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VIETNAM

11-2019

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christine@oivietnam.com  
Online Editor **JAMES PHAM**  
jpham@oivietnam.com  
Staff Photographer **VY LAM**  
vy@oivietnam.com  
Graphic Designer **LAM SON VU**  
lamson@oivietnam.com

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## This Month's Cover

Image by **Vy Lam**

A Capturing From Saigon drawing session (read more about the class on page 38 & 39)

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L'ADRESSE DE BISTRO / IMAGE BY VY LAM

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72%



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PERCENTAGE



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We would like to express our gratitude to Oktoberfest Vietnam 2019's sponsors and patrons for making this festival a great success again.

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# 50/30/20

## Find out why these three numbers are important to your financial security

### WE ALL KNOW THE IMPORTANCE

of saving for our futures for whatever reason, but many factors will come into play on deciding when you wish to start a future financial plan. Perhaps younger people who are taking a gap year or just escaping from the rat race back home for a couple of years will prefer to spend as they earn. To those individuals, the idea of saving for a future event is so far off the radar it may as well be hidden in the recesses of the dark side of the moon and that's absolutely fine.

For the rest of us, we probably have made the decision to be longer term expats and have settled, working for a good company that might not have a package for pension planning or Regular Savings Plans (RSP). You are more than likely going to have to make those arrangements yourself. As a rule of thumb, we should all be working on the 50/30/20 percent split. It is a simple formula that, if followed, will set you up for most events in the future.

So, what is the 50/30/20 rule? Simply put it is *needs, wants* and *savings*.

50 percent of income *after tax* should be used for the absolutes: rent, mortgage, car payments, utilities, food, insurance and healthcare.

30 percent should be going to your everyday "wants": holidays, that new handbag, dinners out, cinemas visits, etc. The general purchases that are more luxury than a necessity.

20 percent should be set aside for savings and investments. That should also probably include a rainy day emergency fund kept as liquid cash in the bank as well as a RSP.

There will always come a day when saving and building a pot of funds will become the wisest decision any of us will ever make. The sooner we arrive at the decision the better, as a lesser amount will be required to put away each month over a longer period of time to end up at the same result than those that start later and have to now put a higher amount away each month which may impact

on daily life. This will be decided also based on the early years of saving, as your monthly income may not be as high as your possible future income from career advancement and promotions. Both compounding and Dollar Cost Averaging will kick in to your advantage the sooner you start, which I will explain later.

The most important thing about setting goals in life is having one in the first place. Whether you are planning for retirement, saving for your children's education, buying a house, a wedding or aiming to achieve other financial objectives, RSPs will help you reach your goals. RSPs are investment plans that offer a consistent and disciplined means of investment that provide access to stocks and unit trusts with low cost on a monthly basis. It takes advantage of the dollar-cost averaging approach that does not require you to time the volatile market. I regularly see people that have not taken any steps to secure their future but the good news is that with a bit of sensible planning the situation can be managed and controlled into a favorable position. It is never too late to get started. The worst thing anyone can do is to do nothing. That will guarantee an eventual date in the future when they wake up one morning and realize that they are now in economic difficulty

with no way out to secure a fully secured financial future.

So why a regular savings plan? "Time in the Market" rather than "Timing the Market". It is difficult to time the market where the prices fluctuate all the time. However, by adapting the approach of dollar-cost averaging, it turns market fluctuations to your benefit. Instead of investing a lump sum of your money, you are gradually building your portfolio over a period of time with a smaller and fixed amount of regular investment.

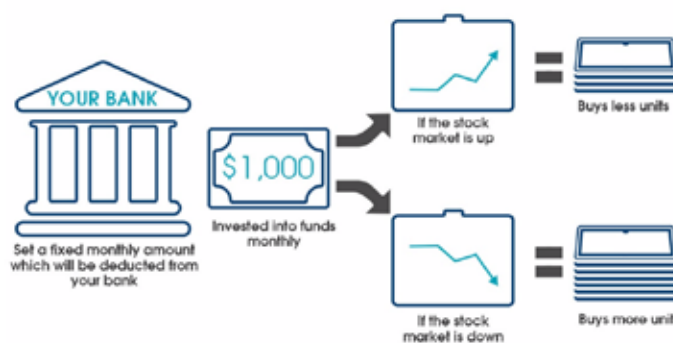
### Dollar-Cost Averaging

By investing a fixed amount of funds consistently every month over a period of time, dollar-cost averaging benefits you regardless of price fluctuation. You purchase more units when the price is lower and fewer units when the price is higher. History has shown us that markets are always up if a long enough period of time is used.

Therefore, rather than to time the market you should be focusing on time spent in the market. Starting young allows you to spend the most time in the market and gives you the opportunity to compound your investment returns over a longer period of time. So if you stick to the 50/30/20 perfect rule you should be just fine down the road. ■



**Lawrence Young** (FCSI) is the Senior Associate for Holborn Asset Management Group (HCMC office). Originally from the UK, Lawrence has been a finance professional for 30 years having worked across Europe and Asia as a stockbroker, Eurobond trader and interbank money broker. His areas of expertise lie in offshore tax efficient saving structures, higher education fee planning, inheritance tax planning, pension planning, life and health insurance, global investment property, offshore company formation and offshore banking. Email [lawrence.young@holbornassets.com](mailto:lawrence.young@holbornassets.com) if you would like him to answer your questions on these topics.







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# TROI OI!

## The country in numbers

### 39 HOMELESS FAMILIES IN THE CITY OF 8.9 MILLION PEOPLE ACCORDING TO A RECENT CENSUS, BUT THE POLL'S DEFINITION OF 'HOMELESSNESS' HAS BEEN CALLED INTO QUESTION.

The southern Vietnamese metropolis was home to over 2.5 million households as of April 2019, said Vo Thanh Sang, deputy director of the municipal statistics office. Only 39 of them, or less than 0.002 percent, were without a home, according to the census results.

Many have questioned the accuracy of such findings, as the staggeringly low number of homeless families seems too good to be true, as real estate is among the priciest in Vietnam. "We needed to adhere to unified criteria from the Ministry of Construction and the General Statistics Office in defining who is considered homeless and who isn't," Vo Thanh Sang, deputy director of the Ho Chi Minh City statistics office, told *Tuoi Tre* newspaper in an exclusive interview.

"Homeless family units were defined [by the census] as those who lived in tents, camps or on the sidewalks," Sang explained. The only homeless family units in Ho Chi Minh City were found in District 1, District 4, and Can Gio District, the official added. "Those who resided under stairs, for example, but had partition walls and doors to separate their living space from the surrounding were not considered homeless." More results of the 2019 census are expected to be announced later this year, while printed publications offering more in-depth analysis of the data will become available in 2020, the official added.



### 280,084 PEOPLE HAVE RECEIVED UNEMPLOYMENT ALLOWANCE SO FAR THIS YEAR, AND MORE THAN 13,600 PEOPLE WERE SUPPORTED WITH VOCATIONAL TRAINING.

The support was offered by the Vietnam Social Insurance, in co-ordination with the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). Expenses for the work totaled VND4.3 trillion from the unemployment insurance fund. More than 4.6 million people enjoyed unemployment allowance and more than 177,400 people were supported with vocational training. Le Quang Trung, deputy director of the Department of Employment under MOLISA, said unemployment insurance was a good measure in case workers met misfortunes related to their jobs. Unemployed people wanting to enjoy the allowance can send their documents to provincial and municipal labor, invalids and social affairs departments, he said.

### USD20,000 VIP AIR CHARTER SERVICE THAT PROVIDES PRIVATE JETS TO CUSTOMERS FOR AN HOURLY RATE HAS BEEN LAUNCHED BY VIETNAM'S VIETSTAR AIRLINES, WITH A ONE-WAY FLIGHT BETWEEN HO CHI MINH CITY AND HANOI.

Vietstar operates a three-jet fleet that includes a King Air B350, an Embraer Legacy 600, and an Embraer Legacy 650, an airline representative told *Tuoi Tre* newspaper. Customers will be charged an hourly rate, starting from VND80 million per hour for the King Air jet and up to VND230 million per hour for the Legacy planes, taxes and fees included.

"We also offer air charter services to international destinations within an eight-hour range [from Vietnam]," the representative said. International flights are subject to surcharges depending on the policy and overflight fees applicable in each foreign airspace. Private guides and chauffeurs for a private car upon arrival are available for an additional cost, the Vietstar representative said. Vietstar Airlines was formed in 2010 under a joint venture between military-owned A41 Aircraft Repairing Company, Vietstar Airlines JSC, and Tin Thanh Express JSC.





~ 100,000

number of workers with higher education level who stayed jobless has been decreasing, but the decreases were insignificant. This is the group with the highest number of jobless workers

Tran Xuan Nhi, former Deputy Minister of Education and Training, commented that the unemployment of bachelor's degree graduates is a waste of time for youth. Tens of thousands of young people finishing vocational schools can find good jobs with satisfactory salaries. However, in many localities, people still want to go to university.

More and more universities have been opened to satisfy the thirst of young people for higher education. The universities receive students with very weak learning capability. In the 2019 enrollment season, some schools announced they had accepted students with just 13-14/30 scores from the national high school finals. The quality of higher education is questionable and the high unemployment rate of bachelor's degree graduates is not a surprise.

## BACHELOR'S DEGREE GRADUATES CANNOT FIND JOBS, ACCORDING TO THE LATEST LABOR BULLETIN.

The figure was higher, 142,300, in the first quarter of 2018. In the last few years, the

unemployment of bachelor's degree graduates who stayed jobless has been decreasing,

but the decreases were insignificant. This is the group with the highest number of jobless workers

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# Bee The Change

In Dalat, a small bee garden hopes to increase the bee population through community collaboration

Text by Jesus Lopez-Gomez  
Images Provided by Dalat Bee Garden



## THERE'S BUCKWHEAT.

There's squash. There's a composting area. But there's one thing curiously missing from Dalat's Bee Garden: bees. "We don't keep bees, but build a habitat that is naturally friendly for bees and other endangered insects," explained Leonie Hapunkt, an organizer with the community garden.

Hofsaess was away when *Oi* visited the garden in September, but the lead gardener Duong Pham made herself available for a press inquiry. "We just had a tree fall, so we're working on this," Pham said walking over to sit on the aforementioned fallen tree, which had

fallen between vegetable patches.

While someone had come to cut and section the trunk by chainsaw for removal, Pham explained that the trunk might stay. It made for a nice partition between things.

Elsewhere in the garden, Pham showed off a stray limb that someone had used as a gardening pole that surprisingly started bearing leaves. It turned out to be a pepper plant.

In project management, this would be a perfect example of what's known as agile development. To the rest of us, we might just call the same practice just trying something. Maybe it's the fact that this

approach doesn't always pay off that makes any positive gains seem remarkable.

But, any way you look at it, the Bee Garden ([www.facebook.com/groups/dalatbeegarden](http://www.facebook.com/groups/dalatbeegarden)) appears to be a big success for its team.

What was originally a vacant lot just outside of the city has been repurposed into a collective gardening effort that's aligned to the various stakeholders. The land has been borrowed from a developer who's agreed to loan the land for a year. Area residents have learned how to compost and are now converting their food waste into fertilizer to help the garden's crops prosper. Even





neighboring Khe Sanh Homestay also pitches in when they can to support the effort and its volunteers.

While the site bears the name “Bee Garden,” Hapunkt explained that the garden differs from a bee-keeping operation in that no insects are maintained on site. “Obviously we are not beekeepers in the sense with the wooden boxes and the white uniform,” she said. “Everybody can be a beekeeper, when you plant enough flowers to attract bees they will come,” she said. “We just give a space for pollinators to thrive.”

Bees are not at the garden, but are central to Hapunkt’s work still. She

founded an information awareness campaign and nonprofit called Bees for Life ([www.facebook.com/bees4life.org](http://www.facebook.com/bees4life.org)). The organization’s stated purpose is to show the urgency of the decline in the bee population.

Hapunkt had gotten to know Pham from her work creating community gardens in Saigon. When the land that became the Bee Garden became available in March, both women and a volunteer team sprang to work to make it what it is today, a place to grow both food and wildflowers principally to support local bee populations.

Outside of bees and insects, Hapunkt

explained that inspiration was a central theme to the Bee Garden. It’s a common point for volunteers and local residents of all ages, she said adding the garden is a community-centered place to come and just try some of your own ideas too. It’s a concept she hopes will spread like pollen borne by bees.

“We see Bee Garden as a big flower who will spread out her seeds, taken by the wind or the people to other areas where new baby gardens can grow to beautiful places. It is a big chance for abandoned areas throughout the city that are easily used as sad spaces for dumpsters and garbage.” ■





# Seed to Shelf

A look inside one of the world's largest agriculture companies

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

**IT'S ALMOST HALF THE WORLD'S** pepper. It's a sizable chunk of the world's coffee and almonds, their cashews and dehydrated onions. But if you're not an industry insider, the name Olam International ([www.olamgroup.com](http://www.olamgroup.com)) isn't like to ring a bell. "We're probably the biggest company you've never heard of," said Nikki Barber, Vice President of Olam International's public relations vice president.

Barber is based in London, though the company is headquartered in Singapore. Originally an agriculture commodity grower, the company has grown internationally now with operations in over 70 countries and a portfolio of 47 agriculture supplies. The company has also expanded their refinement capacity and merged their production capacities with robust refinement and processing capacities. Not only can they grow the raw green coffee, they can roast and grind it too. Not only can they grow the pepper, they can provide different grind varieties.

She gave her remarks in a snug office the middle of the company's pepper operation in rural Pleiku.

Olam provides about 40 percent of the world's pepper, so the 640-hectare pepper growing operation Barber is speaking from isn't totally representative of the agricultural giant's might. There are 2.4 million hectares of farmland under its direct management globally. The area pepper farms feeding into the company's pepper stock—some 34,000 Vietnamese farmers grow agricultural products that are part of Olam operations—far outside what the company is growing directly on its farm. But in important ways, the relatively small pepper operation in the middle of south-central Vietnam is wholly representative of the company.

"Pepper is a sensitive plant," Ravindranath Balakrishnan said walking into the company's pepper growing operation, a covered area where a new kind of pepper grows under a light-dimming insect net under the care of the







handful of full time staff whose job it is to tend to the plants with the help of networked monitoring machines inside the growing house that measure key variables like moisture levels and stem size. The shading net is draped over poles; pepper plants snake up them as they grow like veins on a human body. Pepper plants normally appear as giant, tree-like organisms towering over their farmers, but these are actually mature pepper plants that have grown fully over their supporting pole.

Pepper plants in Pleiku are usually grown out in the open too with varying degrees of care and with farming methods that may vary wildly from producer to producer. One of the farmers who works with Olam now said, before the partnership, he was planting the pepper stalks just as his father had shown him: by burying a pepper stalk several feet into the ground. Typically, a large percentage of pepper that's planted does not take to the soil.

At the Olam pepper operation, however, almost every one of the plants that are trimmed from the nursery and are planted outside—each of which meets Global G.A.P. and Rainforest Alliance certification—survive and yield the farmer additional harvest. At a time when pepper prices have sunk compared to their historical average, Balakrishnan explained that farmers were seeking ways to add value to their crops. Olam's values for sustainability-centered production align with the need. In a few years, the company plants to have the nursery source a higher quality pepper plant commercially for local farmers. The company's volume of production means that this could potentially raise the quality of pepper production worldwide.



For an international company of Olam's scale, the changes they make inevitably affect the global supply of food. Changes to how the company decides to manage their almond operation in Australia—some 45 percent of the country's total output—will inevitably change the almond the world as a whole buys and consumes.

