

A woman with blonde hair pulled back, wearing a red floral dress, is smiling broadly and eating a cupcake. The cupcake has white frosting and a red rose on top, and is held in a white paper liner. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with blue and yellow lights.

Ơi

VIETNAM

MARCH 2015

JUST MARRIED

A defining wedding ceremony takes place openly in Vietnam

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CHEMICAL REACTIONS

Delicious Science Experiments in the Kitchen

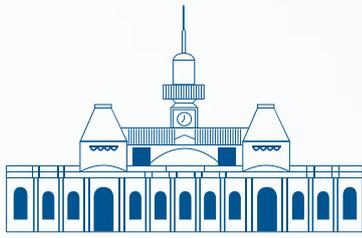
PAGE 50

THE LONG FORTRESS

China's Greatest Engineering Triumph and Must-See Sight

PAGE 68

The Sweetest Things



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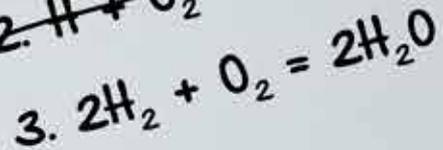
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This Month's Cover

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Model: **Rachel Cabakoff**
Hair & Make-up: **Tieu Tinh**
Location & Dessert: **Villa Royale**
Dress: **Thuy Design House**

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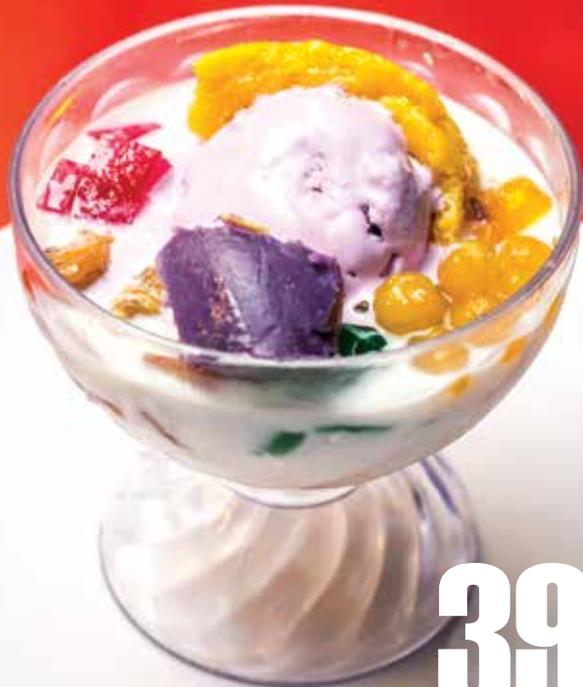


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Satisfy your sweet tooth with our picks of delectable delights



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IMAGE BY NGOCTRAN

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IMAGE BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

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CHAMPAGNE ON THE LAWN - PICNIC BRUNCH.



Make the most of your weekend by enjoying Champagne on the Lawn – Picnic Brunch at the most refreshingly unique brunch location in town. This family friendly alfresco brunch is set on the lush green lawn overlooking the outdoor swimming pool and city center.

As you enter, you are handed a picnic hamper filled with a variety of gourmet treats, then enjoy browsing around the mouth-watering live cooking stations and sip the afternoon away with free flow of Veuve Clicquot champagne and order refreshing cocktails at the live cocktail station. A selection of games will be provided including Petanque and badminton for a memorable and stylish weekend with your friends and family.

Available on Saturday 7th March, 4th April and 2nd May 2015.
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1.750.000 VND++ per person including free flow of Veuve Clicquot champagne, wine, beer, cocktail and soft drink.

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Datebook

What's on this month...

MARCH 11-14

What: Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*

Where: 11 & 12 at Boomarang (Crescent 2, 107 Ton Dat Tien, D7); 13 & 14 at La Habana (6 Cao Ba Quat, D1); 7pm; VND200,000

About: The play is a moral thriller about a woman, Paulina, who believes that a stranger who comes to her home is the doctor who, under a military dictatorship, tortured and raped her many years before. The title of the play is taken from a piece of music by Franz Schubert; Paulina loved the piece but grew to revile it when it was played repeatedly during her torture sessions. Dorfman began writing the play in the mid-1980s when he was in exile from Chile. It was not until Chile's return to democracy in 1990 that Dorfman returned to the play and "understood how the story had to be told."

Contact: Email saigonplayerstickets@gmail.com for more info



MAR 14

What: Open Day at AIS

Where: Australian International School; 9am - noon

About: The open day will provide parents and their children with the opportunity to visit and tour AIS's three campuses: Xi, Thao Dien and Thu Thiem. Visitors will be able to participate in interactive classroom-based activities with teachers, go on a tour with AIS student guides and enjoy musical school performances of *Alice in Wonderland*. The open day aims to give prospective students and parents a greater understanding of AIS, its commitment to academic excellence and how its learning environment supports the individual development of every child.

