006 I watched the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore and was touched by this film. Why? It became clear to me that water is not about attraction, water is a matter of life or death. So I decided to use my profession to contribute to a solution to this pressing climate change issue.

Together with my wife, I went to Vietnam's Mekong Delta, which is at the frontline of climate change. I wrote the journalistic book *Living with the Mekong* about how local people deal with urban developments and climate change. The main conclusion of my book was that we—researchers, locals, NGOs and investors—need to make a new narrative

in order for the Mekong Delta to improve people's lives.

What specific areas of the Mekong Delta will be affected by climate change?

The Mekong Delta will be affected by both urbanization and climate change. Upstream dams are being built for hydropower and electricity because of growing demand caused by urbanization and also for irrigation for the purpose of agricultural production.

A positive impact of these dams is that there are less peak water in the river during rainy season. There are also negative impacts: These dams are blocking the sediments and fish. If there



are less sediments then in the future the delta will sink, rice fields will become less fertile, and fishermen from the Mekong Delta will catch less fish. Both rice and fish are very important for food security in Vietnam.

Land subsidence due to less sediments and ground water extraction (impacts by urbanization) is a big issue in the Mekong Delta. Land subsidence is around 20-40mm per year, which is much more than 5 mm/year sea level rise.

The Mekong Delta will also be affected by much more heavy rainfall. Rising temperatures and floods will lead to an increase in diseases both from mosquitoes and other water-borne illnesses.

When the Mekong River Delta experiences longer and dryer summers because of climate change, how will that affect the rest of the world?

Vietnam needs an approach in which water safety and food security are protected. The Mekong Delta has an important role to play here because its 20 million citizens produce rice and fish for nearly 200 million people. The better the water management is regulated, the more mouths can be fed in Vietnam, Southeast Asia and even the world.

For those who rely on the Mekong Delta for their livelihood, what can they do to shift their reliance away from it? What alternative options do they have besides migrating to big cities for work?

If they live near the coast, they could, for example, change from being a rice farmer to a sustainable shrimp farmer as a response to salinization. In the upper region, the government could propose breaching high dykes. These dykes enable farmers to arrange three rice crops instead of two. However, this third rice harvest is bringing down prices and thus farmers are not earning more money. The other downside is that these high dykes are blocking the deposition of sediments which will lead to less fertile fields. These high dykes are also causing floods and erosion elsewhere.

How did Henk Ovink, the Dutch Envoy for International Water Affairs, become involved? What role does he play in the documentary? What solutions can he give to fight climate change in The Delta?

Henk Ovink went to the Mekong Delta last year and was impressed by the resilience of the people and how they cope with these challenges. He is endorsing our *Me and Mekong* web documentary project.

We did an interview with him for Nextblue (nextblue/en/2018/06/20/interview-henk-ovink-about-water-opportunities-in-asia/). He is promoting a process where coalitions are built out of the local communities, coalitions where local talent is matched with the talent of the world. The key is to come up with inclusive, comprehensive urban water solutions, while strengthening governance



at the same time. Local communities, NGOs, policy makers, scientists and designers need to partner and work together with businesses investors and foreign agencies like the World Bank.

"Storytelling," he says, "helps us to picture things, to make complex things understandable and to take a wide range of factors into account. We need storytelling and design to embrace complexity, while at the same time making things tangible and insightful for all."

Tell us about the five Vietnamese families in the documentary? Why were they chosen?

We have defined five characters: boat people, businesswoman, a family with kids, rice and shrimp farmers. It's a cross section of the Mekong Delta: locations (from the upper delta to the coast), gender, young and old people, and people with different socioeconomic backgrounds.

They all experience water and climate challenges in different ways because of their different backgrounds. How do they cope with floods, salinization, land subsidence and what are their adaptation strategies?

You wrote a book called *Living with the Mekong*, what will the web documentary cover that the book didn't?

The most important difference is the interaction with the people. We want to make a web documentary in a way that you feel that you are there, on the ground, in the mud fields listening to and learning from the local people.

The unique character of *Me and Mekong* includes stories from both professionals and home videos made by the locals because they know their environment best. We share the stories of local citizens told through their phones.

What happens after the documentary is produced?

The *Me and Mekong* web documentary project is supported by the Netherlands Embassy in Vietnam, Wageningen University and other sponsors from the Netherlands, such as HaskoningDHV. Our goal is to exchange local knowledge from locals about water and climate and food with professionals through stories.

The web documentary will be launched at the Amsterdam International Water Week AIWW in November 2019 (www.internationalwaterweek.com). It's an excellent programming for a broad audience, for professionals and people interested in the environmental and social consequences of climate change and everyone who has the ambition to change the world. We are thinking about screening events in Vietnam and other countries. We think this *Me and Mekong* film project is just the beginning of a series on the challenges to the river deltas worldwide.

We will train local youths in the Mekong Delta on how to make videos about water, climate and environmental issues. This workshop will be held in An Giang Province from August 1-4. Their videos will be part of our final web documentary. ■

For more info, visit nextblue/en/



WIND CHASERS

Kitesurfing in Vietnam delivers cheap beers and big thrills

Text by Naomi Sutorius-Lavoie

HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED OF FLYING? If the answer is yes, you are not alone. For centuries humans have looked with longing to the sky and wondered what it might feel like to take flight. Leonardo Da Vinci was so obsessed with this notion that he invented a model for a hang glider in 1496, but it is believed that the first man-carrying kite was invented in China as far back as the 7th century. Ask any kid what super power they wish they had, the ability to fly will always be the most popular answer.

Kitesurfing, a sport that made its major mainstream debut in 1999 might be the latest answer to our endless quest for flight and ultimately the feeling of freedom and exhilaration that comes from gliding through the air. With a board strapped to their feet and a kite in their hands, riders carve the waves, being plucked up by the power of the wind and dropped back down into the

surf zone for a thrilling ride and for more advanced riders, the opportunity to pull off tricks and get big air. It's a great sport for adrenaline junkies because you are playing with not just one, but two uncontrollable and ever changing elements—the wind and the waves—amplifying both the highs and the challenges associated with the sport.

“The feeling of harnessing the wind with the kite in your hands is a feeling of tremendous power, one that requires respect,” says Canadian kitesurfer Kieran Lawler who's been hooked on the sport for the last seven years. “It may look easy watching from the beach, but the kite requires caution and a steady hand.” That being said, most kitesurfing junkies readily admit that very few things in life come close to the sheer freedom experienced when harnessing the power of the wind, skimming across the glittering water and being lifted up into the air.

Lawler represents a new brand of tourist for Vietnam, the high-octane adventure seeking sport traveler. Amongst millennials in particular, there is a growing number of people who want to combine their favorite physical activity and their travels into one ultimate experience. For real kitesurfing enthusiasts, it's more than just a sport, it's a lifestyle and they are willing to travel far from home to live it for a few weeks up to a few months a year. They are constantly seeking to challenge themselves with bigger waves, wind and air and, of course, to bask in the afterglow of an epic session on the water in some new far-flung destination.

Expanding the Wave

While the laid back palm fringed beach town of Muine has been on the radar of die-hard kitesurfers from abroad and weekend warriors from Saigon for the better part of 20 years now, Vietnam is



Binh Nguyen

still not top of mind for many kitesurfers when asked if they would consider it for a holiday. “Does it have good wind? Variable conditions from waves to chop to flat buttery water? A good vibe and chill scene on the beach after I finish my session in the water?” asks Lawler. “Then yeah, I would definitely consider it for my next kitesurfing getaway.”

If that’s all it takes, Vietnam can more than deliver to the foreign tourist and at an affordable price tag too compared to its major kiteboarding counterparts such as Spain, Portugal, Zanzibar, Hawaii and the Dominican Republic.

Muine regularly has kiteable winds all year round and boasts 20 to 25 days of good wind a month, making it one of the best places to go kitesurfing in Southeast Asia. It is packed with kitesurfing schools and you often see upwards of 150 kites in the water.

While that may seem a little

crowded, according to Binh Nguyen a kitesurfing instructor and owner of the popular Binh Yen Homestay, there’s more than enough space for everyone. Binh feels there is so much more room for the region to grow in terms of tourism and that it has loads to offer the visiting adventure sport traveler, from cheap beers to big thrills out on the water.

Binh is somewhat of a local celebrity as he was amongst a team of the first Vietnamese athletes to participate in snowboarding at the Asian Winter Games in Sapporo in 2017. Whether he is skateboarding, snowboarding or kiteboarding, Binh feels that life is better with a board strapped to his feet. Thanks to his many years as a martial arts student, he is known as a patient and gentle instructor who guarantees he will get you standing up. It’s a claim you would be hard pressed to doubt given the fact that he competed in Olympic snowboarding when he had never even set foot on snow before. If he says you can do it, then you can. “Why should Muine only be for experienced riders?” says Binh. “I’m here to teach everybody, from local kids to visiting tourists.”

With lovely beaches and warm weather, choppy waves and no coral reef to cause injuries and, most importantly, great wind conditions, a world class location like Muine is for everyone, from first time riders to lifelong enthusiasts for whom kitesurfing is tantamount to a religion.

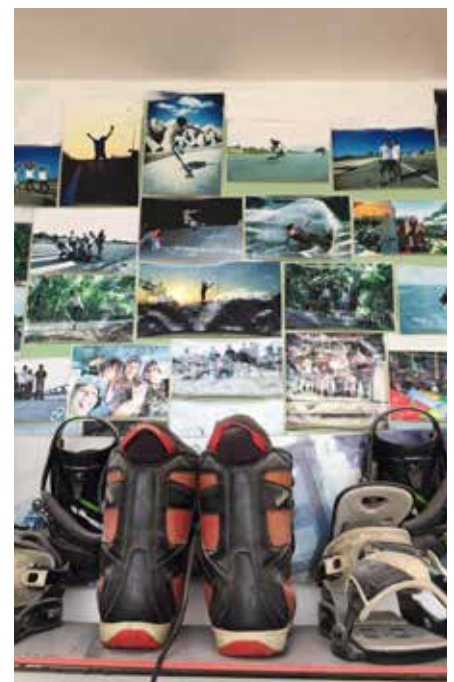
Learning to kitesurf is no easy feat though so be prepared to invest some time and money at a good kite school with certified instructors. While the costs of kitesurfing

lessons is still very reasonable in Vietnam, a basic introductory course is three hours and this won’t get you up standing up. Lessons start with learning to steer the kite by flying it from the beach, safety instructions for self-rescue and body dragging through the water. Most instructors say that students can be standing up and doing the basics with only five to nine hours worth of instruction. Even better is the fact that kitesurfing is not reserved for just the super fit athletic types, anyone from the age of 10 onwards can learn as the level of difficulty depends on the water/wind conditions and how crazy you want to get when it comes to performing tricks. You can go for big air and rough waves or just a calm chill ride on flat water. It’s all up to you to decide how you want to grow into this sport.

Over the last few years, the popularity of kitesurfing has rapidly picked up speed in other parts of Vietnam as well, such as the well developed coastal city of Danang, the glitzy resort town of Nha Trang and the latest chilled out kitesurfing destination, Phan Rang, just three hours north of Muine.

The polar opposite of the choppy waters of Muine, Phan Rang has perfect flat water in the My Hoa Lagoon in addition to clean breaks, a spacious sandy beach and crazy strong wind of 20+knots most days. A burgeoning kitesurfing community has sprung up there so if you want to get in on that action before it becomes too crowded, you best pack your bags soon.

When it comes to kitesurfing in Vietnam, just like the sport itself, the sky is (not) the limit! With its growing popularity and new great windy spots being ‘discovered’ or more like ‘disclosed’ by the local kitesurfing community to the lucky travelers that venture here, this isn’t just a figure of speech but rather a matter of fact. ■



Life With Ly

Meet Ly Hai, Vietnam's entertainment mogul and creator of the hit comedy horror series *Face Off*

Text by Michael Arnold
Image Provided by Ly Hai Production

IF YOU'D WANDERED DOWN ANY random street in Vietnam during the early 2000s and glanced into the lounge room window of any home, you would most likely have seen a TV set lit up with Vietnam's first musical/movie concept album *Life With You* (*Trọn Đời Bên Em*), a popular DVD release that was so original it catapulted its creator—then waning pop star Ly Hai—to immediate success.

Perfectly timed for an era when DVD piracy had yet to gut the industry, the album was a dramatic 60-minute presentation with a romantic narrative that included six original songs. No other Vietnamese artist before Ly Hai had released such a work, and Vietnamese music fans were so intrigued by the idea that the album had an immediate and profound cultural impact.

"The first *Trọn Đời Bên Em* fell into the pop ballad genre, which met the taste of the market at that time," says Ly Hai, now in his early 50s and still very much the shy country lad from My Tho he started out as. "I found that my voice suited this genre quite well, which I hadn't realized before. With some success in both pop/dance styles and now ballad music—as well as the fact that I also composed the songs, wrote the lyrics, and wrote the script, those factors really helped me to impress the audiences at that time."

Following the original *Life With You* album in 2000, Ly Hai went on to put out one album in the series per year, each lasting for around 90 minutes and featuring 7–10 songs. The narrative formats for each release had their own unique dramatic plots in varying cinematic styles—action, romance, and (most popular with audiences) comedy. Between 2000–2010, Ly Hai released a total of 10 *Life With You* albums, featuring a range of musical genres that included pop, ballads, hip hop, R&B, country and dance, among others.

Ly Hai seems an unlikely character for the kind of pioneering work in music,

filmmaking and dramatic performance that typifies his career. He both was and was not destined for a life as a performer—the first giveaway was how, as a very small boy who suffered from a speech impediment that affected his way of talking but not his singing voice, he tended to communicate in song. This drew so much derision from his classmates that he studiously avoided any interest in the arts for the remainder of his school career, turning instead towards sports. He was drawn to volleyball, but was almost too short to be on the school team and absolutely too short to enrol at a sports university—so when a recruiter for Saigon's School of Art and Theater II (now the School of Theatre and Cinema of Ho Chi Minh City) came to scout for talent, he joined the examination for fun and ended up being among the 20 out of 1000 regional applicants to be awarded a scholarship.

In those austere times, however, musicians were even less likely to eke out a living by performing than they are in regular times. Ly Hai toughed out the entertainment circuit, hitting all the venues he could until he tired of the rude wealthy patrons, and then toured the entire country with arts troupes—but was only able to string together a moderate success based on his pop numbers and distinctly Michael Jackson-influenced dancing. Things improved significantly when he was invited to perform on HCMC TV and became a regular feature as "the star with the golden legs"—but by the time the 90s closed, ballads were the dominant popular musical form of choice, and Hai rapidly found his style falling out of favor with local audiences.

Life With You changed everything. The man who'd once owned just two changes of clothes and a bicycle became one of the first ten Vietnamese singers to own his own car. Hai is pointedly reluctant to talk about his material

successes, however, focusing solely on his passion for his work and family—good, old-fashioned country values.

According to Hai, what changed his life most wasn't success, but romance. In 2002 he made the acquaintance of a bright, engaging model and law graduate named Minh Ha (Ha went on to graduate with a master's degree in law in the UK), somehow bumbling his way into a relationship with her after a couple of years' friendship while the pair worked on his fifth sequel to *Life With You*. They've had a singularly successful marriage and are now counting four kids.

"My life totally changed since I got married," admits Hai. "Before I usually stayed up late for work, went out with friends afterwards, and woke up at noon every day. After I got married—especially when we had kids—my life changed; now all I want to do is come back home early to be with my family, to have dinner with my wife.

"Now my life is more stable; my house is fully equipped for work without the need to go anywhere. We have all the in-house facilities we need—a gym, a swimming pool, a cinema, and everything. Lately, almost every meeting, including with magazines, seeing friends, working meets, castings etc. take place at home. We barely go out."

For her part, Minh Ha is as manifestly devoted to the family as her husband, and has been instrumental in building the next phase of Ly Hai's career as a filmmaker, working as his co-producer.

"From 2010, he wanted to be a director and produce movies," explains Ha. "From that time, he reviewed all the lessons he'd studied at university and taught himself how to be a director and a script writer, as well as how to produce a movie. I researched all the materials for him online and I translated it for him from English."

"His first script was *Lost Secret (Bí Mật Lại Bị Mật)*. He was co-director with his friend, the actor Nhat Cuong, before he went on to produce his first solo feature, *Face Off (Lật Mặt)*. At first it was very hard, we went everywhere and we talked to everybody and no one helped us. He'd changed to a new career that people thought he didn't know anything about, and no one helped us. We had to invest our own money into the first movie, and then it became a blockbuster and had a very good profit, and so after that time we just did the work ourselves. We don't need anybody else. Now we have a lot of investors who want to join, it's a different situation."

Hai went on to enjoy considerable success with his film career, setting up his own film company Ly Hai Production in 2014, through which he wrote and produced his popular *Face Off* series, as well as composing and recording the films' OSTs. *Face Off* was named the most popular online movie in the 2016 WebTV Asia Awards, while *Face Off 2* won him the award for Best Director in the Korean Culture & Global Entertainment Awards 2016. *Face Off 3: The Imperfect Trio* was in top five local films with the highest GBO in 2018, and *Face Off 4: The Walking Guest* is currently among the top four local films with the highest GBO of all time, recently becoming the second Vietnamese film to achieve a general cinematic release in the USA, also being released in Australia.

