



VIETNAM

02-2020

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A Time To Give



Tập New Year

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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**
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This Month's Cover

KIBA Restaurant

See our review on pages 40, 41

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THE LONG
CAFFE



THE LONG CAFFE

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IMAGE PROVIDED BY LES ENFANTS DU DRAGON

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The Roaring 20s Are Back Again

Will it be a time of great depression or great success?
Find out



LET US HOPE WITHOUT A REPEAT of the 1929 Great Depression, although that would be 9 years away.

So, what can we expect going into 2020 and the next decade?

A recent study conducted by Schroders can throw a fair amount of light on this. It showed that people lack confidence in exactly how much money they have invested, and where it is. Only 44% of people were confident with how much money they have with various financial providers, and this reduced sharply for those with less investment knowledge.

People in general, were not satisfied with the performance of their investments with over half stating they had not achieved what they wanted with their investments over the past five years, and most attributed their own action or inaction as the main cause of this failure. Globally, there's a clear need to be more patient with investments.

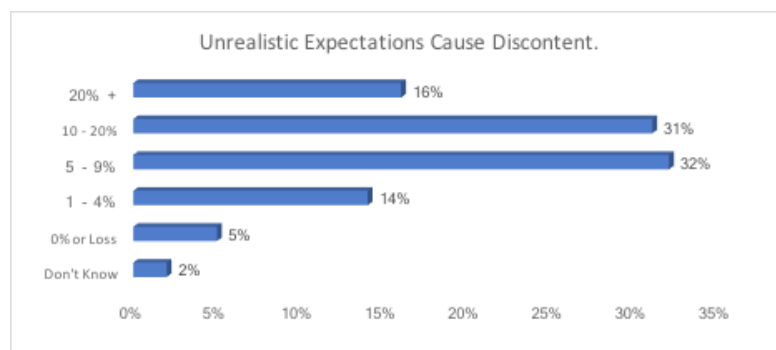
The average holding period before changing or cashing in an investment was 2.6 years, which is just over half the five-year term I would suggest and generally recommend to stay invested for. It was clear that many have an unrealistically high annual return expectation. Investors are expecting on average a high 10.7% return per year over the next five years, while one in six expected at least a staggering 20% annual return on their portfolio.

There was a general home bias for investments, and people are split over the benefit of investing in emerging markets. 31% of people preferred the majority of their portfolio in funds that invest in their home country, while a further 34% preferred investing in countries familiar to them. Only 31% of people globally feel emerging markets could be beneficial to their portfolio, and almost a quarter thought it is too risky to do so. That I don't personally agree with for the next year, so I sit firmly in the camp of the other 75%.

Millennials are less patient than older generations, moving investments elsewhere or cashing in less than every two years (1.9 years). Noticeably more frequent than Generation X (2.7 years), Baby Boomers (3.7 years) and the Silent Generation (4 years). Millennials are also more likely to make reactive decisions in the face of volatility, with 15% of people of this age group agreeing they are likely to do this in times of instability. This again

is negatively correlated to their age group, with only 4% of the Silent Generation feeling they will behave this way.

Geographically, those in the Americas had the highest expectations (12.4%), compared to a slightly more realistic 9% in Europe. Surprisingly, when looking at self-purported investment knowledge, expectations for investments rose for those with more knowledge. This suggests to me that inflated return expectations are not only due to a lack of experience. The below is showing just how investors think their returns should be going forward in percentage terms. The second and third lines are the sensible ones and thankfully where the majority sit. The real range should be between 8% and 12% per annum depending on appetite towards risk.



People also seem to be blaming themselves for investment performance. All the high-ranking reasons related to people blaming their own actions, or inactions, were anything from the length of time invested to the level of risk taken and whether advice was taken from an adviser or peer.

Some believe (as do I) that emerging markets are well positioned as a good source of potential long-term returns. Despite that, people appeared to lack interest in investing in emerging markets, with only 31% of people feeling it could be beneficial to their portfolio, and almost a quarter thinking it is altogether too risky. That figure is slightly higher when discussing emerging markets with investors in Asia who believe that investing in emerging markets could be beneficial to their investment portfolio. This goes back to the point earlier raised of not listening to an advisor or peer.

The general feeling is that the next decade is set to deliver returns that don't match the expectations of

investors—certainly not at the 20% level per annum. But that figure hasn't been realistic either in any part of the last decade so shouldn't suddenly be realistic today. When compared to current bank interest rates which are now negative in many countries including the European Central Bank, Japan, Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland—to expect 20% is not really well thought through.

Emerging markets and commodities should be high on the radar along with a well-diversified portfolio including different industry sectors and jurisdictions. Specifically, you should be turning your attention to India, China and most certainly Taiwan after the recent election win. Historical highs probably coming there this year (you heard it here first). This year is going to be very much about picking the right stocks and watching geopolitical movements. It's all about getting it right in the first quarter! As always contact me directly if you need more advice. ■



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20-YEAR-OLD

**MAN NABBED
FOR STORING
FIRECRACKERS IN
HO CHI MINH CITY.**

A team of on-duty officers caught Long standing in front of Ong Bon Pagoda on Hai Thuong Lang Ong Street carrying a large cardboard box. As the young man was acting suspiciously, the officers decided to check what was inside the box. Before the policemen had a chance to look inside, Long admitted he was carrying 2,500 units of round firecrackers and 120 fireworks tubes. At the police station, Long claimed he had been selling confetti cannons in front of Ong Bon Pagoda for the past two years. Long purchased the products from a seller on Facebook. Lighting firecrackers was common during Lunar New Year in Vietnam but was banned in 1995 because they are dangerous and can potentially cause fires.



~100

**PACKED INSIDE A 46-SEATER SLEEPER BUS IN
VIETNAM'S TET MIGRATION MADNESS.**

Dong Nai police said on Tuesday they had impounded a sleeper bus for carrying passengers exceeding its capacity by 53 people. The bus was traveling on National Highway 1A from Ho Chi Minh City to the north-central province of Nghe An when it was pulled over by traffic police officers in Dong Nai for an inspection. The driver, 40-year-old Tran Van Ha from Nghe An, was also in violation of having extra seats installed on the vehicle against the original design, lacking a vehicle inspection certificate, and carrying oversized luggage. According to Ha, most passengers are workers in the southern province of Binh Duong who were on their way back to their hometown in Nghe An for the Lunar New Year holiday. Ha said he wanted to "earn a little more" by carrying more passengers because it was his last trip before taking a holiday break.

5G

**TO LAUNCH IN JUNE BY VIETNAM'S LARGEST
TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANY, VIETTEL.**

The military-run company said in a statement it would use 5G-network equipment and software developed itself, adding that it has become the sixth firm the world to produce 5G-network equipment after Ericsson, Nokia, Huawei, Samsung Electronics and ZTE. The statement came after Viettel conducted its first trial video call on its 5G network the same day. Viettel said it would develop both civilian and military services based on its 5G platform.



USD 33,660

FINE WAS ISSUED TO FISH SAUCE MANUFACTURERS FOR USING BANNED CHEMICAL.

Inspections of factories

belonging to Dieu Huong Company in An Giang Province and Hoa Hiep Company and Tan Phat Company in Vinh Long Province found that each of the three companies was using sodium carbonate, a banned chemical in food, to make what they called 'fish sauce.'

Sodium carbonate, also known as washing soda, is a common ingredient in the production of soaps and detergents, as well glass, paper, pottery and dyed products. To produce their 'fish sauce,' Dieu Huong, Hoa Hiep, and Tan Phat had been boiling 17,000 liters of MSG and shrimp stock with 120 kilograms of sodium carbonate for 40-50 hours to produce 800 liters of a liquid they marketed as 'fish sauce.'

Tien's team forwarded the results of the inspections to the Ministry of Public Security following their completion but the findings and punishments were only announced this month.

As of January, all three firms have shut down their operations. In a short discussion with *Tuoi Tre* (Youth) newspaper after the case caught public attention, Le Van Diep, director of Dieu Huong Company, admitted that his family-run business had been using the prohibited chemical compound in its fish sauce production for 60 years.



23

KILLED ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE TET HOLIDAY.

Thirty-one traffic accidents occurred, killing 23 and injuring 15 others on January 23 (the 29th day of the 12th lunar month), the first day of the two-week long Lunar New Year holiday. They included 29 road accidents and two railway ones, according to the Traffic Police Department under the Ministry of Public Security. All the numbers of accidents, deaths and injured people increased compared to the first day of the 2019 Tet holiday. Also on January 23, traffic police nationwide dealt with 3,264 cases breaking road traffic rules and 363 other violations on waterways, revoking 526 driving licenses.

1,000

JAPANESE DELEGATES VISITED CENTRAL VIETNAM FOR AN ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND TOURISM EXCHANGE LAST MONTH.

The welcome ceremony for Nikai, who also chairs the Japan-Vietnam Friendship Parliamentary Alliance, and his delegation was organized in Hoi An. During the event, PM Phuc stated that the diverse exchange and cooperation activities that have been held between both sides reflect the vigorous growth of the Vietnam-Japan extensive strategic partnership. Bilateral relations have enjoyed breakthrough, comprehensive, and profound development, with Vietnam considering Japan a trustworthy and important partner, the premier continued. PN Phuc called for more parliamentary exchanges and cooperation between localities so as to reinforce the friendship and mutual understanding between the two peoples, especially among the young generation.





Listen

Entertaining and informative
podcasts for bedtime, road
trips and more

Text by Jesus Lopez-Gomez

MAYBE IT'S A VESTIGE FROM podcasting's older, more mature uncle radio broadcast that a listener might imagine their favorite show being created in a studio with everyone wearing arbitrarily large headphones speaking into microphones connected to audio engineering machines with hospital-level quality complexity.

It might be (pleasantly?) surprising, then, to learn that Saigoneer recorded the 74th edition of their weekly podcast in a living room-like space in their Pasteur Street office. Holding handheld, wired mics and notes on paper or their phones, the publication's editorial staff puts their feet up and records their sprawling, banter-laden conversation easy with the marginalia of Vietnamese current events, like the recent practice of "one-star bombing" or flooding a derided business' page with bad reviews.

"I remember one resort in Da Nang or something—correct me if I'm wrong," said Deputy Editor Khoi Pham. "They were the target of a YouTuber. He complained or something?"

"Oh yeah," replied Content Director Paul Christiansen.

"There are actual services you can hire to destroy a page," Pham said. "So when you have the desire to destroy Paul's Facebook page..."

"I do have that desire," writer Thi Nguyen responds to laughter from the other contributors.

It's this, the meandering conversation with smart, witty people who know something that has popularized podcasts since they were debuted in 2004. The last couple of years have seen a wave of podcast emerge from creators in

Saigon, which already has a nice array of personal blogs and publications that keeps people abreast of conversations happening within the city. There are around 10 currently active, with show durations of nearly an hour a piece, they are also a significant time commitment.

Where to start? Check out our selection of Saigon's podcasts below.

The Bureau Asia

There's certainly a lot of ink spilled in Saigon over who has the best cocktail and you'll have to be pretty committed to that conversation to find this podcast enjoyable. This is a podcast mostly focused on food and beverage happenings while drawing in some noteworthy voices like heritage architect Dr. Hoanh Tran and former Shri manager-turned-cocktail guy and artist Richie Fawcett.

What Works: Dining and drinking have paramount importance for the relatively well-heeled and time-rich foreign population living in Saigon. It can be hard to keep up with what's new on the scene if you're just seeing pictures of new places. The Bureau Asia has value in bringing to light new venues and bringing some thoughtful food criticism.

What Doesn't: It's long. The episode I listened to came in at about 45 minutes and could have been half that with better interviewing and more control from the hosts. Also, the hosts have an odd sense of humor that borders on cringey. The seventh episode opens with a joke about one of the panelists paying for sex. Expect to hear people laugh at their own bad jokes as you might not.

Creators in Saigon

Dana Drahos is a US national living in Ho Chi Minh City who speaks with (mostly) female creatives living in the city. Guests have included Frances Fraser-Reid, the owner of easily one of the most interesting Saigon-based Instagram accounts @so_theadventurebegins, and Millette Stambaugh, a blogger and creative who found her creative purpose in Saigon. *Creators in Saigon* is show that deserves a listen if nothing else for its reminder that this is a special place where people are doing special things.

What Works: Drahos has an easy demeanor with people and doesn't hurry them along. The last episode she

produced was with a self-described "empath," someone who has higher than normal empathy for others. It's a topic that would wilt under the wrong circumstances but is explored with grace under Drahos' care. There an unhurried naturalness to the conversations she has with her guests that shows her charm and skill as a podcast host.

What Don't: Stambaugh apologizes for telling a long story that establishes her biography. It's not her fault, she's responding to a vaguely worded signal that it's her turn to talk: "Jump on in," the host asks leading to a minutes-long, meandering response from Stambaugh. Drahos has a network and talent for finding interesting guests. To bring the show up to the next level, she'll need to figure out how to prompt her guests better and exercise more control of the audio product. Outlining the conversation beforehand, setting a firm time budget and studying other podcast hosts.