But the volumes only tell part of the story. In California, for example, the state which plays a greatly outsized role in the world's almond supply providing some 80 percent of the nuts globally, Olam's crops there are bordered by wildflowers. The flowers are there to support the local bee population, which pollinates the crop. General Mills, a company that buys the almonds grown there, highlighted the company's bee-friendly practices in press communications.





A company of this size it seems has to think strategically in terms of global volumes, of world consumption and consumption trends by country. While consumers may not know Olam, but they know their products' buyers: General Mills, Nestle and Mars.

Perhaps because their industry is agriculture and not something like manufacturing where the inputs and outputs are more static, Olam operates in a manner that's attentive to the world in which they operate. The areas where their farmers are clustered in rural Vietnam are studied for livability and, where appropriate and necessary, the company takes direct involvement to enhance the quality of life for local residents. In Pleiku, the company built a school for area children. Schools are both a necessary resources for a healthy, educated local workforce as well as a hedge against child labor. A neighboring village close to the pepper operation Barber spoke at lacked street lights until Olam built a network of nighttime road lighting for the community free of charge.

The Singapore-based company has an operation that spans the world. Much of the Olam cashew supply processed in Vietnam is grown in Africa and exported out to countries with big demand like India. Yet the company is also small enough to help create a small farmers' cooperative, like the one in Bu Dang. These 294 Vietnamese farmers are among the first to grow cashew crops with a coveted Fair Trade certification. Like pepper, cashew prices have also depressed. The Fair Trade certification is a way to add more value to their crop and create higher revenues for their yield. Olam trains the farmers to achieve certification, but allows them to sell to their preferred buyer.

Among them is 55-year-old farmer Nguyen Xuan Hop. He was one of a group of farmers who met with Barber and press in September, including *Oi Vietnam*. Nguyen said the new farming methods were a little different—namely, that he had to control his fertilizer use



in a more careful manner to accord with Fair Trade standards—but that the co-op was ultimately a better deal for him and the farmers around him. Previously, he said buyer would negotiate with each farmer individually allowing the buyer to effectively set the price of their crop. Through the co-op, farmers are able to bargain collectively and there's more transparency in the process leading to generally higher revenue for the farmers who join.

In many cases, Olam International is offering assistance with land connected directly to homes that's been in the hands of farmers for generations. These are generally not the industrial farm operations of the US, but sometimes seemingly just very productive backyards or green spaces that can mirror nature reserves. Before the cashews Olam International sells can be harvested—typically, right after the new year—they first appear as flowers on large, towering trees, some of them decades old. If you're reading this around the end of November, know that the cashew flower is blooming, a sign of something good to come. ■



Ravindranath Balakrishnan



Nguyen Xuan Hop





**Guillaume Rondon** is a French web entrepreneur selling products online in Europe. He had been living in Vietnam for over two years and wants to share ideas and advice about entrepreneurship. You can reach him at [www.movetoasia.com](http://www.movetoasia.com).

# Expat Entrepreneur

## How to become an entrepreneur while living as an expat in Vietnam

### Why is Saigon a Great City to Launch Your Project?

Vietnam is a great country to be an entrepreneur in. Co-working places have plenty of events, gathering young talents and entrepreneurs every week. Being surrounded by this ecosystem of start-ups, young students who have a side business, freelancers or business owners, people with an entrepreneur smindset and ideas for projects are given great opportunities to succeed. As a business owner, being able to access recent graduates with fresh ideas, rare skills, and a lot of ambition is another great perk of living in Vietnam. The growing expat community in Saigon is the perfect audience: being able to target this community, offer them services (like visas) or products (like restaurants) are options companies are exploring.

### Emerging Markets Like Vietnam Have Great Potential

Vietnam has had an average GDP growth rate of 7% over the last few years. Comparing Vietnam to developed countries like the UK or the US, the middle class is getting richer and are willing to pay for premium goods, and the millennial generation wants to live life to the fullest. Saving money is not usually one of the millennials' priorities as they jump into working life. They want to spend their money enjoying Taiwanese milk tea, experiencing a fine Italian restaurant, or traveling to

Thailand with friends for the first time. From an entrepreneur perspective, this dynamism is a great advantage when thinking of food and beverage services, and importing goods targeting this generation of consumers.

On the other hand, knowing that the internet is disrupting industries and the way we consume, exploring those opportunities is another aspect digital entrepreneurs are focusing on. The internet allows you to target worldwide prospects using Facebook or marketplaces such as Amazon.

### How to Launch a Worldwide Project Through the Internet

All economies are based on supply and demand. Here is an example plan to identify those opportunities and operate an arbitrage business. Arbitrage is done by buying an asset in one market at a lesser price and selling it immediately in another market at a higher price. Identifying those opportunities usually does not involve any investment, and it can be grown and automated.

More and more consumers are using online services such as Fiverr, Freelancer.com or Upwork to find designers, web developers, or writers within a day to achieve a task for them. Nowadays, it is very common to hire freelancers for a few days of work if we do not need a full-time employee.

Here is the strategy I am inviting you to explore:

1. Identify services needed on a marketplace that does not yet exist for a certain industry, language, or a specific skill.

Examples,

- Design logos for a travel agency (industry)
- Writing a business article in French (language)
- Coding a website using Java (specific skill/programming language)

2. Find freelancers in another marketplace that provide those services.

3. As soon as a customer places an order, you are in charge of understanding the needs, following up with your customer, and ensuring the freelancer delivers the service.

The first few weeks will be intense: You must be competitive and build a network of competent freelancers who meet the specifications quickly in order to obtain good reviews and move up in the rankings of the most highly rated services. As you live in Vietnam, you can also use talented freelancers here, grow your team, and keep outsourcing your job to foreign customers through those platforms.

You can expand the business by recruiting freelancers, increasing your prices, offering new services, advertising services in other marketplaces... Now, I have one question for you: What is the next step you will take today to start your first entrepreneurial project? ■

# Here's Our Definitive Q&A Guide To The Exclusive Dragonball Destination F1 Supercar Road Trip From Ho Chi Minh City To Hanoi This April 2020.

Text and Images Provided by **Infinity-Group**

*Your future driving holidays*

## LET'S TAKE A JOURNEY.

Imagine Ferrari 488's Pilot Sport treads caressing the pavement along golden fields.

Or McLaren P1's conspicuous growl reverberating through lush jungle canopy.

Perhaps you enjoy the coastline's glistening rays reflected onto a Porsche 911's silver hood...

...Before weaving around the futuristic skyscrapers of a bustling mega-city.

## Now you can revel in man's mastery over machine and nature with...

- Decadent meals,
- Exclusive entertainment,
- And Lavish accommodations!

The Dragonball Destination F1 crew dubbed "Infinity-Group" has organized over 300 such road trips across continents. Their portfolio includes several renowned car manufacturers, massive product launches, and international media presentations.

Today we sit down with Chairwoman Celine Ventalon.

After participating in Mercedes

France's driving events, she's confident that Formula 1 racing's debut in Vietnam is the perfect time to showcase its supercar scene.

And you're invited to her road trip!

## Where does your love for cars come from?

My childhood dream was to design cars, but the male dominated industry afforded women few graces. As our native French compatriots say, "C'est la vie."

Yet the passion never abates. I wound up driving an AMG GT and M3 Convertible!

You'll also catch me in a Crossblade because my partner and I were Smart testpilots for 4 years. We've participated in countless rallies.

## Tell us about the trip.

The unremarkable has no place among us.

Every detail is finely crafted to the moment your wheels kiss Vietnamese soil. High performance individuals demand nothing less.

80 teams of 2 drivers (dubbed our

'Dragons') will tour 1,800km from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi, commemorating our trip with VIP access to the F1 Grand Prix on the Hanoi Street Circuit.

Each of the 8 days and 7 nights is punctuated with championship dining and accommodations.

You will finally enjoy camaraderie among a fleet of select supercar diehards who love it all:

- The speed.
- The sound.
- The exotic look.
- The racing heritage.

Average daily drive time is 4.5 hours.

I believe the new scenery makes it feel like you're popping your cherry all over again.

## How are you accommodating drivers that, for many, are visitors to an unfamiliar locale?

As stated, we take care of every aspect. That includes transfer, luggage, and refueling. Provisions are made should a collision occur.

## Supercars weren't made to go slow. Is this a race or time trial?





No. As a former testpilot, I get it. People like you and I are constantly pushing the limits. But the purpose of this trip is to fall in love with the view both on the highway and adjacent to it. We ask that everyone obey traffic laws.

Don't worry. There will be opportunities to rev up your engine!

#### **Which vehicles are allowed on the trip and how can we get ours there?**

You can fly in with any classic, supercar, or bold new sustainable whip.

Please, please, please ask us about customs clearance. Our preferred agents operate like surgeons around red tape. However, we recognize that transportation isn't feasible for all participants. That's why we help those drivers source a car locally.

#### **A good parent never leaves their baby unattended. What security precautions have you taken?**

Your baby is locked up tighter than a 90° turn every single day and night.

#### **What can we expect at the Vietnam F1 Grand Prix?**



*Celine*

I'm very proud to welcome guests to our bespoke accommodation—the Dragon's Nest!

Prime view of the Hanoi Street Circuit and lanes is just the beginning. You're truly up close to modern miracles of engineering with VIP access to the Formula 1 Support Race Paddock.

(And don't be surprised when drivers & celebrities make surprise appearances!)

We've flown in international entertainment and top DJs. The best food is paired with the best wine. You'll live 5 lifetimes in the span of 2 days.

It's a seamless luxury experience walking from your acclaimed hotel to high-end transport to a state-of-the-art Circuit Park.

Yes, there's WiFi. Yes, it's fast.

#### **So, how much for all this?**

It's a lot.

#### **How much is "a lot"?**

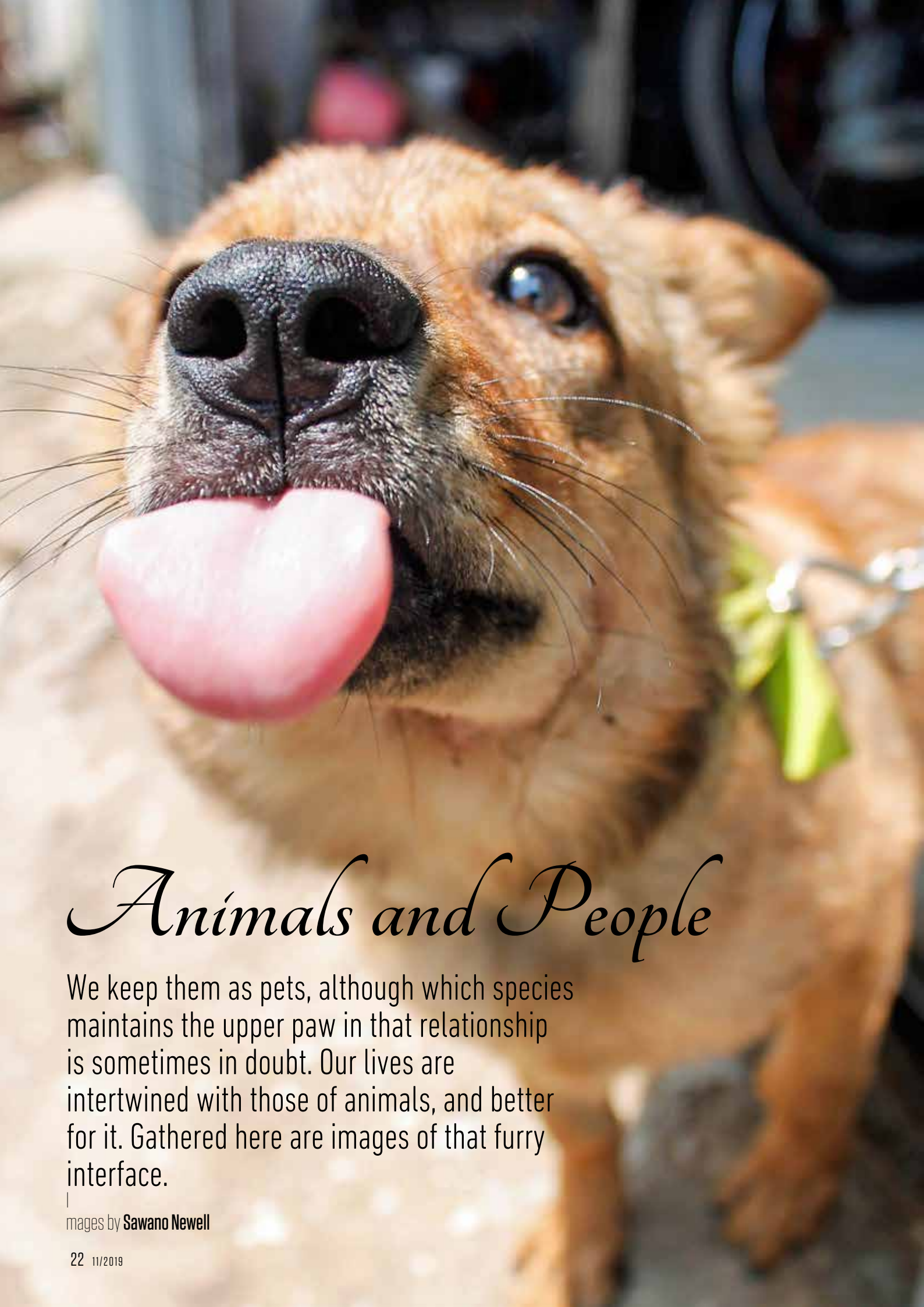
It depends. Your front-to-end experience includes entry for 2 occupants per vehicle and starts at USD25,000. Each additional participant is USD20,000. Work with us to tailor an experience perfect for your needs or ambitions. We're connected to the best hotels and transportation.

#### **Any parting words?**

Seriously, soak in the leather and steel.

Would you miss Woodstock? This is your ONLY opportunity to ink your name in Formula 1 and supercar history. Get in touch with us now before all spots fill up. ■

For more info, visit [www.dragonball.vn](http://www.dragonball.vn)



# *Animals and People*

We keep them as pets, although which species maintains the upper paw in that relationship is sometimes in doubt. Our lives are intertwined with those of animals, and better for it. Gathered here are images of that furry interface.

|  
images by **Sawano Newell**

















# Cemetery Alley

An entire neighborhood built on top of a graveyard

Text by **NPD Khanh**  
Images by **Neil Featherstone**

## IT GOES BY MANY NAMES:

BT Blank Development Zone by city planners, Special Black Zone by the Vietnamese National Post Office, and Cemetery Alley by those who live there. Officially, it's known as alley 344 Chu Van An in Binh Thanh District.

"I actually call it Labyrinth Alley because people get lost in it all the time. Mostly outsiders and young children who aren't familiar with the layout yet," says Lo Ky Thang, the alley's guard for the last 15 years. "Cemetery Alley is because, well, it used to be a cemetery. The bones are still down there." Thang is a second generation resident and, aside from keeping the peace in the neighborhood, often leads those who get lost safely out of the alley.

From the main street, Cemetery Alley is similar to countless other alleys that crisscross Saigon, but hidden behind its dusty, twisting pathways and sleepy façade is a fascinating story of a maze built on a wartime cemetery roughly 60 to 70 years ago. During the American War and the subsequent change in regime, the cemetery was abandoned and in the chaos, poor rural people looking forward to a new future moved in. They seized the plot of land and started building with little regards to infrastructure guidelines, building codes or that they were literally living on top of corpses.

The alley itself consists of a one main axis from Chu Van An road that







goes about 250 to 300 meters long before opening up to another main road. From this single axis branches numerous smaller alleys that crook, turn and interlock each other with no determinable pattern, forming a veritable warren. Some of the smaller alleyways lead nowhere while other seemingly dead ends lead to secret pockets where houses are unnumbered. Government officials called these houses the blank houses and on paper, neither the houses or their occupants exist.