According to Hai, the secret to his success is always staying ahead of the trends.

"Web dramas, for example, are now a hot trend—but I did it 10 years ago," he smiles. "That's one of the reasons why I've been successful. There are many things that people are doing in their web dramas that imitate my *Life With You* series. I was also the first to release a free album online in 2009, earning money from ringtones. At that time, DVDs and CDs weren't selling well because of piracy, so singers had to change to another way of making money

from music, which was ringtones and call waiting tones. After few years, another emerging trend was earning from YouTube views, and I was also a pioneer in this."

As a successful filmmaker, Hai remains optimistic about the potential of the Vietnamese film industry. "They filmed the King Kong movie in Vietnam," he is quick to point out. "Vietnam has so many beautiful views and a beach that extends from north to south, as well as mountains, waterfalls, and so on. Foreign filmmakers should really be encouraged to come and invest in Vietnam. There may be some disadvantages, as people still don't know about us and we're still poor in technique and post-production. But we have to try to show them what we have, and it's best if we can cooperate with foreign resources." ■





Hau Dong

Trance Formation

I repent.

*I bow to thee, deities of Heave and of the Forests,
We are here at this temple today to offer thee these thrones.
Descend to this temple,*

Witness our souls.

*Hear our prayers and forgive us for the
Humble offerings.*

We are thine.

These offering are thine.

Please bless us with prosperity, wisdom and grace.

I pray to thee.

Please let us live in harmony and unity.

I pray to thee.

Reply

Witness thy souls and prayers, I do!

I thank thee for being there.

I thank thee for these offerings.

Do not fear anything.

I have come from afar.

Where I control the way things go.

Having consulted the deities, I say

I bless thee with prosperity, wisdom and grace.

I bless thy family too.

I bless thee with success in what you do.

I bless that thee are loved, I bless thee with wealth.

I bless thee.

American photographer Tewfic El-Sawy spent over two years documenting *Hau Dong*—an age-old spirit possession ritual that involves supplication, spirit incarnation, elaborate costumes and singing. The following articles— *The Mother of All Things*, *The Spirit Medium* and *The Singer*—are edited excerpts from his book *Hầu Đồng: The Spirit Mediums of Viet Nam*.

Tewfic El-Sawy (www.telsawy.com) is a New York City-based freelance photographer who specializes in documenting endangered cultures, religious rituals and traditional life-ways of Asia, Latin America and Africa. Known as “The Travel Photographer,” he also leads photography workshops and expeditions, publishes photo books and teaches multimedia and documentary photography. He is one of the original faculty members of the Foundry Photojournalism Workshop. He is also the founder of the popular The Travel Photographer blog (thetravelphotographer.exposure.co). He has produced and published a number of photo books such as *Bali: Island of Gods*, *DARSHAN* but it is his latest, *Hầu Đồng: The Spirit Mediums of Viet Nam* that he is most proud of. This 170-page photo book is an exhaustive documentary on trances, possession, spirit worship, fortune telling and clairvoyance, fashion and pageantry, sacred music and hymns, faith, belief, superstition, the supernatural, nationalism and history that constitute Vietnam’s indigenous Dao Mau religion and its rituals. Tewfic is the only non-Vietnamese photographer to have documented this ancient but vibrant tradition in such depth.

Hầu Đồng: The Spirit Mediums of Vietnam is available at these locations:

Blurb Bookstore:

www.blurb.com/b/7257989-h-u-ng-the-spirit-mediums-of-vietnam

Amazon Bookstore:

www.amazon.com/x1EA7-x110-x1ED3-Mediums-Vietnam/dp/1367352347



The Mother of All Things

Text and Images by **Tewfic El-Sawy**

MY CAREER AS A TRAVEL

photographer is underpinned by a fascination with ancient religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals still observed and practiced around the world, and it is this core fascination that steers my image-making, and provides context to many of the photographic expeditions-workshops I organize and lead.

It was on such a photo expedition in northern Vietnam in late 2014 that I was introduced to a ceremony of the indigenous religion of *Dao Mau*. Hearing chants and music coming from the small Gia Quoc Cong Vu Van Mat temple in Bac Ha, but finding no one who could understand English amongst the audience, I asked patrons in a nearby restaurant, and was told it was a *Hau Dong* ceremony.

I had heard that term a day earlier in Sa Pa when religious music drew me to a small nondescript building on Fansipan Road. Asking a passerby

what the building was, I was told it was Den Hang Pho, a temple. I walked in and met women in long red robes who were preparing a rehearsal for a *Len Dong* (or *Hau Dong*) ceremony planned for the following day. I was allowed to photograph and, despite my being in the way during their processions, the women seemed pleased I dropped by. I did not know it then, but this group of worshippers are called *ban hoi*; an ad hoc “sisterhood” who belong to a *Dao Mau* temple.

My imagination went in overdrive when I later learned *Hau Dong* ceremonies involved mediums who communicate with the spirits of the *Dao Mau* pantheon. It was the evening ceremony in Bac Ha that triggered my interest in documenting this form of indigenous worship and adopting it as a long-term personal photographic project.

Since starting on this personal project, I’ve attended over three dozen

Hau Dong ceremonies. Many were in the capital city of Hanoi and its suburbs, and others far in the east and north of the country, such as Hai Phong, Lang Son, Quang Ninh and Kiep Bac. Some went on all day (or all night), while others were only a few hours long.

The timings of ceremonies are based on the Vietnamese lunar calendar and are seldom advertised. The announcements are by word-of-mouth communication amongst the community, friends and neighborhoods. Some are held in large temple complexes, others in small out of the way temples and some in tiny private temples, or even in rooms. To have access and be welcomed in ceremonies wherever they are held (especially in private settings), one must gain the confidence and trust of the community, and be accompanied by someone known to the mediums or the musicians.

All the Ladies

Dao Mau, the worship of *Mau* (the Mother Goddess), is an important part of Vietnam's folk culture and identity. Although its historical origins are not clear, many scholars believe its roots go back to prehistory when the Vietnamese worshipped nature and its manifestations. It may have originated in the farmlands where people worshipped the heavens for favorable weather; worshipped earth for bountiful harvest; worshipped water to avoid disastrous floods and lastly worshipped the country's highlands because it provided defense against northern invaders (China and Mongolia).

The Mother Goddess religion is based on the worship of goddesses. These goddesses are the Lady of the Kingdom, *Thien YA Na* (The Lady of the Realm), *Ba Chua Xu* (The Lady of the Storehouse), *Ba Chua Kho* and *Princess Lieu Hanh*. It is associated with spirit mediumship rituals—known in Vietnam as *len dong*, *hau bong* or *hau dong*. It is also practiced in other parts of Asia, such as Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Dao Mau can be described as a syncretic religion mixing elements of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, with substantial influences from other indigenous religions of Vietnam. Each domain, or realm, to which the spirits are assigned, have a specific color, and determine the color of the mediums' costumes, headdress and even ritual implements. The color red is assigned to the domain of Heaven, the yellow to the Earth domain, the white to the Water domain and the green to the Mountains and Forests domain.

Since *Dao Mau* was born in the oral tradition, it does not exist in written form. The tradition lived on for millennia, passing from generation to generation through ritual, ceremonies, songs and dances and poetry.

The basic difference between *Dao Mau* and other religious traditions (including shamanistic beliefs) is that it is not concerned with life after death, but with life now. It is essentially a woman's religion, and is concerned with people's success, health, material benefits and good fortune during their time on earth, rather than in the afterlife.

In contrast with other universal religions, the cult of Mother Goddesses has neither a structured doctrine nor an organized clergy. It is grounded in daily life's tribulations and contentments, and is concerned with the here and now of people's existence, which explains its appeal to the younger generation. It also extols Vietnamese traditional values, virtues and naturally, its history and culture.

Hau Dong is one of the primary rituals of the *Dao Mau* religion and embodies the worship of mother goddesses in Vietnam. It is technically a ritual of spirit mediumship and literally means "receiving the incarnations of spirits" in Vietnamese. There are variations of the term, such as *len dong* ("mounting the medium"

or "going into a trance"), and *hau bong* ("servicing the spirits").

The religious buoyancy of the past two decades in Vietnam increased the opportunities for earning an income from mediumship. Many mediums make a reasonable income from their religious work and depending on their marketing acumen can become quite wealthy.

The ritual of *Hau Dong* takes between two to seven hours, and must start by submitting petitions to Buddha and to the spirits of *Dao Mau* for the ceremony to proceed. This is carried out by a spirit priest (*thay cung*) capable of reading and writing the petitions in archaic Sino-

Vietnamese language. These men (as they always are) are Buddhist "masters" who were brought to Buddhist temples at a young age, and are taught the ancient Vietnamese characters along with written Chinese, but remain laymen throughout their lives.

The ceremonial rites start with mediums sitting at the center of the area in front of the altars, surrounded by at least two assistants (*hau dang*). Dressed in simple white satin pajamas, they light incense sticks, chew on betel leaf-areca wads, and may smoke. They often close their eyes and sway to the rhythm of the *chau van* music. ■





The Chau Van Singer

MY NAME IS TRỊNH NGỌC MINH, I'm 36 years old and live on Hang Buom. I was born and raised here. During my childhood, I was always near temples and as a four-year-old I walked into the nearby temple and witnessed my first *Hau Dong*. It was there that I saw a male spirit dressed in blue, and I could not stop obsessing about him.

Realizing I loved music, my parents sent me to a famous school of music. At the graduation, my classmates who are *hat van* singers took me to a *Hau Dong* ceremony, and after attending a few ceremonies, I became enamored with this type of devotional music and singing. I felt it was a valuable art of Vietnam, and I researched it, and gained more knowledge. My teacher is Nguyen Tat Kim Hung who lives not far from here on Hang Bac. He is one of the greatest and most famous in Vietnam. I always admired and respected him since my first meeting with him.

It was not until I was 24 years old that I really got involved in *Hau Dong* and started to take it seriously by participating as a singer in as many ceremonies as I could find. A year later, I formally started my own career of *Hau Dong* so that makes it 11 years that I'm a professional. My temple is Den Hang Bac, a few minutes walk from my home. When I started this career, I just thought I was paired with fate, and never considered being a Master. I have much support from many, especially my parents who gave me much help to choose this profession.

It was financially very difficult at first, and I couldn't get enough money for my ceremonies. I had just married and had no stable job and very little money. It was very expensive to finance even a single ceremony. I was offered by the National Art and Culture to sing *hat van* as an art form, but I quit after a short time because *Hau Dong* is much more important to me. Both are my soulmates to which I direct my passion and dreams.

Hau Dong is the cultural spirit of Vietnam. Only those with true hearts can

follow this belief system. When you have a strong belief in it, you get peace in your whole life. The spirits are intangible, and cannot be touched or seen. When people face life difficulties but cannot share these with other people, they resort to the sainted spirits.

Before a ceremony, there is a magnitude of things to prepare. Counting only costumery, the number could go up to hundreds excluding jewelry and accessories. For a perfect *Hau Dong*, many people do important backstage tasks, and yet they are generally unseen.

When an individual wishes to hold a ceremony, they have to start it by wearing a scarf, which represents the intersection between the dead and the living. Before being covered by the scarf, they are human but when under the scarf, they offer their bodies to the spirits. They are then able to foretell future events. However, they are aware of everything around them because the spirits only borrow their bodies. The *hat van* singers are the storytellers, and both need synergy in their understanding to have successful ceremonies.

In ceremonies, a male medium can act as a female spirit, and vice versa. Males become graceful and feminine when they represent female spirits, and the reverse is true. In *Hau Dong*, there is no distinction in genders.

You ask about the cost of ceremonies. The cost can range from VND20 million to VND1 billion. Like a dinner party, it really depends on many factors; the number of guests, the quality and quantity of food, the medium, the location of the temple and many other things.

I have many favorite temples. They are historical ancient temples, and national treasures. My two favorite spirits are Hoang Bay and Hoang Muoi (The Seventh and Tenth Prince of the Mother Goddess Pantheon).

There are many benefits to *Hau Dong*. Many sick people who cannot be cured in hospitals find they are healed when they attend a ceremony or two; even from the most hazardous diseases.

There are many such cases that I know of. The advice given by the spirits through the mouths of mediums must be followed. There are always distortions in every religion, and we must be careful of mediums who distort the truth.

Many Vietnamese believe *Hau Dong* is superstition, and some even consider it to be ridiculous but it was recognized as a national religion of Vietnam. It was also submitted to UNESCO to be recognized as an intangible cultural heritage in 2017.

Superstition involves something unethical or of amoral values. The spirits are respected and idolized, and the Vietnamese must reject actions that give a bad name to this religion or that affects its purity.

The participants in *Hau Dong* ceremonies have many diverse reasons to get involved. For instance, they may gather and invite many people to their ceremonies when they are in need to make more money. As with Christianity, some in the audiences ask for health, others ask for wealth and others ask for luck in their business and in their love life.

The costumes come from many places such as Ha Dong, Thuong Tan and most especially Hang Quat street. To prepare for a ceremony, mediums need at least 15-17 sets of colorful costumes. Some of the costume designs are so elaborate that they need some twelve months to sew and embroider. Costumes are critical to the success of the ceremonies, and must be treated with the utmost care.

Being a *dong thay*, I wish I could spread the true meaning of *Hau Dong* and guide people to the right way of morality, the good aspects of life. *Hau Dong* is a way of life, a deep-seated culture that helps people and their lonely souls. It is the spiritual beauty that only belongs to Vietnam and nowhere else.

I hope more and more Vietnamese people will respect *Hau Dong* and experience it to relieve their souls by praying and have their wishes listened to by the spirits. I also hope this faith will reach a worldwide audience. ■

The Spirit Medium



MY NAME IS LE THỊ THU TRANG.

I am 33 years old, married with two children, a shopkeeper in Hanoi, and I am also a medium, a *thanh dong*.

I became a *thanh dong* when I was 25 years old, at the time I got married. Before that time, I had severe insomnia and whenever I managed to sleep I was always dreaming of Ong Hoang Muoi (the Tenth Prince of the Pantheon of the Mother Goddess religion). In these dreams, he always asked me to wear yellow clothes. I was vaguely familiar with *Hau Dong* but wasn't interested in it. So I started to research this belief, and after a year of studying it, I was paired with Ong Hoang Muoi. This pairing didn't happen in a temple or pagoda, but at home. I took it more seriously and visited temples more frequently, and on a regular basis. This caused a rift between me and my husband Dao Ngoc Doanh, and we separated for a while.

In 2013, my husband took me to a large temple where a *Hau Dong* was being performed, and while watching it I became entranced, and my whole body started to sway. I was possessed by my husband's great great great grandmother, and entered my mind and body, ordering me to accept my being paired with Ong Hoang Muoi.

My teacher-master is Nguyen Van Ba who lives in Phuc Lai, Bac Ninh

Province, instructed me to return to my husband and his family to settle down, and enact my destiny alongside them, and that they would be welcome me back. He told me to go to Tam Phu temple in Gia Binh, Bac Ninh and that it would be the right one for me.

Since I became a *thanh dong*, I sleep much better and have no nightmares or disturbing dreams like in the past. I am always surprised whenever I am about to start a *Hau Dong*, I get a vision—or a dream—of Ong Hoang Muoi falling to Earth, and giving me the necessary instructions.

After a difficult time, I now have the strong support of my husband and his family for my *thanh dong* work. I am jubilant about this. He and his family help me to prepare for ceremonies. As I have no special temple, I meet the spirits in many temples and we have to travel to many locations to choose one. It then takes 2-3 months in advance preparation to have a good ceremony. The expenses can vary from one ceremony to the other. It depends on the number of guests, the temple and the distance from Hanoi.

I don't have a specific temple, but I always meet Ong Hoang Muoi at Tam Phu temple where I am paired. I only perform two ceremonies every year or whenever he advises me to have one. During a ceremony, I am still aware of all happening around me. I also listen to

chau van songs to make it easy for the spirits to come in my body.

I know many people think *Hau Dong* is superstition, but worshipping the Mother Goddess is a religion, and not superstition. Thanh Mau gave birth to the whole universe, so it's not superstition. When I am performing a ceremony, I feel that my whole family is getting its benefit.

Female mediums find it much more difficult than men to become *thanh dong*. The process is more challenging, and women have more duties at home. My husband and I have to work to support our family, and it's not easy to be a medium and work at the same time.

Costumes are very important to me, and I ordered 22 sets from tailors working in Thuong Tin village. They are expensive, but I take good care of them and keep them in a special box.

I noticed that *Hau Dong* has become more popular among the young people, especially those born in 1990-91. However, their interest is just superficial, and they like it because of the fashion, the styling and the music. To get involved in it, they would have to spend a lot of time, effort and money and they don't want to do that. Only those who get *can dong*, the divine calling to become a medium, can get the necessary support from their families, community and friends. Otherwise, it is impossible. ■



Her Color

Color has the power to evoke every type of feeling. From femininity and masculinity, to emotions and cravings. Summer colors are all about vibrant, rich and bold colors - take inspiration from the sunshine, ocean and summer blooms. Have fun in the sun by embracing these bold colors, but don't forget to integrate plenty of white as well - it's the official 'non-color' of the summer season.