Contact: For more info visit www.aisvietnam.com/openday or call 3742 4040



MAR 14

What: Solve the Murder of Dr. Black

Where: Wine Embassy (13 Ngo Duc Ke, D1); 7pm-11pm; VND700,000

About: Based on the famous British board game Cluedo, each team of five assumes the role of one investigator and attempts to deduce who killed the victim by moving strategically around a game board representing the rooms of a mansion and collecting clues about the circumstances of the murder. Actors playing the role of police officers will support each team during this highly competitive and funny activity. Finger food and one glass of wine are included in the price.

Contact: Visit www.ubi-quest.com for more info



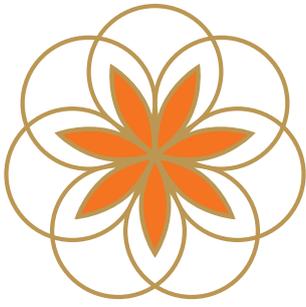
MAR 20

What: Marco Effe

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4)

About: Local electronic music outfit Heart Beat hosts its first event at The Observatory with world-renowned minimal techno figure Marco Effe. Born and raised in Livorno in 1985, he is considered one of the most promising Italian talents. Marco has played at top ranking events and clubs in Europe, such as the Watergate Berlin, Time Warp Italy, Cocoon Club Frankfurt, Studio 80 Amsterdam, Sankeys Manchester, Harry Klein Munich, and many more.

Contact: Visit www.theobservatory-hcmc.com for more details



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MARCH 22

What: Family Fun Day

Where: Saigon Star International School (Residential Area No. 5, Thanh My Loi Ward, D2); 11am – 4pm; free

About: Family Fun Days are a great excuse to get the kids out of the house and have some fun in the open air. Saigon Star International School is one of the greenest and most open schools in the city, yet less than 15 minutes from Thao Dien in District 2, 20 minutes from Saigon Pearl in District 1 and 25 minutes from Phu My Hung in District 7. Expect bouncy castles, water balls, horse rides, arts & crafts, face painting, carnival games, all the kids' favorite food treats plus the infamous dunking tank. Free transport (by prior arrangement) will be available from Thao Dien, Saigon Pearl and PMH.

Contact: Call 3742 7827 to make arrangements or visit www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn for more info

MARCH 25

What: AmCham Palooza Party

Where: Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon (8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1); 6pm-8:30pm

About: The monthly palooza party is a platform to develop new friendships, networking opportunities and information exchange. The AmCham Palooza is a popular group that holds networking events and happy hours regularly to increase communication amongst membership and expats.

Contact: Visit www.amchamvietnam.com for more info

UNTIL MARCH 28

What: The Leavers

Where: Galerie Quynh (Level 2, 151/3 Dong Khoi, D1)

About: The Leavers is an exhibition of new work by Brooklyn-based artist Trong Gia Nguyen. For his second solo exhibition at the gallery, Nguyen will exhibit a series of paintings informed by the artist's ongoing film project, DONG, an exploration of family history through the imperfect lens of memory. The colorful and playful paintings belie a deep reflection on history, culture, and the psyche of those uprooted and transplanted to foreign lands. Sourced from old family photographs, the paintings depict coloring book images that have been filled in but with the black outlines removed, suggesting the skewed ways in which we remember, shape, and colorize the past. Nguyen asks of the viewer to mentally redraw the missing lines, to give definition to this fuzz. Employing oil pastels, a medium that never fully dries, Nguyen reiterates how memory is organic and ever shifting.

Contact: Visit www.galeriequynh.com for more info



What: Einzelkind

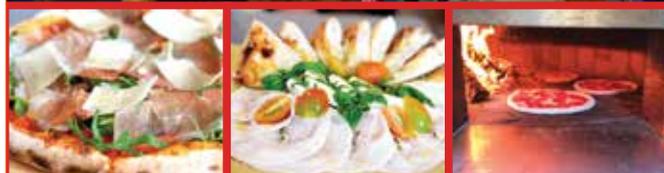
Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4)

About: Einzelkind are Miguel Ayala and Arno Völker, two guys from Frankfurt that love and live house and techno music. They have released several records on labels like Playhouse, Cocoon, Oslo and Get Physical Music. In 2008 Einzelkind founded La Peña - La Peña stands for quality underground music without big marketing, that is the reason why you won't find any names on the actual vinyl releases. It is just about music not about names. Their vision is to treat each record as a presentation itself, complete with original and individual

artwork, features and exhibitions. Each production will feature artwork shown in a cube of about eight cubic meters. Every record release will be strictly limited to 500 copies, which includes a poster referring to a piece made by the artist.