"They have no proper documentation," Thang explains. "These are the oldest houses in the entire alley, some 60, 70 years old. They were built back when this was still an open-air cemetery. The building was illegal. The people don't have documents with them. To sort them out is to comb through 60 years of undocumented history and a couple of hundred households all without proper certificates of residency to their names. As far as the government is concerned, these houses and their inhabitants don't exist while the ones with some paper to them get a pseudo,

one-size-fits-all legal status. Less headaches that way."

So the locals decided to write their own addresses. A handful are numbered based on Chu Van An, others on the nearby No Trang Long street. On various walls, helpful maps and directions have been painted on. The National Post Office is unable to deliver mail into the alley because none of their postmen are capable of navigating the passageways. "They drop it off at my place instead and I do the delivering," says Thang.

Another problem residents had to tackle was the water supply. Cemetery Alley had electricity but no running water. Back in the 80s, the government attempted to build a pipe system through the neighborhood, however the project was called off after two days when construction workers struck the graves underneath the alley. As a result, the water business is shared by a handful of outside merchants who deliver and sell truckloads every day. ■







**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 FYI on UTIs

## Urinary tract problems in cats and dogs

### Cats

If your cat is experiencing problems urinating (dysuria), it is likely because of one of the following bladder problems in cats: idiopathic cystitis, bladder stones or urinary tract infection

The most common urinary issue in cats is sterile inflammation of the bladder, known as idiopathic cystitis. This is an inflammatory condition, which, in most cases, can be treated very successfully with anti-inflammatory medicine. Unfortunately, the cause is not fully understood but stressful situations are a trigger in a large number of cases of bladder problems in cats.

Bladder stones, or uroliths, are also relatively common. Again, the symptoms involve difficulty passing urine and spending a long time in the litter tray. The urine can even be stained red due to bleeding. Urinary tract infections, while relatively uncommon, often occur in combination with stones/crystals.

### Dogs

Dogs can also have difficulty urinating, and this can be the first sign of other underlying diseases. When a dog has a UTI, any of the following symptoms may be present:

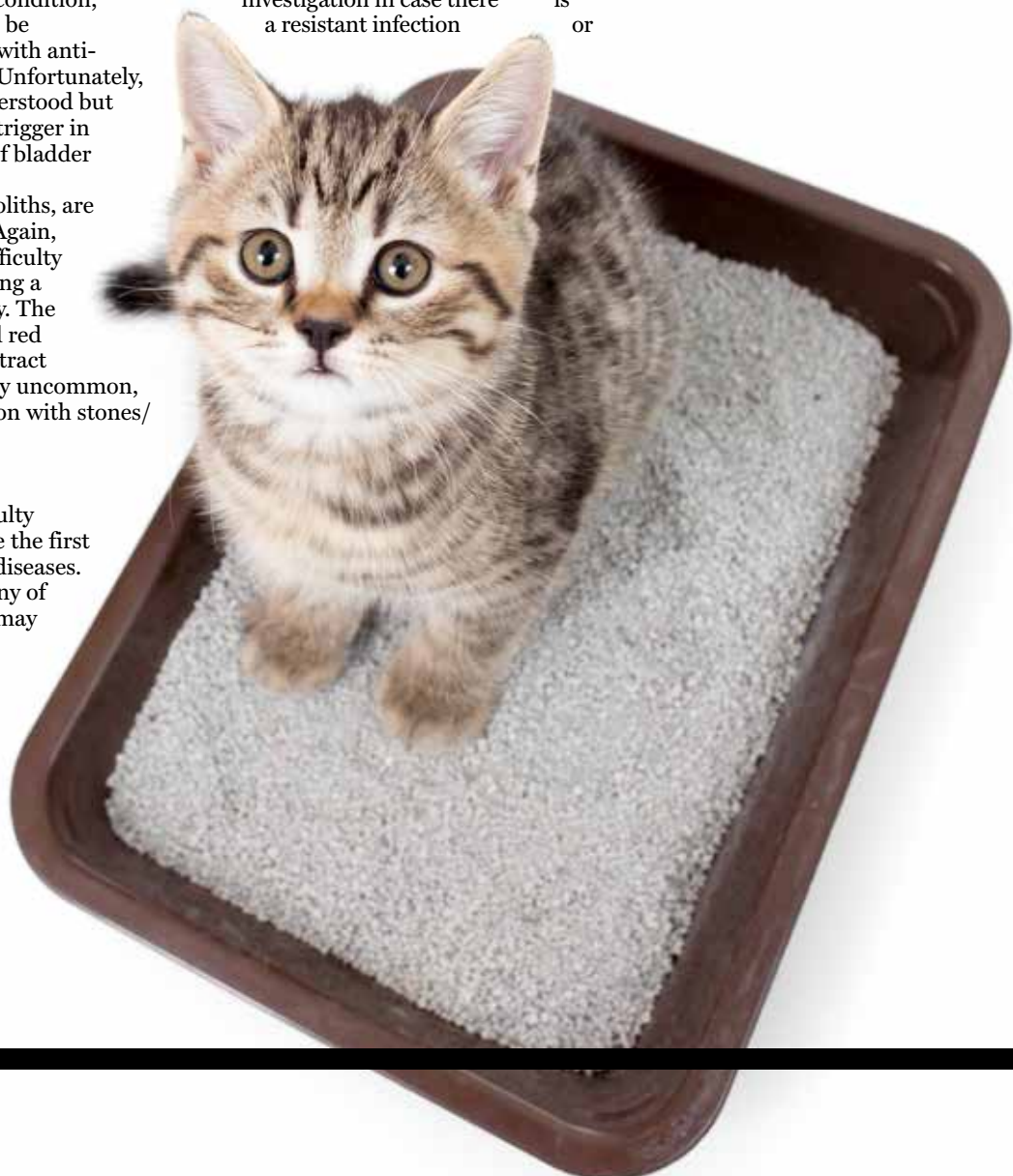
- Straining
- Frequent urination
- Blood in the urine
- Licking of urine

Bacteria cause urinary tract infections when they gain access to the bladder. Antibiotics generally clear UTIs with little fuss, but it is important to test a urine

sample in case there is a more serious condition going on, for example bladder stones, or bladder cancer.

Urine samples are easiest to collect first thing in the morning, using a clean container or ladle. The sample can be poured into a pot, provided by your vet, and handed in for testing. Recurrent bladder problems will need further investigation in case there is a resistant infection or

another condition is present. Once diagnosed correctly, most urinary tract diseases are medically managed using either tableted medication or dietary change—the remainder (such as growths or bladder stones) requires surgical intervention. ■





# Pet of the Month



## Adopting Special Animals with Special Needs

**TYPICALLY, EVERY SHELTER** will have at least one animal at a time that is considered a special needs animal. This might be a dog with a medical condition that requires daily treatment, such as a skin condition, thyroid disorder, or diabetes. Or it might be a cat missing a limb or an eye. Some shelters consider animals lacking in socialization skills to be special needs.

Such animals may not have physical scars but do have emotional scars that require a special touch for the animal to trust humans.

Due to the nature of animal life on the streets of Saigon, at any given time ARC may have several special needs animals with any of the conditions listed above. What we find is that in the amazing capacity for getting on

with life that animals have, cats and dogs generally are not slowed by illness or disability. Even timid animals, given sufficient time and training, can overcome their previous traumas to become loving, loyal companions. All of these dogs and cats are deserving of patient adopters with the vision to see through the disability to the extraordinary animal within.

**Some of ARC's current special animals with special needs:**



**Nabi**, with her lovely white and tabby markings, was born with deformed hind legs that prevent her from standing on all fours. This doesn't stop her from getting around though. According to Nabi's foster mom, she is a fast mover who easily keeps up with the other cats in the house when it comes to playing and racing to the food bowls. Nabi is seven months old and has been vaccinated and spayed.



**Elle** was rescued from the clutches of a temple dog, but not before the dog injured one of her eyes. The injury was severe and required surgery to remove the eye, but to meet her you wouldn't know that Elle has a disability. She gets along perfectly well and doesn't seem to realize she's missing an eye. Elle, a beautiful tri-color young cat, recently turned one year old and has been vaccinated and spayed.




**Spotty**, age 8-9, is currently experiencing some medical issues. Spotty recently had a few teeth removed due to an infection that moved up into one eye and resulted in a painful eye condition. Spotty is also hookworm positive, so should be adopted as an only dog since hookworm is contagious to other dogs. Spotty is working through these, hopefully temporary, medical conditions, and is ready for an adopter who will help her on the path to wellness and happiness.



**Toby** has had a very sad life that has left him unsure of humans. Toby was rescued along with five cats after their owner died. The owner loved them but due to her own poor health, had resorted to keeping her animals in cages. We are not sure how much time Toby spent outside the cage because when rescued, he was very unsteady on his feet. Toby is walking well now and has even started joining the weekend dog walks. Toby is working on his trust issues and needs an adopter with experience in handling anxious dogs. If ever there was a dog deserving of socializing and a happy life, it is Toby. ■

*To adopt one of these ARC special needs animals and experience the joy that caring for a special animal can bring, email [arcpets@gmail.com](mailto:arcpets@gmail.com). Visit ARC's Facebook page to get info on all of the cats and dogs available for adoption: [www.facebook.com/arcpetsvietnam](https://www.facebook.com/arcpetsvietnam)*

A woman with dark hair, wearing gold-rimmed aviator sunglasses, a tan jacket with ruffled sleeves, and a light-colored pleated skirt, is shown from the waist up. She is carrying a red bag with a grey fur half-moon pouch. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a yellow building and greenery.

# Your Style, Your Bag



Hoola Hoola launched its Saigon flagship store at Vivo City last month. Hoola Hoola handbags are designed and made in Italy, and customers get to pick different accessories and combine them to make their own unique handbag. All the handbags are made of a patented material, which is light, washable and waterproof. The accessories are made of different materials including leather, fabrics and nylon.

Founder and CEO Antonio Miscellaneo says the interchangeable design concept sets Hoola Hoola bags apart, "Our idea is to present women with accessible quality fashion bags that can change with their lifestyle and look. We want the Hoola Hoola customer to feel empowered by the infinite possibilities of the different styles they can create with our handbags."









### Hoola Hoola

2nd Floor, SC Vivo City, 1058 Nguyen Van Linh, D7  
[www.facebook.com/hoolahoolavn](http://www.facebook.com/hoolahoolavn)  
[www.hoolahoola.vn](http://www.hoolahoola.vn)







# *For Art's Sake*

*Mid Summer - Trưa hè, 2019, 30.5x45cm*







# Reflecting Tradition

Artist bridging past and  
future with reverse glass  
painting

Text by **Dana McNairn**  
Images by **Vy Lam**







**A TRADITIONAL ART FORM HAS** an unlikely champion in student Nguyen Duc Huy. The 22-year-old, in his second year of graphic design at Ton Duc Thang University, is an avid collector of reverse glass paintings.

While reverse glass painting has been practiced as an art form around the world for centuries, its start in Vietnam can be traced to Chinese immigrants around the turn of the last century. The paintings were inexpensive to produce and purchase, and over the decades migrated further south, becoming a very popular art form in southern Vietnam. Typically the paintings would hang in homes above doorways and altars for decoration and to bring good luck. You've also seen them hanging in temples

and pagodas. The paintings reference classic Vietnamese myths and folk tales, Buddhism and landscapes. As the style spread so did access to them from rural farms to wealthy urban homes. Huy explains the colonial revolution against the French put a stop to the materials used in glass painting and the art form did not pick up in popularity afterwards. Perhaps a decade later, he says there was a resurgence and new materials introduced such as metallic paint and mother of pearl, but it has been on a downward trajectory ever since.

He shows me pieces of glass at different stages of painting and demonstrates painting a piece of glass with the outline of a lotus flower in Chinese black ink. Flipping it over, the viewer will see the reverses of the image. Huy says original colors for the paints were sourced from bark, flowers, leaves and ash and sometimes mixed with tung tree oil. Now acrylic paint or even indoor wall paint is used. Huy restores the paintings he finds by himself. For example, after gently cleaning, he will spray a layer of glossy transparent acrylic to prevent any further paint from chipping off. He fills in and paint-traces any missing outlines with Chinese black ink and then repaints the missing color sections. He may or may not do a second coat depending on the level of damage.

"I started collecting the old enamel pottery," he says, "and I kept finding all this old glass, just tossed in the garbage." His pottery collecting took him all over Ho Chi Minh City and then he started going further afield into the surrounding provinces. "But I had to take the bus everywhere and walk a lot," Huy laughs, "because I started when I was 15 or 16 years old." He feels this art is disappearing for a number of reasons. "Someone dies and this stuff is just thrown out," he says. "I think I'm the only one collecting glass painting." Elsewhere, for example, *Viet Nam News* says there

are fewer than ten southern artists known to be actively painting on glass.

Aby assisted in translation by Huy's colleague, Nguyen Minh Thu, as we sit at Common 9 Cafe where Huy is holding the first of what he hopes to be a number of glass exhibitions. Minh Thu and Huy met at university when she asked Huy to look over her master's thesis on Lai Thieu pottery, a ceramics village in Binh Duong province, just northeast of Ho Chi Minh City that became famous for producing southern Vietnam's "household" items. Walking around the exhibit, one of his oldest paintings is of Guan Yin (the Chinese version of *Quan Am*, the Vietnamese bodhisattva of compassion or goddess of mercy) painted in 1927. The newest is one by him done this year.

Huy says these paintings are also important because daily life, landscapes, wishes for peace—in other words the community itself—is reflected. His purpose in collecting and restoring is to bring younger audiences to a traditional art form and to help promote the values of traditional art forms. "These are a valuable reminder of Saigon's past and the south's past," he says. "This old style is a part of us." He feels the images are neither ecstatic nor sad, rather entirely pragmatic given as so many tend to pastoral scenes, nature, still lifes and even livestock.

Huy is a bridge between past and present. "The young will say, 'oh that's my grandfather's painting,' but hopefully they will also say, 'hey, what's *that* painting over there?'" He's referring to his *Quan Am*, modestly hung away from the other paintings. It's a stylized *Quan Am* because Huy's goddess is painted on a very modern-looking black background. He explains traditionally backgrounds were a light color such as yellow or orange or not painted at all so you can "see" the glass.

Huy wants to collaborate with others to serve communities by having the glass paintings back in local temples or pagodas or a museum. Ideally an organization would take the 60-odd paintings he's collected so far and exhibit them. He says at the moment, his glass paintings likely have more historical and cultural value rather than numeric value because it's a dying art.

Huy is frank about why he collects. "This is so important to Saigon, but now many don't care," he says. "Many of the existing glass painters are old and they're dying and there are no young people picking up the art." He notes that originally it was young boys who were apprenticed to be glass painters and that they entered the art form as a career path. "It was really popular," he says. Huy is the channel encouraging other artists to take an interest in continuing the traditional style or like him, playing with and adapting the form. If it's not taken up and championed it will be lost soon, he says. "It really will go extinct." ■

For more on Huy's work, visit [www.facebook.com/dauansaigon16](http://www.facebook.com/dauansaigon16)





# Anatomy of a Class

In District 2, nude-figure sketch  
classes drawing attention

Text by Jesus Lopez-Gomez  
Images by Vy Lam

## WHEN HOANG DANG KHOA

looked at the naked woman in front of him on a Sunday afternoon, he didn't see a body. "I see shadow and planes. It's confusing," he said, searching for the right words to describe how a live person looks to an artist. "But it's fun."

Khoa, a 17-year-old budding artist and aspiring animator, spoke during a break at the Capturing Form Saigon ([www.facebook.com/capturingformsaigon](http://www.facebook.com/capturingformsaigon)) live drawing class on October's second Sunday. The two-hour sessions are largely unguided and offer a range of utensils, art implements and mediums by which students can capture the form. The one constant: the subject of study is

generally a nude figure.