Clothing: **Umbrella** by Doan Quynh Nhi
(umbrella-fashion.com)

Photographer: **Rong Nobita**

Stylist: **Phuc Tran**

Makeup Artist: **Khang Le**

Model: **Maria R.**







The Finer Things





Members Only

An app that offers a license to luxury

Text and images by James Pham

IN THE 80S, MY DAD HAD A chintzy maroon jacket which he wore everywhere. It paired with bell-bottom jeans or sensible polyester dress slacks with equal ease. The kid in me thought it was the coolest thing ever, not just because it was shiny and had shoulder epaulettes but because it had a tiny label which read “Members Only”. What secret society was my father a part of? And would I be able to join when I got older?

The idea of belonging to an exclusive group with access to some of life’s finest pleasures is the driving concept behind WisePass, a lifestyle membership available in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Bangkok and Manila. With a month’s Standard membership costing VND6,000,000, users are able to receive a service (or “pass” in WisePass-speak) once a day for 30 days at over 300 partner venues (think: lunch at Runam, a bottle of Absolut at Hard Rock Cafe, or even a chiropractic

session). A Premium Membership (VND15 million) allows two Standard passes or one Premium pass a day.

Luxury is defined as “a condition of abundance, or great ease and comfort” which sounds a lot like the WisePass tagline of “Enjoy anything, anytime, anywhere”. Launched in 2016, the company hopes to log 20,000 passes a month by the end of the year. At a reasonable cost of VND200,000 per day at the Standard level, I set out to answer a few questions: Is WisePass worth the VND6 million a month? Would I be treated the same as a regular paying customer? Would services and products be the same quality as if I paid cash? And what would my ego (and waistline) look like after a month of living like the 1%?

Day 1: Lunch at San Fu Lou

I download the WisePass app (available on both iOS and Android) on my phone and head to a San Fu Lou at lunchtime.

The server helps me scan the WisePass QR code on the distinctive black pyramid by the cashier to redeem my set lunch. She brings over a special menu just for WisePass customers and when she’s not looking, I compare it to the regular menu. Serendipitously, the regular menu indicates how many pieces each serving has and I can confirm both menus are the same. Dishes come out quickly—an appetizer, dim sum, and a noodle dish. Value: VND290,000

Day 2: Breakfast at Propaganda

I normally scarf down a quick breakfast to start the day, but since Propaganda is one of the few WisePass partners to serve breakfast, I head out for a leisurely stuffed *banh mi* and an iced Vietnamese coffee. While not quite adding up to the average VND200,000 of a pass, Propaganda’s colorful murals in the regal shadows of the Notre Dame Cathedral always put a smile on my face. Value: VND150,000



House of Barbaard



Propaganda

Day 3: Adjustment at 3C Care Chiropractic Center

Stretching this morning, I hear a troubling pop in my neck followed by shooting pain. I look through the WisePass list of partners and luckily see 3C Care Chiropractic Center, conveniently located at Vincom B. I book an appointment and soon Dr. Kevin Mernissi (France) is deftly feeling out points of tension and stiffness while providing a reassuring running commentary. He cracks my neck with a bone-jarring crunch ("just gas", he assures me) and the pain immediately subsides. Between the neck anomaly and tweaking my back lifting a water jug, I end up going five times, which at VND1 million per visit basically pays for the entire month of WisePass. Normally a Premium service (along with most dinners, higher-end brands of liquor, etc.), WisePass is allowing Standard users to access this service for a limited time as a tantalizing glimpse into the world of higher-value WisePass options. Total value over 5 trips: VND5.25 million

Day 4: Haircut at House of Barbaard

Could a USD20 haircut really be that much better than my usual USD5 haircut? I head to House of Barbaard to find out, a posh Old School barbershop where a guy in an old-timey flat cap and suspenders spends a glorious hour meticulously washing, cutting, and styling my hair. Afterwards, I sip on an included drink in the lounge below, the ultimate Man Cave with tufted leather sofas and a jazzy soundtrack. Now that I've been reminded what a proper haircut feels like, I don't think I can ever go back. Value: VND450,000

Day 6: Sharing the wealth at Board Game House

While most passes are meant for one, I gather up some friends and take advantage of the deal at Board Game House Saigon which allows entry for 3 people, including a drink for each of us, and a plate of chicken wings and fries to share. The staff recommend a few board games, patiently sit with us to explain



San Fou Lou



Image by Board Game House



Latest Recipe

single Standard pass for VND750,000 or five for VND3,000,000. For this brunch (as well as most bottle services), it's actually a great deal if you want to bring along a non-WisePass user. Value: VND1,500,000

Day 16: Cocktails at Shri

From the very beginning, WisePass has targeted the "going out" crowd, offering bottles of liquor at some of the city's hottest clubs and lounges. Even with the addition of restaurants, health clubs, movie theaters, and more, redeeming bottles is still one of the best-value uses of WisePass. I get a small group together and head to Shri, known for its 23rd storey views and amazing cocktails. We redeem a bottle of Havana Club 3-Year and order a gorgeous tapas sampler. It's one of their famous Library events with DJ'd music in the Whiskey Room hidden behind a sliding bookcase. At most venues, you'll need to order mixers to go along with your WisePass bottle, but Shri has them all beat, offering 70% off their legendary cocktails (normally VND250,000) when using WisePass alcohol. We happily indulge and stretch out the bottle to make 15 of Shri's famous cocktails inspired by Saigon neighborhoods and theatrically presented in a cloud of dry ice. When an average night out in Saigon can easily set you back a cool million per person, we spend a fraction of that for an awesome evening of good music, good company, and good drinks. As the WisePass provider, I immediately go from Zero to Hero with my ragtag band of friends. Value: VND2,345,000

Day 18: Lunch at Saint-Honoré

It's a sunny Sunday and I make my way to Thao Dien for lunch at Saint-Honoré. While the majority of WisePass partners are centered around Districts 1 and 3, there's a cluster in Districts 2 and 7, and more scattered around elsewhere (mainly chains like Starbucks and CGV cinemas).

the rules, and we spend a thoroughly wholesome evening building railroads across North America in Ticket to Ride and double-crossing and triple-crossing each other in Avalon. Value: VND240,000

Day 11: Brunch at Latest Recipe

I come back after 4 days out of the country, ruing the missed passes. Unlike a newspaper subscription which can be temporarily halted, it's "use it or lose it" with WisePass. Looking to make up for lost time, I reserve a spot at brunch at Latest Recipe at Le Meridien Saigon. At VND1,500,000, it's by far the highest-value dining venue at the Standard level and I happily spend a lazy afternoon in the cheery, contemporary space, downing copious amounts of fresh oysters and lobster while a guitar duo plays catchy arrangements of pop songs. In addition to monthly subscriptions, WisePass offers the option of buying a



Shri



Saint Honore

Cost of Standard WisePass membership:
VND6,000,000

Total value received: VND15,314,000

The Verdict:

Is WisePass worth the membership? Probably not if you're a homebody who enjoys cooking at home and only occasionally going out. But if you're spending at least USD200 eating out and going for drinks, it's a small price to pay to have daily access to all the WisePass venues. Especially if you live or work in District 1 or 3 where most of the venues are located, you'll likely be able to use WisePass every day without going out of your way. Having WisePass in your pocket with its curated list of venues is also like having a hip local friend who can recommend some of the city's best dining and entertainment options. WisePass also makes a great gift for that person who has everything—the gift of living like the 1% at just a fraction of the cost. ■

When I arrive for the set lunch, Saint-Honoré tells me that the WisePass lunch is only available on weekdays, although the app says it's every day. Fortunately, the manager kindly makes an exception and I'm soon enjoying prosciutto-wrapped mango and baked pesto chicken in the tranquil garden setting. Afterwards, I load up on gorgeous breads and bagels and a slice of Normandy tart. The allure for WisePass partners presumably is the ability to upsell customers on the spot, or more valuably, gain exposure to an economically-desirable segment of the market who can potentially be converted into long-term customers. With so many partners, WisePass certainly invites users to try venues they might not normally, thereby connecting customers and businesses. Value: VND185,000

Day 20: Drinks at Loft

The WisePass app gets a much-needed upgrade, now streamlining important information like exactly what a pass entitles you to, when it's available, and adding a map and telephone function. It comes in handy for venues like Loft, which offer multiple deals at the same time. I meet a friend for after-work drinks, swiping the deal for four free cocktails, and we order extra nibbles. When the bill comes, the server takes VND300,000 off the bill (one of their other offers), but we quickly get it sorted. Value: VND470,000

Day 22: Lunch at Octo Tapas

After hearing people gush for months about the best tapas in Saigon, I finally make it to Octo Tapas and I'm not disappointed. The set lunch starts off with velvety smoked eggplant that's lightly breaded and fried then topped with a dollop of fennel jam for a touch of sweetness. While the regular mains look lovely, paying VND120,000 to upgrade to Wagyu steak is a no brainer, the light char pairing well with the caramelized onion. Value: VND200,000

Day 24: Steak at Rehab Station

Planning on lunching in District 3, the venue I go to say they're no longer a WisePass partner, despite still being on the app. WisePass partners are constantly being added and deleted, with the app often not able to keep pace despite regular notifications to update. Thankfully, Rehab Station is just around the corner and I settle for a nice steak lunch with salad, Dong Son golden ale, and an ice cream finish. Value: VND250,000

Day 30: Whiskey at Hard Rock Café

It's Pink / U2 tribute night at Hard Rock Café performed by the excellent Indonesian house band. We rock out in the family-friendly atmosphere with burgers and ribs to go along with our WisePass bottle of Ballantine's Whiskey, a great way to share a final pass. Value: VND1,500,000



Octo Tapas



Loft

Serenity Through Art, Service and Indochine Style:
**Saigon's Newest Boutique
Luxury Resort**



TWO DIGITS. NOT SO LONG AGO, Saigon wasn't such a tangled frenzy of motorbike horns, construction projects, international commerce and tourist activity as attested to by the length of phone numbers here less than a century ago. The two-digit office listing found on the first page of a Saigon magazine alludes to this quieter time period. Thankfully, a sense of this serenity still exists for visitors to the metropolis. Mia Saigon, the city's newest boutique luxury resort serves as an oasis for travelers exhausted by travel thanks to its one-of-a-kind art collection, original Indochine decor, exemplary service and variety of dining options.

The referenced magazine has miraculously remained intact for decades and guests can now marvel at it during a stay at Mia Saigon. It is one of the dozens of original pieces that constitute five different collections at the hotel. Magazines, book covers, stamps, first day of issue postage sheets and propaganda posters all provide unique glimpses into the Vietnamese history, aesthetics, politics, and preoccupations during the middle of the 20th Century. They are available on each of the hotel's main

five floors so everyone can enjoy them alongside information that provides context. Moreover, every room contains an original piece from each collection.

The hotel's passionate desire to share fine Vietnamese art doesn't end there, however. Masterpieces hang throughout the hotel, including a painting by Vietnam's most valuable artist, Le Pho, two from famous Bui Xuan and selections of Chu Dau pottery. Antique coffee equipment adorns surfaces in the dining room while a variety of teapots and cups that reveal the graceful elegance that was achieved by artisans working with nothing but simple coal fires.

In addition to promoting the nation's artists, the hotel's Vietnamese owners believe in championing local craftsman and thus every piece of furniture in the 35 spacious rooms and 17 lavish suites, from carefully polished lacquer to elegant light fixtures to indulgent pillows, are handmade in Vietnam and custom designed to adhere to the graceful Indochine aesthetic. In addition to selections from each art collection, the rooms also contain unique pieces of Vietnamese ceramics that date back hundreds of years and were only recently

retrieved from a sunken ship. They serve as perfect compliments to the rooms that are each swathed in a shade inspired by a different precious jewel or gemstone.

Before one notices the details and subtle colonial style permeating the premises, one will be stunned by the view. Upon first arriving at Mia Saigon, guests get a terrific glimpse at the placid Saigon River slipping past the hotel. Each room features a private balcony from which to watch coconut-laden barges glide up it while sipping on an espresso or sampling a full breakfast brought in by a private butler. For a truly transcendent experience, the large windowed doors can be completely opened to transform the entire room or suite into an open-air space.

Of course, no number of rare paintings or breathtaking scenes can stand in for service and here Mia Saigon excels. With the motto "No is not in our vocabulary" the staff's greatest concern is catering to the unique and specific needs of each guest. Whether that means offering recommendations for the hippest dining spot, shopping boutique or art gallery in the area, procuring special sundries, or simply offering a greeting and

smile, their aim is to make visitor's feel at home because travel is an exhausting and sterile luxury and anonymous attention quickly becomes stale.

Mia Saigon's stands out amongst the city's many luxury hotels because of its location. Nestled into a sleepy stretch of land alongside the river in District 2, it remains close enough to downtown to give easy access to whatever work or play one is interested in, but still rests far enough away to provide a sense of solitude. Venturing beyond the glitzy, metropolitan city center affords visitor's a look at authentic local city life taking place in small markets and coffee shops, street-food stalls, and fishing docks.

Perhaps the perfect place to enjoy the suburban breeze and quiet air is on the hotel's roof with a cocktail in hand. Gin on the 8th is Mia Saigon's bar specializing in imported spirits from around the globe. It makes for the ideal sunset happy hour and apéritif and thankfully a variety of dining options await guests and city-dwellers alike.

Fine dining restaurant, L'Âme, whisks dishes straight from quaint kitchens and elevates them with a variety of premium local and imported ingredients and modern techniques. The Kitchen, a charming riverside standalone, serves modern-style Mediterranean dishes enhanced with Asian flavors and an elaborate selection of cheese and meats but truly shines with the breakfast buffet which features a wide range of dishes hand prepared in front of guests.

The most unique aspect of Mia Saigon's restaurant options, however, is without question the Visual Dining Experience. As of yet unseen in



Vietnam, it relies on advanced audio and video technology to take diners on a gastronomic journey through Vietnam's rich culinary legacy.

Mia Saigon's commitment to catering to weary travelers looking to recharge between business meetings or sightseeing extends to their spa. From familiar treatments to exotic offerings like the signature gold-leaf facials that rely on the precious metal's special healing properties, a visit to the convenient space helps one to truly relax. Like every aspect of the hotel, the spa operates not only with guests' health in mind but that of the planet. It, therefore, makes every efforts to use environmentally-responsible goods and practices.

While it may take more than two digits to ring Mia Saigon for a reservation (assuming one doesn't want to use the intuitive website), once there it's easy to imagine the city when it was that simple. The attentive service, meticulously designed Indochine decor complimented by previously unseen artwork and lavish dining opportunities all ease guests into a fantasy where stress, deadlines, and commotion don't exist. ■

We invite you to step into our world where unparalleled personal service, quiet exclusivity and memorable moments are all part of the Mia lifestyle.

From immediately to **30/09/2019**, we will offer you preferential prices for the Soft Opening period. Rate starting from **VND3.643.000** includes Breakfast, Dinner and other services.

For further information or reservations, please contact us at www.miasaigon.com
Phone: +84 (0) 28 628 74 222,
Email: info@miasaigon.com
Address: 2-4 Street No. 10, An Phu Ward,
District 2, Ho Chi Minh City



Elevated Expectations

Raise a glass to spectacular views, delicious light bites and refreshing cocktails

Text by **Paul Kim**

Images by **Vy Lam**



WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN

your lounge is inside the newest iconic skyscraper in Saigon? A whopping 75 floors up, perched near atop the Landmark 81 building, Blank Lounge Landmark (75F and 76F, Landmark 81, 208 Nguyen Huu Canh, District Binh Thanh) offers 360-degree views of Saigon. It's sure to impress anyone.

A modern urban theme guides the lounge. With stark and mostly unadorned concrete walls and minimalist designed furniture that seems to evoke the feel of an art gallery café, if it weren't for the colossal engulfing panoramic views. There are touches of local flair, like that of rice stalks and locally sourced gneiss. The lighting fixtures are custom made to resemble either grains of rice or rice crops in different stages of maturation. These beautiful details connect it back together with traditional Vietnam culture. We live in a social media sharing age, so you'll have more than enough content from The Blank Lounge just with the ambiance and towering line of sight.

You will come for the view, but you will stay and come back for the food and drinks. The food menu features a selection of light bites meant for sharing, while the bar list features seasonal fruit and herbs for its signature



cocktails and mocktails. Chef Deonte Daniels, seasoned and well-traveled while claiming Seattle as his origin, has created a truly unique international menu. It remains very approachable with the dishes being familiar in origins; however, Chef Daniels uses local Vietnamese ingredients, spices,

and herbs. This, of course, isn't new in the burgeoning food scene here in Saigon, but how Chef Daniels can effortlessly harmonize it with the other international flavor profiles gives it a unique stamp and will undoubtedly impress those claiming to be a "foodie" or any over-knowledgeable eater.



mocktails as they do with their cocktails. Mocktails are mostly overlooked and discredited as drinks for those with an abstention to alcohol. At Blank they are made with a variety of different native spices, fruits, vegetables, herbs and juices, they are just as rousing and imaginative as their boozy counterparts. The limoncello martini (VND190,000), salted lime pisco sour with kumquat juice (VND220,000), and Bombay sapphire with *pho* herbs (VND200,000) will make your sunset afternoon distinct.