Seven Million Bikes

Host Niall Mackay's Scottish accent produces some unusual sounding English (to my American ear), but it's nothing you can't get used to after a few minutes. There's also plenty of runways to take off from: these podcasts are generally between 45 minutes to an hour-long. What's Mackay doing with this time? Hm, it's hard to tell at first. In the two-parter (an hour and a half total) he has with Genderfunk empress Ricardo "Esta Ricardo" Glencasa, they talk about accents and what time the drag queen woke up before getting into a discussion about the drag queen troupe itself about eight minutes in. Long time listeners of Mackay's podcast will recognize that as his preferred manner of dialogue: a wandering, slow walk up to a topic of substance. After he gets warmed up, Mackay is good at digging into topics and asking important questions to get what he needs from his guests, like when he spoke to journalist Sen Nguyen about her coverage of sexual violence and the dearth of sex education in Vietnam.

What Works: When the show stagnates, Mackay is generally good about moving things along. He usually does one-on-one interviews and his questions are good at pacing things correctly, typically. Mackay has a clear understanding of how to interview and

what to ask to get a worthwhile response.

What Doesn't: The show is long, too long in my opinion (*much* too long in my honest opinion). Cut the small talk. Some of that length comes from Mackay "warming up" and easing his guests in. Do we need to hear comedian Vu Minh Tu explain that her name is a guy's name? It's cute and fine as an appetizer, but we certainly don't need followup questions on it or attempts at jokes made on it. These are things done for the sake of small talk. In this and other podcasts, there is often quite a bit of small talk passing for listenable content that requires either a patient listener or stronger editing. I prefer the latter, personally.

Saigoneer

This podcast isn't quite a perfect compliment to their editorial product. Reporting at Saigoneer is smart and in-depth, but the podcast product is looser and laid back and showcases the personalities of the writers. That can be a good thing or a bad thing depending on what you're after. There are interesting Vietnamese cultural insights occasionally revealed and some events hit, but the show is clearly about something else: at times, gentle ribbing between the contributors or, as in their pre-Tet episode, food criticism on Lunar New Year cuisine.

What Works: These are smart people who know their stuff. Certain moments do pop in the audio, moments that would only happen between intelligent friends who are very comfortable with one another. You're never going more than a few minutes without some lol-worthy moments or some nugget of previously unknown info being fed to you.

What Doesn't: It's a podcast product that's very comfortable with itself. Occasionally, they'll offer a great interview, like music blogger Thuc Dang who spoke about his highly essential publication on local music of merit titled *Vietnam's Next Top Bitches*. But outside of that, it's just the Saigoneer staff generally talking in an unstructured way that friends do. You have to really like that *itself* to stay with the podcast as the conversation can sometimes be unfocused and will shift tone quickly from informational to comical and back again. It's more relaxed than the median podcast product and perhaps more relaxed than it has to be. ■

The Walking Machine

Local metalworker Ly Minh Tien builds a spider-like walking machine to raise awareness on environmental issues

Text by Jesus Lopez-Gomez

Images by Vy Lam

A RIDDLE: WHAT HAS 12 LEGS, six on either side, and is made of metal? It's not a metal spider, but that guess isn't far off. A fitting comparison: "You know the movie *Wild Wild West*?", its builder and metalworker Ly Minh Tien, asked.

It's called a Jansen walking machine. It's named so for a Dutch engineer-artist who's known for crafting a series of kinetic sculptures. Think back to the viral YouTube footage of the Boston Dynamics robot dogs—part functional, part object of fascination. That's a bit like





to the transportation monopoly held by motorized means made with two wheels or four. In our modern moment of high profile environmental activism like that of young icon Greta Thunberg and the Climate Emergency, this ought to sound like a challenge that others have made too. But Tien's raising the flag over a slightly different concern: air pollutants and namely dust stirred by wheeled transport.

"My child gets sick all the time," the engineer said. "When I was a kid like them, I never used to get sick." Tien explained that his two young sons have been plagued with lung and respiratory problems leading to frequent coughing and illness. "I'm afraid the next generation will have it even worse," he confided.



Tien's machine. It's a hulking, black contraption bearing a seat at the top that would hold the user as it crawls forward.

There's no seatbelt, but you won't likely need one. The entire machine carries the user forward at no more than about five kilometers per hour. That's top speed in a straight line, turning can be difficult, both because turning requires a subtle manipulation of the two joysticks that control legs sides individually and because ungentle and sudden movements can cause the machine to malfunction mechanically.

The big difference between the Boston Dynamics robots and Tien's machine is that the robot dog on the internet appears fully functional and ready to walk out of the lab tomorrow. Tien's walking machine is... well... "functionally limited" is a nice way of putting it.

"Impractical," would be the less nice way of saying it. Nevertheless, it's a cornerstone of Tien's message to his country and the world: automotive transport isn't the only way. Tien's machine is a challenge





Tien is a Vietnamese metalworker who trained in the northern France city of Reims. It was there that he saw Jansen's machine crab-walking through a video on YouTube. The experience left an impression on him. He started to explore other such devices on the web, but found that other builders who'd completed Jansen's design around the world settled for a relatively small machine.

"I like it big this way," Tien said gesturing toward his creation, which is about the length of a common motorbike. Seated atop the thing, a person of normal height would be slightly taller than the average population.

Tien started building the machine in August 2019. "I made a lot of mistakes," he said laughing gesturing to a pile of discarded metal accruing in one corner of his workshop.

Building out the real thing has been a vindication to those who doubted him while he was building the machine. There were many, he recalled. "They said it would never work."

But beyond convincing his critics, Tien is now focused on convincing Saigon authorities to let him display and operate the walking machine in a public place like the Nguyen Hue promenade. His goal is to use the machine to create a public awareness campaign of alternative transport. "I just want people to see something different," Tien said. ■



Creating *Extra Space*

The real estate market in Vietnam is crowded. The self-storage industry, however, is growing

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

WHAT DOES THE EXPRESSION

‘self-storage’ make you think of? The term might evoke images of those storage units you would find in any US or European city, holding an overflow of personal belongings for several weeks, months or even years. For someone who lives in Vietnam — well, you might get a different response.

“They might think of a big warehouse at Cat Lai port,” the large commercial port east of the city, MyStorage founder Aric Austin said. A smellier, more humid and less attractive version of MyStorage and certainly not catering to the needs of private individuals or smaller companies.

Your average Vietnamese probably won’t think of an expansive, well-lit and air conditioned facility where you can store anything from a few suitcases for a couple of days to your business inventory for several years. They won’t be able to imagine that someone would come pick up and return your goods at any time. Add a splash of pleasant sea blue on everything to match Austin’s company’s brand look and you’ve got District 2 self-storage outlet MyStorage.

Austin came to Vietnam in early 2018, leaving Berlin and also leaving a career in media and startups. He’d reached a point in his career where he understood the essentials to build a successful business — financials, recruitment, scaling and so on — and wanted to build something brand new.

After having started to research it seriously, Austin realized that creating a storage company made sense for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the fact that the storage industry is already well established in peer ASEAN cities such as Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Nothing like this existed

in Vietnam, although it is one of the countries in Asia with the highest GDP growth. Like these peer cities, Ho Chi Minh City has a thriving middle class that will be needing storage services. Small apartments, due to increasing housing costs, and higher spending on material goods inevitably lead to a need for secure storage solutions.

MyStorage was thus founded with the mission of offering a convenient, secure and affordable storage solution to people living in Vietnam’s growing mega cities. To give them more space in their lives for the things they enjoy.

“We have found that there is a strong relationship between a country’s GDP and its urbanization rate, which leads to an increasing demand for storage, and we can observe this trend taking place Vietnam. We believe Ho Chi Minh City is the next place to catch the wave as people become more affluent and move into urban areas with less space. Also, we see a trend to ‘decluttering’ in general which is demonstrated by the success of shows like Marie Kondo on Netflix,” said Austin.

Since he opened MyStorage in the summer of 2019, locals have come to be close to half of his clientele, with the remainder consisting of expats from nations such as the USA, Australia or Japan where self-storage is a well-known concept.

Increasing numbers of residents moving to Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi from the countryside means the size of homes and apartments in these metro areas will likely shrink, making self-storage a more critical part of these cities’ growth and development. What’s more, many

of these living quarters are offered with furnishings that may not fit the residents’ tastes. Before MyStorage was founded, there were few options to relocate these large items.

“As professionals at all stages in their careers come to Saigon, from the newly minted single expat to those relocating with their family, MyStorage will be there to serve their needs, securely holding luggage or whole households’ worth of goods,” added Austin.

Here’s how it works. Customers make an inquiry via email, telephone or book the service directly on the website www.mystorage.vn, where they can determine when their items should be picked up and how much space they require. If requested, MyStorage also delivers complimentary storage boxes to the customers before the pickup date so that they can safely pack and organize items. On the scheduled date, MyStorage picks up the customer’s belongings and brings them to their clean, secure and air-conditioned storage facility.

Customers can ask for their items, either all or some of them, to be returned at any time. This has proven to be a particularly valuable feature for commercial customers who need to house overflow inventory, marketing material or other items where they need frequent access.

As for future plans, the MyStorage founder said the company will focus on making the service more efficient through further tech development and will also expand within and beyond Ho Chi Minh City. The company has also recently debuted a Korean language version of their website to serve the city’s sizable Korean population and are planning to launch a Japanese site in the very near future. ■

For more info on MyStorage, visit mystorage.vn

Soweto

Images and Text by **David Dredge**
(daviddredge.com)



Soweto, deriving from South Western Township, was established in the 1930s to remove native people from the capital cities and neighboring areas. The first permanent housing erected in this area were the mining houses: long dormitory-style buildings where only men and mineworkers could live. The nearby goldmines are all but exhausted but the large yellow mine dumps and long, narrow mine houses still stand in the area as a reminder.

The heart of Soweto was always a thriving hub for artists and musicians but it has since become a hub for bars and restaurants with influencers driving sports cars vying for attention.



The little that the community does have is shared. Residents tend to solve problems internally preferring not to involve local authorities. The communities themselves are often quite varied with residents from several ethnic groups and from various different African nations. South Africa has 9 official languages and many more ethnic groups. South Africa is also the second wealthiest nation in Africa making it a refuge for many people throughout the continent.

The children are the most heartwarming aspect of the township. Their smiles and friendliness is incredible considering how little they have. The day I visited this township a young girl was electrocuted trying

to pick a peach just like the one the boy is holding in the photograph. She climbed a fence to pick the fruit from the tree and, unfortunately, the makeshift electric wires that are fashioned by fearless township

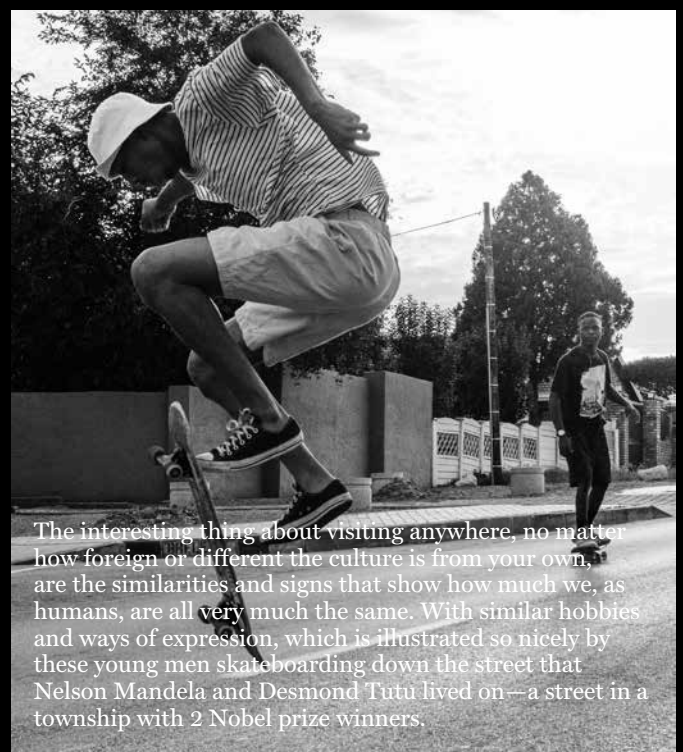
electricians had killed her. Life is especially hard for kids because they are often left to their own devices or in the care of an older relative or even slightly older sibling.



There is always life around the small stores and local sellers. The people of Soweto are kind and welcoming despite the hardships they face.



An iconic photograph of Hector Peterson, a 13-year-old boy who was gunned down by police during a peaceful protest held by Students in Soweto. The students were protesting unfair education laws during the 1970s Apartheid period. The site of the incident is now a museum and memorial to the students who risked their lives to speak out against inequality and injustice. The words of Hector Peterson's parents are engraved at the site, sharing their profound sense of loss and strength.