That day's model was a slim, Western woman. Aside from the empty jug she carried as an accessory, the model was otherwise completely nude. "Being an artist, you see the shape" principally, he said. The pencil and ink drawings of the model are sketched in a miniature series on his paper. The white is like a fog out of lines and smudge shadow partially depict the model.

The body has "dark planes, shapes and structure" totally unlike a manmade object, Khoa explained. "It's a challenge."

It's a challenge all the artists undertake together. Organizer Lilly Wong said artists come with different skill levels and training. She offers some





Lily Wong

guidance but is largely interested having the artists create the drawing with their own style and perspective. "Technique can be taught," she said. "It's about style over technique."

As an artistic endeavor, the human body appears to be more manageable as a portion than as a whole. It's almost as if the whole body is too much to attempt at once, like the only real way to do it well is to focus on one specific aspect of

the body narrowly: the back, the abdomen, the shoulders.

The hardest part of the body for almost everyone to draw? The hand, Wong said. Wong took over the Capturing Form sessions in August 2018, but the first drawing rendezvous dates back to summer 2017. Wong, an art educator, art consultant and artist herself, took over with big intentions for Capturing Form. The program has offered novel practice-cum-exhibit events, one of which featured an artist crafting a 3-D painting with an Oculus Rift.

A Capturing Form art show is being planned for next year. The program has gained a following under Wong. Some participants are

longtime attendees, like Khoa. That Sunday was his tenth session.

Wong explained that the classes' popularity is due to how foundational the human anatomy is to artistic training. Across all art education "from basic to master," the human anatomy is a foundational piece of the curriculum, she said. Even architects have to do some kind of human drawing, she added.

Capturing form is "an opportunity for artists who can't study the human anatomy," she said. "It's keeping the tradition alive." ■







# The Look of Lacquer

*Specula (Installation view from backside)*

## The paradoxes that produce lacquer painting

Text by **Dana McNairn**

Images Provided by **Phi Phi Oanh**

**LACQUER IS A NATURAL** medium, but it forces you to be in a certain environment and in a certain geography to work.

Visual artist Phi Phi Oanh, who works with lacquer, says lacquer is affected by its habitat, humidity, heat, time and even space. This makes lacquer painting a labor- and time-intensive art form.

*Son mai* is traditional Vietnamese lacquer painting and uses resin extracted from *cay son* trees that grow in the mountains of Phu Tho province in northern Vietnam. This resin extraction is similar to the extraction of latex from rubber trees or the resin from pine trees. Fresh lacquer is white and turns amber or brown when it comes into contact with air. It's then evaporated into a viscous liquid and used as a painting medium, colored traditionally with varying amounts of iron oxide to turn red or black. Artists also use eggshells, silver or gold leaf and mother of pearl in the process. Typically lacquer and these other materials, once applied to wood, make

a very durable and waterproof surface.

Currently based in Danang, Phi Phi spoke to *Oi Vietnam* one rainy morning via Skype. Hailing from Houston, when she first came to Vietnam she said her initial thoughts were around the idea of oil painting. She received her BFA from Parsons School of Design in 2002 and a Masters in Art and Investigation from the Complutense University of Madrid in 2012. It was a 2004 Fulbright scholarship to research lacquer painting that brought her to Hanoi. With oil painting, she says typically there's a certain scale involved, such as the size of the canvas, for instance. But then she thought wouldn't it be more interesting to explore lacquer as a visual medium? It was the contradictions inherent in the medium that beckoned her.

"Lacquer is so paradoxical," she says. "It needs heat and high humidity to dry, so the geography of the tropics. It needs



*Black Box (Installation view VN Museum room 2)*



*Specula (Installation view with spectator)*



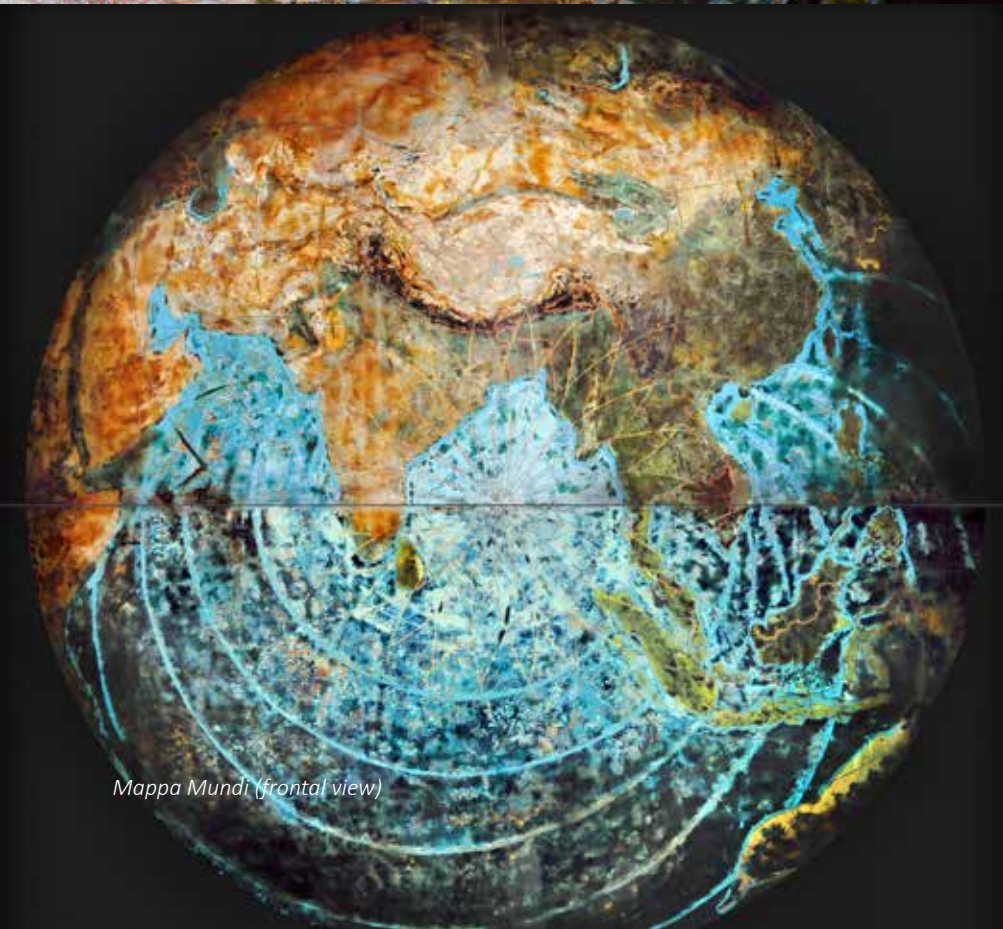


*Palimpsest (Projection view)*

dark to dry. It's shiny on the surface, but deep." That depth comes from the applied layers that are ground off the surface. So in one way lacquer appears reflective or mirror-like while simultaneously showing translucent depth. The required humidity also poses conservation challenges. Lacquer, she says, is indigenous. It was reinvented as a painting medium during French colonization, specifically around the time of the establishment of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine in Hanoi in 1925. Previously, while lacquer work in Vietnam tended to be utilitarian, she says, used as a "skin" for wood to protect things like room and wall screens, boxes or funeral bowls, it



*Mappa Mundi (detail)*



*Mappa Mundi (frontal view)*



*Palimpsest (Lacquerscope)*

is an ancient craft throughout Asia. It's another contradiction that draws Phi Phi. On one hand, it has this history and on the other, in Vietnam, it's only since the end of French colonization that there has been a period to reinterpret it. Lacquer has gone from unsigned, produced collectively folk art for functional purposes, she says, to an art form with a subject and an object where individuals as artists sign their names. "This gives lacquer agency," she says. "The agency is because now lacquer has become an image. It can be shared and it can be interpreted."

This interpretation is also because of the form's paradoxes. Daylight and indoor light at different times of the day produce different things to "see" in the painting. Seeing lacquer differently can just as easily be accomplished by shifting your viewing angle and noticing something else you hadn't before. But a shift in color, Phi Phi says, is like a different session rather than just different layers. It can become, she says, a different experience entirely.

"So lacquer rewards those looking at it over time periods," she says. "It slows down the gaze." She adds that lacquer surprises her every day exactly because of the contradictions. "The way you work with it, it's more like 3D or more like sculpting." She's interested in the materiality of lacquer painting: the physical richness of textures and surfaces found within it. "I try to create experiences with my work," she says, "to stop assumptions about what lacquer is or isn't and to challenge and break assumptions around that thinking." ■

For more info on Phi Phi Oanh's work, visit [www.phiphioanh.com](http://www.phiphioanh.com)





# Landscape | Mindscape

New works by Ha Manh Thang, one of Vietnam's most accomplished painters

**CONSISTING OF MIXED MEDIA** paintings on canvas, silk, and paper, the work, inspired by the artist's extensive collection of Vietnamese antiques, evokes the change of the seasons, and the mixture of melancholia and awe experienced when viewing the remains of beautiful ruins.

Ha first began collecting antiques in 2002 while he was a student at the

Vietnam University of Fine Arts, and he has never stopped, filling his light-bathed studio with exquisite lacquer and pearl-inlaid woodwork, glazed pottery, and ancient statuary from the antique shops of Hanoi. Ha's work has always approached traditional Vietnamese craft and culture with a contemporary sensibility and an expressionistic flare. While earlier series followed the visual

logic of the architectural blueprint or the landscape, depicting whole buildings and lakes in their entirety, the new work follows the logic of the still life, depicting antique objects in toto, or focusing on particular motifs appearing therein.

Notably, the new series includes several studies of a lotus shaped pedestal—a specific item from the artist's collection, carved in wood in





the early 17th to the 18th century during the Le Dynasty. Time and again he painted this lotus pedestal, which once served as a support for a statue of the Buddha, yet which now remains vacant, symbolically evoking the material foundations of spiritual belief as well as the erosion of history with the passage of time. Rendered both on paper and on canvas, the works on paper start off fairly straightforward, showing the lotus petals around the edges, and the vacant socket in the center. However, these studies become increasingly abstracted with each iteration until, in the ultimate painting of this subject on canvas, the pedestal has been reduced to a dark and blurry shadow, a withered ghost of what once represented purity.

The lotus pedestal studies are the most obviously representational works in the show while other works drift deeper into abstraction, subtly evoking images of trees and waves,



*Lotus pedestal #6 - bệ sen cổ, 2019, 165x165cm*



*Spring rainy #1 - mưa Xuân, 2019, 100x50.5cm*

drawn from such sources as lacquer boxes and pearl-inlaid panels. Most of the paintings were rendered on canvas, but in a new development, Ha has introduced silk into some of his works. By letting his thick impasto brushwork subside over the silk portions, the light is allowed to pass through, casting shadows on the wall behind and drawing the viewer deeper into the paintings.

Moving from the external landscape to the internal mindscape, the starting points from which Ha paints fade into obscurity, and in their place, sensations arise. The chill of a Hanoi winter's night, or the morning light breaking through the trees in spring: these subjects are not depicted so much as evinced, inviting us to experience the perspective of an artist who paints not just what he sees, but what he feels: bittersweet beauty amidst decay. ■

## ABOUT HA MANH THANG

Ha Manh Thang's work is a poetic meditation on the passage of time, memory and place. His paintings speak to viewers about mindfulness and the vicissitudes of life. Seeped through with a quiet lyricism informed by Ha's interests in Western jazz and classical East Asian poetry, and inspired just as much by chance encounters as elaborate conceptual starting points, his paintings are, in the artist's words, 'attempts to better understand oneself in relation to nature, and to express what one cannot grasp'. Born in 1980 in Thai Nguyen Province, Ha is one of Vietnam's most important painters. Ha has been featured alongside acclaimed artists such as Gerhard Richter, Marlene Dumas and Peter Doig in several international publications including 'Painting Now' (Thames and Hudson, 2015) and 'Painting Today' (Phaidon, 2009). Ha has held a number of notable regional and international exhibitions

including Pueblos en Resistencia, 1 Bial del Sur, Caracas, Venezuela; Instruments of Meditation: Works of Art from the Zoltán Bodnár Collection, Reök Palace, Budapest, Hungary; Connect: Kunstzene Vietnam, ifa Galleries, Berlin and Stuttgart, Germany; The rain and the small stream presented by Ernst & Young's Asean Art Outreach program, Singapore; and Post-Doi Moi: Vietnamese Art After 1990, Singapore Art Museum. Ha Manh Thang's work is collected by public and private collections around the world including National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; Post-Vi Dai Collection, Geneva, Switzerland and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam; and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, Vietnam. Ha currently lives and works in Hanoi.





*Khoảnh Khắc 2 - Fragments 2, 2015  
Mixed media on canvas, 81 x 200 cm*



*Sông Hồng - Fleuve Rouge - Red River, 2015  
Mixed media on canvas, 146 x 194 cm*



*Triều Lên - Marée Haute - High Tide, 2015  
Mixed media on canvas, 146 x 97 cm*

# Fragments of Life

Mixed media paintings by Paris-based artist  
Nguyen Cam

Text and Images Provided by **Craig Thomas**

**THE STORY OF ANY ARTIST WHO** has enjoyed a long and celebrated career is likely to involve a series of obstacles overcome and a continuous evolution of practice that are indicative of both prodigious talent and great determination. Overlaid on this normal path of artistic struggle, Nguyen Cam has had to deal with challenges and vicissitudes that are unique to an artist of his generation born into a country in the throes of a multi-generational conflict. First emigrating with his family from Vietnam to Laos in the late 1950s, Cam would spend the next decade in Vientiane where the bombs of the war raging in his country of birth would also fall. Due to the illness of his father, the still as yet untrained teenager would be forced to use his nascent painting skills to provide for the whole family by painting portraits and even opening the city's only art gallery.

At the age of 25, Cam would make a

second migration that would take him from Southeast Asia to Paris. He says, "If I continued to merely look at photos of paintings by other artists, I would be overly influenced by them. If I came to the place where these great artists lived and could experience the same environment that these French artists, I would be able to find my own path." Following the time honored tradition of aspiring artists notably exemplified by George Orwell, Cam washed dishes in a Parisian restaurant as he worked to gain entry into the Fine Arts School of Paris. He later paid for his studies by producing hand drawn advertisements at night in a cold and gloomy underground studio. Cam recounts these early years of personal struggle with a mischievous grin and describes his time as a starving student as the best of his life.

After a distinguished career of more than two decades exhibiting his work in Paris and other cities in southern France





*Khoảnh Khắc Mùa Thu - Fragments d' Automne - Fragments of Autumn, 2015  
Mixed media on canvas, 81 x 200 cm*



*Rạng Đông Trên Cao - Aurore au Sommet  
Dawn at the Summit, 2015  
Mixed media on canvas, 81 x 100 cm*

and in Spain, Cam would make his first return to the country of his birth in 1994 at the invitation of the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Association. Although deciding against relocating back to Vietnam, he would become a regular visitor to the country and would accept an invitation to teach at the Hanoi Fine Arts University. In this role, he was able to help many notable Vietnamese artists to gain a better understanding of the modern currents of the art world at a time when the country was just re-opening to the world and the internet was still in its infancy. It was in these early years that Cam would also meet and begin a more than two decades long collaboration with Hanoi's groundbreaking gallerist Suzanne Lecht of Art Vietnam Gallery. The two would go on to mount numerous exhibitions of the artist's work both in Vietnam and in the US.