So, what do you do when your lounge is inside the newest iconic skyscraper in Saigon? You compose everything just as impressive as the view. ■



Assorted Munchies

We had a broad array of dishes, with the beetroot cured salmon toast (VND260,000) as the most brilliant choice among a stellar selection. The cured salmon could stand with the legendary Russ and Daughters' from the former Jewish enclave of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Add the black caviar, perfectly

poached egg, cashew cheese all on top of a slice of lightly toasted sourdough bread with a smear of Thai basil pesto and it indeed becomes a flavor explosion of savory, sweet and sour. The side of salad with fish sauce pairs well with the smoke and salt from the salmon and caviar, creamy flavors from the cheese and egg, and the garlic from the basil pesto.

Then there is the buffalo roll (VND130,000), with *pho* flavored buffalo floss, *banh hoi* noodles, an assortment of peppers, carrots cucumber, pickled purple cabbage and accented with basil fish sauce, and vanilla and carrot sauce. Perfect for sharing with your date, client, or friends.

I would also recommend the tiger prawn and scallop ceviche with coconut crackers in a creamy coconut sauce (VND170,000). For snacking; the *pho*-spiced buffalo jerky (Yes, *pho* spiced!), and coffee coated cashews (VND140,000). For those with a sweet tooth, the coconut mousse with passionfruit (VND140,000) inside of a chocolate casing shaped to look like a coconut shell will satisfy.

Blank's beverage program takes the meticulous and time-consuming onuses of making their own syrups, limoncello and bitters. What also sets them apart is that they pay equal attention to crafting



Stranded Coconut



Salted Lime Pisco Sour



How to Wow

Stop dreaming about your fantasy wedding and start making it happen

Interview by **Di Vietnam**
Images Provided by **Bliss**

WHILE BUDGETS MAY VARY, you're only going to tie the knot once (we hope). If you're going all out to make your ceremony one nobody will ever forget, you might need the advice of a seasoned professional like Le Thi Thu Trang. Her company, Bliss (www.blissvn.com), is one of the country's premier luxury wedding and events planning services, and we bring you her advice for making your special day truly magical.

Can you introduce a bit about yourself? How did you get into the bridal industry?

I'm Le Thi Thu Trang, Founder and Director of Bliss Weddings & Events Planner Vietnam. For a long time, weddings in Vietnam have become mandatory rituals with boring procedures. I used to live in the US before 2010 and at that time I was thinking about bringing Western style weddings to Vietnam for two reasons: Western couples would be able to experience Vietnamese culture in their weddings and Vietnamese couples could try new wedding styles from Western countries, such as an outdoor wedding or a beach wedding, which were

not popular in Vietnam at that time. Therefore, in 2010, I decided to return to Vietnam and create Bliss to help couples enjoy their special day as I did.

Why is a good wedding planner so invaluable?

Wedding planners can help couples create their desired look and style; even venues with onsite coordinators can't provide the detailed service that a wedding planner can. No one wants exactly the same wedding as someone else and it's the little details of your wedding day that make it so individual and special. A wedding planner can help you pull all these little details together, style your venue and work with your suppliers to create the exact look and feel you want.

Wedding planners can keep things stress free: Organizing a wedding means making a huge amount of decisions, which can be very overwhelming. A good wedding planner will take the stress out of the process, giving as little or as much support as you need, reassuring you about your decisions and assisting you with those you're unsure about.

Wedding planners are the 'go to' person so you can enjoy your big day: Imagine if the suppliers you booked were contacting you on your wedding day to find out exactly where the cake knife is, where the band should get ready and what they are having for their tea before they go on stage... Now imagine if all these calls were coming through to you on the day and how you'd feel. Wedding planners are pros at dealing with all of this and more importantly freeing you up to relish every minute of your special day.

Now more than ever, couples are looking to make their wedding stand out. What's your advice for adding a personal touch to a wedding?

Nowadays, most couples tend to be busy with work. However, every couple expects to have a wonderful, outstanding and perfect wedding day with their own personal touch. Therefore, to add a personal touch to their wedding, we advise clients to share with our professional consultants their favorite colors, love stories, hobbies... so that we will, based on those aspects, sketch a wedding theme for them.

Can you tell us about the first ever wedding you planned and how it differed from the ones you're planning now?

The first wedding Bliss planned was an international wedding for a Japanese couple in 2010. And the difference between an international wedding in 2010 and in 2019 is that we were able to serve 30 guests only in the Japanese wedding, but for now, we can serve over 200 guests for international weddings and 1,000 guests for local weddings.

What's the most expensive wedding you've planned? What was the theme and how did you make it happen?

The most expensive wedding we have planned so far costs USD500,000 (this included food and beverage) for VIP clients and for confidential reasons, we cannot send you photos of the wedding. Due to the couple's love story and hobbies—they are both from the highland areas of Vietnam—speed and racing, we create a wedding theme for them called “Breeze of Blooming Highland” and decorate the wedding like a forest full of trees and hills. Moreover, Bliss also supplied a ceiling hanging flower system, 3D mapping, LED screens, modern sounds and lightings system and 100 percent imported fresh flowers. At this special wedding, Bliss played the role of a wedding planner as well as a decorator. We also undertook media and press support for the wedding.

Is there a minimum budget that you will only work with?

Yes, the minimum budget that we can work with as a wedding planner-cum-decorator for a destination wedding for 50 guests or less is approximately



USD30,000 (includes food, beverage and hotel).

How would you describe your style of planning/event design?

We would describe our style of planning design as creative, unique and trendy. We will base it on the couple's ideas mostly but along with that, we also look for trendy ideas from other countries to combine so that the wedding not only meet the couple's requirements but also follow global trends.

What can a couple expect when working with you as their wedding planner?

We will handle everything for them that is related to their wedding, such as the hotel/ resort, food and beverage, wedding dress, makeup, photographer, decoration, etc. We have a policy where we do not accept commission from our partners.

Do you get many weird requests? If so, what's the weirdest?

I do not think we have had any weird requests from our brides and grooms, but there has been a few wonderful requests such as in 2013, Bliss planned

and decorated a wedding on Danang beach, our couple wanted to have fireworks at their wedding so it was the first wedding in Vietnam that received permission from the government for fireworks. In 2014, Bliss had a chance to work with a famous planner from Hong Kong and a couple from Hong Kong, the special thing was that the couple booked out Intercontinental Saigon for three days for their wedding. In 2015, Bliss was the planner for a celebrity in Vietnam and we were also the first wedding planner in Vietnam who tried an Indochine style wedding, all items in the wedding were from Old Saigon.

What trends do you envision for 2020?

In recent years, most couples tend to prefer something elegant but still trendy, not bold colorful weddings that we used to have. For that reason, we envision the trend for 2020 would be “Lush, Green Florals and Foliage”. Recently, couples tend to want to feel like they are being surrounded by nature and forestry in an indoor setting. There's a bigger emphasis on creating an overall natural look and feel, and greenery hanging from the ceiling is a popular new trend. ■



The Fast Lane to *Luxury*

A top choice for luxury performance connoisseurs with the desire to travel in style

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

IT'S A GREAT IRONY THAT arguably one of Maserati's strongest defining elements—the car's drive—is something hidden by necessity while the Italian vehicles rest in a showroom like the one at PetroVietnam Vietnam. Welcome to Trident Auto, Saigon's Maserati dealership.

Resting at the base of the tower complex, this glassed-in auto showroom houses just a handful of Maserati car models, including the Quattroporte mid-sized sedan and the Levante SUV. The car mostly likely to grab your attention is the gleaming white Ghibli sportscar sitting next to the reception desk. The car opens to all leather: chairs, head liner, armrests, dash, everything. One trying out the experience, playing as a prospective Maserati owner, would naturally sit in the leather front seat and rest their hands on the wheel. You'd need a test drive to get a sense of the longstanding reverie drivers have for Maseratis. The Ghibli is described as a car with quick, taut and responsive handling by auto enthusiasts.

Language of a promised good time will have to suffice unless you're

enterprising enough to take the car from the showroom it rests in, a home fitting for a legacy Italian car brand. The showroom contains imported, Italian-made decor vetted directly by Maserati. Hand-selected furniture from brands such as Poltrona Frau grace the floor like standing guards of the palace. The showroom is usually quiet, however, and usually sees clients by appointment only, a company representative explained.

So, who's buying Maseratis in Vietnam? The company representative explained that the buyers tend to middle-aged business persons who've been sufficiently successful in their careers to put a down payment on a luxury Italian car. A previous generation of successful, Saigon-residing business persons may have been more drawn to a Mercedes or a Lexus. The representative said these models have seen their star fade with a

new generation of buyers with higher buying power.

The equanimous noun “businesspersons” is used here deliberately. Maserati buyers are evenly distributed between the two genders, the representative said. There have been around 100 Maseratis sold from this showroom. The Ghibli may occupy the showroom's forward area and have the most visibility of the group, but the spokesperson said Saigonese tend to prefer the Levante. The SUV makes up about 80 percent of the vehicles sold from the showroom. Why? At least one of those reasons should be obvious: the country's precipitous rainy season makes





drivers drawn to something with a bit of a higher ride to move safely over the city's soaked streets. The vehicle's generous seating room also makes it an attractive pick for those with families or just a lot of friends.

Vietnam's streets could see a lot more of these vehicles on the road in the future, but we're talking far off future. The European Union and Vietnam have passed a trade agreement that eliminated taxes on a lot of big ticket items, like wine, some food and European-made automobiles, like the Maserati. However, the agreement does not immediately reduce the taxes on all the vehicles to zero, instead favoring a seven-year long gradual elimination. It'll be a while yet before the showroom moves its next hundred cars, but it might not take three years this time. ■



Sommelier in the Spotlight

World champion Italian sommelier
Giuseppe Vaccarini turns his attention to
the Vietnamese market

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





THROUGHOUT THE 2010S, three countries have been key to serving the world's wine: Spain, France and Italy. Together, the three of them represent well over half of the world's wine consumption by value and volume, according to data from the International Organization of Vine and Wine. Italy occupies second place in both rankings. Spain's 21,000 hectolitres of wine outsized Italy's 19,700 hectolitres in 2018. Pricier French wines generated 9.3 million euros, eclipsing the Italian wines' 6.1 million euros, which tend to be sold for around half the price of their French competitors, according to *European Supermarket Magazine*.

The French "have to fight Italy sometimes, but they're good cousins," top Italian sommelier Giuseppe Vacarrini explained congenitally to a gathered audience. The holder of the "1978 Best Sommelier of the World A.S.I." title spoke at an appearance organized by Italian consul Dante Brandi at the diplomat's home.

Italy's presence at the top of these rankings is surprising for a country with a land area of about 300,000 square kilometers, about 60 percent of the size

of both Spain and France. The country is also home to nearly 500 different wine varieties produced in the country. There are some 50 different French grapes, but France produces just 15 varieties in quantities over 10,000 hectares. Similarly, Spain has about 400 native grape species, but only about 20 are used for commercial production.

But there's only so much wine one can drink in a single life. Is more choice really better? Or as Brandi put it, "Are these an asset or a liability?" he asked Vacarrini at the event. "An asset. I'll explain why," Vacarrini responded. He said some would describe the sheer number of varieties as "crazy" compared to peer wine-producing nations, but he asserted that the wines make taste statements about the regions from which they hail. The experience of each is distinct and understanding can be taught, he said. "It's not difficult to learn. You have to memorize sensations, aromas and taste."

The sommelier said understanding enhances joy. The pedagogy and puzzle are part of the pleasure, he added. Vacarrini was awarded best sommelier in a global ranking by standard bearer the Association

de la Sommellerie Internationale 1978. He helmed the organization as president from 1996 to 2004.

But "it's hard to learn if you don't have the wines, obviously," Vacarrini said. The wine consumption of Vietnam pales in comparison to beer. A free trade agreement between Chile and Vietnam from 2011 resulted in an abundance of Chilean wines in Vietnam, *Forbes* data shows, the leading country of imported wine. A free trade agreement, which will gradually reduce tariffs on European goods inbound to Vietnam, has recently been ratified by both parties. Could Italian wines claim a greater place?

The International Organization of Vine and Wine data show that the US is a leading consumer of Italian wine, but a taste for the drink has also emerged in other less obviously wine wanting parts of the world, like Japan, Vacarrini said. The country is today a well respected home to an emerging sommelier community. The country's wine consumption per capita increased to 2.48L in 2016, a nearly 50 percent increase from five years prior, according to a report authored by Japanese beverage conglomerate Kirin.

Asked what it would take to create a similar phenomenon like that in Vietnam, Vacarrini said particular challenges stand in the way, namely Vietnamese cuisine. Food and wine are two actors that work in harmony, and Vietnamese food—it's preference for sometimes aggressive, intense tastes and the a la carte nature of the typical meal—can sometimes be a difficult dance partner for a wine typically served with a Western-style meal. He said that traveling played an important role in the integration of wine in more places in the world, both in inbound travelers visiting from other parts of the world and in outbound Vietnamese tourists experiencing foreign food traditions.

Undoubtedly, some of the work of engendering a taste for Italian wine is about developing a technical understanding and knowledge of the fluid, a knowledge of regions, vintages, etc. But for Vacarrini, a man who's spent his career living inside the world, wine knowledge seemed to be about something different than just knowing the information. The sommelier's explanation of wine centered on visceral sensations and feelings, fuzzier things than region or year.

Vacarrini said wine is part of a total experience that also calls for high quality food and service, and that the sommelier is like an orchestra director. The wine is an important part of the composition, but a supporting actor nonetheless in a broader, more visceral, felt thing. "Everytime, the sommelier has to decide an emotion, a new emotion for the customer," he said. Seen that way, Italian wine's some 500 different grape varieties are like 500 different kinds of ways to feel, and there are probably a few more ways to feel than even that. ■

A full-page photograph of a man in a dark blue button-down shirt and white trousers, leaning against a dark railing. He is looking off to the side with a serious expression. The background is dark with warm, out-of-focus lights, suggesting an outdoor night setting. The text is overlaid on the lower left portion of the image.

For Gentlemen with Attitude

Text by **James Pham**
Images by **Davide Dredge** and **Hoang Kim Quy**




EVERYTHING GREAT USUALLY begins as a simple idea with a few serendipitous twists thrown in for good measure, and House of Barbaard is no different. When Dutchman Guido de Leeuw visited Hanoi in 2015, he noticed how difficult it was to buy a nice dress shirt despite being in the “Land of Tailors”. Smitten with the idea of establishing a clothing line in Vietnam featuring European aesthetics, Guido went home and tapped best friend and graphic/product designer Tom Goedhart. The fashion-forward duo sat down to create a business plan, but soon decided

on a softer entry into the world of style and fashion—by distributing Dutch hair products suitable for Vietnamese hair, sourced from their favorite barber shop back in the Netherlands. Fast forward a year, and the two noticed another gap in the Vietnamese market—high-end haircuts for men. “When we first arrived in Vietnam and asked for a pompadour, the barbers didn’t know what we were talking about. We’d come back two days later, and they’d be there with a TV set up, ready to cut our hair while watching a YouTube tutorial,” laughs Tom. So it was that the distribution business

became an Old School barbershop loosely modeled after Schorem, a men’s only barbershop in Rotterdam specializing in classic cuts like pomps and quiffs.

Originally intended as a low-key storefront barbershop in Hanoi, a last-minute snag in leasing led the duo to renting a colonial-era villa instead (hence the “House” in “House of Barbaard”). Without the lure of a storefront setting and now needing to fill up the much larger space, the two added a small bar and seating area to the shop. “We soon found that the guys liked it so much, they

A man with dark hair, styled back, is shown from the waist up. He is wearing a light blue, long-sleeved dress shirt with dark buttons and a patterned cuff on the left sleeve. He is also wearing tan trousers and a dark red belt. He is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

didn't want to leave," recalls Tom. "They'd stay for drinks, have a cigar, and chat. It was standing room only on weekends." They also found that some customers were actually flying in from Saigon, desperate to get a decent haircut from barbers personally trained by Tom and Guido's favorite barber brought over from the Netherlands.

The Saigon location opened in early 2018 as a more fleshed out version of the House of Barbaard, complete with a gorgeous ground floor lounge done up in tufted leather sofas, dark wood, and vintage lighting. Its distinguished Man Cave feel makes it the perfect place to sip on a scotch or smoke a Cuban after your haircut, while also hosting weekly live music events and other social events.

With the Saigon version of House of Barbaard now more than a year old, the duo have turned their creative energy back to their first love, launching their clothing line this past May with five gorgeous ready-to-wear dress shirts and a whimsical

collection of dress socks. "We wanted to make a line of stylish dress shirts available to everyone.

We found that in Vietnam, it was either shirts for the bottom-end market or super-expensive, imported shirts, and nothing in between." The House of Barbaard aesthetic is for "gentlemen with attitude", sharp dressers who buck convention while remaining tastefully classy.

There's an expression that "God is in the details", and if that's true, you'll find only believers clad in House of Barbaard. Made from fine Italian or Indian fabrics, Barbaard shirts incorporate a myriad of sumptuous details, all cleverly designed to be revealed only as much as the wearer wants to show. The buttoned side gussets are a throwback to when gentlemen wore sock suspenders while the ornate embroidered logo is only seen when unbuttoning the second button. "Sometimes, you just don't want to see a logo on the chest pocket and the placement of our logo encourages people to loosen up a bit," explains Tom.