The interesting thing about visiting anywhere, no matter how foreign or different the culture is from your own, are the similarities and signs that show how much we, as humans, are all very much the same. With similar hobbies and ways of expression, which is illustrated so nicely by these young men skateboarding down the street that Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu lived on—a street in a township with 2 Nobel prize winners.

With scarce opportunities for residents, people set up simple businesses and barbecue stands to earn money.

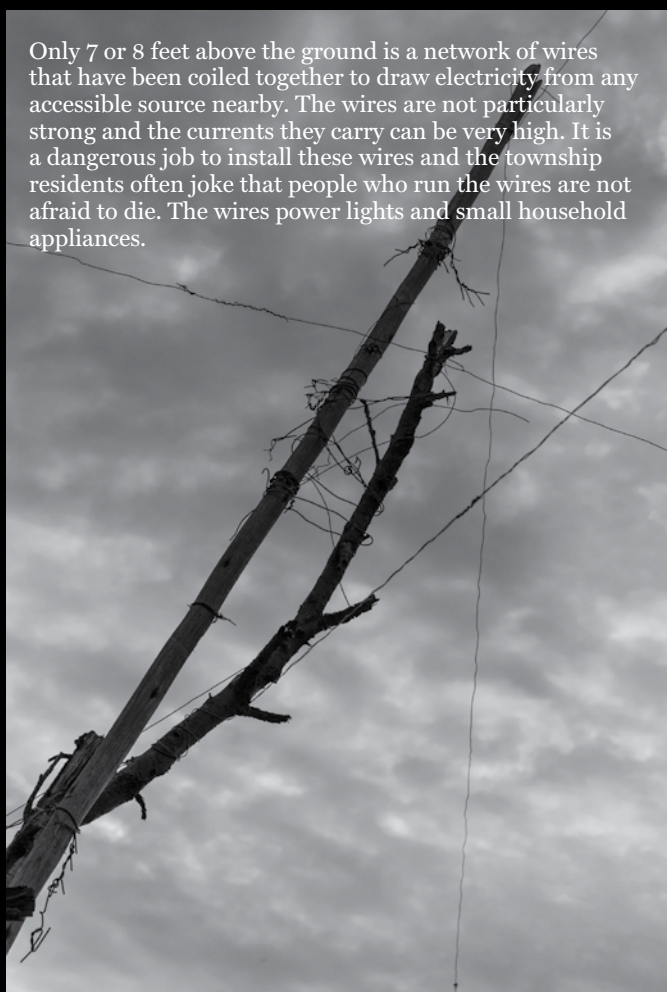


Wherever you go in the township you see smiling children. This young girl is running an errand for her aunt; she stopped to check out the candy on her way home.



Pictured is a community leader who also works at this community center for young people in one of the townships. The community center provides one meal a day for 500-600 students. The center has a television room, a small computer lab and a few classrooms where students are free to attend after-school programs. The programs teach basic computer literacy, language and math as well as acquiring trade skills and driving licenses. The young people who attend the classes are encouraged to complete courses, which will hopefully assist them when seeking employment. Photographs of successful graduates of the programs are enshrined on noticeboards to inspire the students—many of the young people lucky enough to have benefitted from this community become life-long donors to the center.

Only 7 or 8 feet above the ground is a network of wires that have been coiled together to draw electricity from any accessible source nearby. The wires are not particularly strong and the currents they carry can be very high. It is a dangerous job to install these wires and the township residents often joke that people who run the wires are not afraid to die. The wires power lights and small household appliances.



The mural depicts the students protesting, holding placards and throwing stones while the police look on with their guns and dogs. In reality, the crowds were far bigger and in truth it was protests like this that signaled to the world what was happening in South Africa and eventually led to independence in 1994.

The Customer Experience

Social media marketing trends revolutionizing retail in Vietnam

“THE STORE IS MEDIA,” IS THE mantra in the best-selling book *Reengineering Retail: The Future of Selling*, written by retail experts Doug Stephens and Joseph Pine.

The book explains that “customer experience is the new marketing trend and the best way to generate demand for your retail offerings is through an experience so engaging that consumers can’t help but spend time in your place, give you their attention, and buy your offerings as a result.” The author defines a “remarkable experience” as those that are “engaging, unique, personalized, surprising and repeatable.”

This new global marketing trend has had a significant impact on how businesses in Vietnam market their products and services to their potential customers. Social networks have recently become some of the most influencing factors affecting Vietnamese businesses that also have resulted in personalized customer relationships.



A growing number of Vietnamese consumers are using e-commerce websites, such as Tiki, Lazada and Shopee, and often read product reviews before making a purchase decision. Customer feedback ratings through social networks are an essential process that helps businesses understand what customers need.

There is also a growing trend for businesses to use inbound marketing strategies rather than traditional outbound strategies. Inbound social media marketing is a new and more effective, less expensive marketing tool.

It focuses on attracting customers, or leads, via company-created customized social media content, thereby having potential customers come to the company rather than the more expensive approach of paying marketers to catch a potential buyer’s attention.



According to recent reports from Statista on rewards programs, brand reputation, and reliable online reviews, it has more of an influence on consumer purchases than a recommendation from family and friends. Only 42% of consumers were influenced by word-of-mouth from family and friends and 68% of buyers were more influenced by online reviews.

The food and entertainment industry in Vietnam is no exception to this marketing trend. Vietnamese businesses have abandoned old-fashioned direct marketing methods such as outdated static websites that require constant updating and the use of environmentally unfriendly paper-based promotional coupons and flyers to promote their businesses.

Viettel Mobile has been on an advancing leading-edge technology such as artificial intelligence, face recognition, NFC (Near Field Communication), IOT (Internet of Things) and new mobile payment options. Hoang Anh Duc of Viettel Mobile Product Center explained how these technologies will be applied where clients can perform transactions on their own without human support: “At Viettel we focus on personalized

customer experience, allowing the client to optimize the products/ services provided to customers. Also, artificial intelligence allows customer behavior analysis to provide a basis for customer care and build new customer development orientations.

We optimize the customer experience, especially in the banking sector to make transactions appear seamless. We are applying face recognition software and artificial intelligence to make transactions, in this way customers won’t have to go to the bank and provide more identification to carry out simple transactions, while also minimizing risk.”

Duc continued: “Viettel is also the leading provider of several payment services related to these two new technologies, such as NFC payments at BRT bus stations and payments made at outlets. Vietnam has more than 60,000 merchants accepting payment via various IoT technologies such as NFC technology and is growing very fast.

Imagine a scenario where you go to a restaurant and a variety of your favorite dishes are offered via an artificial intelligence platform right at the dinner table. And after dinner, you won’t have to wait for the check; the money will be deducted automatically. Or later when you are out on the town planning to enjoy a movie or visit the theatre, you can avoid queueing at the box office for a long time and easily buy a movie or theatre ticket right in the lobby by scanning a smart poster. Afterward, simply show your receipt on your smartphone as you enter the theatre without the need for a paper ticket. This is our vision for Vietnam, and we are working tirelessly to achieve it “

A new marketing app called GO-ID, developed by a Vietnamese-Canadian joint venture social marketing company will be launched just in time for Valentine’s dinner scene. The new start-up is an all-in-one solutions provider



Thomas G. Giglione is the founder and managing director of Guaranteed Original, a member of the Asia-Pacific Legal Innovation and Technology Association (*alita.legal*), and ICODR (*icodr.org/ALITA*) is the premier organization consolidating legal innovation and technology initiatives in Southeast Asia and ICODR is an organization that promotes worldwide standards for all forms of technology-assisted dispute resolution platforms.

of consumer engagement services that creates customized inbound marketing campaigns. They specialize in improving online negative consumer reviews and creating consumer engagement programs such as their customized “Check-in Selfie Challenge” promotional program using their own customized Facebook app.



GO-ID also offers customized NFC smart labels, posters, smart wrist bands for conferences and tabletop advertising hubs that are designed for cafés, restaurants and the event promotion industry. Their latest social marketing tool is a new customized electronic social advertising hub that also features automatic Wi-Fi connection so wait staff are not bothered by repeated requests for WI-FI passwords from customers and comes complete with multiple phone-charging stations for customers to keep their smartphones fully charged. The new advertising hubs also incorporate a color touchscreen to play customized promotional videos that also serves as an interactive menu for patrons to order and pay for their food online. The wireless advertising hubs are rechargeable and can be placed at the front of a restaurant so customers can view any lunch or dinner specials while waiting to be seated or can be placed at the customers' table. The devices can be updated with customized promotions so that each tap on the unit gives merchants valuable data on the customer's order in real-time.

These are the types of technological advancements that improve the merchant's relationship with their customers. Customer relationships are no longer made of one-time interactions but become a continuous long-term relationship especially when integrated with a customized rewards program. One of the most effective ways to increase the number of customers signing up for a loyalty program is by tapping into this exact moment and having the customers sharing experience through their social contacts.

Every customer is now empowered to give feedback in real-time right at the place of business while using a product or service. This social marketing tool not only promotes customer loyalty but also influences customers to leave positive online reviews. These reviews are then shared within their social networks for their social contacts to view, which then creates the sharing of interactive buyer experiences to the general public.

Pizza Belga is one such restaurant in Hanoi that has adopted the new inbound social marketing trend and serves high-quality, authentic, Italian cuisine. Kevin Boudreaux from Belgium and his Vietnamese wife Hai Linh Nguyen founded the restaurant. Hai Linh proudly explained how their social media and technology marketing campaign has positively impacted their business.

“Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Google Business, TripAdvisor and local sites such as Foody has played a crucial role in our restaurant business,” she explained. “Managing a successful business nowadays requires not only good knowledge of our core function, such as pizza making in our case, but also other skills including social media marketing. I believe that social media can bring you new customers and high-quality products and good service make those same customers come back. For example, we recently launched the “Happy Moments” inbound social media campaign which turned out to be quite

successful.” Talking about the experience, the founders of the restaurant reported how the promotion was positively received by their customers.

“This was the first time we ran such a program because we were searching for a more authentic way to promote Pizza Belga. Instead of promoting the restaurant through traditional advertisements, we encouraged our customers to comment about Pizza Belga on social media since customers' opinions have more of an impact. Many of our customers enjoyed the program and participated,” she said.

Pizza Belga also initiated another socially conscious media campaign for the Hanoi Pet Rescue Center. Kevin said that the objective of the campaign was not only to promote the restaurant directly, but also to raise the awareness of animal protection and to raise funds for Hanoi Pet Rescue Center.

Pizza Belga has also paid close attention to customers' needs and, as a result, are now offering more vegetarian options on their menu and were encouraged by their customers to eliminate plastic water bottles and plastic packaging.

“As far as social media and technology are concerned when it comes to business, we believe that it is mandatory for business owners nowadays to understand social media alongside other related technologies while also being socially responsible,” Kevin explained. “These tools will not only promote our business but will give insight into how our customers relate to our restaurant.

It is evident that with the success of restaurants such as Pizza Belga, the trend now is that customers care more about their experience with the brand than they do about the price of the product. Businesses that listen to their customers will be rewarded by them as they seek more interaction and engagement from brands in real-time when their voice matters the most. ■

Zoonotic Diseases

What can I catch from my pet?

ZOONOTIC DISEASE, ALSO

known as zoonosis, is an infection that spreads from animals to people.

As proud owners of dogs and cats we need to follow a few rules to keep our family safe. The good news is—it's simple. To minimize the risk of infection, follow the basic personal hygiene habits when in contact with your pet. Wash your hands (failure to follow this simple rule is a number one reason of people getting ill), don't let your dog lick your face (why, please read below), keep feline litter box clean, pick up dog's feces (to minimize risk of infection to others by indirect contact).

Even though you always wash your hands after playing with your pet and never missed its vet appointment it is good to know what kind of zoonotic diseases can be caused by dog or cat to human. Most common diseases can be caused by bacteria, fungus and internal and external parasites. While you don't need to worry you might catch the flu from your puppy, you should carefully follow its deworming schedule to avoid worms infestation in yourself or your children. Children, elderly and people of compromised immune system are of higher risk of infection. Therefore there should be special precaution taken in households with pets.

Pathogenic germs can spread from animals to people via three ways.
Direct contact: with animal via petting, hugging, licking, biting and scratching. Germs are transmitted with body fluids like saliva, urine, feces and mucus.
Indirect contact: with surfaces where animal spread pathogens with its body fluids. Children getting parasitic infection while playing on a grass contaminated by dog feces are a good example. Always clean after your dog to protect yourself and others. *Vector borne:* Infection caused by a tick or a flea bite. Insects can be brought to our house on a dog or a cat that is not up-to-date with tick and flea prevention.

The most common zoonotic diseases include: intestinal parasites, diarrhea, skin problems (allergy, ringworm, scabies, flea bites), cat scratch disease, tick borne diseases and rabies.

As the subject of zoonosis is wide and it's impossible to compress all into one article, let's focus on an example what parasitic infection can do to humans. Here is why you should not

let dogs lick your face, you should wash your hands after contact with any animal, pick up your dog's poo and keep your pet up-to-date with deworming.