Contact: Visit www.theobservatory-hcmc.com for more details

MAR 28



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APRIL 5



What: Dragon Dash

Where: Phu My Hung, D7; VND400,000

About: The five-km competition will have obstacles such as a sand trap, a vertical cargo net, a rope wall escape and heavy carry. Completion of all obstacles or penalties is mandatory in order to qualify for podium positions and prizes. There will be two competitive waves with each consisting of 250 participants who will strive for prizes including three fastest men, three fastest women and three fastest teams. The first place finishers from each category will then receive a formal invitation to compete in the grand finale of the Dragon Dash championships.

Contact: For more info visit www.darevietnam.com or www.facebook.com/thedragondashvn.

UNTIL
JUN 29



What: Sole Imprint of a Wood-Flux

Where: Phuong My Flagship Store (81 Le Thanh Ton, D1); 9am-9pm

About: Wood-flux is a concept that refers to a Japanese genre of woodblock prints on silk and paper called Ukiyo-e, meaning "pictures of the floating world." Inspired by the caliber of Ukiyo-e woodblock and the textile pattern of Phuong My's Spring/Summer 2015 collection, artist Nguyen Huu Tram Kha showcases various fascinations of a wood-flux. Ukiyo-e art prospered from the 17th to the 19th century in Edo (today's Tokyo), thanks to its patronage by the merchant class, which gained them higher recognition in Japan's then social hierarchy against the elitist military dictatorship. Instead of realistic depiction, Ukiyo-e prints of natural scenes, such as seascape and flora, were imaginative visions about the world.

Contact: Visit www.san-art.org for more info

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NEW LOOKS AT CARAVELLE

Caravelle (www.caravellehotel.com) pulled back the curtain on a fully refreshed Café de l'Opera and an all-new champagne bar. Both venues are positioned on the ground floor, where the hotel has presided over a prominent corner of Lam Son Square since 1955.

Formerly the Lobby Lounge, Café de l'Opera boasts an unrivalled perspective on the Saigon Opera House and historic Dong Khoi Street. The café has been redesigned and expanded to allow even better views of the city center. Among the highlights at Café de l'Opera are the nightly live music, 5pm - 10pm, from their resident duo Sitti and Jason, Tuesday to Saturday and an open kitchen serving tapas.

Nearby, Champagne Corner is tucked into a stylish nook in the hotel's arcade. Through partnerships with the world's leading Champagne houses, Caravelle's Champagne Corner offers patrons the finest French bubbly, paired with a selection of small bites, oysters, truffles and caviar. Connoisseurs can look for vintages from Dom Perignon, as well as time-honored labels from Veuve Clicquot and Moët & Chandon.



DIM TU TAC OPENS

Recently opened at its location overlooking the Saigon Harbor, Dim Tu Tac (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4) serves Hong Kong and Shanghai style dim sum along with an a la carte menu of specialty dishes from the two cities - all under the supervision of Hong Kong chef Leung Kwong, who has more than 40 years of experience in the culinary industry.

On the dim sum list are soufflé egg white ball with mashed red beans, spare rib congee, steamed rice rolls with shrimp, minced pork dumpling with spicy sauce, pan-fried minced pork bun, deep fried radish pastry, and many more. The a la carte menu offers dishes such as fried rice with shrimp in XO sauce, steamed frog with ginger chili, braised vegetable with golden mushrooms, and fried e-fu noodle with eggplant and minced pork. Complement the food with Hong Kong's famous milk tea.



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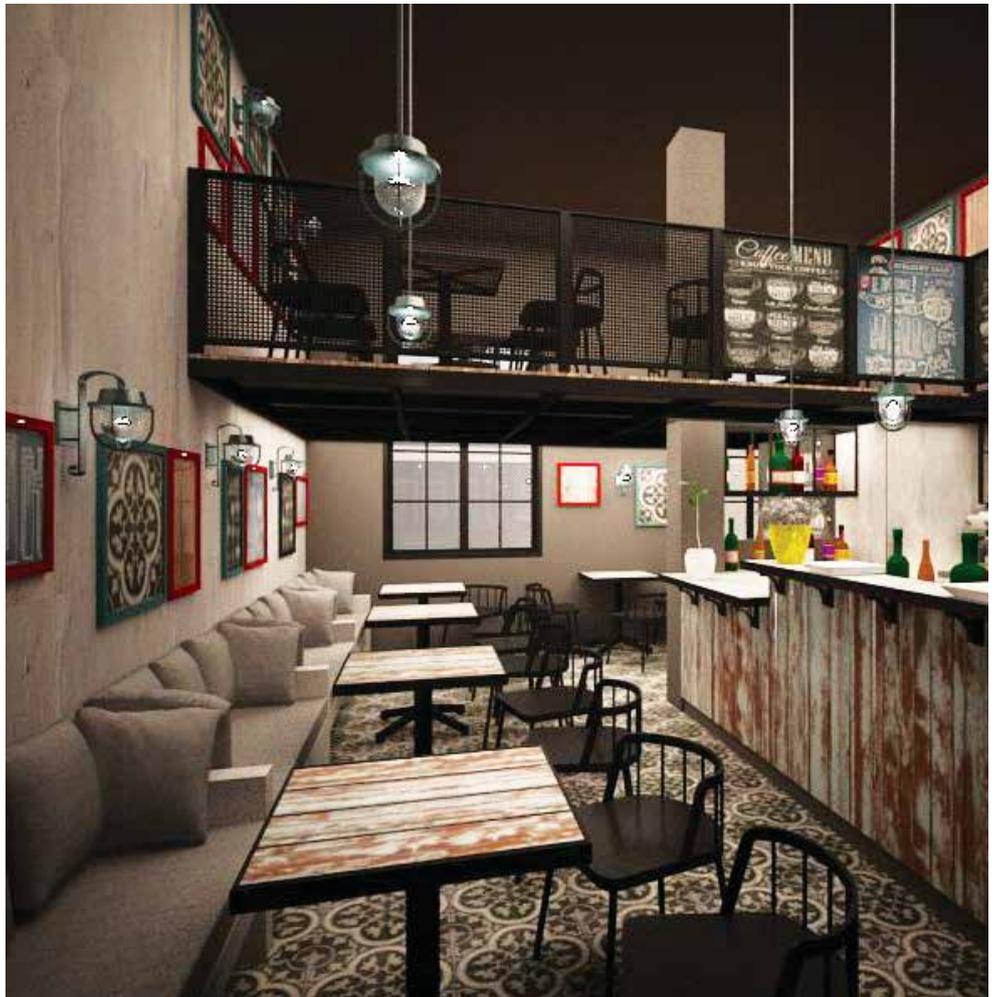
www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn

TRANSPORT AVAILABLE

ELSOL CAFÉ OPENS

Hidden away in a historic Saigon building is a new cafe dining experience for expats and Vietnamese alike. Elsol Cafe (Second Floor, 4 Nguyen Sieu, D1; Facebook: [elsolcafe](#)) is the creation of a Japanese living in Vietnam who loves old buildings, art, music and food – and sought to combine all into one alluring destination. A visit to the café is like a visit into a private home, with all the seclusion, ambiance, art, calm and architecture to make you feel like a welcomed guest.

The menu features a unique mix of tastes from around the world. In the mornings, the specialty is Italian style coffee. Lunch sets feature popular Japanese fare and vegetarian salads. In the evening you can choose between Italian, French, Spanish, Japanese and Vietnamese favorites, accompanied by imaginative cocktails, wine or beer. Coffee is always center stage at Elsol Cafe, where almost every gourmand's taste is catered to - only the best of Vietnamese organic coffee beans are used, custom roasted and ground before brewed in Syphon, Aeropress, Hario V60, Cold Brewed or Nel Drip techniques, or if you prefer, in traditional, handmade Japanese style. Fresh smoothies are prepared using fruits and vegetables from specialist, quality produce suppliers and without sugar.





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EDEN CAFÉ OPENS

Eden Coffee House (R3-85 Khu Pho Hung Phuoc 1, D7; www.edenservices.vn) is the latest restaurant and café to join the Phu My Hung community. The café offers illy brand coffee along with an eclectic menu for breakfast, lunch and dinner; however it's the sweet or savory crepe options that add something different to the usual neighborhood fare. There are a range of gluten sensitive and vegetarian options available as well. Situated a little bit away from the main street, Eden Coffee House offers a peaceful garden vibe early in the morning or late in the evening.



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RENAISSANCE RIVERSIDE HOTEL SAIGON PROMOTIONS

Celebrate the woman in you this month with special menus at the hotel's restaurants. From March 2 - 6, 30 percent off on food for all ladies dining in, and from March 7 - 8, 50 percent off on food for all ladies dining in. Escape the chaos of the city and enjoy a BBQ buffet poolside with Renaissance's (8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1) panoramic view across the river, every Friday and Saturday (6pm - 10pm) priced at VND590,000++/person (free flow of draught beer for two hours). Available from now until March 31.

Guests can enjoy a 50 percent discount on selected drinks during Happy Hours (5:30pm - 7:30pm daily) at Atrium Lounge, Lobby Lounge and Pool Bar from now until March 31.



INTERCONTINENTAL ASIANA SAIGON PROMOTIONS

March 7

Champagne on the Lawn - Picnic Brunch: This alfresco brunch is set on the lush green lawn overlooking the outdoor swimming pool and city center. As you enter, you are handed a picnic hamper filled with treats, then enjoy the live cooking stations. A selection of games will be provided including Petanque and badminton for a memorable and stylish weekend with your friends and family. VND1,750,000++ per person including free flow of Veuve Clicquot champagne, wine, beer, cocktail and soft drink.

March 8

Market 39: What better way to show the women around you that you care than a surprise celebration on this Women's Day. At Market 39, their chefs have prepared a wide selection of international delicacies, lobster, seafood and a variety of desserts in a buffet set up. Women's Day Brunch is priced at VND1,498,000 VND++ per person including free flow of Veuve Clicquot Champagne, wine, beer, cocktail and soft drink. Women's Day Dinner is priced at VND1,199,000++ per person including free flow of wine, cocktail, beer and soft drink.