Look closely and you'll see that the all-important second button, known as the "Barbaard button", is also patterned to match a specific pair of Barbaard socks in eye-catching shades with Art Deco or Victorian motifs. "Gone are the days when a man's socks are supposed to match his trousers," says Tom. "You can be neat and sharp but still play around with your socks." He advises clients to have a whiskey in the lounge while the customizable button is sewn on to match the accompanying pair of socks.

The five styles currently available reflect a wide range of aesthetics. The Cheeky



Italian comes in a soft shade of pink with striking blue floral lining on the collar and cuffs while the Seductive Mariner sports a unique one-piece collar for extra volume and height, a throwback to the fashion of the roaring 1920s.

Impressive as House of Barbaard's foray into fashion has been, the duo promise much more is to come, including more shirt models, shoes, pants and cologne already in the works. Gentlemen with attitude, prepare yourselves for the rise of the House of Barbaard. ■

Barbaard socks (VND180,000 per pair)
Barbaard shirt and socks
(VND2,600,000 per set, or VND
6,500,000 for 3 sets)

Store locations
Ho Chi Minh City: 12/4b
Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D1
Hanoi: 36 Hang Chao,
Dong Da
www.houseofbarbaard.com

Wine & Dine

IMAGES PROVIDED BY LAANG RESTAURANT





Oasis Dining

A calm and soothing restaurant that feeds the stomach and relaxes the soul

Text by **Carly Naaktgeboren**
Images Provided by **Laang Restaurant**

SITUATED EVENLY BETWEEN bustling Xa Lo Ha Noi and Xuan Thuy Streets is the serene oasis of **Laang Restaurant** (22 Dang Huu Pho, Thao Dien, D2; www.laangsaigon.com). Its location perfectly echoes the meaning of its name, an interpretation of the Vietnamese word, “*lãng yên*,” or calm among chaos. Recently opened as part of the culinary powerhouse Quan Bui Group, Laang offers Asian style flavors from locally-sourced ingredients, as well as a wide array of coffees and cocktails. Inside, the decor is soothing shades of blue and green with wooden accents and gentle lighting. Orchids, potted plants and wired hanging lamps fill the space with a spa-like presence. Outside is a large patio with a koi pond, herb garden and decorative bells calling for relaxation.

After meandering over stone steps that hover above a small pond and entering through a heavy, nut brown door, we are seated next to the large window overlooking a fountain. Immediately pouring over the extensive menu and unable to make





just one decision, we begin with the mixed starter of wraps and rolls (VND229,000). Out came the start of our feast, sitting on a teal plate in a circular fashion and offering sizable portions of each option. We fed on crunchy fresh spring rolls made with avocado, chicken, cucumber and carrot; crispy fried spring rolls stuffed with scallop and chicken, fish patties fried in rice paper coating, and betel leaves with fried squid and prawn. In the center of the plate sits a light prawn salad made with coconut palm that melds well with the fuller flavors of the rolls. As the vegetables are local and based on what is available, many of the dishes come in slight variations or have flexible ingredients. This allows customers to sample on only the freshest of foods and try new takes on their usual favorites.

We follow up the appetizers with fried duck breast with ginger fish sauce (VND199,000) and a side of fiber melon and gourd loofah (VND79,000). The duck is cooked perfectly, with crispy edges and tender, savory meat. The plate is long enough to extend half the length of the table, and was layered from end to end with duck breast. The ginger fish sauce is just sweet and acidic enough to cut through the rich flavors of the meat. Our side of vegetables, while simple, may have been the dark horse of the dining experience. The melon and gourd are cooked lightly in oil and topped with large cloves of roasted garlic.

This is followed up with the decadent dish of fried prawns with mango-mayo sauce (VND229,000) which is as rich and flavorful as it sounds. Tasting of creamy pasta without even needing the carbs, it is an almost dessert-like treat to eat. The fruity flavor of the mango flirts coyly with the heaviness of the mayo, making for an exciting pairing that one wouldn't expect. We follow up our phenomenal lunch with iced lattes (VND55,000) and a well deserved siesta.

Seeking to bring respite to the hectic energy of city life, Laang Restaurant offers a menu with a



wide variety of options including rolls, soups, seafood and meat courses, and an extensive vegetarian selection. With soft piano music playing and the aroma of fresh, flavorful food wafting through the air, diners feel instantly at ease in the chic yet zen space. Reaching two stories



and hosting several large open, airy spaces, Laang is an excellent location for dates, family dinners, and also for hosting large events. Located at, Laang succeeds in giving customers calm among the chaos. ■



Bet The House



Elevating Vietnamese service and cuisine to the next level

Text by **Grant Hawkins**
Images Provided by **WMC Group**

ON THE CORNER OF DONG KHOI and Mac Thi Bui streets, one block from the Nguyen Hue walking street, sits **Vietnam House** (97 Dong Khoi, D1). It occupies all three floors of a newly-renovated historic building, originally built in 1910, and aims to establish a legacy for the next hundred. Created by celebrity chef Luke Nguyen, the vision of Vietnam House is to elevate Vietnamese cuisine to a much higher level. At the restaurant's two-year anniversary, we check-in and see how they're doing on this mission.

Luke Nguyen is a Vietnamese-Australian chef and restaurateur who has become the international face of Vietnamese cuisine. He has produced documentaries on the origins of Vietnamese cuisine and the influence of French cuisine, and is most well known for his appearances on *MasterChef Australia* and *MasterChef Vietnam*. In Luke's own words, Vietnam House seeks to elevate Vietnamese cuisine by "using the most incredible produce, using modern cooking techniques, and also presenting it in a very beautiful and wonderful way."

The first thing to note at Vietnam House is the incredible service. From the



Vietnam House Bean Curd

parking attendants, to the maitre d, to the servers, all of the staff are courteous, professional and easy to communicate with. After you arrive, you step into a gorgeous interior that incorporates Vietnamese themes from hand-carved wood, colorful embroidery, and stained

glass—all elevated to feel international, elegant and sophisticated.

Vietnam House has a wide selection of international wines, in addition to beer and cocktails. Our server recommended the Bordeaux Chateau La Gamaye (VND1,488,000), a 2016 mix of



Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc. A smooth, dry red with a fruity finish.

The Set Dinner (VND938,000/person) is very popular—nine signature dishes served family-style for a minimum of four people. We opted instead for the a la carte menu and began with the Soft Shell Crab & Green Mango Salad (VND238,000), followed by the Fried Shishamo (VND198,000). The green mango salad is a classic Vietnamese dish and a personal favorite, and Vietnam House stuck to the basics and did it just right. Small details like the bits of sweet pomelo and tender crab meat make this a standout. The Shishamo fish, or “egg fish” is an original: the fish are full of eggs, and crusted in green sticky rice for a surprising and delightful presentation. They are served with a tamarind dipping sauce and are great for sharing.

The main courses also range from Vietnamese classics (Fish in Clay Pot) to more creative, international dishes (Grilled Honey Glazed Whole Pigeon). We chose the X.O. Garoupa Filet Char Grilled in Banana Leaf (VND498,000) and the Wok Tossed Cubed Pepper Beef Tenderloin with Smoked Potato Mash (VND468,000). Both the fish and the steak are tender, juicy and flavorful. The fish is served with XO sauce, originating in Hong Kong and made of various types of dried seafood. The steak is cooked with capsicum, onion, Phu Quoc black pepper, garlic & oyster sauce, and comes to life with the smoky flavor of the mashed potatoes. Both dishes come with a gorgeous presentation and, if you're quick, Vietnam House does approve of food selfies.

We couldn't resist a side of Wok Tossed Morning Glory with Snails (VND168,000), made in the traditional way with yellow snails, garlic, oyster sauce and chilli. This dish demonstrates what's so special about Vietnam House: while this dish can be found at any Vietnamese restaurant, the execution and presentation here elevate the dish to a new level. The flavors are subtly balanced; the texture of the water spinach is fresh and perfectly al dente; and the plating itself is gorgeous.



Fried Shishamo



Pandan Creme Brulee

The theme of Vietnamese classics and International favorites continued to dessert with the Vietnam House Bean Curd (VND98,000) and the Pandan Crème Brûlée (VND198,000). Bean curd, for those unfamiliar, is a sweet, soft chunk (similar to soft tofu) served in a warm ginger syrup, with a side of coconut milk to reach your desired level of sweetness. The crème brûlée is a clever, local twist on the traditional dish and is served with coconut ice cream and sesame tuile.

As the evening drew to a close, it was clear that Vietnam House continues to pursue its mission of elevating Vietnamese cuisine to an international level. With outstanding service and a stunning environment, carefully considered and flawlessly executed plates, and an exciting menu of traditional and international dishes, Vietnam House continues to be a top destination for locals and travelers alike. ■



Saigon Grand Cru, a Possibility?



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.

The undrinkable world of Vietnamese wine

JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO, the owners of the iconic Chateau Lafite (DBR), one of the top 5 Grand Cru of Bordeaux, announced its first Chinese wine, Long Dai, which will be released this year and distributed by Pernod Ricard.

With so many countries that already have a great tradition, as well as ideal soil and climate conditions, of making great wines, why did they choose China? My guess is because DBR is trying to get two things together, a quality name for wine (the Chinese are all about reputation rather than taste when buying wine), and wine made in China that fulfills their nationalistic ego, so they will be given the best of both worlds. A Chinese wine with a top Bordeaux name will be sold out for sure!

Last year I had a chat with international critic Jancis Robinson, and she said: "I have been coming to

China for the last 20 years, and although wine made in China has considerably improved, there is still a long way to go." I totally agree.

Now, what about making wine in Vietnam?

A few companies have tried and all have failed. Dalat wine, which is neither wine nor comes from Dalat, has gained a reputation, not necessarily a good one. The two or three companies that make Dalat wine keep their strategy to make something fast and quick, with no regards to quality or taste, and cheat by adding any fruit they can find to increase volume.

There is at least one company in Dalat importing wine, doing their "magic" with chemicals to change color, taste and smell, then bottling it under any label the customers want. It does not taste bad, they avoid high wine

taxes, but again the word "cheat" comes to my mind.

But what about growing proper grapes here and making real wine? That would be great, but of the many companies that tried, including two international big wine players, none have succeeded. The reason is that wine making needs knowledge but also certain characteristics of the soil, climate and weather, as well as certain temperatures, usually continental and Mediterranean seasons, but so far all of that is not present in Vietnam. Perhaps with climate change, soon we will be able to enjoy real delicious Vietnamese wine, similar to what you can find in Thailand. And if you were wondering about the Saigon wine that has appeared in some minimarkets, well it is not from Saigon and I'll let you decide whether it is wine or not. ■



Wine & Dine

ROOFTOP BARS



Escape Lounge and Rooftop

Escape Lounge and Rooftop, a new stylish, sophisticated lounge in Thao Dien is a reminder of the time when flying was elegant and romantic. You can enjoy the view from their rooftop surrounded by palm trees, bamboo, murals, relaxing music, all in a vacation atmosphere. Escape serves tropical cocktails, spirits, great food, and Saigon's best craft beers.

11 Thao Dien Street, Thao Dien District 2
083 827 9179/escapelounge.vn



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 their 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 2: 144/3 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, Cafe RuNam is now embarking on the road to becoming a successful franchise. The venue's first floor is particularly enchanting in the late evening.

96 Mac Thi Bui, D1
www.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 cafe is the perfect haven to escape the hustle and bustle of District 1. The east meets west interior décor is reminiscent of Old Saigon, and is greatly complemented by the Vietnamese fusion cuisine on offer.

77B Ham Nghi, 1st Floor, D1

The Workshop

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



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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



Le Bacoulos is a French brasserie located in the heart of Thao Dien. Following the brasserie tradition, Bacoulos serves typical French food at affordable prices.



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.

ITALIAN



Ciao Bella

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

11 Dong Du, DI
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, DI
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, DI
+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, DI

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 spawned a sister eatery in District 2. Set off the street in a peaceful garden with indoor and outdoor eating areas, separate bar and function area, it offers a wide-ranging Italian menu and monthly movie nights.

87 Nguyen Hue, DI
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, DI
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, DI
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, DI
028 3823 3333

KOREAN



Galbi Brothers

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

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



Lee Cho

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

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7
5410 1086



Seoul House

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

33 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
3829 4297



THAI



Koh Thai

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

Kumho Link, Hai Ba Trung, D1
028 3823 4423

Lac Thai

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

71/2 Mac Thi Buoi St. D1
028 3823 7506

Thai Street

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

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

The Racha Room

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

12-14 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
090 879 1412

Tuk Tuk Thai Bistro

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

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

VIETNAMESE



Five Oysters

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/tomatitosaiagon

+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

L1 99 Đường Số 45, District 4
☎ 037 805 2168
✉ ordertippys@gmail.com

L2 10 Lê Văn Thiêm, District 7 PMH
☎ 035 475 9810
✉ ordertippys@gmail.com

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Travel & Wellness

MIAMI





Singapore Fling

Uncovering Singapore's past,
present, and future

Text and Images by **James Pham**



Singapore - Image by Corona Vu



DESPITE BEING A QUICK

two-hour flight from Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore and Saigon could not be more different. With gorgeous green spaces, spotlessly clean streets, a multi-cultural population harmoniously co-existing, and a modern, breezy lifestyle—Singapore is often held up as a model for Southeast Asia and beyond.

Walking, eating, and Instagramming our way through Singapore, our mission was to uncover how this tiny, space-starved, resource-poor state became a regional powerhouse and modern playground.

Separate but Equal

Blessed with a strategically-located, natural harbor at the mouth of the Strait of Malacca, Singapore was established as a British free port in the early 1800s as a means to “destroy the spell of Dutch monopoly”. In addition to merchants from Armenia, Arabia, Europe and beyond, laborers from China and British India arrived to help clear the land, transport materials, and build the town, quickly swelling Singapore’s population to more than 10,000 within five years of the port’s opening. Doing much of the hard work, each of these communities settled in ethnically segregated residential zones.

“This dish reminds me of Singapore’s melting pot of cultures,” says PS of Everyday Tour Company as we tuck into a tangy sweet “salad” known as *rojak*. “The potatoes represent the British, the tofu the Chinese, and the fermented shrimp fritters from Malaysia. All different ingredients that blend together for a yummy dish.” Meaning “eclectic mix” in colloquial Malay, this Indian version of *rojak* seems to sum up Singapore’s unique blend of cultures.

Outside, in the area known as Little India, we walk by a brightly colored mural by local visual artist Eunice Lim depicting whimsical patterned cows. “This area was near the water and was used to raise cattle,” explains PS along

her street art and street food tour. While Little India was originally a playground for the Europeans, evidenced by an open space that used to be a race course, its ponds, mangrove swamps and proximity to the Serangoon River made it good for raising cattle which were not only used for meat and milk but to pull bullock carts, the island’s main means of transportation. Indian settlers took to the cattle trade and Little India was born.

After a quick metro ride to Chinatown, we soon find ourselves stuffing our faces with *popiah*, a fresh spring roll stuffed with lettuce, egg, turnips, and fried flour bits, all wrapped in a handmade skin from the Michelin Plate-awarded Ann Chin. Originating in China’s Fujian province, it’s just one of the many dishes Chinese immigrants brought with them to Singapore. Mainly farmers and fishermen, immigrants took advantage of Singapore’s free immigration policy which made it easier for poorer immigrants to come, either as free or indentured laborers. “That’s why letter writers were so important back then. You could say they were the Instagrammers of their time,” says PS, as we take in a mural depicting an older man writing letters for uneducated and illiterate immigrants. “They were the social bridge, writing letters to family back in China and then reading the replies. They knew all your secrets, so it was best not to piss them off,” laughs PS.

Local Born

When Chinese and Indian men arrived on the Malay Archipelago, they often took wives among the local Malay or Indonesian women. Their children were known as Peranakan or “local born”. To find out more about this unique community, we head to the tony district of Joo Chiat, known for its pretty pre-war homes with their intricate facades and gorgeous Black and White houses, named for their dark timber beams and whitewashed walls with Tudorbethan flair.



Letter writer



Pulled tea

next head to the spectacular National Museum. While the museum is the nation's oldest, dating back to 1887, it's strikingly modern where a futuristic extension of glass and metal complements one of Asia's most beautiful neo-classical buildings. We enter the Glass Rotunda where a set of watercolor botanical drawings of plants and animals of the Malay Peninsula from the early 1800s are reimagined as three-dimensional animations. Butterflies flit along the walls, stars light up the night sky and deer romp through forest settings, all enhanced by scents created by Swiss fragrance company Givaudan. "Definitely visit the Glass Rotunda", lists Raihan Hamid of the National Museum of Singapore as one of her top 3 tips. "Also, don't be afraid to engage with the exhibits where there are often things to touch and do. Thirdly, visit the History Gallery as it charts the development of the island through the years, all in one exhibit."

We take her up on the tip and head to the History Gallery, focusing on Singapore's modern reinvention. With a labor-driven economy, no real natural resources, and not much of a domestic market, prospects for the island nation looked dim as it attained self-government in 1959. However, led by Dr Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's first Minister for Finance, Singapore began welcoming foreign investors and multi-national corporations. The government also invested in technical training with the aim of moving towards building a skills-intensive workforce. We walk through more exhibits showing key developments of the 60s and 70s, including a multi-media display showing the building of government flats which made home ownership highly affordable thereby bringing citizens into the city, and an exhibit outlining the 10-year cleanup of the Singapore River, complete with a funnel to experience what the river used to smell like.