With his latest collection of works, Cam evinces the hand of a mature artist

who is able to eschew unnecessary flourishes and distill his work to an appealing simplicity and elegance. He communicates to us through confident and bold brushstrokes that arrestingly fill the empty spaces of his works. They speak to something elemental and even other-worldly. A language all his own. Many of the works are calligraphic and evocative of a time when man was first using images to convey meanings which process would in time lead to our modern written languages. Cam says, "My calligraphy returns to the origin of calligraphy and the origin of calligraphy is nature. In written Mandarin, the sun is represented by a circle with a horizon line drawn through the middle. Calligraphy has since evolved but with my work I return to a time before that evolution." ■

*Nguyen Cam is represented by Craig Thomas Gallery ([www.cthomasgallery.com](http://www.cthomasgallery.com)).*



*Thủy Triều - La Marée - The Tide, 2015  
Mixed media on canvas, 130 x 97 cm*



# For Guys on the Go

## IN TODAY'S INCREASINGLY

hectic world, we're all perpetually on the go. Whether it's on and off airplanes, in and out of cabs, or between the office and social outings, life never stops.

For guys on the go, the holy trinity in bags—whether briefcase, backpack, or gym bag—is light, durable, and stylish. All leather bags? Gorgeous. But heavy, and a disaster in a sudden Saigon rainstorm. Designer names? Handsome to be sure, but not likely to survive an everyday beating.

Enter Stuart & Lau, a men's briefcase and luggage brand conjured up by world citizens Matthew Stuart and Jimmy Lau that's somehow managed to fuse dapper with durable.

"When designing products, we always start with the user and consider how our products will serve him best functionally and stylistically—with equal emphasis paid to both," says Matthew Stuart, formerly with Ralph Lauren in their Hong Kong office. "We aim for that healthy balance between innovative, thoughtful features and shapes with lasting appeal."

Together with Jimmy Lau, a New York-based marketing consultant, the duo have been gathering buzz with their limited yet standout line of offerings that have been topping "best" lists left and right. "Our focus is on truly best-in-class offerings for each particular category—whether that is a briefcase, a backpack, or a gym bag—that possess an amazing array of features encased in a subdued, classic design. That's the mantra," says Matthew.









Take the Cary, their signature briefcase. Made of DuraLite fabric that Stuart & Lau have customized to their specifications, it's built to stand up to the demands of urban living. "It's a nylon-polyester twill top layer with a bonded rubber foam backing that makes it waterproof, durable, and wrinkle resistant. The rubber foam gives the fabric strength, while still being lightweight, so it holds shape like a thicker canvas without any of the drawbacks. In this way, the fabric performs as a technical material while maintaining the appearance of a refined twill," explains Matthew.

Handsome full grain leather handles, strap, and trim give the bag a stylish finish, pairing equally well with a business suit or a pair of dark jeans and a nice linen shirt. Explaining the aesthetics of the Cary, Matthew says: "Your briefcase is a multi-year investment, so we tend towards the timeless and generally eschew seasonal styles. This allows us to invest more in the product over time, making improvements, versus creating seasonal products for the sake of freshness."





One of their latest improvements is an idea so ridiculously simple as to be absolutely genius: offering the same award-winning briefcase, but in three different sizes: Slim, Single, and Double compartment. All three share the same thoughtful design features: a padded laptop sleeve for up to 15" devices, an umbrella holder on the back of the bag, hidden stow pocket with microfiber lining, zippered mesh pockets for cords and cards, and beautiful hardware with plated nickel finish.

"We felt that the Cary represents our 'perfect briefcase' and a great foundation had been built over 3 years now. But some men carry more, and some carry less. So rather than reinvent the wheel, we decided to offer the Cary in three sizes," says Matthew.



While Stuart & Lau's no-nonsense aesthetic ensures high performance from their products, the brand's unique marriage of Hong Kong style with New York sensibility adds something special to the mix.

"Both places represent internationalism and mobility in many ways, particularly when paired together," says Matthew. "They are each a frenetic place where a smarter solution can add real value by simplifying one's commute across the hectic cityscape. This vision of a man in motion, well served by a better briefcase and at ease in his journey through either city, certainly inspires our design philosophy and in many ways, is our reason for being."

*Stuart & Lau offer free global shipping as well as a Limited Lifetime Warranty. To see the full range of products, visit [www.stuartandlau.com](http://www.stuartandlau.com)*



# Wine & Dine

KAZAMA RESTAURANT - JAPANESE SEASONED COD  
ROE CREAM SAUCE UDON / IMAGE BY VY LAM











# Zen Dining

Explore Japan's lesser-known national dishes surrounded by ponds and greenery

Text by Michael Arnold  
Images by Vy Lam

*Japanese Grilled Teriyaki boned chicken thigh*

**YOU'RE IN LUCK IF YOU'RE** looking for some peace and quiet in Thao Dien: a short stroll down a very leafy side street off the main road stands **Kazama** (14B15 Thao Dien, D2; [www.kazamatokyo.com](http://www.kazamatokyo.com)), an unassuming little venue designed to convey quietness and dignity in one of the district's loveliest settings. Kazama serves a fusion Japanese cuisine with a modest range of dishes and a simple wine list in a calming environment, making this a pleasant and comforting space particularly welcoming for couples, small groups and families.

The restaurant's diminutive 70-year-old designer has very consciously created this idyllic 500sqm, single storey restaurant to convey an atmosphere reminiscent of a refined home garden, with a touch of feng shui and Zen thrown into the mix. Kazama seats 80 diners—mostly out in the open under the shade of trees and alongside ponds of colorful carp. Visitors are encouraged to while away their lunch hours and evenings outdoors at a certain psychological distance from their office cubicles and cramped apartment rooms, in order to enjoy some

light Japanese food. The open areas are fully covered during the rains, and for those seeking to escape the heat, there is plenty of seating inside within two air-conditioned rooms offering views over the greenery.

Japanese this may be, but don't expect sushi and sashimi: Kazama's purpose here is to gently introduce some of Japan's lesser-known cooking traditions. According to the restaurant's manager Nguyen Thi Diem Phuong—who spent nearly a decade living in Japan herself and has known the restaurant's owner Mr. Kazama Tasuku for much longer than that—the venue intends to distinguish itself from the more traditional Japanese eateries dotting District 1 by focusing on a menu that explores the edges of what most people associate with cuisine.

"Actually, when we think of Japanese food, we usually only think of sushi and sashimi, just like foreigners here usually associate *pho* and *banh mi* with Vietnam," says Phuong. "We want to show there's another side to Japanese food—we have some kinds of udon, we also have Japanese curries, and we serve fried chicken, which

is very famous and very frequently eaten by people in Japan. So we want to introduce it here as a Japanese national dish."

That being said, Kazama's menu has been designed with an appreciation for local tastes. "We want to show you not what *you* know about Japanese food, but what we would like you to know about Japanese food," says Phuong, "but that would be difficult if we did it in the traditional way, so we have to design it in a very Western way for our target customers, as well as with some Vietnamese tastes for locals—so we do things differently from other restaurants."

The venue's burgers are a case in point, selected for their popularity with a Western market but also much loved in Japan. The crispy fried whitefish burger (VND150,000) is a common treat from throughout Japan, while the crispy fried soft shell crab burger (VND180,000) is a concession to the Vietnamese palate.

We're in the mood for a lighter lunch, so on the chef's recommendation we opt for a Japanese mixed seaweed salad (VND110,000), which is nicely set off by the restaurant's home-made wasabi





Sakura ice cream



Japanese mixed seaweed salad



Japanese seasoned cod roe cream sauce udon

dressing. It's crisp and fresh, and is a decent starter for the follow-on mains: for the udon we try a Japanese seasoned cod roe cream sauce noodle (VND120,000) which is somewhat reminiscent of a good carbonara spaghetti with beautiful seafood notes, and to sample the signature chicken recipe, we go for the Grilled teriyaki boned chicken thigh, a sliced fillet paired with vegetables that is just heavy enough to be filling without what would be the full weight of a Western or Korean version of the dish. We pair this with chilled glasses of Chilean chardonnay.

Dessert brings an unexpected treat—delicate ice creams in distinctively Japanese flavors. We're served elegant plates of pink sakura and grey sesame flavored ice cream scoops, suitably mild and nothing at all to feel guilty about.

The restaurant itself is picturesque enclave that is very accessible from central Thao Dien—more delightful than fancy and more relaxing than you might otherwise



Phuong

expect from a Japanese venue. This will be a favorite place for those in the area wanting to get away from the noise and clutter of the fast-developing district, a breathing space in a private garden for a meal that satisfies the spirit. ■

**Restaurant KAZAMA**  
14B15 Thao Dien, D2  
[www.facebook.com/KazamaRestaurant](https://www.facebook.com/KazamaRestaurant)  
028 3636 4635





Charcoal bamboo bun burger

## *L'Adresse is the Address to Be*

L'Adresse Bistro highlights Arab cuisine and culture in a magnificent setting

Text by **Daniel Spero**  
Images by **Vy Lam** and **Shad Adnan**

**I RARELY TAKE THE MOTORBIKE** out of my daily patterns of District 7 anymore. If I go into town its by car to avoid the stress and pollution, so as I snaked along the elevated motorbike only lane, cresting on Phu My Bridge, I found the ride contrastingly soothing to the routine commute.

With almost no traffic on this Sunday night we drove along Vo Chi Cong, appreciating the varying angles of the city until heading left on Dong Van Cong. A handful of kilometers later, on the left, there's a new luxury residential high-rise called Vista Verde. It's here of all places where one of Saigon's newest and most dynamic gastronomic experiences can be found—**L'Adresse Bistro Saigon by Shad Adnan** (2 Phan Van Dang, D2; [www.facebook.com/ladressebistrosgn](http://www.facebook.com/ladressebistrosgn)).

The bistro's eclectic décor blends Middle Eastern style with accents of exposed bricks and comfy palette sofas.

Along one wall are three traditional Bedouin areas presented in three-sided tents with a fabric canopy along with pillows and cushions; perfect for a group to lounge and casually converse.

As we sat the owner and operator, Shad Adnan, came over to greet us. When I commented on the bistro he mentioned how the furniture is handmade and upholstered with traditional Middle Eastern fabric patterns, which he contracted to have built. "Whatever you see was creatively devised by three designers. It looks simple and spacious and nice, but it has taken lots of effort to make customers feel relaxed and to feel like they are in an Arab setting. We wanted to do something that reflects our traditions and culture by creating a bistro that reveals this."

Beyond the appearance there's free Wi-Fi, but going a step further he tore up the floor to lay electrical wiring throughout





Shad

the bistro to be sure that every table has an outlet underneath to encourage people to come and stay for a while. “I want a place where people can come together, because that’s my identity. What I want is a place where people can communicate and relax.”

So relax we did. I ordered a Far East IPA (VND115,000) and perused the menu of Middle Eastern/Mediterranean/Lebanese dishes: hummus (VND125,000), *tabbouleh* (VND135,000) and *baba ghanouj* (VND125,000). Each comes served with homemade *khubz* bread, which is a flatbread staple in the Arabian diet, similar to a pita or naan. They also have *fattoush* (VND130,000), a Levantine salad with mixed greens, fresh veggies, pieces of fried *khubz* bread and topped with a *sumac* Mediterranean dressing. There’s a hummus and lamb dish (VND175,000), fowl *mudammas* (VND125,000), which is an Arabian bean stew that dates back to ancient Egypt, and more. The signature dish, however, is the Levantine Mixed Grill (VND300,000), consisting of skewers of grilled meats, such as lamb, beef or chicken, as well as skewers of grilled fresh vegetables. The meats are imported along with the herbs and vegetables that can’t be grown locally.

We had the hummus with *khubz* bread. The bread was a little crispier than a pita and more flavorful. The hummus was the best we’ve tasted. We also had *makani* (VND195,000), Lebanese sausages made of halal beef and lamb. The sausage is a dry sausage with traditional

Arab seasoning and a hint of molasses that’s complemented by the juices and caramelized onion it’s served in.

While finishing up, Shad returned to see how we were getting on. I mentioned that on my next trip I’d like to see how the *tabbouleh* holds up. He then explained how he partnered with a business associate to bring seeds from Lebanon to Dalat where these Lebanese crops are now grown. “Now we are getting real, authentic cucumbers, tomatoes, zucchini, lettuce, and most importantly, the parsley. The parsley makes the *tabbouleh*. Vietnamese parsley is completely different. It doesn’t have that zesty, citrus taste that we are looking for.”

If you’re intrigued by Middle Eastern cuisine Shad and L’Adresse Bistro have you covered. For a more Vietnamese-friendly palate, there’s the Loco Moco (VND180,000), steak and eggs on a bed of rice in a Hawaiian style, which is quite popular with the local clientele. “The Vietnamese people like it because it kind of reflects their cuisine with meat, egg and rice,” explained Shad. They also do a time-honored paella (VND250,000) and even have a burger, though as Shad added, it’s with a fusion twist. “The patty, which is 180 grams, has a combination of Lebanese spices, while the bun is a black bun, which is typically Japanese, so it’s a charcoal bamboo bun.”

L’Adresse Bistro Saigon also has breakfast, scrumptious desserts, including a traditional Knafe (VND125,000), and a long list of drinks, including Italian coffees, local craft beers, imported wines and a range of cocktails.

In addition, Sophie, Shad’s wife and business partner, and the bistro’s chef will create *plat du jour* Vietnamese platters to further entice locals as well as expats. ■



Makani



Fattoush



Hummus with khubz bread



Sophie



# 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**



## Also Try...

### Air 360 Sky Lounge - Events

This rooftop bar combines vibrant music, fancy designs and 360 degree view of Saigon's skyline to make it one of the best spots for drinks, lounging and events.

**0974 58 77 88**  
**136-138 Le Thi Hong Gam, D1**  
**www.air360skybar.com**

### Broma Saigon Bar

Famously known for 'not being a bar' Broma is one of Ho Chi Minh City's most popular hangouts with prices ranging from VND30,000 – VND500,000. Broma is a more upscale option for those wishing to escape the cheap drinks in The Pham.

**41 Nguyen Hue, D1**

### Chill Skybar - Dining

A modern lounge, bar and dining space that is considered the first "skybar" concept in Vietnam. It is perched on top of AB Tower, exclusively on the 26th and 27th floor with views of the city's skyline

**0938 822 838**  
**Level 26, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai, D1**  
**www.chillsaigon.com**

### Eon Helibar

This cosmopolitan nightspot is an ideal venue for a vibrant night out with live acoustic performances and DJ's spinning nightly, EON Helibar has a non-smoking section. Rental of the entire restaurant for larger functions is also available.

**Level 52, 2 Hai Trieu, Ward Ben Nghe, District 1**

### Shri Rooftop Bar & Restaurant

Shri Rooftop Bar & Restaurant at Centec Tower overlooks some of Ho Chi Minh's top attractions, including Reunification Palace, Notre Dame Cathedral, Kumho Plaza, and Lotus Building, as well as the Phu My Suspension Bridge over Saigon River. Open all day, you can savour modern European and Vietnamese fare at the indoor dining area before enjoying the rest of the night at the rooftop bar and lounge.