Hookworms and roundworm are the most common intestinal parasites that cause zoonosis. Both dogs and cats can get infected and pass it to humans.

Roundworms are commonly found in dog and cat feces during routine fecal exams. Infected animals shed eggs in their feces. There are two types of infection in people (called toxocariasis). Ocular—when larvae migrate to the eye—symptoms include damage to the eye and loss of vision. Visceral—when larvae migrate to body organs causing symptoms like fever, fatigue, coughing, wheezing and abdominal pain.

Hookworms produce eggs which are shed in feces and can contaminate the environment. People become infected when larvae penetrates the skin (by walking barefoot, sitting on contaminated surface). Larvae migrates through the skin causing inflammation and severe itchiness. In some cases, parasite can infect intestine and cause diarrhea.

How to protect yourself and your family? Protect your pet! Vaccination is critical in terms of rabies. It prevents the disease and save lives. Make sure your dog or cat is up-to-date with all the preventatives at all times. Here is a short reminder to follow prevention schedule in Vietnam:

Dogs

Flea and tick prevention: all year round, every 1-3 months

Intestinal worms: all year round, every 3 months or according to fecal exam result

Heartworm: all year round, every month

Rabies vaccination: every year

Cats

Flea and tick prevention: all

year rounds, every month,

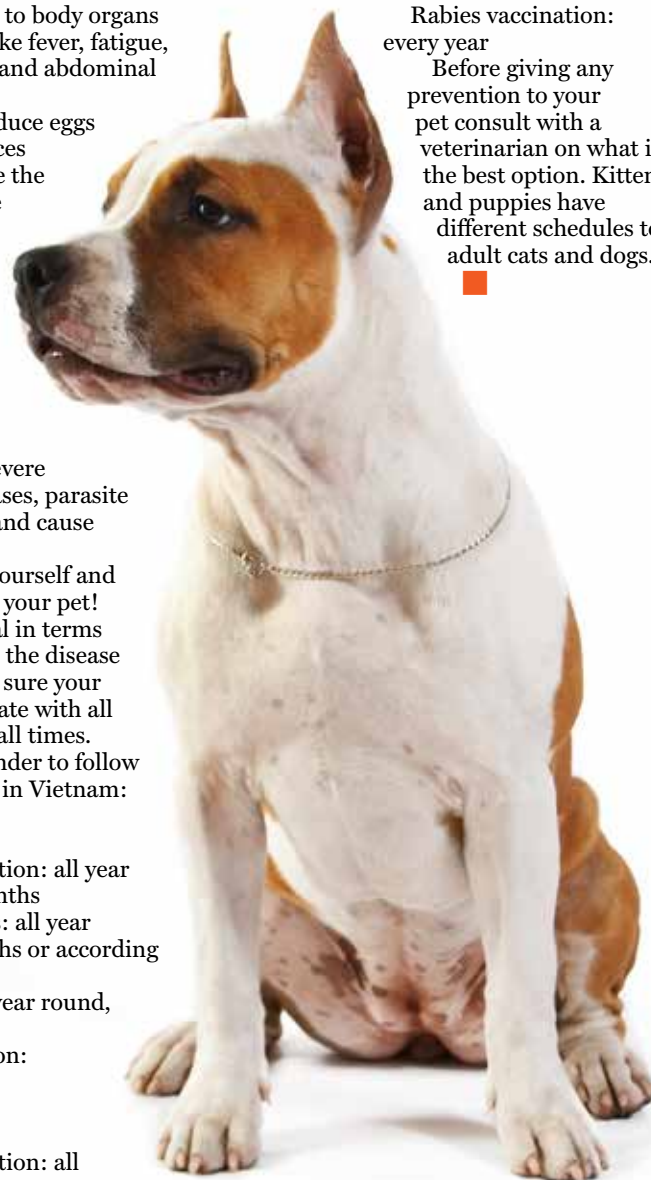
Intestinal worms: all year round, every 3 months or according to fecal exam result

Rabies vaccination: every year

Before giving any prevention to your pet consult with a veterinarian on what is the best option. Kittens and puppies have different schedules to adult cats and dogs.



Dr. Martyna Lukmin is a veterinary surgeon who graduated from Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences in Poland in 2015. After graduation, she gained experience at veterinary clinics in Poland and Cyprus with a focus on small and exotic animals. She traveled around Southeast Asia and South America working with animal charity organizations before coming to Laos. She has been with Animal Doctors International since 2016. Martyna loves the ocean and sharks, and spends her free time traveling, diving and reading.



Pet of the Month



Images by **Sawano Newell**

WE'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE TWO older kittens on opposite ends of the energy spectrum. If you would like

a calm quiet housemate (Suka) or a lively bundle of joy (Buttons), we have both types in the ARC cat room at the

moment, and we welcome you to come visit and see which is the perfect cat for you. ■

Suka

Suka is 10 months old, and we are not sure why she is still in the ARC cat room! Suka came to ARC as a tiny kitten, all eyes and ears, and has grown into a lovely, bright little cat. She was fostered for some time but never really became as socialized as she could be, so was placed in the cat room to be able to interact with the dedicated volunteers who work there. The volunteers rotate shifts during the week to feed, clean up after and play with the cats, and that stability has given Suka a new confidence in humans. When she first entered the cat room, Suka hid in a box on a high shelf and did not come out for weeks. Now though, she loves nothing more than to come out and see what is going on during the day with the volunteers and other visitors to the cat room. Suka remains a little shy and is not a cuddler, but will warm up to a confident and caring person to become a friendly and dedicated companion.



Suka

Our Lunar New Year's wish for Suka is that she finds her own loving home where she will bring much quiet play

and joy to her adopter(s). Suka has been spayed and vaccinated and is ready for her forever home.



Buttons

Buttons

Buttons is a lively and curious nine-month-old kitten. He is also a striking looking tabby with some white markings to make him stand out from the crowd. Buttons enjoys meeting new people and playing with the cat room volunteers whenever possible. He is the opposite of shy, being a super friendly and outgoing kitten, but he also loves to cuddle and becomes quite attached to his favorite humans. Buttons has been fostered in several homes, so can adjust well to new places. Also, one of his fosters had a dog and Buttons and the dog got along well, so if you are looking for a cat who likes dogs, Buttons is your guy! Buttons also gets along well with most other cats, but occasionally he has met older alpha cats who have not been happy with his abundant positive energy, so he would do well with other younger cats he can play with. Buttons is neutered and up-to-date on his vaccinations, and is ready to go home with you any time. *Chúc mừng năm mới* Buttons, we hope you find a home of your own soon!

If you would like to make an appointment to meet Suka or Buttons, or want more information on adopting any ARC cat or dog, email at arcpets@gmail.com. And remember, the best way to help the neediest animals in Vietnam is to Adopt, Don't Shop!



A Time
To
Give





Shining Women

Helping women break the cycle of poverty through empowerment and education

Text by **Aliesha Duffin**

Images by **Ngoc Tran**

"IT WAS A CALL ON MY HEART to come to Vietnam," says Fiona Briers, founding director of NGO Bright Solutions (www.brightsolutionsvietnam.com). "[Vietnam] is progressing rapidly, and giving many young people brighter futures. Through access to higher-level education, English acquisition, international studies and better business prospects, Vietnam is advancing. However, the majority of the population cannot access these options due to lack of or incomplete years of schooling, limited skills and inability to train or retrain, missing gaps in their childhoods, and so on." She believes Bright Solutions can give access to these options and positively impact the lives of underprivileged women in Vietnam.

Fiona's passion for Vietnam and improving the lives of marginalized women here in Ho Chi Minh City is evident upon meeting her. In 2007, she came to the country for the first time as a tourist. She spent time talking to one of the young tour guides who expressed the difficulties local women face trying to

get good jobs to be able to support their families. "I felt clearly it was a country to which I could contribute," she says, when asked what inspired her to start Bright Solutions. "My heart and passion is to serve and empower the poor. To do what I can with the skills and experiences I have to enrich the lives of others. My belief is that the poverty cycle is often generational due to tragic or difficult circumstances and a lack of education."

Bright Solutions helps women to successfully manage their own futures and finances by training them in sewing and handicraft skills. The training consists of practical, management and life skills. The women are put through programs that help them to continually increase their skills and expertise and include a strong emphasis on finance management.

Fiona's drive, coupled with her background in education and human management, helped to form Bright Solutions. "I created a vocational training program to invest in genuine relationships of encouragement and acceptance with all of my employees



Fiona Briers

so that confidence and identity are restored to women who come from vulnerable backgrounds." Every potential employee is interviewed to see if they would be a suitable candidate for the program. They come with a social worker to meet Fiona and then after the meeting both women will decide whether or not Bright Solutions is the right fit. To begin with, the woman will only need to commit to one month.

She does not need any prior skills, she just needs to be willing to take the first step. This initial step is a crucial one; it forms the environment where they will be encouraged and nurtured towards independence.

"I didn't know how to save or couldn't do so in the past but have now followed Bright Solutions training," says Mrs. Nam who works at Bright Solutions.

For these women, Bright Solutions opens the door to formal work environments, with the flexibility to complete their work from home when necessary. For most, their time with Bright Solutions will be their first formal job. "Mrs. N didn't have money to pay school fees for her son on time. Once working at Bright Solutions she could pay for her son at school on time so her son feels good now, he studies very well, he is so proud of his mother because his mother could work in an international environment," says Hanh, one of the women's social workers.

Most of the women employed at Bright Solutions are hired through referrals from Enfants et Developpement (a French non-profit organization) working with and assisting the registered poor in District 8. "Networking with NGOs to source employees is a vital link as they are directly involved with those most in need," says Fiona.

Mrs. Thuy has been with Bright Solutions for three-and-a-half years and during this time she has been transformed from a very nervous, submissive and shy young grandmother, fearful of not meeting expectations, into a bubbly skilled frontline manager. "I used to keep silent at home and in my previous job. Now I feel more comfortable to talk to coworkers. Nothing worries me as much as before," says Thuy. Many of the women who work for Bright Solutions were unable



to complete primary school because of difficult circumstances, but through the proficiency and confidence they have earned, some have continued their mainstream education at night school or sought new study options. Others are able to become employable by having a stable work history while reintegration into the community is achievable for some. Each woman that passes through Bright Solutions has their own goals that they are trying to achieve.

Fiona's ultimate goal for her company is to remain self-sustainable and run as a local Vietnamese entity, and to grow in size to embrace more and more women from disadvantaged backgrounds. "I would love those who know the vision of the company and who have come through Bright Solutions with training, management and experience to be the ones who ultimately become the leadership team. Hopefully this is not unreachable!" ■



Lending a Hand

From small loans to
big successes

Images provided by Dairu Foundation

CHARITY WORK IS NOT WITHOUT its critics. The old proverb about teaching a man to fish puts its downside quite plainly—there's only so much you can do for someone in need before you're at risk of creating a dependency that could do more harm than good.

That's the concern, in some respects, that has given rise to microfinancing. While the idea of a charity that lends rather than gives seems a little counter-intuitive at first, the hope is that in giving people the opportunity to take themselves out of poverty, one engenders a sense of self-respect and dignity that does more to bring about real change than the traditional give-and-then-disappear model delivers. A man who learns to fish may not go hungry again, but a man who gets the chance to start his own fishing business can feed a whole town.

The model is working in Vietnam. Recognized as one of the top microfinance institutions in Vietnam consecutively

since 2007, the Dairu Foundation works both with the Vietnamese government and in partnership with other aid organizations to help alleviate the symptoms of poverty—mainly operating in the poorest districts of Tieng Giang, Vinh Long, and Dong Nai provinces.

“We work with Save the Children and Handicap International, but most of our cooperation is with the Union of Friendship Organizations working around the Mekong,” says the General Manager of the Dairu Foundation, Hanh Nguyen. Although microfinancing projects in the poorest communities are its top priority, Dairu also runs mobile schools, offers scholarships for kindergartens, builds kindergartens, and provides residents with financial education.

Success Stories

The foundation was established in 2002 by Tomas Trüb of the Swiss media company Ringier AG, who fell in love with

the country during his frequent visits. Tomas has since invested a large amount of his personal fortune and recruited many other donors to help create better living conditions and opportunities for underprivileged Vietnamese families.

Since then, the foundation has seen many success stories. “If they asked someone to lend them money, people would shoo them away because they wouldn't believe that they could spend it wisely and repay the loan,” says Hanh. “One of the poorest residents, Mrs. Ngoc of Vinh Long province, joined our program in 2008 with a loan of one pig. She had no land, nothing. By 2010, after three years in our program, she was earning more than USD50,000 per year.”

The microfinancing program has led to other more diversified projects, including mobile schools. These provide children without access to computers or the internet at home with basic skills they'll need later on in life to pass high



The Dariu Foundation and the mobile schools they run have become well-respected in the areas in which they are provided. With the excellent reception and success of the program, Dariu is currently working on expanding the school's model to other countries.