Over sips of ginger "pulled tea", a strong black tea sweetened with condensed milk made frothy by dramatically pouring it from a height, Kathy of Singabites tells us more of this area named after a wealthy ethnic Chinese businessman of Peranakan descent. "The rich Peranakans settled in this area," she says of the "local born" who were mainly traders for the Chinese and colonial populations. "You'll see there are no government flats here. Instead, you have these lovely shophouses with Five Foot Ways," quaint covered verandas mandated by early urban planning.

"While the husbands provided the family's religion, the rest of the influences came from the wives," explains Kathy as we later nosh on *rainbow lapis*, a delicate Peranakan (or "nyonya", meaning "women") dessert of cold rice pudding flavored with coconut and pandan leaves. Starting to gain popularity outside of Singapore, nyonya

cuisine is a signature blend of Chinese cooking techniques along with spices and flavors typically found in Malay and Indonesian food.

Probably the most famous example is *katong laksa*, an addictively spicy soup whose name might have derived from a Sanskrit word meaning "one hundred thousand", referring to the extensive variety of ingredients used. It's said that the Peranakan version came about as local wives incorporated chili peppers and coconut milk into Chinese noodle soup. Kathy orders us each a bowl topped with cockles and prawns, and we gleefully slurp down the thick, soul-satisfying broth that's a wonderful marriage, literally and figuratively, of Peranakan culture.

Living History

Wanting to learn more of Singapore's unique culture and history, we

Urban greenery at National Museum





Wishing bells on Mt Faber

Happy Hill

For a better view of modern-day Singapore, we take the cable car to Mount Faber, the island's second-highest hill. Another of Dr Goh Keng Swee's projects, the 1,750m-long Mount Faber Line has since transported more than 57 million passengers between Mount Faber and the resort island of Sentosa since opening in 1974. At the top, we look out over lush swaths of forest and out to Keppel Harbor, Sentosa Island, and the open ocean beyond. Panoramic views are framed by the large Bell of Happiness and hundreds of smaller bells tied to the fence, complete with handwritten wishes for a life full of happiness, peace and harmony.

A Whale of a Time

A key to Singapore's success has been utilizing its limited assets in innovative ways. Part of that has been a two-century long project to reclaim land from sand, resulting in a whopping 25 percent of precious real estate added to the tiny island nation. One of the best examples is the resort island of Sentosa, incorporating three nearby islands and islets to its landmass, now known for world-class theme parks, hotels, and residences. We spend an afternoon at the spectacular South East Asia Aquarium (S.E.A. Aquarium) at Resorts World Sentosa. Home to more than 100,000 marine animals representing 1,000 species, it's one of the world's largest aquariums. We wander the interactive exhibits featuring more than 50 diverse habitats spanning an incredible 42.8 million litres of water. Engaging for all ages, we gape at sharks swimming overhead in the Shark Seas underwater tunnel, take in the explosion of colors in the 8m-high Coral Garden, and are hypnotized by the rhythmic swimming of a thousand jelly fish all lit up in an array of colored lighting. But it's the Open Ocean Habitat that has us truly slack jawed. At 36m long and 8.3m high, it's a glorious



Shipwreck Habitat

70cm-thick acrylic window (equivalent to two rows of three double-decker buses stacked atop one another) into the immensity and diversity of the ocean with over 40,000 marine animals including graceful rays and goliath groupers. It's hard not to feel humbled in front of this vast spectacle that represents just a tiny fraction of our wonderful oceans.

Green Fish, Yellow Pot

Brimming with friendly feelings towards the environment but also strangely hungering for seafood, we next make for Yellow Pot, the authentic, innovative Chinese fine dining restaurant at Six Senses Duxton. Beautifully designed by acclaimed British designer Anouska Hempel, the boutique hotel transforms a row of 1920s heritage trading houses into the brand's only city property anywhere in the world. Dark woods and an elegant black and gold palette create an intimate aura, but it's the modern Chinese cuisine

featuring quality, sustainability-certified ingredients with no addition of MSG that brings us here. Six Senses is committed to sourcing locally before internationally, and the tea we drink comes from a tea house just a few blocks over while the Kühlbarra Barramundi (USD24), beautifully steamed and topped with a healthy yet kicky scallion-ginger pesto, is farmed just 40 minutes away. The Wok-seared Organic Grass-fed Beef Tenderloin (USD28) is melt-in-your-mouth tender, with hints of sweetness and heat provided by a thick glaze of honey and two types of peppercorns. However, for any halfway decent Chinese restaurant, the yardstick has to be its Roast Duck (USD27). Here, Yellow Pot's version is outstanding, true to the original Beijing style but with some new twists. The duck is marinated in a mixture of dried spices and fermented bean curd for days, then roasted over hickory wood chips for that dish-defining crispy skin and juicy meat pairing. If this is the future of Chinese cuisine, it's a sunny prospect indeed.

City in a Garden

Not content to simply be a "Garden City", Singapore is aiming to be a "City in a Garden" where greenery and flora aren't just decorative accents, but play a part in actually impacting the quality of life. Stepping foot onto Singapore, it's hard not to notice all the trees and plants shading the entire road from the airport into the city with medians bursting with flowers. Within the city, every conceivable space seems to be filled with greenery, a natural way to break up the concrete and glass.

Leading this transition is the stunning Gardens by the Bay, a ginormous 101ha waterfront park instantly recognizable by its 18 space-age Supertrees that stand from 25-50m tall, some of them doubling as air exhaust structures while others harvest solar energy. We wander



Cloud Forest

around the gardens entranced, taking in the magical Floral Fantasy exhibit and walk through the horticultural-themed gardens. But it's really the two Cooled Conservatories, entire climates recreated within futuristic domes, that are most impressive. The Flower Dome replicates the cool-dry climate of the Mediterranean with lots of blooming flowers and shrubbery, while the Cloud Forest is in a class all of its own. Walking in, you're confronted with a 35m-tall mountain shrouded in lush vegetation and mist fed by the world's tallest indoor waterfall. Behind every exhibit of the museum, there's an element of edutainment – educating visitors while providing interesting and at times thought-provoking commentary on our fragile environment—including one of the best films I've ever seen on climate change, visually showing how each fraction of a rise in temperature will likely affect the earth and its residents.

Live, Eat, and Play at Marina Bay Sands Singapore has a reputation of being a world-class city in which to live, eat, and play and nowhere is this more evident than the incredible Marina Bay Sands complex, just next to the Gardens by the Bay. Recognizable by its triple hotel towers which support a cantilevered Sky Park, 1.2 hectares of gardens and swimming pool 57 stories above the city, the complex is also home to two theatres, a casino, shops and restaurants, all rebuilt on reclaimed land. We're here to eat and play, and find ourselves at The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands at lunchtime browsing the star-studded collection of celebrity chef restaurants with household names including Gordon Ramsay, Wolfgang Puck, and Daniel Bouloud. We settle on **db Bistro & Oyster Bar** by Michelin-starred Chef Daniel Bouloud for its promise of fresh seasonal catch from around the world, prepared using Chef Bouloud's signature combination of classic French techniques paired with gorgeous presentation.

We find that the staff speak Oyster, regaling us with exactly where in the world the day's oysters are from and their distinct flavor profiles. Finding it impossible to decide, we order the Petit Signature Seafood Platter (USD92) with a chef's selection of fresh oysters, Maine lobster, jumbo prawns, mussels, clams, and ceviche, a wonderfully light, refreshing antidote to the hot Singaporean afternoon. The casual bistro atmosphere created by hanging globe lights, red leather banquettes and tasteful nautical accents sets the mood for Chef Bouloud's casual French fare, like the Pâté "en Croûte", a work of art incorporating chicken, duck, foie gras, black truffle, smoked bacon, and dashes of brandy and port wine, instantly whisking us to a lavender-filled French country kitchen. For non-seafood fans, there's the Herb Roasted Chicken Breast, bone-in for extra juiciness, served atop a bed of quinoa with a tomato confit for an explosion of healthy color and flavor.



Oyster bar at db Bistro

From art on a plate to where art meets science, we head across the courtyard to the **ArtScience Museum**, a dazzling display of the creative processes at the heart of art, science, technology and culture. We enter the interactive exhibits where the line between humans and technology blurs, starting with Future World, the museum's landmark permanent exhibition. A digital waterfall cascades down the walls and onto the floor, detecting and flowing around visitors. Butterflies flit about, more appearing the more people are in the room, but then dying as they're touched, a statement about our potential for destruction. Visitors can literally insert themselves into several of the displays by scanning their faces or drawings which immediately become an animated part of the display. While all the galleries practically beg to be Instagrammed, the final one is especially stunning,

made up of over 170,000 LED lights resembling twinkling stars that feels like you're witnessing the birth of the universe. Next, we head into ArtScience Museum's new exhibition, *Wonderland*, bringing the enchanted world of *Alice in Wonderland* to the 21st century and beyond. We unleash our inner Alice-like curiosity, opening cabinets and drawers to discover surprises hidden inside and attend a magical Mad Tea Party where the walls and table settings come alive with projection mapping and other visual effects techniques.

An Illusion of Flavors

From illusions of sight, we transition to illusions of flavors at Smoke & Mirrors, a chic destination bar perched on the rooftop of the National Gallery Singapore. As its name implies, Smoke & Mirrors is all about applying experimental new twists to turn classic drinks on their heads. Head Bartender extraordinaire Jorge Conde presides over his own backroom workshop where the alcoholic alchemy happens, employing techniques



Future World

such as fermentation, distillation and preservation to reduce ingredients down to their very essences, often bereft of color. This makes unraveling the unique flavor combinations a surprisingly difficult yet delicious task, even for cocktail aficionados. We try the Between the F1 with its spirit-forward, sour notes inspired by the flavors of Between the Sheets and a Sidecar. Here, though, the twist is in the color, jet black (thanks to a very fine bamboo charcoal powder), a nod to Singapore's Formula 1 Championship which takes place at the Marina Bay Street Circuit, part of the gorgeous waterfront views commanded by Smoke & Mirrors. In fact, the spirit of Singapore subtly inspires many of the drinks, including the refreshing Robbery at the Museum, a light take on the classic Singapore Sling, adding welcome variations of sour cherry including Maraschino liqueur, cherry brandy and house-made cherry bitters. The drink

with the best story of the night, though, is the humorously-named She Uses Cilantro for Everything, with its use of pechuga (Mexican mezcal redistilled with a raw chicken hung over it, supposedly adding to the spirit's final flavor), cilantro, and chili oil, recalling Singapore's national dish of chicken and rice.

Throughout our time in Singapore, we saw this theme repeated again and again, a reinterpreting of the old into something new, even futuristic. Beautifully preserved or repurposed colonial-era shophouses stand next to modern skyscrapers. Land, reclaimed from the sea, to house stylish resorts and world-class entertainment venues. Food and drink that embrace their unique culinary roots while experimenting with new ingredients. The locals have a saying that if you don't like what you see in Singapore, come back in a year, because it'll all be different still. Well, we came, we saw, we liked, and we can't wait to do it all again next year. ■



*She Uses Cilantro For Everything
Image by Smoke & Mirrors*

IF YOU GO...



Image by Gardens by the Bay

Everyday Tour Company (www.everydaytourcompany.com) specializes in alternative, non-touristy walks. Signature tours take guests through public housing estates, an evening walk through eclectic Kampong Glam, and a morning walk exploring street art and street food (USD 60). PS kept the pace of the tour lively and struck a lovely balance between sitting and eating and walking to admire street art and the stories behind them.

Singabites (www.singabites.com) is all about unique food-based tours, combining visits to locally-owned eateries with fascinating insights into local stories and cultures. In addition to exploring the neighborhoods of Katong and Joo Chiat, the recently-launched Artisan Experience has guests interacting with chefs and hawkers and trying their hand at pouring pulled tea, wrapping rice dumplings and flipping pratas. *Oi readers get 15% off Katong morning and evening tours by using code "oivietnam19".*

Admission to the National Museum (www.nationalmuseum.sg) is USD11 and free guided tours are available. Look for the "Wings of a Rich Manoeuvre", a chorus of eight kinetic chandeliers studded with Swarovski crystals above the bridge linking the National Museum's original 19th-century colonial building with its

modern wing, and lose yourself in the spectacular Story of the Forest in the Glass Rotunda.

Visitors can purchase tickets for either of Singapore Cable Car's two lines (Mount Faber and Sentosa), or a Sky Pass which allows travel along both lines. See the website (www.onefabergroup.com) for lots of exciting activities, events and promotions in 2019 to mark the Singapore Cable Car's 45th anniversary, including "Miraculous", a multimedia night show complimentary for all cable car riders.

One-day tickets to the S.E.A. Aquarium (www.rowsentosa.com) for adults / children are USD30 / 21. The aquarium is part of Resorts World Sentosa where themed attractions, hotels, dining establishments and MICE events no longer serve single-use plastic bottles. If visiting in October, don't miss the inaugural Wine Pinnacle Awards 2019, a three-day celebration of excellence and diversity in the world of wines (www.winepinnacle.com).

Yellow Pot at Six Senses Duxton (www.sixsenses.com/hotels/duxton/dining) is committed to local, seasonal and responsible sourcing of produce with an emphasis on drawing flavors through fresh and natural ingredients. After your meal, walk the few blocks over to the new Six Senses Maxwell and have a drink at the gorgeous library-

themed bar, Cook & Tras.

Visit both Cooled Conservatories at Gardens by the Bay (www.gardensbythebay.com.sg) for USD 21 / 11 (adult / child), and the Floral Fantasy for USD 15 / 9 (adult / child). Admission to Bay South Garden including the Supertrees and horticultural-themed gardens is free.

Just opposite Sands Theatre, at the Galleria Level of The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands (www.marinabaysands.com), db Bistro & Oyster Bar by Chef Daniel Bouloud is open for lunch and dinner, and brunch on weekends. The Express Lunch is especially popular with the business crowd, an excellent value at USD24 for 2 courses and USD31 for 3.

Timed-admission tickets for 1, 2, or all 3 exhibitions at ArtScience Museum start at USD14. Summer months and weekends are especially high traffic so pre-booking tickets online is strongly recommended at www.marinabaysands.com.

Smoke & Mirrors (www.smokeandmirrors.com.sg) is known for its spectacular panoramic views of Singapore's skyline and creative cocktail program. If you can't stand not knowing exactly what's in your drink and how it was made, simply scan the QR codes for top cocktails on the menu. Cocktails priced from USD16-21.



Better Than Home

Tailored luxury living at Oakwood Premier OUE Singapore

Text by James Pham

Images Provided by Oakwood Premier OUE Singapore

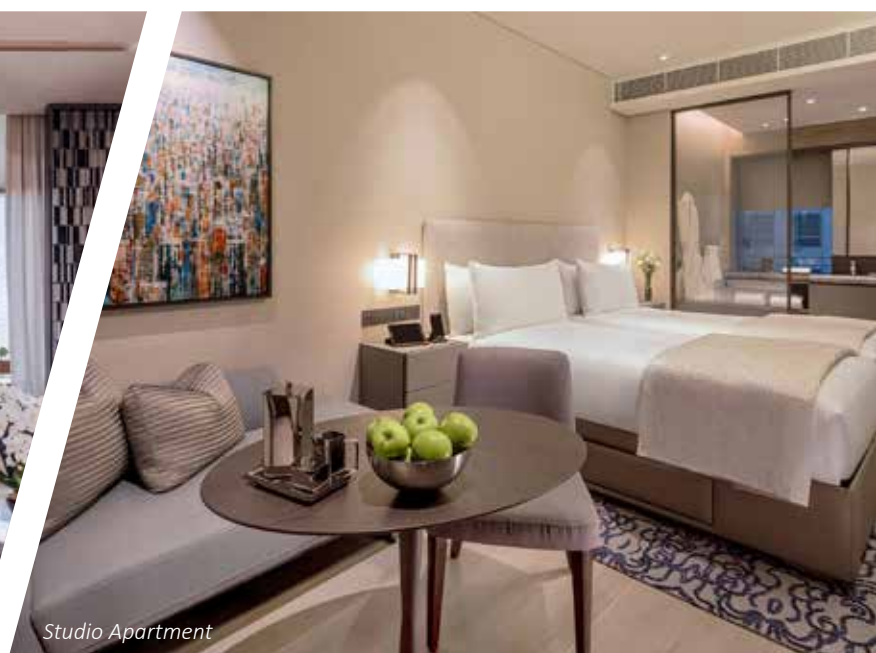
THE PHRASE “HOME AWAY FROM HOME” is often overused by the hotel industry, especially considering very rarely does what you get resemble anything that feels remotely like home. More than just nice accommodations, “home away from home” should include all the other intangibles that allow you to

really and truly live like you do at home. At home, no one pays USD5 to wash a t-shirt or has to borrow a stranger’s phone to look up an address, so why should we have to when we travel?