**Centec Tower, 72-74 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai**

### 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**

### Saigon Saigon Bar

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

**19-23 Lam Son Square, D1**  
**(028) 3823 4999**  
**www.caravellehotel.com**  
**11am till late**

### 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**

## MICROBREWERIES & CRAFT BEER BARS



### 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: Lelabarpag**



## Also Try...

### 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/**

### 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**

### 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**



# 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

## 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

## 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

## 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

## 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

## 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 ca phe sua da served here.

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1

# FRENCH

## 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, Idécaf.

31 Thai Van Lung, D1

## Le Bacoulos

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

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

## 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

## 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.

17B/4 Pasteur, D1 - www.tycozsaigon.com

# ITALIAN

## Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1  
028 3824 4286

## Carpaccio

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

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

## Giao Bella

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

11 Dong Du, D1  
028 3822 3329  
tonyfox56@hotmail.com  
www.ciaobellavietnam.com

## 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

## 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

## Opera

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

2 Lam Son Square, D1

## Pasta Fresca

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

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

## Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1  
028 3821 8181

## Pizza 4P's

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

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



# INTERNATIONAL



## L'Adresse Bistro

L'Adresse Bistro is a place where traditions & culture meet. It combines the rustic, modern feel of the west & the authenticity of Bedouin traditions of the Arab. Multi-themed with laidback tent, group family sofa, Barrel sections for two & Palette seating arrangements guests would benefit from variety of style, look & feel under one roof. With more than 20 brands of beer, bar, coffee, L'Adresse Bistro meets everyone's expectations.  
**2 Phan Van Dang, Dist.2, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam**  
[ladressebistro.onuniverse.com](http://ladressebistro.onuniverse.com) @ladressebistrosgn  
**+84906707900**



## 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](http://www.tomatito.vn)  
[www.facebook.com/tomatitosaiгон](https://www.facebook.com/tomatitosaiгон)  
**+84 869 388 864**

## 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](http://www.noirdininginthedark.com)

## 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**

## 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**

## 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](http://www.blancrestaurant.vn)

### Butcher MANZO & Craft Beer Bar

Manzo means "Bee" 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](http://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 Vodra 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](mailto:info@forksaigon.com) [www.forksaigon.com](http://www.forksaigon.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](http://chayavietnam.com) Facebook: chayavietnam

## Gyumaru

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

**8/3 Le Thanh Ton 028 3827 1618**  
[gyumaru.LTT@gmail.com](mailto:gyumaru.LTT@gmail.com)

## Ichiban Sushi

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

**204 Le Lai, D1** [www.ichibansushi.vn](http://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.sushidiningaioi.com](http://www.sushidiningaioi.com)

## Yoshino

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

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

# KOREAN

## 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**

## Galbi Brothers

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

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

## 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



## 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](mailto:ngocchaugarden116@gmail.com)

## 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**

### 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**

### Cha Ca La Vong

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

**36 Ton That Thiep, D1**

### Com Nieu

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

**59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3**  
**028 3932 6363**  
[comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com](mailto:comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com)  
[comnieusaigon.com.vn](http://comnieusaigon.com.vn)

### Cuc Gach Quan

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

**10 Dang Tat, D1**  
**028 3848 0144**

### Five Oysters

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

**234 Bui Vien, D1**

### 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](http://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](http://www.quananngon.com.vn)  
**8am - 10pm**

### 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**

### 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](http://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**





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](http://www.wineinvietnam.com).

# *V for Vino*

## Why you should try Spanish wines

**IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER** you are a beginner or advanced wine lover, I am determined to convince you to try Spanish wines.

Why? Because at the moment they offer the best value for money of all the countries, beating even Chile, plus they are delicious. Don't get misled by my surname, which is Spanish, I was born and I learnt about wine in England!

Don't get me wrong, you can still find not so good, even terrible Spanish wines, same as with any other wine producing country, but if you do a little bit of research, it will be easy to find the good ones, even the hidden jewels.

While Spain fights every year with France and Italy to be the biggest wine producer in the world, many wineries have moved from bulk production into quality production, that is great for us wine drinkers because we are getting many more good and excellent wines.

There are two other factors that help Spanish wineries to deliver great value. First, Spain still has one of the

highest unemployment rates in Europe, therefore labor is cheap, making wine production cheaper. Second, most Spanish wineries don't have marketing departments, much less English speaking ones, so they mostly sell in Spain, and are yet to be discovered internationally (that would lead to a higher demand and higher prices), especially small boutique wineries.

So what Spanish wines should you drink? Try as many as you can, and look for small wineries as they offer the best value. If you want to go for something similar, but different to Bordeaux, give Rioja and Ribera del Duero a try. These two areas are internationally known for having the best quality generally, and you can find amazing wines.

There are a few areas that are not well known and they keep their price-

quality ration very attractive. Bierzo, in the North West of the country, is a tiny area producing amazing wines with Mencia grapes; if you are a Burgundy lover you are likely to love these wines.

In the North of Spain, bordering France, you have two amazing areas: Navarra and Campo de Borja. The first one blends Spanish and international grapes (Cabernet, Garnacha, Tempranillo, Chardonnay), delivering gorgeous inexpensive wines. While the later mostly produce Garnacha and Tempranillo, also inexpensive with many very nice wines.

Don't miss the Galicia wines, Ribeiro and Albarinho, not cheap, but they are amongst the best white wines in the world, and very unique. ■





# >> The List Business

## INSURANCE



### OUR OFFICE LOCATIONS

#### Administration Office - Ho Chi Minh City

10th & 16th Floor | Royal Center Tower B |  
235 Nguyen Van Cu | Dist. 1

#### Sales Office - Ho Chi Minh City

6th Floor | Pax Sky Tower | 159C De Tham | Dist. 1

#### Sales Office - Hanoi

19th Floor | VCCI Tower | 9 Dao Duy Anh |  
Dong Da Dist

#### Pacific Cross Vietnam

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

[www.pacificcross.com.vn](http://www.pacificcross.com.vn)  
[inquiry@pacificcross.com.vn](mailto:inquiry@pacificcross.com.vn)

## Also try ...

#### ACE Life Insurance

One of the world's largest multiline property and casualty insurers, insurance products include universal life insurance, term life, whole life, riders, and global personal accident.

21st Floor, 115 Nguyen Hue, DI

#### Baoviet Insurance Corporation

BaoViet is now the leading financial insurance group in Vietnam with more than 145 branches across 63 provinces.

23-25 Thai Van Lung, DI

#### IF Consulting to Insurance in Asia

IF Consulting has for 20 years provided advice to individuals and businesses in assessing health/accident risk and finding the best suitable solution. The company is independent and Vietnam-based.

90-92 Dinh Tien Hoang DI  
[www.insuranceinAsia.com](http://www.insuranceinAsia.com)  
[advice@insuranceinAsia.com](mailto:advice@insuranceinAsia.com)

#### Liberty Mutual Insurance

Liberty Mutual is a 100% US-owned general insurer licensed to provide insurance services directly to Vietnamese individuals and state-owned enterprises as well as motor insurance.

15th Floor, Kumho Asiana Plaza,  
39 Le Duan, DI  
028 3812 5125

#### McLarens Young International

McLarens Young International is a global claims service provider that helps our clients achieve timely and equitable claims resolution.

9th Floor, Yoco Building  
41 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, DI  
028 3821 3316

#### Prudential Vietnam

Prudential Vietnam is one of the leading life insurers nationwide, also providing a variety of financial solutions, with over 200 customer service centers, branch offices and general agency and business partner offices.

Unit 25F, Saigon Trade Centre  
37 Ton Duc Thang, DI

## RELOCATION

#### AGS Four Winds (Vietnam)

Global leader in international removals & relocations, with 128 offices in 78 countries, they can move you to/or from any location worldwide.

5th Fl, Lafayette De Saigon, 8A Phung Khac Khoan, DI  
028 3521 0071

[ags-vietnam@agsfourwinds.com](mailto:ags-vietnam@agsfourwinds.com)  
[www.ags-globalsolutions.com](http://www.ags-globalsolutions.com)

#### Logical Moves

They offer your belongings the best protection available with the latest technology, experienced staff and equipment. With door to door services, Logical Moves is all about quality service, best prices and well-arranged time.

028 3941 5322  
[www.logicalmoves.net](http://www.logicalmoves.net)



#### SEAL Logistics

Saigon Express Agency Limited (SEAL) is an experienced and versatile relocations and logistics company. SEAL staff are experts in relocations and pet transportation and can deliver all your logistics requirements to your satisfaction at a competitive price!

+84 28 39432853  
[sgnexpress@seal.com.vn](mailto:sgnexpress@seal.com.vn)  
[www.seal.com.vn](http://www.seal.com.vn)



## VETS & PET HOTELS

#### AEC Pet

Opened since 2012, the clinic staffs a team of specialized veterinarians who are committed to offering professional, caring and personalized services to their patients.

A12-A13 Nguyen Huu Tho,  
Kim Son Project, D7  
028 6298 9203

#### Animal Doctors International

Offers the very highest levels of compassionate, competent and professional veterinary medicine and surgery to all pets in Ho Chi Minh City with international veterinary surgeons. Upholding international standards, the team works tirelessly to help clients with the support of a dedicated surgical suite, digital X-Ray and comprehensive diagnostic facilities.

1 Tran Ngoc Dien, Thao Dien, Q2  
(028) 6260 3980  
[animaldoctors.vn](http://animaldoctors.vn)

#### Bed & Pet-first Dog Villa

First pet villa brand in Vietnam, offering the best care and amenities to your pet. Our 11,000 sq ft villa was designed with the best comfort in mind and we paid attention to every little detail so that your pet can relax and enjoy their stay. The services we offer: Boarding, Dog daycare, Bathing, Grooming, Dog Walking, Pet shop and more.

14A6 Thao Dien, D2  
028.37 444 178 - 0934 080 186  
[www.bedandpetfirst.com](http://www.bedandpetfirst.com)  
[Facebook.com/bedandpetfirst](https://facebook.com/bedandpetfirst)

#### Saigon Pet Clinic

Founded in 2008, Saigon Pet Clinic's goal is to open the best animal welfare veterinary clinic in Vietnam. They combine skill and technology to ensure your pet gets the best possible care.

33, 41 street, Thao Dien, D2  
[www.saigonpethospital.com](http://www.saigonpethospital.com)  
028 3519 4182

#### Sasaki Animal Hospital

The hospital is managed by a team of skilled doctors from Japan and Vietnam. Services include grooming and general care.

38-40-42 Nguyen Thi Thap,  
Him Lam, D7  
[www.sasakihospital.com](http://www.sasakihospital.com)  
028 2253 1179





# Travel & Wellness

OSLO











# Ode to Oslo

48 hours as a tourist in my own city

Text by Elizabeth Jules

## LET ME START BY SAYING THIS

is not your typical “48 Hours in Oslo” article because, well, I live in Oslo... and I was born here. While I have lived abroad for a majority of the 22 years in between, Oslo is the only place I have always been able to call home. This past weekend, I decided to embrace my inner tourist and set out on a tourist-inspired Oslo adventure.

### Day One

I woke up early Saturday morning, eager to get the weekend started. Since museums don't open until 10am, I decided to beat the tourist crowds and take the subway to the Vigeland Sculpture Park first thing in the morning. In the heart of the Frogner Park, there are over 200 sculptures in bronze, granite and cast iron made by Gustav Vigeland, all of which are in the nude. The park is Oslo's most popular tourist attraction and in the true spirit of a tourist, I snapped a photo with the most iconic sculpture, Sinnataggen. If you want to see more of Vigeland's work, the Vigeland Museum is located in the south end of the park.

Next up was Bygdøy, a peninsula that holds the key to much of Norway's history and is known to many as the museum peninsula. I started with the Fram Museum, also called the Polar Ship Fram, which lets you set foot on the wooden ship used for polar exploration in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Right next door, the Kon-Tiki Museum is home to the original

balsawood raft Kon-Tiki, which Thor Heyerdahl used to sail across the Pacific Ocean in the mid-1900s. A bit further inland on the peninsula, the Viking Ship Museum takes you further back in time to the Viking Age, telling the Viking history through well-preserved Viking ships and archaeological discoveries. Around the corner, the Norwegian Folk Museum shows traditional Norwegian houses and crafts from cities around the country, giving you a feel for how Norwegians lived in the olden days.

After a walk through history, it was time to return to the land of the living and find something to eat. I caught the bus to the city center and then another bus to Vippa, a relatively new food hall located at Vippetangen. Inside what used to be a sugar warehouse, a number of eateries stand side-by-side serving street food from different cultures. Vippa is introducing a new concept to Oslo, bringing food, culture and learning together under one roof. I tried the Vegan Wok from Tunco and was happy to learn they give a meal to a child in



Vigeland Sculpture Park





Kon Tiki Museum

Kenya for every meal purchased, a cause that means a lot to me since I lived in Kenya from the age of five to eight.

From Vippa, I took the bus to Jernbanetorget and walked down Karl Johans gate, the main street in Oslo open only to pedestrians. Stores and restaurants line the sidewalks of the street, which takes you past the Norwegian Parliament building to the Royal Palace. If you want to see the changing of the guards, it starts at 1:30pm every day and lasts about a half hour. Just down from the palace is the National Gallery, well known for its Edvard Munch collection that includes *The Scream* and *Madonna*. You can see more of Munch's work at the Munch Museum in Tøyen. Next, I grabbed a cup of coffee from Fuglen, a coffee shop by day and cocktail bar by night with a retro vibe that is outfitted with vintage furniture for sale.

I sipped my coffee on the way to Aker Brygge and Tjuvholmen, sticking my head into the City Hall and passing by the Nobel Peace Center. Aker Brygge is a lively pier lined with shops and restaurants and just beyond it is Tjuvholmen, a manmade island that sits in the Oslofjord. I walked onto the dock and watched the colorful sunset before stepping into the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, a contemporary art gallery with a unique design. That was enough adventure for one day and finally I headed home to get some much-needed rest before Day Two of exploring.

## Day Two

I awoke on Sunday to a fresh dusting of snow and excitedly hopped on the subway to the Holmenkollen Ski Museum & Tower. This is the world's oldest ski museum and is further from the city center than other sights (roughly 20 minutes by subway), but it is definitely worth the trip. While seeing 4,000 years of skiing history is fascinating, I find the most impressive feature of the museum to be the observation deck at the top of the jump tower, offering views of the entire city of Oslo and the surrounding nature. I

even saw the snow-covered mountains of Norefjell where we have our cabin.

From Holmenkollen, I rode the subway back to the city center and made my way towards the neighborhood of Grünerløkka. I walked down Torggata, a street for pedestrians and bicyclists with many popular restaurants and bars, which led me to Akerselva, a river that runs through Oslo. I followed the river's edge until I came to the Sunday Market at Blå, a one-of-a-kind market in Grünerløkka with handmade crafts and second-hand treasures. Grünerløkka is known as the 'hip' neighborhood, filled with street art, vintage shops and a vibrant night scene. Stores are closed on Sundays so the streets were quieter than usual but it was still a nice place to walk around.

Just around the corner from Blå is Mathallen Oslo, a large food hall with a mix of international cuisines. As an up-and-coming foodie destination, Oslo is in the process of revolutionizing its food scene. Mathallen is a more upscale version of Vippa and houses a range of specialty shops with high-quality goods. In addition, there are a number of cafés and eateries to eat from, making it impossible not to find something you like. I tried

the Tofu Sesame Bun from Noodles and enjoyed the trendy atmosphere before venturing to Markveien, the main street in Grünerløkka, where I caught the tram back to the city center.

The final stop of my Oslo weekend adventure was a trip to the Norwegian National Opera & Ballet, an architectural gem on Oslo's waterfront. The Opera House is one of Oslo's newest attractions with a modern design and unique construction, allowing visitors to walk on the diagonal roof of the building. Similar to the Holmenkollen Tower, the rooftop offers views of the city, the mountains, and the fjords, but from a different vantage point—you can even spot the ski jump in the distance. I took in one last view of Oslo, a city that will always hold a special place in my heart, and began my journey home.