Education for the Poor

The scholarships provided by Dariu are a little different from what most people imagine by the term. In the most hard-hit impoverished areas, barriers to schooling are far more fundamental than the lack of a place at school. Scholarships mainly go to poor families who have children of around kindergarten age, and are in the form of school supplies such as uniforms, notebooks, pencils, and bikes for students living a long distance from their closest school.

Because of the Vietnamese administration's need for more than 3,000 additional kindergarten

classrooms in the Mekong Delta, the Dariu Foundation has also made a large investment in building classrooms in the area. Both the government and Dariu share the costs of building the preschools 50-50, with the former assuming all responsibilities after construction is completed.

"The government provides teachers' salaries, furniture, toys, and all the necessities. We just help to build the schools," Hanh explains.

Of course, without donations and the support of international organizations, Dariu wouldn't be able to run the projects that they do. With an official staff of 70 employees, they are always appreciative of the enthusiasm of newcomers wishing to join their cause. For those HCMC-based earners who prefer to invest in charitable work rather than the alternative, it's worth taking a look at the Dariu Foundation website at www.dariu.org to learn how to get involved. ■



school and university exams. The courses teach the children how to use Windows and Microsoft Office, and run for three months.

Providing children with these skills heads off compounding issues that may occur in the future. "One of the problems is with the culture," says Hanh when asked why many families in the Mekong Delta and the Dong Nai highlands are lagging behind in education compared to their provincial counterparts. "They think they can make an income easily so they don't need to go to high school or university."

Duong Tran Le Truong, a bright 15-year-old boy from Go Cong Dong, currently takes courses at the mobile school in his community. The school has motivated him to work in the IT field. "I'm happy because I can learn and improve my skills for a better future," he says. "I'd love it if some more programs like this could come to my community."



Smiles and Tears

From a long career in the military to a second calling as a philanthropist, meet the founder of Les Enfants du Dragon

Text by **NPD Khanh**

Images provided by **Les Enfants du Dragon**

MEET THE CHILDREN OF THE dragon. They may not be offspring of real dragons but their parents are fully intent on making sure their kids inherit the spirit and greatness of this mythological creature. The children's 'parents' are Marc de Muynck and Dr. Buy Huy Lan, a dentist based in France, founders of the NGO Les Enfants du Dragon (www.lesenfantsdudragon.com).

Officially created in 2009 as a French NGO under the charter and full patronage of both the Vietnamese government and the French consulate, Les Enfants du Dragon aims to help those in need through various humanitarian projects and partners. Unlike other NGOs of the same size and scope, Les Enfants du Dragon does not specialize in any specific area. With several core members, a dozen volunteers, the support of local governments, other NGOs and numerous fundraisers, the association tries to support in all aspects. It has built houses, bridges, ensured clean water supply to poor localities, provided scholarships and bicycles, opened free English and French courses for children, supported teacher training projects, supplied walking sticks for the elderly, entertained sick children and organized camping trips for orphans. Instead of narrowing it on just one focus and limiting its own members, it acts as a branch connecting various partner organizations and through its

many programs aims to channel its reach to make the most impact.

"The name came from the myth of how Vietnam was created, it told that the founding father, who is a dragon, and the founding mother, a fairy, together had a hundred children and these children became the first kings of Vietnam," Marc explains of the meaning behind the name. "These very same kings laid the foundation of ancient Vietnam as a country and people and their names are still honored to this day."

Marc visited Vietnam for the first time in 2001. He was 51 then and had just retired from a long military career. He was on a mission, albeit of a different sort than the ones he used to carry out, bearing charity gifts from France to an orphanage in Sa Dec, located in the Mekong Delta.

"There are problems here the likes of which I was not aware of back home. Poverty. Illiteracy. Children without parents. People that need help," he says of his first impressions. Despite that,



there was something about the dusty and rough Southeast Asian country that stuck in his mind, a “certain good feeling that is somehow unique and enduring”. The feeling endured and was the main drive to create Les Enfants du Dragon.

“After that first three-month holiday in Vietnam, I went back home and joined with an NGO called Volunteers of the World. I did many projects with them and helped many people in Rangoon and Mandalay, Myanmar. I started running with many other NGOs and humanitarian projects. For many years I worked with Maison Chance, Karuna, and Coup de pousse humanitaire. I helped all kinds of people, from orphaned children to homeless vagabonds, to people ridden with diseases whose cures they couldn’t afford,” says Marc. “Eventually though, I became... dissatisfied. I did not really find my place. Very often, a volunteer is only a pawn which is given a specific task and is involved little or not at all in the projects or the decision-making.”

He had two choices: one was to quit volunteering altogether, the other to find a way to help people the best he could and in a way that he wanted. Marc’s decision was clear: “I can’t imagine my life as retiree in laziness or in third age leisure clubs. People would often ask me, how do I go from being a lifelong dedicated military man to a lifelong dedicated humanitarian man? I have only one answer to that. To forgive myself. Perhaps I want to repay the world for what I’ve taken from it. Perhaps I want to deny my past self. Either way, in my opinion, people can only feel true happiness when they help those who aren’t as fortunate in life as they are, when people bring joy to children whose parents are no longer there.”

In 2007, after cancer surgery, he returned to Vietnam, got in contact with the many friends he had made during his first trip and started various



projects, from helping upgrade a nursery in his residential neighborhood in Ho Chi Minh City, which was often flooded during torrential rains, to building houses for poor people in the southern province of Dong Nai. These projects eventually laid the foundation to the birth of Les Enfants du Dragon in 2009. Since then, it hasn’t been a smooth road, but it has been one that is infinitely fulfilling in ways that matter the most.

“None of us volunteers get paid in any way of course except in smiles... and sometimes in tears too,” says Marc. “We have a good team now. Good morale and partnership. We are doing good work and we will continue to do even more good work to people who need us most. We started because there was poverty and suffering in the world. We won’t stop until they disappear.” ■

Wine & Dine

KIBA RESTAURANT / IMAGE BY VY LAM







Friends and Food

Fish Tacos

Kiba is jazzing up tapas in ways our taste buds have never experienced and we can't seem to get enough

Text by **Grant Hawkins**
Images by **Vy Lam**

IN ONE OF SAIGON'S TRENDIEST areas, the area south of Ben Thanh Market in District 1, sits fusion tapas restaurant **Kiba** (31 Pho Duc Chinh, D1). Occupying two floors and a large terrace above a street-level wine shop, Kiba serves marvelous, original cuisine with Spanish and Asian influences, in a stylish and comfortable space.

Upon arrival, we were welcomed onto a spacious and leafy terrace with a beautiful view, soft lighting and near silence (a luxury in District 1). At the recommendation of the host, our dinner began with two glasses of the Il Pumo Negromaro (VND120,000), a full-bodied Italian red wine, and the complementary Cabbage Pickles & Corn Chips. This small tapa consists of fermented cabbage (which changes regularly) and crispy house-made corn chips. It's a bright, tart palate cleanser with a subtle interplay of crispy chips and crunchy veggies.

The idea of Kiba was born two years ago when two Spanish classmates, Pedro Goizueta and Donato Diez, along with their Vietnamese friend Van Ha were inspired to marry traditional Spanish

tapas with the local Vietnamese cuisine. The name "Kiba" has two meanings: first, a portmanteau of "kitchen" and "bar"; second, the Vietnamese words "*kì*", meaning elaborating with dedication, and "*bà*", or three: three friends committed to the culinary craft. After launching in September of last year, Kiba has received a warm reception from the local foodie community, as well as international chefs—but more on that later.

Our first main dish was the Ceviche (VND140,000). Depending on who you ask, ceviche originated in either Chile or Peru, but today the lime-seared seafood is a staple of Spanish tapas. Kiba mixes the fish with local pomelo, playing off the tart flavor and meaty texture and adds smoked avocado to balance things out. It is finished brilliantly with a few small pieces of dill leaves, adding a delightful and surprising complexity.

Next, we were treated to the Carrot Pakora (VND105,000). Pakora is an Indian dish of crunchy fried chickpeas usually served on vegetables, but for this dish it simply looks like dirt—and that's on purpose. Tender smoked baby



Donato & Pedro

carrots, fresh herbs and flower petals sit atop a bed of 'pakora dirt' to create an edible garden. Add a few puddles of sweet tomato raita and drizzle all with a raspberry coulis, and you have one of Saigon's most Instagrammable dishes. (Check out Kiba's Facebook page—www.facebook.com/kibasaigon—if you don't believe me.)

Our final entrée was the Fish Tacos (VND230,000). The fish is catch of the day—lemon fish, red snapper or salmon—and the sauces are basil adobo and house smoked chili sauce. For these petite tacos, tortillas are rejected in favor of Vietnamese *banh*



Carrot Pakora

trang, or rice paper. They come with two dipping sauces, a thick pesto and a rich chili paste, both of which are outstanding and balance out the intensity of the salmon nicely.

There is much to say of the food at Kiba, but that's not the whole story. A common theme of the dishes we sample is fresh herbs as accent flavors, and these are grown in Kiba's rooftop hydroponic garden. Basil, cilantro, kale, dill, tomatoes and five different kinds of mustard leaves are picked fresh daily for use in various dishes and cocktails. It's clear to see the pride on owner Donato's face as he shows it off, and the boldness of these fresh herbs pays off on dishes like the Ceviche and Carrot Pakora.

Also notable is Kiba's occasional set meals with wine pairings. The first of these was for Christmas

2019 and included four holiday-themed courses, each with a wine pairing. The second, more recently, was a one-night-only collaboration with chef Valentino Starace from Zaranda in Spain, a Michelin two-star restaurant. Expect more high-profile collaborations to come, and keep an eye on Kiba's social media accounts to score a seat at the table. They also offer full catering services for different types of events, namely the recent Lotus Art Project, private parties and weddings.

Kiba has compiled a menu of creative and delightful fusion tapas, pulling from a diverse range of cultures and cuisines. The quiet and measured ambiance of the terrace would be enough for me to visit again, but the bold concoctions of flavor are what really stand out. Three dedicated founders have focused on a few small details to make their Kitchen and Bar stand out, and we're excited to see what they do next. ■



Ceviche



Rice Pudding

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 Buoi, 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 cafe 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, Idecaf.

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

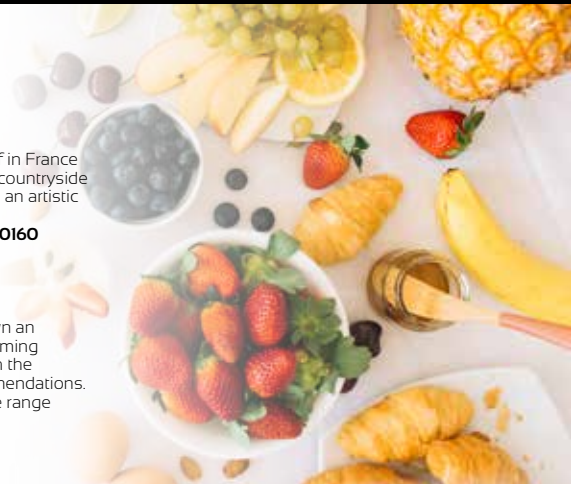
Chef Thierry Drapeau a 2 star Michelin chef in France takes his inspiration from the surrounding countryside and its top-quality ingredients, then adding an artistic flourish to his fine regional cuisine.

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1 - www.tycozsaigon.com



ITALIAN



Ciao Bella

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

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

Ciao Bella

Also Try...

Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1
028 3824 4286

Carpaccio

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

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

La Forchetta

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

24 Hung Gia, PMH, D7
028 3541 1006

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, a multi themed bistro, a place where traditions & culture meet, is announcing most unique live entertainment for unforgettable interactive experience as we bring you fresh musical arrangements from Live band, to DJ, to Sax and Dance. Join us on Tuesday for our happy hour and Wednesday where ladies get their first (selected) drink free.
+84906707900 ladressebistro.onuniverse.com
Insta & FB @ladressebistrosgn
2 Phan Van Dang, VistaVerde, District 2.



Tomatito Saigon

Tomatito won the award for Best Restaurant of Saigon 2018. This sexy tapas bar is Chef Willy's casual interpretation of the prêt-à-porter concept. Willy has a very personal perception of style, that is reflected in all his creations. His universe is colorful, funky and eclectic.
1st Floor, 171 Calmette, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City
www.tomatito.vn
www.facebook.com/tomatitosaiagon
+84 869 388 864



Saffron

The first thing that will strike you when you enter Saffron is the terracotta pots mounted on the ceiling. Located on Dong Du, this restaurant offers Mediterranean food, some with a distinct Asian influence added for further uniqueness. Prepare to order plates to share and don't miss the signature Cheese Saganaki! Guests are welcomed with complimentary Prosecco, fresh baked bread served with garlic, olive tapenade and hummus.
51 Hai Ba Trung, D1
(0)28 3824 8358

Also Try...