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MAISON MIKIO PROMOTION

Maison Mikio Boutique Salon (8 Ton Dat Tien Street in the Garden Plaza 2 Complex, Phu My Hung) is offering 20 percent off on scalp clinics and Milbon hair treatments. The salon and spa offers clients a spacious yet intimate setting for salon and beauty services such as hair styling, coloring, manicures, pedicures, skincare and waxing. Call 5412 4773 or visit Facebook: *maisonmikio* for more info.



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY AT NEW WORLD SAIGON

March 8

Parkview: Enjoy a ladies' lunch or dinner at 50 percent off regular prices. Round up your favorite ladies for a buffet filled with fresh seafood like lobster, tiger prawns, oysters, sushi and sashimi, along with house cured beef, delicious desserts, and much more. All ladies in attendance will be welcomed with flowers. Lunch is VND610,000 per person, dinner is VND910,000 per person.

Dynasty: The chefs at Dynasty will be cooking up a trio of delicious and healthy Dragon Garoupa dishes: garoupa head soup with bean curd and vegetables followed by wok-fried or steamed garoupa filet with homemade XO sauce and finishing with garoupa tail braised with mushrooms in brown sauce. All ladies in attendance will be welcomed with flowers and complimentary Bird's Nest Soup when ordering the three-course Dragon Garoupa. Priced at VND1,500,000 per set including a complimentary seasonal vegetable dish to accompany the meal. For more info, call 3822 8888 or visit www.saigon.newworldhotels.com.

A Malaysian national with Chinese origin, Hew Wai Seng joins the hotel as their new executive sous chef at Dynasty. With more than 15 years of experience specializing in modern Chinese, traditional Cantonese, Teochew and Hakka cuisines, he won the gold medal for individual appetizer at The World Golden Chef Competition in 2005 and the silver medal for individual appetizer at the Melbourne City Chef Competition in 2010.



HOTEL EQUATORIAL PROMOTIONS

Let the man cook dinner for his lady on Women's Day (March 8). With three stations spread in each restaurant, the hotel will provide a chef hat, apron and recipe to follow, and choose either Chit Chat Café or Orientica seafood restaurant for the interactive cooking class. For Earth Hour, the hotel will light just candles from 8:30pm to 9:30pm on March 28 – an opportunity for couples to bask in the romantic candlelit atmosphere of Chit Chat or Orientica restaurant. Dinner is priced at VND678,000++/person.

To celebrate their new menu, they are hosting an all-you-can-eat dim sum at Orientica. If you collect 10 lunch stamps you will receive a free lunch. Saturday and Sunday is VND338,000 ++/person; a la carte dim sum menu priced from VND48,000++/dish (Monday to Friday lunch). On St Patrick's Day, the hotel's Funky Heaven band will perform live music to accompany special Irish beverages at Flo Lounge. Visit www.hochiminhcity.equatorial.com for more info.



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SAIGON – PHAN THIET SEAPLANE PROMOTION

In celebration of the new Saigon – Phan Thiet seaplane route, Hai Au Aviation is collaborating with Victoria Phan Thiet Resort & Spa to provide all-inclusive deluxe fly-and-stay packages. The flagship product, a three-day Beachside Getaway Package, eliminates the usual six-hour drive from HCMC to Phan Thiet. Passengers will take to the skies by seaplane to enjoy breathtaking views from along the beautiful coastline. The flight is completed by landing directly onto the water. Upon arrival at the resort, guests can enjoy unlimited spa treatments and a candlelight dinner for two. The whole experience is priced from VND11 million per person until 30 June 2015. For enquires call 096 206 9689 or email rsvn.hcm@haiuaviation.com.



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Pitfall

Understanding the double-talk on double taxation



A member of the Paris Bar, **Hadrien Wolff** has been practicing law in Vietnam for more than seven years, currently as a partner of Audier & Partners based at its HCMC office. Having gained extensive legal experience in the Netherlands and Cambodia, **Marijn Sprokkereef** is an associate at the Hanoi office of the same firm. **Audier & Partners** is an international law firm with presence in Vietnam, Myanmar and Mongolia, providing advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

Dear Hadrien and Marijn,

I am an Australian married to a Vietnamese woman. We both live in Thailand where we met each other and where we have worked for separate companies over the last four years. My wife is a 'resident' here, which means she has a work permit and pays taxes here. She originally came to Thailand for a fixed term work assignment, but her status has now changed to being effectively employed on "local terms" for an indefinite duration. Does the fact that she has chosen not to de-register from the Vietnamese "family book" change anything with her tax status? Also, I have just received an offer to work on a project in Vietnam for nine months starting from May 2015. Will I need to start paying income tax in Vietnam if I decide to take the job?