Enter Oakwood Premier OUE Singapore, an upscale serviced apartment in the heart of Singapore’s



Grand Lobby



Studio Apartment



Breakfast Buffet at SE7ENTH



Residents Lounge



*Fried Chicken
Drumlets with
Truffle Maple*



Outdoor Infinity Pool

downtown. Just awarded a hotel license at the beginning of the year allowing short-term rentals, Oakwood is the rare hybrid that offers all the conveniences of a luxury hotel combined with the true at-home comforts of a serviced apartment.

Comprised of 268 well-appointed studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments, Oakwood guests have access to all the services you'd expect from a 5-star hotel—in-house restaurant, room service, daily housekeeping, turndown service, 24-hour security and concierge, and more (don't pass up the signature robe which feels like you're getting hugged by a hundred rabbits), together with a host of unexpected touches of at-home living – a fully-stocked, self-service launderette, round-the-clock fitness center, and spacious rooms ingeniously designed to incorporate the comforts of apartment living like Bluetooth sound system and a fully-equipped kitchen with microwave (larger units even have

rice cookers, ovens and dishwashers). Oakwood's expertise in helping long-stay guests get the most out of life in Singapore is a boon for hotel guests who enjoy the same access to the in-room Samsung tablet with specially curated Oakwood app, as well as exclusive deals with shops and local vendors in the glitzy Oakwood Downtown Gallery conveniently located at ground level for everything from haircuts to spa treatments as well as admission tickets. The complimentary internet-connected Samsung mobile phone was also especially useful out and about.

Located in Singapore's Central Business District and overlooking the harborfront, Oakwood makes an excellent base from which to explore this vibrant city. The heritage buildings, art galleries and museums to the north, Marina Bay Sands to the east and Sentosa Island to the south were all just 15 minutes away by car. Complimentary

weekend shuttles whisk guests to several of the city's top leisure spots, or take advantage of the Grab app (which actually originated in Singapore). Make sure to link your app to a credit card before you go and enjoy completely cashless transportation in Singapore. Within walking distance of Oakwood, we found lots of excellent eateries—chic restaurants for the business lunch crowd and two of the city's best-known hawker centers: Maxwell, home to Michelin-starred Tian Tian Hainanese Chicken Rice, and Lau Pa Sat, known for its awesome evening satay scene.

But more often than not, we found ourselves looking forward to coming home to Oakwood after long days of sightseeing. An evening dip in the outdoor infinity pool surrounded by the skyscrapers of the financial corridor was the perfect way to cool down, followed by a few drinks and shared nibbles in the intimate lobby bar. The quiet surrounds of the Residents' Lounge was the perfect place to tend to a bit of work with a cappuccino amidst the plush sofas and large windows seven stories above street level.

Oakwood's 74-seat in-house restaurant, SE7ENTH, serves a scrumptious breakfast spread with eggs cooked to order as well as other delicious hot dishes. Our favorites were the soy chicken wings and the quinoa that's treated almost like a healthier version of fried rice. The weekday Executive Set Lunch at SE7ENTH is also popular with the business crowd, featuring free-flow appetizers and quality mains prepared by Executive Chef Dickson Fung. Highlights were the Crispy chicken wings with an addictive truffle maple glaze, the Beyond Burger, the world's first plant-based burger that looks and cooks like beef without using GMOs, soy, or gluten, and the Hazelnut chocolate cake with its velvety filling on a slightly crunchy base which made for a wonderfully smooth end to the meal.

When next in the incredible city of Singapore, why settle for just playing and eating well, when you can live well, too, at Oakwood Premier OUE Singapore? ■

For more, visit www.oakwoodasia.com/singapore-cbd



Bienvenido a Miami

Beautiful beaches and art deco delights are just some of the city's many charms

Text by Crystal Rogrigo

MIAMI IS DIFFERENT FROM any other US city I've ever visited. It felt more like we stepped foot into a Latin American country than we were visiting another American destination.

One of my best friends and I decided to meet "halfway" between Amsterdam and San Francisco. With neither of us in the mood for a city trip to NYC or Boston we figured Miami would be the next best bet. Neither of us really had much of an idea of what to expect about Miami, except that it would be awesome.

We stayed in South Beach during our first three nights in Miami, figuring that was the most obvious option. If you're looking for what to do in Miami (and I hope a storm is not part of your visit!) check out my tips below to plan an incredible visit.

Visit Little Havana & Calle Ocho

On our first morning in Miami, I convinced my friend to go to Calle Ocho with me. She was pretty skeptical, and for good reasons. But *Lonely Planet* recommended it. And, of course, it is the name of a Pitbull song, so it had to be cool. It was supposed to be Little Havana, a cultural haven where we would be engrossed in Cuban culture.

Straight after breakfast we hopped in a cab and told the driver "take us to the

heart of Calle Ocho." She was a bit taken aback by our request, but drove us there anyway. "Well, this is where it begins," she told us. "You girls be careful here."

So here we were, on Calle Ocho at about noon on a Saturday afternoon. It was hot. Hotter than I ever would have imagined since the dry California heat never prepared me for crippling humidity. My friend was a bit nervous. I encouraged her this would be so *worth it*. It was going to be great!

Except most places were closed. We walked around aimlessly until I spotted other tourists drinking from a coconut. We could do that, too. I scouted the location, which led us to Los Pinarenos Fruteria, a family-run market. Inside the open market, fans raged to cool under the sweltering humidity. Los Pinarenos Fruteria is a great place to cool down, sip a coconut and chat with the locals.

Los Pinarenos Fruteria turns out to be something of a Miami establishment. A trip to Little Havana wouldn't be complete without stopping by here, so do yourself a favor and check it out. After milling around the area, we came across a souvenir shop selling what would be one of the highlights of our trip—a Pitbull world tour shirt. It was then that we came to a realization: Pitbull is the crown jewel of Miami.

This would set the scene for the rest of our trip. On Calle Ocho you can also check out how Cuban cigars are made at one of the local cigar shops. We just wandered in and had a look at all the impressive cigar rolling and the slightly intimidating atmosphere. After our visit to Little Havana, I'm convinced that no Miami itinerary would be complete without a trip to Calle Ocho.

Visit the Art District and the Wynwood Walls

We were done with the Calle Ocho at this point. No more the wiser on Cuban-American relations or really anything about the Calle Ocho other than a coconut market and that you can buy fresh rolled cigars there. It was time for me to redeem myself, so I insisted that since Wynwood wasn't too far away that we check that out next.

A 10-minute cab drive later and we were hopping out on to the black pavement, the midday sun beating down, and warehouses around us. I was in doubt in my mind, but I had to prove to her that my trusty *Lonely Planet* wouldn't let us down.

This time, it didn't. The Wynwood District really is the place to experience the arts. It is home, of course, to Art Basel, and is chocked full of galleries



on every corner and impressive public art. Think Andy Warhol, Banksy, Keith Haring, Shepard Fairey. When you visit Wynwood, you'll be spoilt for choice on whose art you want to check out. The Wynwood Walls are one of the key points of interest in Miami, they also provide for some great photo ops, and are one of the most unique things to do in Miami.

It's a great place to roam, check out the art, and enjoy great food. For a complete list of the walls and where to find each mural, check out the Wynwood Walls website. This area is also great for nightlife and happy hour, which we learned a few days later when we returned to Wood Tavern for USD4 cocktails.

The Nightlife

We headed for Skybar at the Shore Club. First of all, don't let the name fool you. This is definitely not on a rooftop, which we quickly learned when the signs for the bar pointed toward the pool. The bar was so-so, but the upside was we befriended a bartender who gave us a lot of great tips for going out. After that, we headed to his recommendation, Mango's. This is the kind of place that I imagine is straight out of a film. It's an over-the-top, Latin themed bar complete with dancers appearing on bar tops every 10-15 minutes to perform. It was here at Mango's that we noticed a special page on the back of the cocktail menu... a page that would confirm what we thought to be true—that Pitbull is truly the crown jewel of Miami! Unfortunately, I have no photographic proof of this but, trust me, it's true.

Miami is awesome and should not be missed. I felt like I had entered some Latin American country, like this could never be a place in the US. That is the feeling you get from this city, like a piece of Latin American has been transplanted and thrives in its own cultural bubble, separate from the rest of the conservative state of Florida.

On our last night we made a trip to Bodega—a must visit for drinks. I like Bodega because it has a different vibe than the rest of South Beach. It's much more laid back, not a flashy club at all, actually, just a hidden bar with a taqueria as its front and a DJ spinning all your



Little Havana

favorite hip hop from the 90s to today in the back.

Out of all the clubs and bars we visited, and trust me there were a lot, this was my favorite, and one of the only ones really worth sharing that you might not hear about from a travel guide. Put Bodega on the list of the best things to do in Miami for adults.

Enjoy The Beautiful Beaches

We spent plenty of time relaxing on the beautiful sand of South Beach Miami. This is truly a little slice of paradise. The water here is so warm, it feels like entering a bathtub.

South Beach Miami

When you visit, be sure to take time to wander down the boardwalk that runs the length of Miami Beach. It's a great way to explore the area, and also



South Beach Miami



Wynwood Walls



Bodega



Key Biscayne

restaurants and, of course, all the parties — although some places in South Beach did warrant a cab. The President Hotel was in the ideal location on Collins Avenue—it wasn't the most glamorous hotel in Miami, but it was clean, the air conditioning worked and we could easily get around Miami, so that was all we really cared about.

How to Get Around Miami

Honestly, the easiest way we found to get around Miami was by Uber. Since we stayed in South Beach we could easily walk to the beaches or wander around to find breakfast and dinner. I'd recommend not renting a car (unless you plan on driving to the Keys or Everglades like we did), since you'll only have to worry about finding a place to park your car and pay for parking once you're there. If you're just in Miami for a long weekend, just book an Uber and that should do the job. ■

to check out the incredible hotels that line Miami Beach. You can grab lunch or drinks at nearly any of the hotels, or you'll find vendors on the beaches selling snacks. One important thing to know about Miami before you go is that everything there is picture perfect and beautiful. Just beware of going in the summer because it is extremely humid. So humid that we caught ourselves constantly singing Marc Anthony and Pitbull's song *Let It Rain Over Me*.

Visit Key Biscayne

After visiting Key West and the Everglades, we had one last day in Miami before flying out again. We headed for Key Biscayne (also known as Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park) to check out its beautiful beach, and beautiful it was. And filled with gigantic lizards.

Key Biscayne is definitely a must visit if you want to enjoy a less crowded beach, and even clearer water than on South Beach. Being here in the clear, warm water made me realize that this could be the ideal place to learn to dive and see marine life. So I've already got my agenda for my next Miami visit planned.

Miami was so much more than I expected. Filled with Latin culture, so different than the America I'm used to. After living abroad I value the different cultures within the US so much more, and find myself being more curious than I ever imagined about new places in my own country. Miami was the perfect place for a girls trip... a sort of Las Vegas meets the Caribbean meets the MoMA. Beautiful Art Deco architecture, impossibly blue and warm waters, and a nightlife that is unbeatable. Needless to say, I'd return to Miami any day.

Where to Stay in Miami

We stayed in South Beach at the President Hotel to make sure we'd be walking distance to the beach,



The President Hotel



The Everglades

>>The List Business

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>>The List Travel



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www.anamandara-resort.com



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Lotte Legend Hotel Saigon

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Kids & Education



Nature Helps Children Learn

Spending time in nature helps kids do better in school, in a number of surprising ways

Text by Ming Kuo



SOME YEARS AGO, RICHARD LOUV made the case in his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, that kids were spending so little time in nature that they had “nature deficit disorder.” The consequences they suffered were dire: more stress and anxiety, higher rates of obesity and ADHD, and more.

Many parents probably recognize that being outside in nature is good for their children’s health. But they may also see a tradeoff: Encouraging their kids to get outside means less time hitting the books. And less time studying must mean less academic success, right?

Wrong. Remarkably, it turns out that the opposite may be true. As research has grown in this area—including my own—we’ve discovered that nature is not just good for kids’ health; it improves their ability to learn, too. Even small doses of nature can have profound benefits.

The evidence for this comes from hundreds of studies, including experimental research. In one study, fifth-grade students attended school regularly at a local prairie wetlands, where science, math, and writing were taught in an integrated, experiential way as students participated in onsite research. When compared to peers attending regular schools, those who’d attended school outside had significantly stronger reading and writing skills (as measured by standardized tests) and reported feeling more excited about school because of the experience. Students at the outdoor school who’d previously had low attendance rates ended up with higher attendance, too.

Other studies echo these findings. One study found that students at schools with more tree cover performed better academically—especially if they came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Still another compared students randomly assigned to take science lessons either in a classroom or in a school garden and found outdoor lessons more effective for learning—and the more time they spent in the garden, the greater their gains.

How do green space and nature help kids learn? In a surprising variety of ways, we’re discovering. Nature improves children’s psychological and physical well-being, for sure—and that can impact learning. But it also seems to affect how they attend to and engage in the classroom, how much they can concentrate, and how well they get along with teachers and peers. Here is what we know so far.

Nature restores children’s attention

Attention is clearly important for learning, but many kids have trouble paying attention in the classroom, whether it be because of distractions, mental fatigue, or ADHD. Luckily, spending time in nature—talking a walk in a park and even having a view of nature out the window—helps restore kids’ attention, allowing them to concentrate and perform better on cognitive tests.

Nature relieves children’s stress

Just like adults, children are less stressed when they have green spaces to retreat to occasionally, helping them to be more resilient. Studies have found that holding a class outdoors one day a week can significantly improve the daily cortisol patterns of students—reflecting less stress and better adaptation to stress—when compared to kids with indoor-only instruction. Also, in a study looking at children in rural environments, those with more nature nearby recovered better from stressful life events in terms of their self-worth and distress.

Nature helps children develop more self-discipline

Many children—particularly those with ADHD—have trouble with impulse control, which can get in the way of school learning. My colleagues and I have found that green space near kids’ homes helps them to have more self-discipline and concentrate better—especially girls. Also, parents of kids with ADHD report that when their kids participate in activities outdoors versus indoors, it reduces their ADHD symptoms. Since self-discipline and impulse control are tied to academic success, it’s perhaps no surprise that outdoor instruction makes students more engaged and interested.

Kids seem to like classes outdoors. Unfortunately, many teachers fear bringing kids outside to learn, worrying that they’ll be “bouncing off the walls” afterward and less engaged in the next (indoor) lesson. Luckily, research seems to suggest that kids are more engaged in learning not only *during* outdoor classes but also upon returning to their classroom afterward—even if the subject they return to is not nature-related.

Time outdoors may increase physical fitness

While physical fitness is important for children for many reasons, one

that may not immediately come to mind is the role it plays in learning. In particular, cardiorespiratory fitness seems to support efficient cognitive processing, and kids with higher fitness levels do better academically. Though it’s not clear that nature affects physical fitness directly, it is true that the more time kids spend in nature, the better their cardiorespiratory fitness. Having access to nature may encourage children to be more physically active and keep in shape longer as they age.

Nature settings may promote social connection and creativity

The social and physical environment in which children learn can make a difference in their academic success. Letting kids spend time in settings with natural elements or giving them structured nature experiences can make for a calmer, socially safe, and fun learning environment. And being outdoors can also enhance peer-to-peer relationships and student/teacher relationships needed for learning, even for students who otherwise feel marginalized socially.

Some argue that nature provides a rich tapestry of “loose parts”—sticks, stones, mud—that encourage pretend play and exploration, creativity and problem solving. Indeed, teachers’ and principals’ observations suggest that children’s play becomes strikingly more creative, physically active, and social in the presence of loose parts.

It’s clear to me that we need to do more to bring this important resource into our schools. Architects and city planners should keep trees and green areas in and near schoolyards. And teachers and principals should incorporate lessons outdoors and use recess not as a reward for good behavior, but as a way to rejuvenate students’ minds for the next lesson.

By doing so, we won’t only be benefitting our kids’ psychological well-being—though that’s reason enough! We will likely help them perform better in school, too. And, as a connection to nature breeds more care for nature, we may also be inspiring the future stewards of our natural world.

Humans evolved to grow and thrive in natural environments, and research is showing the costs of indoor childhoods. It’s time to cure “nature deficit disorder” in our kids by giving “nature time”—not just studying and extracurricular time—the importance it deserves. ■

Ming Kuo, Ph.D., leads the Landscape and Human Health Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research convincingly links healthy urban ecosystems to stronger, safer neighborhoods, lower crime, reduced AD/HD symptoms, reduced aggression, and an array of other mental and physical health indicators. Dr. Kuo’s work has spurred increased urban forestry efforts in Wales, Germany, the Netherlands, the Caribbean, and the United States, and, in 2018, she was awarded the Heinz Award for the Environment.

Learning With *Comics*

Build empathy and understanding by pairing comics with novels

Text by **Ryan Chapman**



COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS are powerful forms of expression that can be an important part of every English language arts (ELA) teacher's arsenal. They can serve as literary bridges to enhance not only ELA instruction but also self-awareness, empathy and creativity.

The art, whether vibrant or void of

color, allows for a deeper comprehension of themes. The text, carefully chosen to work in tandem with the illustrations, creates a sense of connection and truth.

To effectively instruct with graphic novels or comics, teachers need to make sure that students understand how the medium functions. Just as every word and aspect of grammar is purposeful

in a traditional text, every part of the panel in a comic or graphic novel is used with intention. The placement of words, movement of lines, and chosen colors all have a purpose. Examining these details provides accessible channels for students to gain not only literary and artistic comprehension but also social-emotional skills.