Blanc Restaurant

How to listen with your eyes? Blanc. Restaurant employs a team of deaf/hearing impaired waiters. Try a new dining experience and order your dishes from the a la carte menu in sign language; communication will take on a new form.
178/180D Hai Ba Trung, Da Kao, D1 - 02862663535
www.blancrestaurant.vn

Butcher MANZO & Craft Beer Bar

Manzo means "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

FORK Restaurant

Open from 11 am till 11 pm everyday, Fork Saigon gathers Spanish tapas and asian one going from 50.000 VND to 160.000 VND. It offers an expensive list of international wine and 16 available by the glass. A mixologist corner is also present with Gin and Vodka base in addition to local craft beers and seasonal white or red sangria. A set lunch at 190.000 VND served Monday to Friday from 11 am to 3 pm is also available. It allows you to pick any 3 three items between a large selection (Montaditos, meat, fish and vegetable), iced tea and dessert of the day included.
15 Dong Du, D1 - 028 3823 3597
info@forksaigon.com www.forksaigon.com

Noir - Dining in the Dark

Can you differentiate beef from duck? Mystery meals are served in complete darkness by blind/visually impaired waiters. Select from one of the three-course set menus from the East, West or Vegetarian. Mystery wine pairing available too. Discover with taste and smell, embark on a culinary journey of the senses.
178/180D Hai Ba Trung, Da Kao, D1
02862632525 www.noirdininginthedark.com

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 offered – sourced locally and created fresh every day.
30th Floor, Pullman Saigon Centre
(0)28 3838 8686

twenty1one

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 street-side; and a terrace by the pool out back).
21 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3



JAPANESE

Chaya Restaurant

Chaya, a new small Japanese Cafe is coming to town. We are here to bring the best Japanese atmosphere to Saigon customer. At Chaya, customer can relax on the Tatami, taste some delicious Sushi Roll, Japanese sweets or local cuisine while enjoying Japan historically decorated space. Most of our ingredients are imported directly from Japan, especially Kyoto Matcha. Welcome!
35 Ngo Quang Huy Street, Thao Dien, District 2
0938 996 408 (Vietnamese)
0939 877 403 (Japanese)
chayavietnam.com **Facebook: chayavietnam**

Gyumaru

Gyumaru is a quintessentially minimalist Japanese dining experience rotating around the style of meat meal Westerners would be quick to link to a gourmet burger, but without the bread. Fresh, healthy, innovative cuisine in a relaxed, cozy environment and regular specials including quality steaks.
8/3 Le Thanh Ton **028 3827 1618**
gyumaru.LTT@gmail.com

Ichiban Sushi

Ichiban Sushi Vietnam serves fine sushi and signature drinks/cocktails in a lounge setting. Featuring one of the most eclectic Japanese menus in the city. The current Japanese venue to see and be seen in – everyone who's anyone is there.
204 Le Lai, D1 www.ichibansushi.vn

Kesera Bar & Restaurant

An Ideal place for your city escape and enjoying Japanese fusion foods. We have the best bagels in town, fine wine and cigars in a custom cabinet and is a must-do for anyone visiting the city.
26/3 Le Thanh Ton, Ben Nghe Ward, Dist 1
028 38 270 443

Sushi Dining Aoi

Sushi Dining Aoi is one such restaurant, where the whole atmosphere of the place evokes the best of the culture. With its typical Japanese-style decor – the smooth earthen tones of the wooden furniture and surrounds, the warmth and privacy of the VIP rooms – it's possible to believe you're in a more elegant realm.
53-55 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, D3
028 3930 0039
www.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

Galbi Brothers

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

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

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.

32 Tran Ngoc 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

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
comnieusaigon.com.vn

Cuc Cach Quan

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

10 Dang Tat, D1
028 3848 0144

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 Saigoneers.
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

May

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

19-21 Dong Khoi, D1
028 3910 1277

Mountain Retreat

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

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

Nha Hang Ngon

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

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

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

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 centerpiece in pretty ceramic bowls and lots of greenery. The menu highlight unique ingredients only found in Hue, like the Va tron fig salad with shrimp and pork, assorted platter of rice cakes meant to be shared, the sate-marinated ribs come with a plate of crunchy greens and mixed rice, originally grown by minority groups in the Central Highlands, and many more.

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

Also Try...

3T Quan Nuong

Tasty BBQ venue situated above Temple Bar. The venue has a traditional, rustic theme with old-style furniture and a quaint Vietnamese decor, making this a nicely atmospheric restaurant and a great place to dine with international friends new to the cuisine. The menu features a number of local favorites.

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1
028 3821 1631

Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

Ready for Rioja

The amazing wines of Rioja

IF YOU HAVEN'T TRIED RIOJA

wines yet then you are probably missing out on some of the best wines in the world. I'm not alone in saying this because most international experts agree that, together with Bordeaux and Burgundy, Rioja wines are some of the best in the world.

But where is Rioja and what makes their wine so special? Rioja is a small area in the north of Spain, not far from the Cantabric

Sea and France. And, in fact, we should "blame" bad luck and the French for its top quality wines.

Over a century ago when an illness devastated the French vineyards, some clever French producers crossed the

border to Spain and discovered that Rioja, which was already producing decent wines, had the right conditions for making great wines, and even though the grape varieties were different to those in Bordeaux, they worked with the Spanish and taught them how to age the wine in barrels and a few other things that led to Rioja producing what some think are the best wines in Spain.

A lot of time has passed and Rioja has evolved on its own, and improved a lot, still being not only the first region but the top one, awarded with DOCa, a government designation recognizing Rioja wines as the top.

Tempranillo is the main grape, but you will also find Garnacha, Maturana, Mazuelo and Graciano grapes used to make red wines, which are the most popular in this region.

Depending on the aging of the wines, and a few other factors, Rioja wines can be labeled as Cosecha (usually young wines with little or no aging in oak, but also used for special wines that don't follow the rules), Crianza (aged for at least 2 years of which at least 1 will be in the barrel), Reserva (aged for at least 3 years of which at least 1 will be in the barrel and being from exceptional vineyards), and Gran Reserva (aged for at least 5 years of which at least 2 will be in the barrel).

But do also look for special wines, which fall out of such categories, these wines are usually named *Vino de Autor* or *Edicion Especial* but can have different names. This is where the winemaker usually makes incredible wines in small quantities by using top quality grapes from small plots.

If you like Bordeaux, Brunello or Barolo, you will fall in love with quality Rioja wines. Start young and get moving to Crianza and higher. And they offer great value for money. ■



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

>> The List Business

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Travel & Wellness



WOMEN'S CRAFT VILLAGE IN RANTHAMBORE, INDIA / IMAGE BY JAMES PHAM



Incredible India



Text and images by **James Pham**

"India is the one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for all the shows of all the rest of the globe combined." – Mark Twain

Throughout history, India has beckoned and beguiled with her jewels, spices, and spirituality. It's given us everything from chess and calculus to yoga and the decimal system. Even today, there remains an irresistible exoticism that cloaks the subcontinent like a finely woven sari, inviting visitors to peel back the layers.

While its penchant to add spices to literally everything—saffron in warm milk, cardamom and cinnamon in chai, a pinch of anise as a mouth freshener after meals—makes India a feast for the palate, its light and color are equally a feast for the eyes.

From carts selling a rainbow of pulses and spiced snacks to endless fields of bright yellow mustard flowers, it's impossible not to get swept up in India's celebration of color. Patchwork camel saddles look all the more sumptuous against a luminous backdrop of golden sands at sunset while women going to market positively glow in their everyday saris, a brilliant contrast to the drab, soot-covered buildings.

Even in the absence of color, there is beauty. The gleaming white marble of the Taj Mahal that only adds to its delicately carved façade, a timeless labor of love. Unremarkable towns that casually boast thousand-year-old temples, light filtering through latticed stonework, illuminating dark spaces within.

In India, colors seem doubly as bright to the point where I worry that when I leave, the world will seem only half as colorful. ■







How to Be a Better Flyer



Having visited nearly 70 countries as a travel writer and copywriter, **James Pham** documents his adventures on Instagram at [flyicarus.fly](https://www.instagram.com/flyicarus.fly)

I FLEW ABOUT 30 TIMES LAST year and while I can't say I look forward to air travel, I've learned how to make the best of it.

There's a lot that all savvy flyers do to be as comfortable as possible in a narrow metal tube while fighting ever-shrinking seat pitches and on-board amenities—dress in layers (because you're never assured a blanket), wear comfortable (but neat) clothing, limit alcohol, drink lots of water, and the like.

Here are a few other ways I try to control my own personal space:

Block out the world. Conventional wisdom says get a good night's rest before a flight, but really, who has time for that? I usually stay up half the night trying to get last-minute work done and arrive at the airport hating life. However, I try to get there early and spend that extra time working, surfing the net, or otherwise decompressing. No last-minute anxiety over checking in late and missing my flight. A hat I can pull over my eyes and noise-cancelling headphones puts me in my own personal space.

Book an aisle seat for short flights and a window seat for longer flights. I try and travel light, so an aisle seat means I can get on and off faster. There's also that tiny extra bit of leg room in the aisle. Window seats are better for sleeping as you have the wall to lean on. Put on a neck pillow (or scrunch up a sweater or jacket in a pinch) and it's practically a vertical bed.

Give myself treats to look forward to. In the week leading up to a flight, I'll download movies, TV shows, and books that I want to see or read, but save them for the day. Nothing that requires deep concentration, though. Same goes for packing favorite snacks. If I'm in a foreign airport, I'll treat myself to whatever I'm craving. A bag of Famous Amos mini chocolate chip cookies in Kuala Lumpur kept me happy on a recent flight to the Maldives. Depending on the length of the flight, I'll ration out both shows and snacks to make the time go by faster.

Hydrate. On longer flights, I'll make sure to bring a small thermos with a few packets of instant coffee or cappuccino. Fill it up with cold water after security or make yourself a coffee. Spend the USD5 you saved on tiny, overpriced airport coffee on something more worthwhile at your destination. The thermos comes in handy again on the flight for juice or drinks without fear of spillage.

Pack your carry-on thoughtfully. No one likes the idiot who waits until he's standing in the aisle to fuss with his carry-on. I make sure mine is packed carefully with whatever I might need during the flight on top. I also pack a light tote so that once I get to the gate, I can keep my flight essentials (passport, money, tablet, headphones) with me and stow the luggage away (always locked as it seems the incidents of theft from overhead compartments is on the rise). The tote comes in handy so you don't have to risk forgetting anything left in the seat pocket.

Invest in a Bellroy Work Folio. Having everything I need at my seat in one place reduces the stressful anxiety that comes from worrying about losing a passport, ticket, or phone while keeping me pleasantly engaged. Enter the Work

Folio A5 from Bellroy (USD199 at www.bellroy.com, backed by 3-year warranty). Made from premium leather, it looks great and is supremely compact while fitting everything I need at my seat—my iPad mini, notebook (for jotting down ideas and a to-do list for when I arrive), pen (for all those pesky forms), phone, business cards, passport and boarding pass. Tuck the folio into my tote along with my wallet and noise-canceling headphones and I'm good to go. I first came across Bellroy (a mashup of Bells Beach and Fitzroy in Victoria, Australia where the team is located) five years ago. Born out of surf culture known for everyday carry that's both minimalist and durable, Bellroy has perfected the Lean Luxe aesthetic, "helping the world carry with greater simplicity and ease". My first Bellroy product was the Travel Wallet, able to hold a passport yet remain incredibly slim. I loved it so much, it became my everyday wallet for the next four years until it only recently gave up the ghost. I'm looking forward to getting the same amount of use out of my beautifully crafted Work Folio A5 (there's also a larger A4 version which fits full-sized tablets and is great for basically having your desk on the go) both on and off planes. ■



3 Keys to Your Mental Health

As an expat living in Vietnam, or even simply as a human being who is facing life's daily challenges, how do you know if you are mentally and emotionally healthy?

IF YOU STRUGGLE TO FEEL WELL somewhat consistently, you don't necessarily need therapy to change the way you feel. Here are 3 key ways to manage and maintain your mental health.

Nobody always gets it right every time, so if you find yourself struggling in one or more of these areas, and you want to improve, just do that one simple thing that people do to get better at something: practice.

You Have Response Flexibility

This is a psychological term that means how good are you at adapting and adjusting to things when they don't go your way? As an expat in Asia, this might mean your new job or your new boss sucks, your relationship is on thin ice, or maybe the traffic or language barriers get a bit overwhelming. If you have only one way of responding to frustrating experiences, well, you are not very flexible in your responses. Your go-to reaction when frustrated or facing challenges may be limited to lashing out (anger), shutting down (social withdrawal), or passive-aggressive reactions (acting aggressively but in an indirect way that is less obvious than normal aggression).