YOUR QUESTIONS ARE related to the Vietnamese Law on Personal Income Tax of 2007 (the "Law on PIT"), which was most recently amended in November 2014. The scope of the Law on PIT covers two categories of taxpaying individuals.

First of all, it covers "resident" individuals with taxable income either within or outside the territory of Vietnam. The term "resident" means individuals who are present in Vietnam for a period of at least 183 days calculated within a calendar year or within 12 consecutive months from the date of entry into Vietnam, as well as individuals who have a regular place of residence in Vietnam. This category therefore includes, among others, foreigners who are working in Vietnam.

The second category of individuals falling within the scope of the Law on PIT includes "non-resident" individuals with taxable income arising within the territory of Vietnam. Among others, this category includes foreigners who are not physically present in Vietnam, but who have taxable income in Vietnam nonetheless.

Assuming that her only source of income originates in Thailand, your wife

will most probably not fall within the scope of the Vietnamese Law on PIT. She may have to prove her Thai residency, however, which she could do by providing the tax authorities with a residence certificate.

The fact that she did not de-register from the Vietnamese "family book" should not make her a Vietnamese resident for income tax purposes. Instead, the question whether or not she will have to pay income tax in Vietnam will only depend on whether or not she has taxable income arising in Vietnam.

For your personal situation, on the other hand, taking the job will most likely mean that you will fall within the scope of the Law on PIT and that you will be considered as an individual taxpayer in Vietnam.

As is often the case in situations involving a foreign element, a person may actually qualify as an individual taxpayer in more than one country at the same time. In order to avoid such individuals having to pay double personal income tax, to prevent tax evasion and in order to facilitate and promote overseas trade,

investment and employment, countries often enter into so-called "double taxation avoidance agreements" (or DTAAAs).

The Law on PIT makes it clear that in case of conflict, the provisions of international tax treaties will prevail over any of its own provisions. To date, Vietnam has entered into DTAAAs with more than 60 countries, including with many Western countries, but also with Thailand in 1992.

Similar to many other DTAAAs around the world, the tax treaty between Vietnam and Thailand provides that where a "resident" of the one country derives income which may also be taxed in the other country, the first mentioned country shall allow as a deduction from the payable income tax an amount equal to the tax paid in the other country.

In the complicated world of taxation, we hope the above will help you understand your situation a little better!

Every month, **Hadrien and Marijn** answer legal questions from Oi readers. If you have any legal question you want answered, send them to legal@oivietnam.com ■

Troi Oi

The country in numbers

5,800

fake seals seized in Binh Duong Province. Four people have been detained on charges of forging seals and/or documents of agencies and/or organizations pursuant to Article 267 of the Penal Code, the police stated. The group provided fake graduation certificates from universities, colleges and vocational schools; certificates of languages and information technology; driver's licenses for fees ranging from VND200,000 to VND1 million. The board of directors of the provincial police department has given a cash reward of VND30 million to police officers who took part in the bust.

1 ton of marijuana plants were found in Ca Mau. The alleged culprit Canh told police officers that he had hired the land from another farmer for bean and vegetable cultivation. The district police are conducting further investigations and it is still unclear who grew the illegal plants. Under Article 192 of Vietnam's Penal Code: "Those who grow opium poppy, coca shrubs, marijuana or other plants which bear narcotic substance, have already been educated more than once, have already been given conditions to stabilize their lives and have already been administratively sanctioned for such acts but still commit them, shall be sentenced to between six months and three years of imprisonment. As for those who commit the crime in an organized manner or are repeat offenders, they will be sentenced to between three and seven years of imprisonment and subjected to a fine of VND1 million and VND50 million."

3 tons of live cats destined for consumption have been seized and destroyed in Hanoi after being smuggled from China. Cat meat, known locally as "little tiger", is an increasingly popular delicacy in Vietnam and, although officially banned, is widely available in specialist restaurants. The truck driver told police he had purchased the cats in northeastern Quang Ninh Province, which borders China, and that they had all been sourced from neighboring countries. Vietnam has long banned the consumption of cat meat in an effort to encourage their ownership and keep the country's rat population under control.

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USD35 MILLION

air traffic control center opens in Hanoi. The Vietnam Air Traffic Management Corporation (VATM) opened the Hanoi Air Traffic Control Center (Hanoi ATCC) after nearly three years of construction. The center is located on Nguyen Son Street in Long Bien District. The new facility, which replaces the current Hanoi ATCC, has 39 workstations and eight terminal points, which are capable of handling 1,000 planes at a time and 20,000 flight plans with a range of 3,792 km, said Hoang Thanh, chairman of the Board of Members of the VATM. The new Hanoi ATCC is equipped with an automated air management system, among the most advanced of its kind in Southeast Asia. The center will ensure safety for civil flights in particular and airline activities in general, including low-range flights in the Hanoi flight information region (FIR), according to news website Dan Tri. It also serves as a standby facility to replace the Ho Chi Minh Area Control Center (ACC) to take over the air traffic operation in Vietnam's FIR whenever an unusual incident occurs.