Pair With Traditional Reads

Pairing comics with more traditional selections can deepen comprehension and understanding. This process, much like using a poem to enhance a concept found within a traditional prose text, allows for learning to be transferred. When selecting a comic or graphic novel, consider the purpose of teaching the traditional text. Search for common themes across a variety of media.

For example, after my students read Kurt Vonnegut's short story *Harrison Bergeron*, we discussed the concept of identity and its connection to a healthy society. During our discussion, students talked about society's needs, the "common good," and looking out for others. I was struck by the absence

of comments regarding the importance of the individual, so I introduced Stephen Collins's

graphic novel *The Gigantic Beard That Was Evil*.

The story is told using very few words coupled with a series of black-and-white illustrations. This pairing serves to aid both the plot and the philosophical commentary in a simple yet powerful way. At first glance, the society on the island appears to be orderly and without flaw, just like the protagonist, Dave. Soon, chaos erupts in the form of a gigantic beard, sprouting uncontrollably from Dave's face. He is now feared, shunned, and questioned. Where is this fiendish beard coming from? What has he done to deserve such a punishment? This beard—something that is very different from the societal norm—is seen as evil.

Through the meticulous art and captivating narrative, the students came to see the imperfect nature of perfection and the power of individuality. They came to understand that individuality was not something to be hidden or lost but instead was something to be celebrated. The discussion moved to a place of real, meaningful dialogue—a place where the students pondered their own vital role in society as an individual.

Pairing *Harrison Bergeron* and *The Gigantic Beard That Was Evil* provided a variety of literary techniques for my students to examine and synthesize within a conceptual framework. Simply using one text, one style, or one medium is akin to proverbially teaching with one hand tied behind our back. Finding comics or graphic novels that highlight the same themes and concepts as traditional texts can open doors to conversations about topics that span disciplines such as self-awareness and empathy.

Offer Choice

At times, I bring in one comic or graphic novel that connects to the concept being discussed. Other times, students are given a few options to use in their studies. Choice gives students a chance to exercise decision-making while also providing different options for varied interests.

The characters of Spider-Man, the Black Panther and Superman present different aspects of humanity for the students to explore. Examining characters in a variety of comics helps students to build empathy as well as to better understand their own values. For example, loyalty, as a concept, is multifaceted. Studying the loyalty to one's country found within the Black Panther will often look different than studying the loyalty to one's mission found within Batman. With this variety, the students' understanding of the concept of loyalty is more comprehensive and nuanced.

Student choice is instrumental in fostering a culture of acceptance and validity. Giving students options of different artistic styles and character backgrounds allows for those students who "aren't into comics" to find something to connect with and enjoy. The opportunity to choose their own comic or graphic novel also strengthens students' social-emotional competencies of decision-making, evaluating, and self-motivation.

Comics are just like any other type of reading: in order to help the hesitant student, you have to find the right fit. Encourage students to reflect on what types of reading they have enjoyed in the past. Consider the students' interests and passions, and allow for their exploration and questioning.

As teachers, our goal is to reach students—to help children see the world around them in a way that allows for autonomy and inclusion. We want them not only to grow academically, but to thrive in understanding their own humanity and the world around them. Using comics or graphic novels in the ELA classroom can facilitate not only improved English Language Arts skills, but also important social-emotional competencies. ■



Feeding Time

Breast milk is the best food you can offer your new baby

THE DECISION TO BREASTFEED can give your baby the best possible start in life. While that's true, it's still an intimate and personal choice—and there are many factors that can weigh on a mother's decision. In healthcare, we can guide parents to recognize the benefits breastfeeding brings to both mother and child, but we must also respect and support women for whom breastfeeding is not possible or is not the best choice.

According to UNICEF, 24% of babies in Vietnam are breastfed (either exclusively or with formula feeding) up to the age of six months—higher than the overall global rate. The official recommendation from the WHO is that women are advised to breastfeed exclusively for the baby's first six months of life, without the need for additional solid food or fluids, including water.

Breastfeeding reduces the risk of many diseases that are a threat to infants, including Sudden Infant

Death Syndrome (by 36%); middle ear infection (otitis media), allergic rhinitis, and childhood leukemia (by about 18%). There are also some studies that show children who are breastfed tend to have a higher IQ, and are less likely to be obese or overweight in adolescence and adulthood.

The benefits to the mother include a reduced risk of pre- and post-menopausal breast cancer (because of the reduced exposure to estrogen) and a reduced risk of ovarian cancer. These benefits increase with longer periods of breastfeeding.

It's usually considered best for mother and baby to experience close skin contact immediately after birth to trigger a bond that also helps to stimulate the production of breast milk. After giving birth, it takes about two or three days for the milk to come in to the breast. The first milk that comes in is something called colostrum, a creamy

yellow liquid containing high levels of antibodies—which are proteins that fight infections and bacteria. Babies only drink about 5–10 mls of it, after which the breast milk begins to be produced in its normal form.

Normally when a baby suckles, the first part of the milk taken will be more watered down. Milk with a higher fat and nutritive content comes in at the end. It's often recommended that breastfeeding mothers should make sure that they are allowing their baby to stay on long enough to get what they need and not switch too early, so that the baby is getting the creamy fat content at the end.

It's unfortunate that some mothers do experience significant challenges in feeding their babies that can be overwhelming, especially in the absence of professional help from a midwife or lactation consultant.

Around 30% of women will

experience at least one breastfeeding problem in the first two weeks after delivery, and many of those will consult their doctor. The most common reasons for stopping breastfeeding in those early weeks is the baby not suckling or rejecting the breast, as well as painful breasts/nipples. After the first few weeks, the most common reason for stopping breastfeeding is reported as insufficient milk—which can include the *perception* of insufficient milk. Appropriate management and support for these problems is therefore key to achieving ongoing breastfeeding.

Low milk supply is the most commonly reported cause of mothers choosing to stop breastfeeding. However not all mothers who worry about low milk supply have an actual issue. *Perception* of low milk supply is a common problem, when parents misinterpret normal newborn behaviors—such as cluster feeding (prolonged periods of frequent brief feeds), growth spurts, and frequent feeding—or misunderstand how breastfeeding works, not appreciating that breasts may come to feel softer as the weeks go by; a baby's swallowing pattern may change; or that response to a breast pump is not a measurement of milk supply. Milk production is a feedback mechanism—the more you feed, the more milk is produced, and the less you feed, the less milk is produced—so if the mother starts supplementing breast milk with bottle feeding, this may lead to an actual decrease in her milk production.

Sometimes there really is an issue with milk transfer, in that the milk isn't being effectively withdrawn from the breast by the baby. The most common cause of this isn't an illness—it's more to do with positioning and attachment of the baby at the breast. If the mother is not positioned correctly while breastfeeding or the baby is not attached to the breast well, feeding will become more painful and this will lead to ineffective milk transfer. The best indicators of low milk supply are the frequency of wet nappies and weight gain (after five weeks of age).

Rarely, in perhaps 2–5% of cases, there is an underlying medical problem. Issues such as retained placenta, hyperthyroidism, and heavy bleeding during delivery can affect the pituitary gland, which affects milk supply. One third of women who have polycystic ovarian syndrome will have problems with their milk supply—breast surgery can also be responsible for this situation, as can the effect of hormonal contraception.

Pain in breastfeeding can have a significant impact on the relationship and whether the mother chooses to continue breastfeeding her child.

Cracked or sore nipples are common and are usually due to positioning and attachment issues. This is common in the early days of breastfeeding, and usually with practice and patience the issue resolves itself and the woman can carry on without needing to see a doctor. However, breastfeeding isn't supposed to be painful, and if the problem continues for a long period it is advised for the mother to seek help from a medical or health professional. If it does continue, it can cause fissures and acute pain—which will then affect breastfeeding. Applying a small amount of breast milk on the nipple can be very protective and restorative, as well as using purified lanolin (which is found in a lot of commercial nipple creams). Sometimes an antibacterial ointment is also necessary.

Cracked nipples are caused by attachment problems, when the baby is not attaching to the breast properly. Usually, when a baby attaches to the breast, it will make a wide open mouth so the top lip is way above the nipple, and make strong sucking motions. But if the baby is latching onto the nipple only, this will eventually cause nipple pain.

Sometimes when milk is not effectively removed from the breast, a painful condition called mastitis may arise, which presents as a wedge-shaped area of the breast that becomes painful, red, hard or firm, and hot. It may be accompanied by symptoms such as fever and chills, body aches, tiredness, nausea, and vomiting. It occurs when milk is held too long in the duct, causing distension—a blocked duct that then gives rise to mastitis. Blocked ducts are normally caused by poor positioning and attachment. When mastitis does occur, it is important to present to your doctor early to assess whether treatment is needed and to get advice on positioning and attachment to prevent the problem in the future.



Dr. Olivia Wyatt was born in South Africa and raised in Botswana, where she worked with HIV patients with Harvard Medical School and the Clinton Foundation. Now a mother of three—daughters Aggie, Rose and Evie and son Louis—Dr. Olivia regularly convenes FMP's Saigon International Mother and Baby Association, a group supporting new and expecting mothers with parenting guidance and information, where she leads discussions on topics such as feeding, sleeping, development milestones, colds & coughs, and vaccinations over coffee, tea and cakes.

Usually, if the nipple is brushed against a baby's top lip and nose, it will fully open its mouth. This is called rooting, and every suckling animal has the same instinctive response. It will latch on naturally when the nipple touches the top of the mouth, which draws in quite a large part of the breast rather than just the nipple. If the mother and baby are properly guided, the baby will get used to the correct rooting response, and the more frequently it will occur.

Trained healthcare professionals can support mothers and educate them about the best positions for the strongest attachments. A lactation consultant—or a midwife, or a nurse—can help to educate new mothers on how breastfeeding works, what to expect, what's normal, and what's not often talked about, especially in the early stages. ■

POSITIONING AND ATTACHMENT TIPS

- Sit comfortably with your back well-supported and your lap flat.
- Keep baby's body in a straight line facing the breast.
- Support baby's neck, shoulders and back so he/she can easily tilt back the head.
- Ensure baby's lower lip and chin makes contact with the breast first.

SIGNS OF EFFECTIVE ATTACHMENT

- Baby has a large mouthful of breast.
- Baby's chin is firmly touching the breast.
- Baby's mouth is wide open.
- Feeding doesn't hurt.
- No change in shape or color of the nipple after feeds.
- Baby's cheeks stay rounded while sucking.
- Baby takes long, rhythmic sucks and swallows with occasional pauses.
- Baby finishes feeding independently.

Baby should produce regular soaked/heavy nappies. Bowel motions should be soft and yellow from day 4/5 with two or more dirty nappies a day and poos at least the size of a large coin.

>>The List Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



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www.aivietnam.com

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Secondary Campus:

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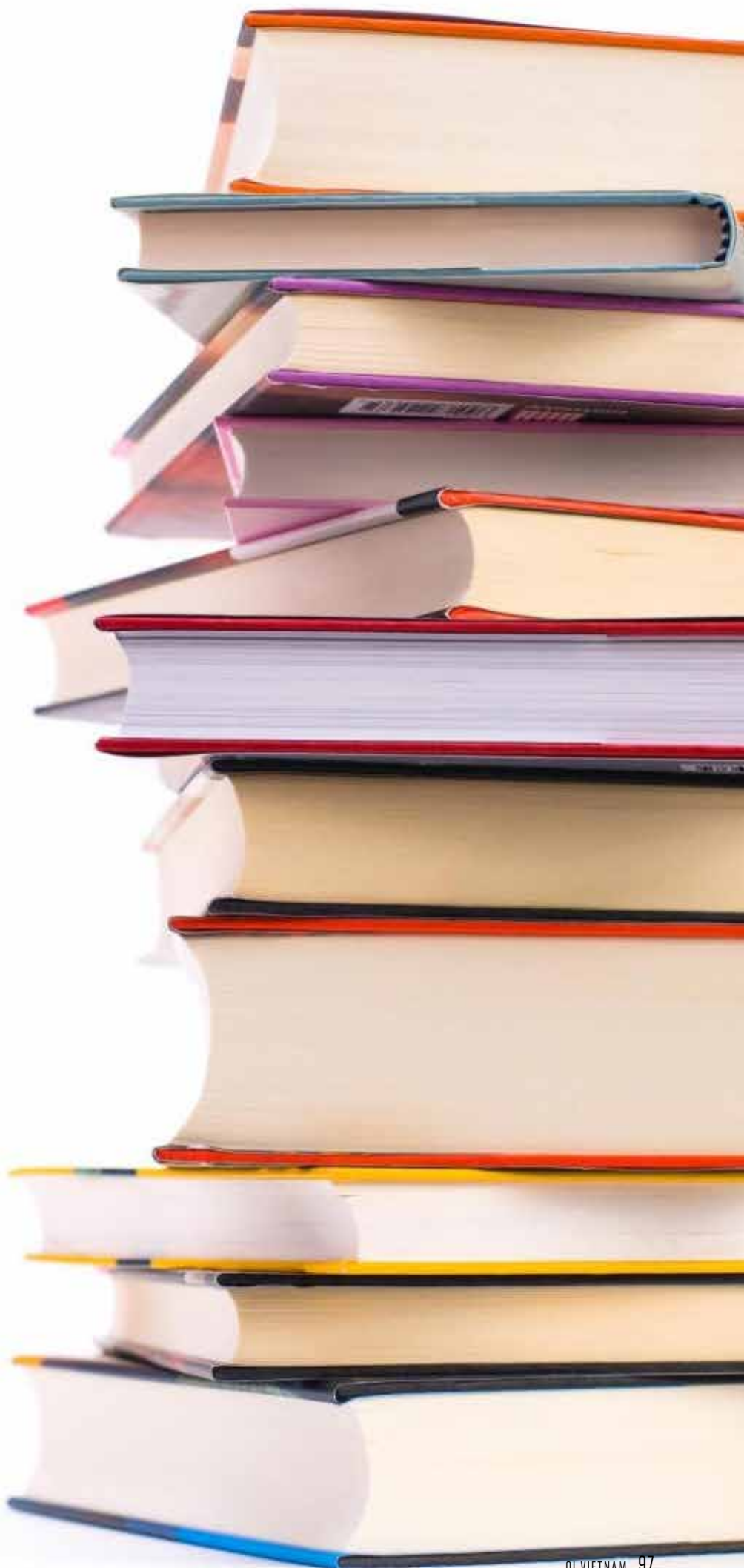
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Vietnamese Tennis Fans Look Forward to 2019 Rolex Shanghai Masters

Images by Mike Frey/Rolex Shanghai Masters



THE CLOSEST MAJOR MEN'S

tennis tournament to Ho Chi Minh City is also the most prestigious ATP event in the Asia-Pacific region. The 2019 Rolex Shanghai Masters will have it all, and will once again be held at the Qizhong Tennis Center, October 5th to 13th.

The multi award-winning tournament, and one of only nine ATP Masters 1000's in the world, is always looking to provide tennis savvy guests a greater experience. This year, in order to better meet the diverse needs of fans, the tournament is introducing a new scheduling program which will see day and night session tickets on sale for the very first time.

The Rolex Shanghai Masters is the only official ATP Tour tournament in Asia that is scheduled to host each of the Big 3 - Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal as well as every other player in the top 20.

Besides Chinese tennis fans, the Rolex Shanghai Masters has been seeing a year-on-year increase in foreign visitors coming to Qizhong Tennis Center. This new ticket scheduling will also give them an opportunity to explore one of the world's great cities.

Every year advance ticket sales have been increasing at a tremendous rate and as a result tennis fans are advised to get in early as sessions fill up fast, in particular the last three

days which are sold out weeks in advance.

Tickets for the center court from Monday to Friday (October 7th to October 11th) will have the day and night sessions allowing spectators a greater choice according to their personal time. The opportunity to buy all-day tickets, as before, also remains.

The new day and night session prices will be "wallet-friendly" with the National Day celebrations coinciding with the early stages of the tournament. For example, on Oct 7th, the daytime ticket for center court will cost only 160 yuan (approx. USD23), almost one third of the original all-day ticket price.

And if the whole family wants to watch the match, family tickets will have more preferential choice. There are tickets for two adults with one child and one adult with a child. A daytime ticket for a child will be a minimum 50 yuan (approx. USD7). That is undoubtedly the best choice for the whole family.

In addition to ticketing on the center court, there will also be ticketed seats on Court 3 which will be 90 yuan (approx. USD13) per day. ■

To purchase tickets and get more detailed information, go to the official ticket booking website www.jusstickets.com the official T-mall store of Rolex Shanghai Masters www.masters.tmall.com and member's online mall www.mechub.org.





THE LONG CAFE

The first coffee shop in Vietnam serving coffee that is roasted no longer than 10 days.

The Long Caffe truly wants its customers to enjoy the best coffee with the richest aroma. Beans are carefully chosen from the best Arabica plantations in Vietnam. With an aim to provide customers the most relaxing moments, the cafe has an open-space design that uses natural materials, such as wood and marble, to separate inner and outer spaces in a harmonious way. Such design gives customers a comfortable and warm feeling right when entering.

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