However, if you are able to see the situation with a different perspective, which may involve practicing compassion for the person who is challenging you. (Remembering that they, just like you, are human, struggling with their own issues, and doing their best to be happy.) Or perhaps you have learned how to not take things so personally, so when someone says something that used to offend you, it's much easier now to let it go, or even send them well wishes in hopes they can become more skillful with their difficulties. Finally, another strategy that lends itself to response flexibility is noticing your own story or belief about that event. If your first two jobs in a new country were unfair or a let-down, does that mean all jobs will be the same? If someone breaks your heart, does that prevent you from trusting again? Learning how to see each event and experience in its own right, having its own unique qualities, allows us to learn

from it and move on in healthy ways, instead of generalizing that 'everyone must be like this' based on your past experiences.

In other words, you've got your expectations in check (realistic expectations means you expect to be disappointed sometimes, you know you will be let down on occasion, and you are prepared for things to not go your way)! When things do go wrong, you've got some tools in your tool-belt that you can use to respond mindfully instead of react habitually. Skillfully choosing your reaction is response flexibility!

You Prioritize Your Mental Health

I often remind my psychotherapy clients that there are three pillars or foundations of well-being: Sleep. Exercise. Diet. If you are neglecting one or more of these things, chances are you're not feeling very good about yourself. I've had more than one client come in for a session and wonder what kind of psychological diagnosis might help them to make sense of why they are irritable, unable to focus, depressed, etc. Upon exploring further, it turns out they're hardly sleeping, their diet consists of fast food, or exercise is a thing of the past. So, it makes perfect sense why you are feeling down if you're not

taking care of yourself in these three key areas. You know your body, and you know the minimum amount of sleep you need to feel well rested.

There are schedules, mindful practices and routines you can implement to help with this. Exercise doesn't need to be the huge obstacle we sometimes make it out to be. Sometimes a simple walk in the neighborhood is sufficient. For me, I know I need to sweat hard doing cardio for at least 30-40 minutes a few times a week to feel relaxed, refreshed, clear-headed and healthy. I bet you know what you need as well. As for the diet, throw in some colors here and there and lay off the soda/sugar. As an expat, you may also need to work with the lifestyle of drinking with co-workers or friends on the regular. Prioritizing your mental health is a necessary and super important practice.



Robert is a licensed psychotherapist (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.

You Practice Gratitude

I know you've heard this from me before, but practicing gratitude is huge. It is the antidote to feeling down, depressed and feelings of lack. You may know about neuroplasticity, and if you do, you know that "neurons that fire together, wire together." This means the more we practice thinking in certain ways, the more that set of neurons wire together to form a path in the brain. This

makes it easier and easier for that type of thinking to be our new habit.

Thoughts and feelings are related, so practicing gratitude helps us to feel grateful. It sounds simple and it is (but it's not easy to remember to actually do it)! No matter how big or how small, every day your practice is to remember to think of 1 or 3 or 10 things to be grateful for. This literally impacts your brain, which impacts your feelings, even if you don't mean it or feel grateful when you're doing it. Just keep doing it and let those neurons fire away. Examples of this may be: I am grateful for this pain free breath and pain free body. I am grateful for the health that I do have (even if other parts of me are not healthy). I am grateful for two working ears that allow me to hear the

sounds of construction outside (reframing a negative experience to a positive one). I am grateful that my Mom is there for me when I need her and powering through her own challenges.

The takeaway is if you're making gratitude a part of your life, you are practicing self-care in a way that many counselors and psychotherapists would recommend.

Thanks so much for taking the time to read this article. If you need help or someone to talk to, I am a licensed mental health professional in Vietnam. I work with people all over Asia (in-person or online), who feel depressed, anxious and are dealing with social and relationship challenges. Talk therapy, marriage counseling and couple's counseling are common avenues to address these difficulties. ■

>>The List Travel



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Kids & Education







SSIS Makes VEX Robotics History in Vietnam

Text and Images Provided by **Saigon South International School**

AFTER MORE THAN SIX MONTHS of hard-work, robotics teams from around the country gathered excitedly at Saigon South International School (SSIS) on January 18, making history when the school hosted the first-ever VEX Robotics National Championship in Vietnam.

Toting their robots, the eight teams, from four international schools in Vietnam - SSIS, ISHCMC, ISHCMC AA, and Concordia International School of Hanoi, convened in the High School gym at Saigon South International School. Anticipation was high, as the winning team would go on to earn a coveted invitation to the VEX Worlds Competition, the largest robotics competition in the world, held in Louisville, Kentucky (USA) in April.

Providing Students with the Best Opportunities

Widely considered one of the best competitive robotics competitions in

the world, over 40 countries have teams registered through the VEX organization. And it is not by chance that VEX now has found its way to Vietnam. As a leading institution in education for the future, SSIS places immense value on providing students with the best opportunities in robotics, coding, and computer science.

"Bringing the VEX Robotics competition to Vietnam is a perfect example of how SSIS is creating the very best opportunities for students, not just at SSIS but in the nation," says SSIS Head of School, Dr. Catriona Moran. "This historical event could not have happened without the dedication and persistence of our Secondary STEM Coordinator, Evan Weinberg," she continues.

Collaboration and STEM Skills Brought to Life

Mr. Weinberg, who has seventeen years of experience in competitive robotics, has a palpable enthusiasm

for robotics. "Robotics most often brings math or engineering to mind, but it is really about building with your hands and testing ideas to see what works," he says. Working together in tightly-knit groups, students have to learn how to plan and revise concepts, considering multiple perspectives. The skills students foster in collaboration, creativity, and empathy are guaranteed to give them an edge in the future, regardless of what fields they pursue.

As competitions are an integral part of VEX robotics, teams in Vietnam can now, for the first time, bring their STEM skills to life by testing their creations against other teams in these game-based engineering challenges. And, more than just robotics, VEX is about collaboration. Just like in life, students that don't collaborate effectively will find it very difficult to be successful. "These events are only super competitive for the two minutes of the



and freedom to develop their ideas. But often teams will spend months designing and coding before actually starting the physical build.

Once the build begins, the design process involves creating several prototypes, as well as developing driving skills. And although teachers are present in the IDEA center, ready to pitch in as needed, it is the students who take the lead in the learning process.

Spread the Knowledge

In addition to sharing the program within their school, SSIS students and teachers have been leaders, and catalysts, of the VEX program in the greater community. Students connect with their peers from other schools and other extracurricular clubs to encourage them to start robotics programs at their schools. At the same time, teachers and administrators reach out to their coaches to answer questions about getting started.

For two years, SSIS has hosted

an open house at which students present stories of the previous year's competitions to potential coaches and team leaders from other schools. These efforts have led to several international schools in Vietnam and one private Vietnamese school starting with the VEX program.

21st Century Skills

The initiative to bring VEX Robotics to Vietnam is because of the wonderful skills and attitudes robotics programs foster in students. VEX combines team-building and collaboration with coding, design-thinking, and engineering, providing a valuable context for applying academics. With this, we are answering the question that schools around the world are asking themselves every day: "How do we prepare our students for the future?" ■

For more info on Saigon South International School, visit www.ssis.edu.vn

match. The rest of the time, it is normal for teams to help each other and share tools or bits of code. Crafting winning strategies based on the strengths of the robots on the field takes creativity, communication skills, and teamwork."

Preparing for the Challenge

Each year, thousands of robotics teams across the world wait with bated breath for the VEX organization to announce the year's challenge. The 2019-2020 challenge, "Tower Takeover," was published in April last year, and requires participants to design robots that can successfully stack the tallest column of colored cubes in a designated zone.

But the challenge does not stop there. The robots must be able to drive autonomously for the first 15 seconds of each match, and teams form alliances to join forces against another alliance, to earn the most points during the 2-minute matches, further emphasizing the need to be able to collaborate well.

In other words, there is a lot for teams to take into consideration in the months leading up to the competition, as they build and design their robots to meet the challenge. In addition to crafting robots for the tournament, students compile spreadsheets for parts orders and collaboratively plan agendas for each team meeting. They come up with the designs, and the best teams will take care to keep a detailed Engineering Log Book, as this, too, is a factor for teams to qualify for the "Excellence Award," the highest honor any team can win in a VEX Robotics competition.

Room to Grow

Last year's addition of the IDEA Center to the SSIS High School, a maker-space with digital and traditional fabrication tools, has given SSIS students the room



How Do I Motivate My Teen?

Bossing them around won't work forever; we need to help teens manage their own lives.

Text by **Christine Carter**

Dear Christine,

I have two teenagers, a boy who is in high school and a girl who is in college. My daughter has always been self-motivated and a great student. I've never needed to nag her to do her homework, and she has always gotten good grades and great teacher comments.

My son is another story. His study skills are lacking. He doesn't like school, and he doesn't work very hard. I have to constantly be "on him" about his school work. We've had him tested for learning disabilities and ADHD, and he does not have either, although the tests showed that he does have great difficulty paying attention to things that he is not interested in.

He's now a sophomore. Still, I'm constantly "helping" him with his homework, figuring out what work he has due, what tests he has coming up, or what assignments he might have failed to turn in. I'm afraid he won't do it otherwise.

Our son says he does not want me to back off and that he wants

me to continue helping him. At the same time, he is not exactly welcoming of my help in the moment. He's often a little surly when I remind him of assignments, and he usually makes excuses for why he doesn't have to work on something. He lacks self-motivation, and without me pushing him (and keeping him organized), I fear (1) that he might actually get worse grades; (2) that he won't get a college degree; and (3) that this will limit his job prospects. Ultimately, I'm afraid that he's going to end up living at home into his early adulthood, stuck on the couch playing video games.

I can't help wishing that our son was more like our daughter. I want him to be more independent and self-motivated. Above all, I want him to do well enough in high school to go to a decent college. What do you recommend I do? If I'm honest, I'm looking for permission to keep propping our son up.

*Thanks,
Parental Crutch*

Dear Crutch,

In some ways, you are right to be worried: About a quarter of young men in the US in their 20s are unemployed. That statistic is mind-blowing to the economists who track these things, given that men in their 20s have historically been the most reliably employed of any demographic. While the trend toward

unemployment encompasses young men of all education levels, low-skilled men—like those without a college degree or training in a trade—are particularly likely to end up living back at home. A staggering 51 percent now live with their parents or another close relative. And what are they doing instead of working? (Hint: They aren't going to school.) You've already guessed it; many of them are playing video games three or more hours a day.

So, it's good that you have college and work aspirations for your son. But I'm afraid that your current efforts on his behalf aren't going to pay off.

Unfortunately,
trying to
control our
children

is frequently futile and usually counterproductive.

That's the clear conclusion psychologist Wendy Grolnick has reached over two decades of watching parents talk to their children. Here's the gist of her research: The children of controlling parents—those who tell their children exactly what to do, and when to do it—don't do as well as kids whose parents are involved and supportive without being bossy. Children of "directive" parents tend to be less creative and resourceful, less persistent when faced with a challenge, less successful at solving problems. They don't like school as much, and they don't achieve as much academically.

And what's
true for
children



in terms of parental control is about a thousand times more true about teenagers. Once kids reach adolescence, they need to start managing their own lives, and they know this. Most kids with micromanaging parents resist what their parents want for them every chance they get. They do this not because they are lazy or short-sighted, but because they need to regain a sense of control.

This cannot be overstated: Healthy, self-disciplined, motivated teenagers have a strong sense of control over their lives. A mountain of research demonstrates that agency—having the power to affect your own life—is one of the most important factors for both success and happiness. Believing that we can influence our own lives through our own efforts predicts practically all of the positive outcomes that we want for our teens: better health and longevity, lower use of drugs and alcohol, lower stress, higher emotional well-being, greater intrinsic motivation and self-discipline, improved academic performance, and even career success.

You have an important choice, Crutch.

Choice A: Keep riding your son; keep him organized and on track. He'll likely get a lot more homework turned in, he'll study for tests he would have avoided or forgotten about, and he'll apply to the colleges you put in front of him. The big question in my mind, though, is about what will happen when he's off at college and he doesn't have you there by his side to keep him on track.

Actually, in my mind, it's not that big of a question.

The odds are he won't make it. An astounding 56 percent of students who start at a four-year college drop out before they've earned a degree. Nearly a third drop out after just the first year. If your son

doesn't develop the study skills he needs to succeed (without you), he is not likely to develop them once he gets to college.

Which brings us to Choice B:

Back off so that your son can build the skills he'll need to survive without you. This does mean risking letting your son stumble, but at least he'll be at home with you when he does.

Your son, of course, will not want you to back off. Why would he want to put in that kind of effort if you'll do it for him? Plus, there is no risk for him right now; he can't really fail if he doesn't really try. I'm not saying disengage from his life. It's important for you to stay involved and supportive, but to do so without being directive or controlling. Set limits so that he knows you aren't lowering your expectations. For example, if you expect him to maintain a B average, that's great. What happens if he doesn't do that? Decide as a family, and then be firm and consistent in enforcing your limits.

In fact, don't dial back your effort at all, just shift your focus. Right now, you are propping your son up. Instead of putting all your energy into doing things that your son would be better off doing for himself, put your effort into supporting his self-motivation.