USD937

penalty will be enforced on those caught committing a fake divorce. According to the government anyone "carrying out a divorce for purposes other than the purpose of ending a marriage is considered an act of fake divorce and shall be given an administrative penalty." In addition, filing a divorce to evade property-related obligations, to do things that violate population-related laws or policies, or to achieve purposes that are not aimed at ending a marriage will be subject to a fine ranging from VND10 million to VND20 million. Also under the draft decree, those who live together as husband and wife with relatives that have a direct blood line but their cohabitation is not serious enough to be held criminally responsible will also be fined at the same rate. The draft legislation also sets a fine ranging from VND1 million to VND3 million for acts of adultery or marriage between foster parents and their adopted children.

26,000

residents in the Old Quarter of Hanoi will be relocated to a new residential area in Long Bien District in 2017. City authorities have said that the move aims to reduce the neighborhood's population density which is nearly eight times that of New York City's. In order to bring the density down to 500 people per square hectare from the current 823, last December the city approved plans to build 16 eight to nine-story apartment buildings in the Viet Hung Urban Area at a price of VND5 trillion.

The facilities will include kindergartens, primary schools, health clinics and other public works, according to *The Hanoi Times*.



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Paper Trail

Two bookworms open an independent store specializing in English language books

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**

BOA BOOKSTORE IS a bibliophile's hidden treasure trove, with the hidden part being almost literal. The address is number 6 Turtle Roundabout (Room C26, 2nd Floor, 42 Tran Cao Van or 6 Cong Truong Quoc Te, D1), though to reach the bookstore proper, you have to climb up two flights of stairs and navigate a short stretch of sooty hallways in an old apartment building. The room is number C26. The door is closed most of the time. Do not feel shy. Push that closed door open and inside you will find an apartment room stocked from floor to ceiling with books, books, and even more books.

The stock here consists mostly of English-language books with a smattering of French ones. Half are brand new while the other half are secondhand - all imported from the US. Titles run the gamut from young adult, romance, popular self-helps to finds few would expect from a Vietnamese bookstore such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, HG Wells'

Seven Novel collection, HP Lovecraft's *Complete Cthulhu Mythos*, and even a complete collection of Edgar Allan Poe's poems and tales in three different editions: hardback, hardback with illustrations, and Barnes & Noble Classic leather bound with silver or gold plated pages.

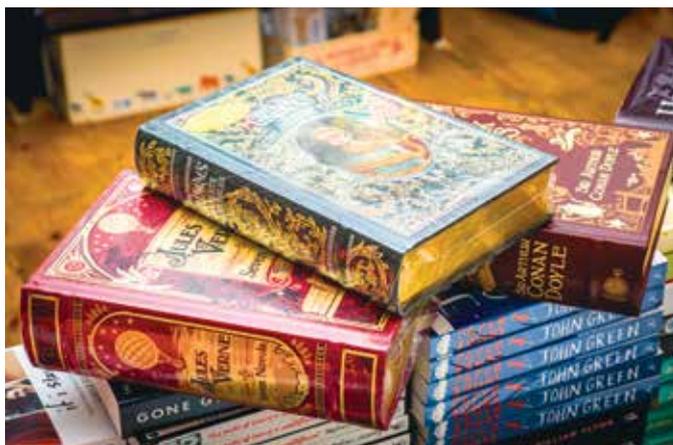
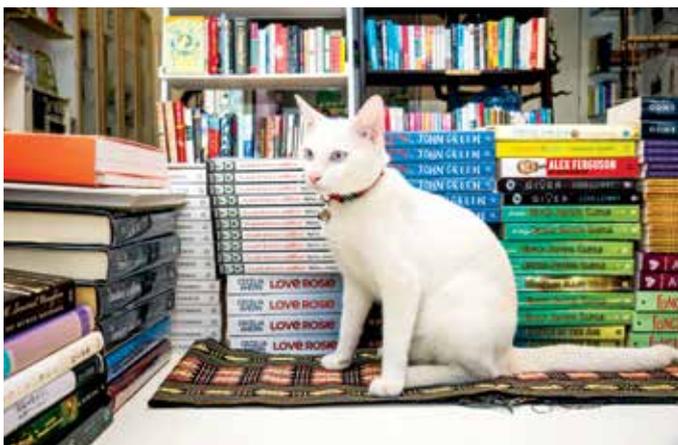
"Because we are so small, and our customers are so niche, we can make some really brave choices in our selection," says Thao, Boa's co-owner. "If we ran a bigger store with more varied customers like Phuong Nam Book or such, then we probably would have to stock the popular, easy to sell varieties more. But as we are now, we can be the bookworms we want to be."