Being a tourist in my own city taught me that there is always more exploring to be done and more adventures to be had. I visited some sights I had seen before and others that were completely new to me. And when I went around, something interesting happened... the city grew. Even though I saw more of Oslo than I ever had before, I was constantly discovering places that I didn't know existed and that I now want to explore. I encourage you all to be a tourist in your own city, you may find that you've been missing out on much of what your city has to offer. ■



Blå



Vigeland Sculpture Park



# A Day Trip to Nara

Shrines, temples, parks,  
deer and delicate  
ceramics in an ancient  
Japanese town



## CHRYSANTHEMUMS' SCENT-

In the old town of Nara,  
Many ancient Buddhas.  
-Matsuo Basho (1644-1694)

If I imagine cherry blossoms' scent instead of chrysanthemums' scent (we visited Nara in early spring after all), this poem by 17th century haiku master paints the picture I have of this town perfectly. It is a picture of the temples and shrines surrounded by thick forest, deer wandering the grounds of Nara Park, colorful array of spring blossoms, and the tranquility presiding over it all despite the constant buzz of tourists and worshippers. On the other side, there is a picture of a modern Japanese town, with its restaurants and shops, rows of houses in the residential neighborhoods (with inevitable *kei* cars parked in front of each house), chain cafés and traditional Japanese sweet shops.

Nara is an ancient town—it was the first permanent capital of Japan from 710 to 794 AD, and its two most notable temples and shrines date back to that period. The Todai-Ji temple was established as the head of all provincial Buddhist temples, and its influence over government affairs grew so powerful that the capital was finally moved to Nagaoka.

Todai-ji's main hall is considered to be the world's largest wooden building, and it houses one of Japan's largest bronze Buddha statues. We ended up not visiting that temple, but a couple of days later we did see the second largest bronze Buddha statue of Japan on an improvised day trip to Kamakura near Tokyo. Just for reference, the statue in

Nara is about 15 meters tall, and the one in Kamakura about 13 meters.

We did, however, visit the Kasuga Taisha Shinto Shrine, whose legendary history could explain the presence of more than 1,200 deer roaming the grounds of Nara Park. The story says that the god Takemikazuchi arrived in Nara on a white deer, to protect the



Kasuga Taisha Shinto Shrine





Sanjo Dori street



Manyo Botanical Garden



Stone lanterns

newly established capital. The deer have been regarded as heavenly animals and protectors of the town ever since, and are today one of the main tourist attractions of Nara. Both Todai-Ji and Kasuga Taisha are included in the list of eight temples and shrines of Nara that have been proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage site.

We started our day of sightseeing by stepping off the JR Station in Nara and taking the main Sanjo Dori street heading to Nara Park. Even though our main objective was to visit Nara's temples and shrines, we were soon distracted by the buzz and the shops of Sanjo Dori—stationery shops with beautiful calligraphy brushes, sweet shops selling intense green matcha flavored desserts and attracting a crowd with their mochi pounding demonstrations, souvenir stores selling deer-themed products crafted in Japan and quite irresistible. Wandering Sanjo-Dori eventually got us to the park, with its cheerful crowd of deer and tourists: there were people feeding the deer with special deer crackers (sold on the site and called *sika senbei* in Japanese), people trying to catch a selfie with the animals, kids running around, at the same time

enchanted and a bit scared of the deer that got too close.

When we got closer to the Kasuga Taisha shrine, we saw signs for Manyo Botanical Garden just next to the shrine. Naturally, we were drawn to it because who can resist a Japanese garden in early spring? Certainly not me. There wasn't much info about this garden on the internet, except that it is known for its Wisteria Garden, Camellia Garden, Iris Garden and a Five Grain Garden—we missed the irises and the wisterias because they were not yet in bloom, but we were lucky with the camellias, each bush blossoming in its own color. From all those tourists wandering around Nara Park and the temples, we were left almost alone among the camellias, hidden in a grove of tall trees. We took a walk around the pond, over little red bridges and under blossoming cherry trees in complete peace. It was a perfect hidden spot in the midst of buzzing tourist activities, and if you ever find yourself in Nara, it's worth taking some time off at this peaceful place... but shh, keep it a secret.

The Kasuga Taisha shrine is one of the most visited and most photographed shrines in Nara, known for its numerous stone lanterns that line the way to

and from the shrine. The lanterns, called *toro* in Japanese, were originally used in Buddhist temples where they illuminated paths and were only later introduced to Shinto shrines as well. The Kasuga Taisha shrine is surrounded by Kasugayama Primeval Forest, another UNESCO World Heritage site that, along with the mossy lanterns, delicate cherry blossoms and an occasional deer roaming its grounds, made the atmosphere sublime and peaceful despite the crowds.

There was a path leading away from the shrine, through the woods, to the opposite side from where we came from. Again, as soon as we headed a few steps away we were almost alone. We had enough time for a walk along the path that passed by two more shrines and eventually got us out of the woods on the other side of the town center. We found ourselves in a quiet residential neighborhood where the road was lined by family houses, a café here and there and not much else.

I would say that both of us have some kind of compass that leads us to cute things, and so we stumbled upon the cutest ceramic shop that featured two cats, a lovely lady selling the ceramic and offering us some tea, tiny clothes stretched along the tree branches in front of the house, and some of the most beautiful ceramic we've ever seen. We were immediately attracted to the work of ceramicist Yasumi Koubou. Her cups and bowls were delicately thrown and adorned with simple blue and yellow flowers, which led us to making some room in our luggage and heading home with two beautiful pairs of teacups and bowls. Those cups and bowls have been a constant reminder of our time in Japan ever since we got back.

(In November, one of the cups got broken in an unfortunate accident in our kitchen, which led my husband Luka to contact all the online shops he could find that sell Koubou's ceramics. After a secret action that included our friends that live in Japan, a pair of autumn colored teacups arrived as a surprise for me on St. Nicholas Day! The cups are now being well taken care of, used only for the best tea and pampered with delicate handling. Hopefully, there will be no more unfortunate accidents.)

On our way back to the train station we got a bit lost in the maze of narrow residential streets (which was lovely by the way), and then eventually found our way to the center. I really don't know how and why we didn't find any restaurant for lunch (looking at Google Maps of Nara there are hundreds of restaurants, so it remains a mystery). We ended up in one of the chain cafés eating croissants with chocolate deciding on where to eat when we get back to Osaka (our base for exploring the region). When I think about it now, I would love to come back to Nara as there is still so much we haven't seen and its culinary scene definitely deserves a chance. ■





# What No One Tells You About Therapy

3 truths and 3 misunderstandings about what it's actually like to go to therapy

**THERE ARE SOME COMMON** truths and misunderstandings about what actually happens if you decide to see a mental health therapist. All too often as I've traveled around Asia, and especially here in Vietnam, one of the first reactions I get from people when I tell them I'm a psychotherapist is: "Oh, so you know what I'm thinking right now?" Of course the answer to that question is: "No! I'm not a mind reader." I still wonder how that became such a

common belief. This is just one example of the different stigmas about counseling or psychotherapy. Another stigma in some parts of the US, for example, is more about being embarrassed or ashamed of the idea of going to a stranger for help.

I hope at least part of what this article might help to do is bring some awareness to these populations about the realities of therapy. Let's break this down and take a look at what therapy is, and is not.

## **Therapy is Not Reading Your Mind**

Ok, this one is kind of obvious, but apparently needs to be said: Therapy is not about reading someone's mind. If you choose to go to therapy, the only things your therapist knows about you are the things that you have already shared. Your therapist is not trying to manipulate you or trick you in any way. Your therapist wants you to feel better and the relationship is transparent (open and honest). Once the relationship



between you and your therapist develops, over time, your skilled and qualified therapist will begin to understand more clearly your values, why you make the choices that you do, and how these choices are impacting your relationships. One of the cool things about therapy is your therapist does gain access to your inner world, eventually understands you and your values, and can help you keep things in perspective when you feel lost. One thing you don't have to worry about is your therapist being somehow inside your head and knowing what you're thinking. If your therapist *could* read your mind, *would* this be such a terrible thing? Yes, ok, you're right, it would! Anyway, your therapist is on your side and wants what is best for you.

### Your Therapist as a Real (Flawed) Person

A good therapist is authentic, real and human. Your therapist may make mistakes. Your therapist won't know everything. Your therapist shouldn't hide behind a wall of diplomas. Your therapist should know how to say, "I don't know" or "let me think about this". Your therapist should be *very cautious* about giving advice, because what *they* would do in a situation isn't necessarily what's best for *you*. A qualified therapist will have good intentions and acknowledge their limitations. They won't ask you to put yourself in a situation that might be harmful or dangerous, and there are always professional boundaries between the therapist and the client. So a therapist likely won't be attending your wedding (although exceptions are often made), or there won't be a therapy session over dinner and drinks. The relationship should feel like a professional partnership. Two people authentically navigating this crazy thing called life. Certainly, your therapist should never bargain with you for payment (offer therapy services in exchange for something you might provide), nor should a therapist *ever* suggest any type of more intimate relationship. If something like that should happen, the client should strongly consider terminating the relationship immediately. It seems like a no-brainer, but just like in any profession, there are some good therapists and some that are not. For example, in California, it is suggested at the beginning of therapy that the therapist give the client a pamphlet entitled *Therapy Never Includes Sexual Behavior*. Crazy!

### Therapy is Not Eliminating Your Problems

Therapy is not about eliminating a client's problems. For many therapists, there have been times a client has come to therapy and immediately stopped coming, even after only one session, because they leave the session and

nothing has changed. Recently, a client of mine came into the first session and went through the list of things that are wrong, and when it became clear to the client that I had no ways of eliminating these problems, I received the surprised and bewildered look of a deer in the headlights. I can only imagine the client's inner dialogue in that moment: "I'm paying this much money for this and he isn't going to fix these problems?!" A therapist doesn't have a magic potion or isn't able to snap their fingers and make your problems disappear. What they can do is help you understand how you're interpreting these problems, what you're doing to manage them effectively (or ineffectively), and then help you acquire new perspectives, skills and tools so you can start feeling better. Freud once said something like "the best possible outcome of therapy is normal human suffering".

### Therapy is a Living Thing

Therapy should feel alive. Sometimes the most helpful moments are ones that are highly charged (emotional), intense (strong feelings), or thought provoking (gaining insights). If your therapy experience feels boring and shallow and you're just talking about your day, or even worse, talking about your therapist's day (haha), then that's a problem. A good therapist does much more than just listens with a blank face and asks, "How does that make you feel?" Although there is a time and a place for this question (for example, if a client is avoiding certain feelings), a therapist is often more concerned about how you're functioning than how you're feeling. In other words, what is at the heart of your relationship challenges? What is beneath your questionable choices? What is this experience bringing up in you? A good therapist should feel like a partner who collaborates with you on how to best deal with life's challenges. A therapist can be like a guide, offering a roadmap on how you might approach your difficulties. Therapy should feel authentic, raw, vulnerable and alive!

### Therapy is Not Easy

Therapy ain't easy bro! A skilled therapist will likely challenge you with difficult questions that require you to be brutally honest with yourself. In addition, therapy will probably bring up painful feelings and emotions that you would rather not deal with. It is learning how to work with these difficult feelings that is one of the biggest benefits of therapy. Therapy requires work. The therapist may give homework and suggestions that need to be practiced. If a client comes to therapy expecting the therapist to do all the work, the client will likely end therapy too soon and be disappointed in the result (or



Robert is a licensed psychotherapist ([www.herosjourneytherapy.com](http://www.herosjourneytherapy.com)). Similar to counseling, therapy is for those who are struggling with problematic behaviors, beliefs, feelings or relationship issues. Robert has been to over 30 countries, a highlight being riding a motorbike from the south of Vietnam to the north. He now lives in Saigon and focuses on working with expats in Vietnam.

lack thereof). Some of the most helpful things we can do for ourselves are very simple in nature, but not easy. One of the most healing things that can be done is allowing oneself to be completely vulnerable in the presence of another. This brings up all kinds of things, not the least of which is feeling the vulnerability of intimacy and the fear of rejection. When we can practice acknowledging and learning about these fears and difficulties with a therapist, it allows us to gain the confidence and skill to do it with others.

### Therapy is Paradoxical

A paradox means the opposite of what we think to be true is actually true. In other words, a paradox is a statement (or assertion) that is true, even though it seems to be false. An example might be: to become whole, one must empty oneself (spiritual paradox). Or another example: The way out is through (psychological paradox), which means the way out of the pain is to allow it to move through you (turn towards the pain instead of avoid it). What we've learned so often in life is that so many things are *out of our control*. We try to control our conditions (find the right relationship, get the right house, and the right job), and then we still end up dealing with pain, dysfunction and relationships that suck. We seek therapy to learn how to surrender to life as it unfolds, instead of clinging to how we think it should be. So it is often in surrender (this doesn't mean giving up), that we find freedom as opposed to control. Similarly, it is in turning toward difficulties instead of avoiding them that finally opens us up to the parts of us that need attention. Paradox can mean doing the opposite of what we initially think we should do. One of my favorite quotes about paradox is from Carl Rogers: "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." ■



# >>The List Travel



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[www.mianhatrang.com](http://www.mianhatrang.com)

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# Kids & Education











# NO IPHONE., NO IPROBLEM

Surprisingly, ISHCMC-AA students embraced the school's no phone policy

**THIS IS THE GENERAL FEEL WE** gained after implementing a new “no phone policy” at ISHCMC-AA this academic year. To our surprise it has been embraced with open arms. It was an idea widely supported by our students' parents to help us help them get their kids off their device.

Students are no longer permitted to have a phone on their body during school hours; that means no phone in purses or pockets. The impact has been widely felt and with great appreciation. The

push came from a documentary titled *Screenagers*, a film that identified the major issues with screen time affecting not only social development, but brain chemistry as well. If your school is also struggling with cell phone addiction, we strongly recommend you move towards this step with your faculty.

Over the past two years the phones became ubiquitous. Kids stared at them anytime they could. Screens were opened at lunch, on the steps, and as soon as they reached their locker. I once saw a

student walking up the steps with their laptop open while scrolling on their mobile device. Most teachers felt taking away the phones would cause students to break down and cry. This much is probably true and all the more reason to have a rule against phone use in the first place. A recent psychological study from *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found that adults who spent more than two hours a day on social media were twice as likely to label themselves as “isolated.” You can find hundreds of





**Bill Hanrahan** is a Technology Education Coach & Social Studies Teacher at ISHCMC-American Academy. He is a Syracuse University adjunct instructor for psychology and entrepreneurship and is convinced *Seinfeld* is the best show there ever was or will be.

studies coming to the same conclusions.

We've had a few issues this year with the phones being snuck into the bathroom, or brought to class unknowingly. Now, phones are confiscated and given to the main office the first time we see them. It hasn't been nearly as much of a toll as we thought it would be. On average teachers collect one phone a week. Syracuse University Adjunct Professor of Physics at ISHCMC-AA, Andrew Mathie said, "Their attention span is much better when they don't have a screen to distract themselves. I'm concerned about task switching when they have computers and phones, and when distractions aren't present, it really does seem like we can get more work done, and explore topics in greater detail."

"Away For A Day" was our first jab at a school day with no phones. It was an entire day with board games, book readings, poetry cafe, classes that promote conversation, minimal technology dependence and more. The incredible support of the teachers helped make this day possible. We found that if you gave the students something to do instead of using their phone, they didn't express much distress. We were amazed that the children actually talked to one another. One 7th grader, who I thought would have an extreme breakdown without her phone, said to me when I asked her about school, "I just read my book instead." The pressures students experience from social media are temporarily put on hold. A disappearance of instant gratification and dopamine hits from Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram keep kids more focused in class. We no longer worry as much about the sharing of quizzes

and tests via images snapped on their cameras. Syracuse University Adjunct Professor of Calculus at ISHCMC-AA, Michael Haddad said, "The kids actually like school better this way." And he's right. This is unanimous. Sure, the kids want their phones back, but they don't really know why they want them.

When we were kids most of our day was spent playing and socializing with other kids. We learned how to fight, cry, scream, compromise, cheer and laugh. The explosion of the mobile phone on teenagers' livelihoods took away all the bonding that occurs with face-to-face conversations. Social media and our phones have connected us on a scale unknown to humanity, but has simultaneously detached us from our reality more than ever. By eliminating the phone from our school we are protecting children from the danger of growing up without knowing how to talk to people. Our students are gathering in circles again. Kids look at one another instead of their screens. They laugh, smile and make eye contact. There may even be a few more romantic crushes this year.