As I explained not long ago to another mom who was overhelping her husband, the way to foster self-motivation in others is to support their autonomy, their competence, and their relatedness. These are the three core psychological needs that, when filled, lead to self-motivation. You can choose to refocus your attention on promoting his self-motivation. Here's how.

1. Give him more freedom. He needs the freedom to fail on his own—and the freedom to succeed without having to give you credit. Your son can't feel autonomous in his schoolwork if you are still the organizing force.

Instead of directing your son, ask him: "What's your plan?" As in, "What's your plan for getting your homework done this weekend?" Asking kids what their plan is makes it clear that they are still in control of their own behavior, and it helps put them in touch with their own motivations and intentions. Often kids simply need to make a plan—and sometimes if they aren't asked to articulate their plan, they won't make one. (Especially kids who are used to being nagged; those kids know that their parents will eventually get frustrated and do their planning for them.)

This not-making-a-plan thing is developmental, by the way—it is often more about their executive function than their motivation. Our frontal lobe, which enables us to make plans for the future, often doesn't develop fully until our mid 20s. This doesn't mean that teenagers can't plan, or that we should do it for them; it just means that they need a little more support practicing planning than might be obvious given their other capabilities.

It's also really important that we parents pay close attention to our tone

of voice, especially if what we are saying could potentially limit our kids' freedom in some way—if we are making a request that could be interpreted as pressure.

Research suggests that moms who talk to their teens in a "controlling tone of voice" don't tend to get a positive response, and they are more likely to start an argument.

It's not enough to just stay neutral, unfortunately; although a neutral tone of voice is less likely to make teens defensive and argumentative, it was found to be equally ineffective in motivating kids. What did work? The teens who were the most likely to carry out the request being made had parents who used a "supportive" and encouraging tone of voice.

2. Help him feel more competent.

If I were a betting woman, I'd bet that your son feels incompetent compared to his superstar sister. This likely leads to resignation. Why should he try if he'll never be as good as her, anyway?

Help him see where he's done really well in the past through his own effort (rather than your nagging). Don't be afraid to ask him: Where do you feel most confident? And then help him see that it is his own effort that has led to that capability.

You can also support him in building new competencies. It sounds like he needs to build better study skills, for example. Who would be a good study skills coach for him? It's important for him to develop his ability to learn and push himself outside of his comfort zone.

3. Finally, support his sense of belonging and connectedness with others, particularly at school. Is there a teacher whom he feels connected to who can encourage him? Or a coach who is also willing to talk to him about his life as a student? Or a peer group who would encourage him to pay more attention to school work? Sometimes the best way we can help our kids is to help them find a community where they can thrive. One way to do this is to enlist the interest and attention of another adult.

Crutch, I'm very clear about this: The time to take the training wheels off is now. When he falls, let him pick himself up and try again. This will build autonomy and competence. You can celebrate his successes—this will build relatedness. Let him learn how to ask for the help he needs; when he gets it, it will expand his sense of belonging and connection to others.

Redirecting your energy towards promoting your son's self-motivation will not likely be in your comfort zone. But once you get the hang of not nagging and not being so directive, your relationship with your son is sure to be far more rewarding—for you both. ■

Yours,
Christine

Christine Carter is a sociologist and coach specializing in marriage, parenting, happiness, work, family, and, well, life.

Workplace Wellness

Understanding the importance of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work

NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF JOB we do, the average person spends more time at work than on any other activity. Our work environment impacts our health and well-being, and our personal health impacts greatly on our work output and efficiency. It is therefore important to create and maintain a healthy workplace environment, for the benefit of both employers and employees.

Most of us spend a full third of our lives working—but very few people would say that they consciously take good care of their health while working, or that their employers provide a working space that supports and enhances their state of health. Most people regard work as a “necessary evil” of life and look forward to the next holiday and retirement. But what if this could change?

Up until recently, the focus has been on avoiding physical injury in the workplace, and this is regulated by various agencies like OSHA (e.g. mandating the hours of work, wearing appropriate protective clothing, making

sure floors are not slippery, that air-conditioning or ventilation units are properly maintained, that staff facing a computer monitor every day keep the screen at eye-level, and that arms and wrists are poised at the most natural position while seated).

More recently, many companies have become more aware of the benefits associated with investing in employee health (beyond just physical health). Good health means less sick days, which is good for business.

Psychological health in the workplace is now becoming more and more important. Research shows that it is not only essential for the well-being of the employee, but this also directly impacts on the productivity and quality of work produced by the employee. Psychological safety for the employee thus directly translates into better staff retention and higher productivity for the company.

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes four key elements that every workplace should have to ensure their health. These four elements are:

- A healthy physical environment
- Psychological safety
- Resources for health
- Participation in the community

A healthy workplace is defined as one in which workers and managers collaborate in using a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace. Employers are very unlikely to reach their goals if their employees do not provide and proactively ensure a working environment that can support good physical and mental health.

When the environment where employees are working brings comfort and safety, they feel healthy and happier. This also motivates people to come to work every day and to be more productive—just imagine a person who dreads going to work because it’s going to be a dirty office with poor air ventilation and an unreasonable and mean boss—versus looking forward to spending a day in a pleasant, clean office where colleagues and bosses are respectful and



A graduate of her native New York's Stony Brook Medical School, **Dr. Jane Shadwell Li** deals with a broad variety of treatments, conditions and diseases at Family Medical Practice—taking particular interest in the fields of dermatology and tropical medicine.

encouraging. Which scenario encourages more motivation and productivity and new ideas?

There are numerous examples. Ergonomics, for one, is vital in any physical environment—this is the science of designing a workplace in a way that considers the capabilities and limitations of workers, removing risk factors that can lead to musculoskeletal injuries and allowing for improved human performance and productivity. The most common ergonomic considerations involve positions related to computer, desk and chair. Beyond this, certain touches in décor can positively influence an employee's sense of well-being—such as a place to put a picture of family or any other personal item that provides encouraging thoughts or helps staff to relax or be more productive—as long as such things meet the business needs as well.

Studies show that better lighting can increase an employee's work rate by 23%. Other statistics also indicate that workers who have a view of the outdoors are likely to be 25% more productive, and process calls 12% faster. Employers can also make sure the working space sounds, looks, feels and smells great. Adding plants in the office can be calming and also act as air purifiers.

Color is also very important in a working place, as certain colors can help to boost workers' productivity. Yellow interiors are energizing, expressive, radiant and happy; blues are more intellectual and stimulate the mind, helping staff to stay focused. Greens promote balance, calmness and security, and also symbolize nature, the environment, growth and development. Red may be the color of fire, blood and violence; however it is known to promote bold decisions, and it is also good for restaurants and sales offices.

Beyond these more physical considerations, psychological safety in the workplace is of paramount importance. Essentially, a psychologically healthy environment

is one where an employee can work without fear of negative consequences to their self image or career.

Organizational behavioral scientist Amy Edmonston introduced concepts of psychological safety in her book *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*. She wrote that a safe workplace is one fostering trust and respect, where people feel comfortable working and being themselves. She emphasizes that a person should not be afraid to speak their mind during team meetings, even if his or her idea is different or opposite to the majority or consensus.

For the employers out there—just to clarify—a psychologically safe work place is not one in which the employee is “happy” per se (some employees will be happier at home or playing computer games all day), but rather, one in which employees feel safe to speak their mind, safe from being bullied, and safe from sexual harassment—and where they can express their real opinion so as to not suppress their creativity and ideas that can contribute to the success of the business.

Any leaders or team members who discourage staff from speaking up, ridicule them for different suggestions or being different, or punish someone for expressing different opinions, are acting in a way that is detrimental to the success of the team and the business. To this end, the management of an organization plays an important role in ensuring a corporate culture and organizational structure that provides psychological safety to its employees, and make sure its supervisors are there to help the employees do the best job they can.

In the long run, psychological safety benefits the company by increasing staff retention (saving money on recruitment), through increased productivity and better quality work from the existing team, and providing a better public image for the company.

Provision of personal health

resources should also not be overlooked. This can simply include information made available about exercise, nutrition, and health insurance or ways to balance one's lifestyle between work and rest being made available in the workplace. Staff should be encouraged to exercise by providing exercise facilities; employers can also remind them about healthy dietary options or provide healthy fruits and snacks on-site.

Safety talks onsite during lunchtimes, such as talks on ergonomics, breathing exercises and cancer screenings, can be of great benefit to employees—as can providing annual flu shots on-site to all employees free of charge to minimize staff sick days.

Another good example that can be implemented in places of work is N.E.A.T.—Non Exercise Activity Thermogenesis. This is a method focusing on expending calories even when not exercising. Workers can use everyday activities to increase their energy expenditure without having to exercise, which is particularly good for people with busy schedules who can't go to gyms easily. Examples of these activities are using stairs instead of elevators; doing one's own household chores; parking a bike or getting out of a taxi 1–2 blocks away from the destination to fit in a brief walk; and getting up from one's work desk every 30 minutes to stretch. At lunchtime, staff should not eat lunch at their desk, but instead take a walk to a restaurant or canteen.

One last thing to consider in having a healthy workplace is corporate participation in community activities to improve the health of the workers, their families and the members of the community in general. This can involve taking part in group activities both inside and outside the business.

A significant part of our lives is spent in the workplace—let's make sure this part of our existence is as positive as possible. ■

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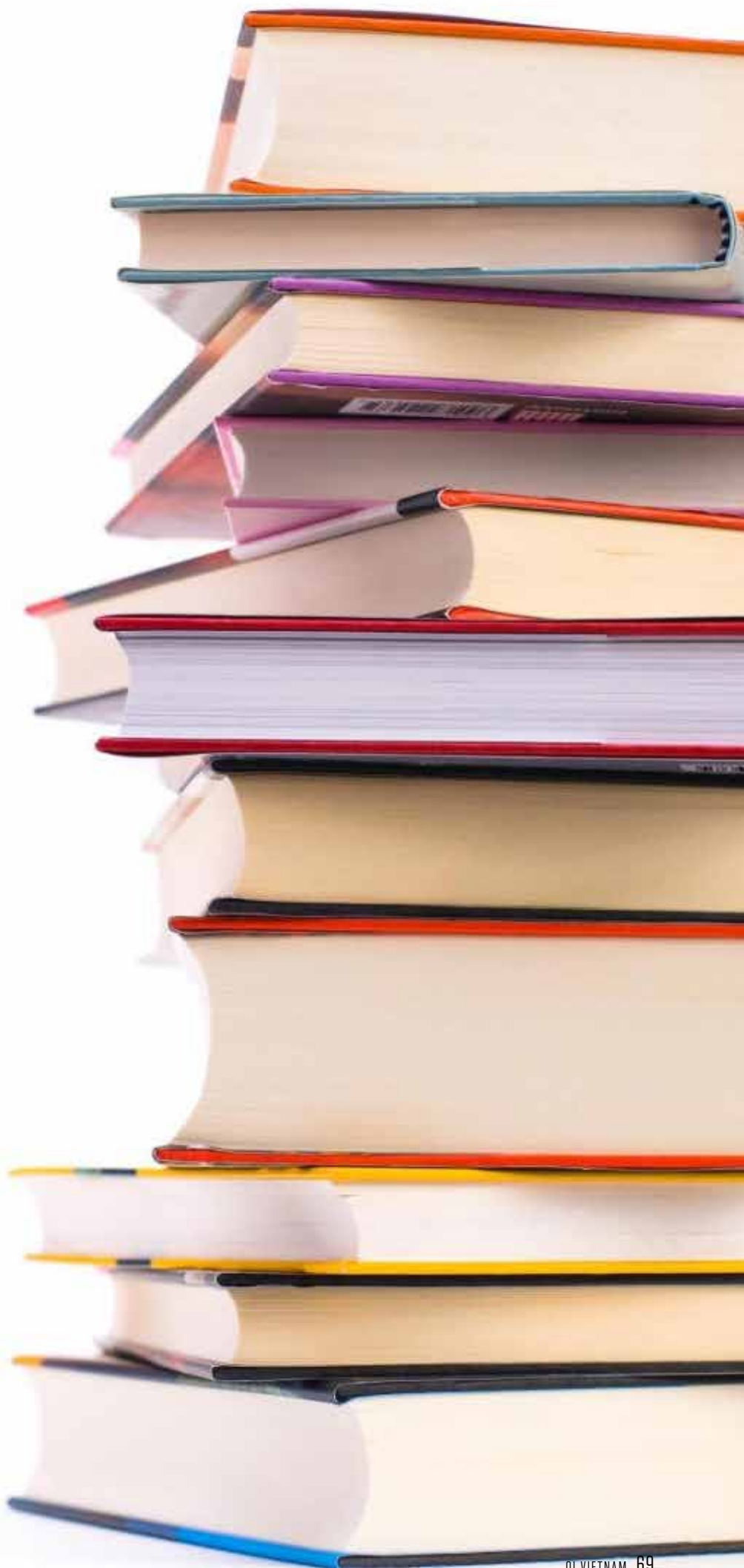
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Sách Quảng Cáo
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