Needing to respond in real time has helped us identify some students who need emotional support, too. We can now help certain students develop their social skills. And though it still occurs, the bullying is much more easily targeted. It's the physical and verbal bullying that is much easier to spot. This makes our jobs as teachers and counselors easier. Bullies can no longer hide behind a text. Kids are learning the valuable lessons of treating each other with dignity. They learn they shouldn't type something online about someone if they wouldn't say it to their face. The

harassment kids may experience online stops once they enter our school.

The movement is growing. Cognita is about to launch an annual and international "Global Be Well Day." This is a day that incorporates mindfulness, social activities, well being and more. The idea is to create a school environment where people feel good. Create a place where people want to be. It's no secret anymore, companies like Forbes and schools like ours are adopting mindfulness globally. More and more programs are targeting living your life better without a device. A new psychology course titled *The Science of Well-Being* is being offered by Coursera and Yale. There is a whole unit on the misconceptions of happiness that discusses our comparisons of each other's lives online. The need to understand the brain and how it works has become more important than ever. The benefits of slowing down, thinking, being present, far outweigh the fast paced connection we've been told is a benefit to society.

Parents can make a difference in their child's life. Implementing the rule is easy. Enforcing that rule is something entirely different. Model the behavior you want to have. Develop the culture at your home you want to see. Don't want your kid to lie on the sofa aimlessly staring at the screen? Well, you shouldn't do it either. You can try this with your colleagues, too. Be the culture you want to have at the workplace. When a colleague walks into your office, take your eyes off the laptop or mobile device. Treat each other like we are present. The people on the other end can wait. After all, this technology was invented so it can speed up connection, not replace the one we have. ■







# Barrier to Reading

How much background knowledge is needed to understand a piece of text? New research appears to discover the tipping point

Text by Youki Terada

**BY NOW, YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD OF THE** baseball experiment. It's several decades old but has experienced a resurgence in popularity since Natalie Wexler highlighted it in her best-selling new book, *The Knowledge Gap*.

In the 1980s, researchers Donna Recht and Lauren Leslie

asked middle school students to read a passage describing a baseball game, then reenact it with wooden figures on a miniature baseball field. They were surprised by the results: Even the best readers struggled to re-create the events described in the passage.

"Prior knowledge creates a scaffolding for information in memory," they explained after seeing the results. "Students with high reading ability but low knowledge of baseball were no more capable of recall or summarization than were students with low reading ability and low knowledge of baseball."

That modest experiment kicked off 30 years of research into reading comprehension, and study after study confirmed Recht and Leslie's findings: Without background knowledge, even skilled readers labor to make sense of a topic. But those studies left a lot of questions unanswered: How much background knowledge is needed for better decoding? Is there a way to quantify and measure prior knowledge?

A 2019 study published in *Psychological Science* is finally shedding light on those mysteries. The researchers discovered a "knowledge threshold" when it comes to reading comprehension: If students were unfamiliar with 59 percent of the terms in a topic, their ability to understand the text was "compromised."

In the study, 3,534 high school students were presented with a list of 44 terms and asked to identify whether each was related to the topic of ecology. Researchers then analyzed the student responses to generate a background-knowledge score, which represented their familiarity with the topic.

Without any interventions, students then read about ecosystems and took a test measuring how well they understood what they had read.

Students who scored less than 59

percent on the background-knowledge test also performed relatively poorly on the subsequent test of reading comprehension. But researchers noted a steep improvement in comprehension above the 59 percent threshold—suggesting both that a lack of background knowledge can be an obstacle to reading comprehension, and that there is a baseline of knowledge that rapidly accelerates comprehension.

Why does background knowledge matter? Reading is more than just knowing the words on the page, the researchers point out. It's also about making inferences about what's left off the page—and the more background knowledge a reader has, the better able he or she is to make those inferences.

"Collectively, these results may help identify who is likely to have a problem comprehending information on a specific topic and, to some extent, what knowledge is likely required to comprehend information on that topic," conclude Tenaha O'Reilly, the lead author of the study, and his colleagues.

## 5 Ways Teachers Can Build Background Knowledge

Spending a few minutes making sure that students meet the knowledge threshold for a topic can yield outsized results. Here's what teachers can do:

- **Mind the gap:** You may be an expert in civil war history, but be mindful that your students will represent a wide range of existing background knowledge on the topic. Similarly, take note of the cultural, social, economic, and racial diversity in your classroom. You may think

it's cool to teach physics using a trebuchet, but not all students have been exposed to the same ideas that you have.

- **Identify common terms in the topic.** Ask yourself, "What are the main ideas in this topic? Can I connect what we're learning to other big ideas for students?" If students are learning about earthquakes, for example, take a step back and look at what else they should know about—perhaps Pangaea, Earth's first continent, or what tectonic plates are. Understanding these concepts can anchor more complex ideas like P and S waves. And don't forget to go over some broad-stroke ideas—such as history's biggest earthquakes—so that students are more familiar with the topic.

- **Incorporate low-stakes quizzes.** Before starting a lesson, use formative assessment strategies such as entry slips or participation cards to quickly identify gaps in knowledge.

- **Build concept maps.** Consider leading students in the creation of visual models that map out a topic's big ideas—and connect related ideas that can provide greater context and address knowledge gaps. Visual models provide another way for students to process and encode information, before they dive into reading.

- **Sequence and scaffold lessons.** When introducing a new topic, try to connect it to previous lessons: Reactivating knowledge the students already possess will serve as a strong foundation for new lessons. Also, consider your sequencing carefully before you start the year to take maximum advantage of this effect. ■



# Going Through Rough Patches

If your dry skin looks red or patchy, or feels dry or itchy, it could be more than just dry skin



## AN UMBRELLA TERM FOR A

number of related skin diseases that produce red, itchy, dry patches of skin, eczema is a common condition that can affect people from very early in life. While in many cases it eventually ends, in other cases it can be present throughout life, tending toward periodic flare-ups.

The condition actually affects a significant proportion of the population—upwards of 30–40%—so it's a prevalent problem. Importantly, because the skin has different thicknesses depending on the area of the body, different areas can be more easily affected than others. The skin of the soles or hands is thicker and less likely to exhibit symptoms, whereas thinner skin around the eyes, on the neck and armpits, groin, arms and legs—especially areas with creases where there's sweat and friction—are the most common locations for outbreaks. Additionally, eczema can affect the nails, making them look brittle, dark or dry, which can easily be mistaken for a fungal infection. While the typical symptoms are red and itchy skin, they can vary widely from person to person and depend on the type of eczema affliction.

There is no cure for eczema, however there are effective treatments.

How does eczema occur? Initially dermatologists believed the mechanisms were external—but in the end they discovered that some people have a

condition from birth that affects the production of certain proteins that stabilize the superficial layers of the skin—meaning that the skin changes faster and it's not able to remain as waterproof as normal skin should be. Skin that is poorly built will be fragile to environmental substances, not acting as a proper barrier—which is harmful, especially when coupled with it not retaining water as it should. The result is that the skin gets inflamed and dry.

The problem lies with a protein called filaggrin. When there's a problem with the building or production of filaggrin, the structure of this protein is not protective and the skin develops eczema.

## Different Forms of Eczema

We know that the skin of eczema sufferers lacks sufficient production of filaggrin, but from this, a range of variants can arise:

### *Nummular Eczema*

Nummular eczema is characterized by ring-shaped patches that can be mistaken as fungal infections or as other diseases like lupus. Nummular eczema is a chronic condition that is often itchy and well-defined. These coin-shaped lesions can last for several months.

### *Pompholyx*

Pompholyx is a type of eczema that causes tiny blisters to develop across the fingers,

palms of the hands, and sometimes the soles of the feet. It produces painful and itchy blisters that look a little bit like the blisters of herpes but in larger clusters of sores. In general, pompholyx appears due to stress or other environmental pressures.

### *Keratosis Follicularis*

Keratosis follicularis, also known as Darier disease, is a condition where some sufferers have little dry pimples on the sides of the arms, or sometimes on the back or legs, caused by keratin plaques around hair follicles. In more severe cases, these little mounds of keratin may be greasy or have a brownish yellow crust.

### *Papular Eczema*

Papular eczema, which normally happens in the elbows and knees, causes a rash of small, itchy bumps to develop on the skin that can be mistaken in some cases as psoriasis, warts or other viral rashes. These bumps are called papules and are more likely to affect people with darker skin.

### *Contact Dermatitis*

While slightly different from eczema, contact dermatitis is lumped in with eczema because of the red, itchy rash it causes. Contact dermatitis is due to direct contact with a substance or an allergic reaction to it. The rash isn't contagious





**Dr. Ruben Martinez-Castejon** has been the referral point for skin-related conditions at FMP since 2012. He obtained a postgraduate diploma in dermatology at Cardiff University and studied dermoscopy with the finest experts in the field—a technique that aids in the early detection of skin cancer.

or life-threatening but it can be very uncomfortable. Many substances can cause such reactions, including soaps, hair dyes, cosmetics, fragrances, jewelry and plants. Contact dermatitis is not only triggered by things that touch our skin; it can also be due to things that are inhaled or eaten.

### Complications and Sequelae of Eczema

In addition to these subtypes, there are also a number of conditions that arise as a consequence of suffering from eczema:

#### *Impetigo*

In children, eczema is dry; it can be blistering and easily infected by bacteria. This is very common and is known as impetigo, a highly contagious disease that usually appears as red sores on the face, especially around a child's nose and mouth, and on hands and feet. The sores burst and develop honey-colored crusts. Impetigo is usually caused by streptococcal bacteria, but in some rare cases it can be infected by fungus or herpes.

#### *Post Inflammatory Hyperpigmentation (PIH)*

PIH is a type of hyperpigmentation that can affect the face and body, which is especially high in phototypes 4, 5 and 6, which is the type of tanned skin that Vietnamese and other Asian peoples

have. PIH appears as flat spots of dark discoloration on areas of persistent or recurrent inflammation. This condition is rooted in increased melanin production in response to inflammation and light exposure on fissures and cracks of inflamed skin. While eczema is typically periodic, PIH is often a chronic postinflammatory condition.

### Treating Eczema

The first thing to consider in regard to treatment is the triggers of eczema. Stress is often the culprit. Another cause is change of temperature, from cold to hot or hot to cold, even when walking from the heat outside into say, the AC in a taxi or cinema. Unfortunately, pets are also a common reason for flare-ups. While an individual may have always had pets, every animal is different and carries with them different triggers. Additional causes for outbreaks are numerous, from dust or dust mites to humidity, or even a physical reaction to the excrement of insects. Therefore, it can be difficult to pinpoint the exact source.

A big problem many people have with eczema is the incorrect way they have of treating it. They cycle through using a steroid cream when the inflamed area is itchy or red and then not using it when symptoms subside—but this cycle is unending. This is like trying to hide a piece of wood under the water. What

happens when you stop holding it down? It pops right back up to the surface. On top of this, steroids have side effects that can appear with prolonged use, such as folliculitis, telangiectasia, skin atrophy, or discoloration (skin color changes). One option to remedy this is to switch steroids to calcineurin inhibitors such as tacrolimus (protopic). This drug reduces the inflammation without the side effects of the steroids. It acts as a moderate potency steroid. Another option will be to use moisturizers more frequently.

A much more effective treatment for eczema is like a cocktail of steroids and moisturizers. The right proportion for the base of this cocktail is five parts (or times) moisturizer to one part steroid. Moisturizers should be used frequently, many times a day. A good way to do this is to wash and then dry the skin, and afterward apply a thick moisturizer. In severely affected areas (arms and knees flexures) it may be necessary to occlude the skin with a bandage overnight. It's important to remember that the less thick the moisturizers are, the more chemicals have been added, which is not good—so stay away from lotions in lieu of thicker creams or ointments. Remember, the goal is to ensure that the skin is waterproof. You must do this for as long as is required to keep symptoms subdued—which could be years, or for some, the whole duration of their life. ■



# >>The List Education

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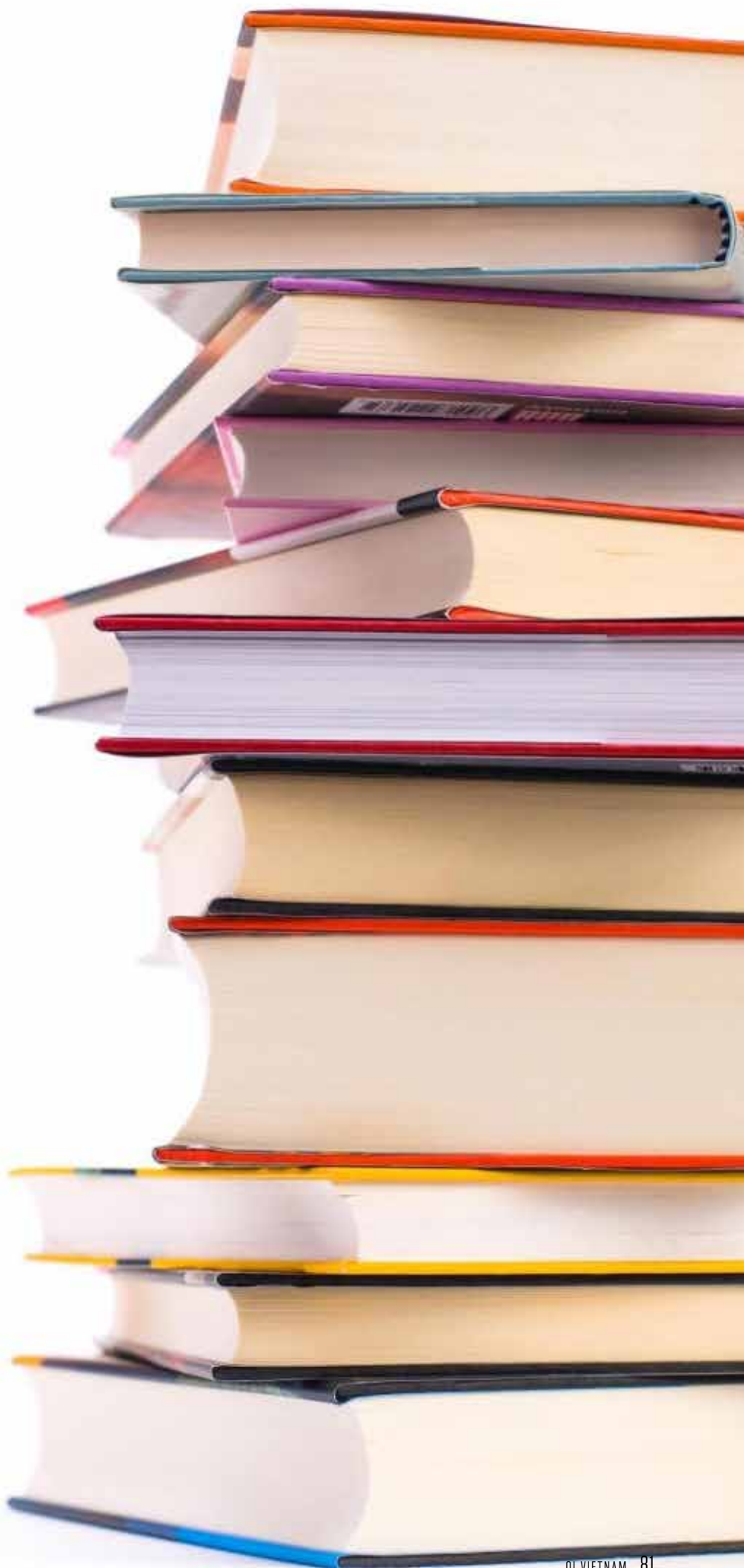
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