Looking at the rare editions and collectible titles it boasts, it's hard to believe Boa started out two years ago as an online forum to sell secondhand books. "Thuy and I started out on this tiny forum for English-language book lovers. We were just regular members and

were just having fun sharing our obsession with like-minded people," says Thao. "By chance, Thuy had a relative in America who occasionally shipped her a book or two. She shared them online and before she knew it, people were asking her to order books for them and were willing to pay a little extra for her time. That was how Boa actually started out."

Thao, 24, and Thuy, 25, opened the bookstore using their savings. "A lot of people questioned our choice in business investment, our families included," shares the latter, who works a second job in a furniture company to finance their new venture. "This is, after all, the era of Kindle and digital texts so it probably seems a little unwise to put all your savings into a tiny book business dealing exclusively with physical foreign language books. But we just love books too much to do anything else."

For the first year, Boa was less a book



business proper and more a nameless book ordering service favored by English literature students and teenagers. “We were students and broke. We could afford only 10 books per month and keep maybe 20 to 30 in stock at a time. That’s how small we were.”

Stranger Than Fiction

It took two years for Boa to get its proper name, storefront and become a bookstore. That they could grow from 10 books per month to an inventory of 10,000 titles in stock and a monthly addition of 500 new books is a testament to the growing community of English readers in Saigon.

“We owe this to the community’s support,” say the young owners. “Without their love and help, we wouldn’t be here today, doing what we love and making a career out of it.” To show appreciation to the community and to promote reading, in the first few months of

the store’s opening at the Turtle Roundabout, Boa ran a public reading project named Book Station.

“We got the idea from mini public libraries in other countries. We made this little redwood box by hand, stocked it full with English books and every day put it in the front yard of the restaurant downstairs. Anybody walking around the Turtle Roundabout could see it,” Thao explains. “The rule is that everyone is welcomed to borrow the books inside provided that they bring one of theirs to replace the book they borrow. The book can be new or old and about anything, provided it is in decent condition.”

Book Station was hugely popular until someone stole all the books in the box in broad daylight. “It came as a shock to us,” says Thuy. “It never occurred to us that could happen. The spirit of the project is to make reading readily available to all kinds of people. We posted no guards and

had no locks on the box. These books are secondhand. They aren’t worth a lot. If you sell them all, maybe you will get enough for a cup of coffee and a bowl of *pho*. Whoever took our books could not have taken them for money. They could only have done it out of spite.”

Since then, the redwood box has been shelved away to gather dust in a corner of the store. The two have received many offers to refill the contents but they are still undecided on Book Station’s future.

“That does not mean we aren’t going to do anything,” the pair insists. “We have a few options open to us. Book Station 2.0 is always an option but we want to share our passion in a meaningful way with people who love books just as much as us. We have a couple of contacts in international schools in District 2 who won’t say no to a donated Book Station box. That’s one way to make sure our books are well loved and read.” ■

Casting Call

French-Vietnamese actress Linh-Dan Pham opens up on family, acting and Vietnam

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

BEST KNOWN FOR her breakthrough role as Camille, Catherine Deneuve's adopted daughter in the Academy Award-winning *Indochine*, Linh-Dan Pham has gone on to star in dozens of movies and television shows, earning her a nomination and a win for Most Promising Actress at the Cesar Award, the highest film honor in France.

Oi talked to Linh-Dan about life as an international film star, her Vietnamese roots and what it will take to put Vietnamese cinema on the map.

Looking back on the young actress who played Camille in *Indochine*, if you could go back in time, what would you say to her?

Actually, I wish I could go back to the young actress who played Camille: the innocence, the fearlessness! It's like the more I know, the more I doubt. It's like I'm a freshman every time I prepare for a role.

After *Indochine*, you quit acting for 10 years, bowing to your mother's wishes to pursue a more stable career. Do you think that was related to your Vietnamese upbringing?

Maybe it was my Vietnamese upbringing... but this could also happen in any traditional family. Acting is still a very unstable profession and parents want stability and safety for their children. But to be honest, in my case I did not really discover a passion for acting after I shot *Indochine*. I had a great time shooting it but I didn't really miss it when it was over. Yes, I missed the attention you get on a shoot being in the lead part, but I didn't really miss the "craft." I didn't realize that that was what I wanted to do. I realize now that I can only express my creativity through acting.

You left Vietnam when you were only one. People in those circumstances often feel torn between two worlds - not quite having the typical "look" of their new home while not sounding "native" enough for their home country. Have you ever felt that way?

This is an interesting dilemma that you mention... but it is one that I never felt. That's maybe because of how I was raised. There

was never a doubt in my parents' minds that we were Vietnamese people living in France. So for example, I spoke Vietnamese and had to abide by "Asian" rules (respecting elders, not going out, heading home by 10pm when all my French friends were going for a night out, etc...) but I went to school with and had Caucasian, North African, Jewish friends. And we were all French! To me, I am Vietnamese with a French passport. I always thought that that was a strength rather than a weakness. I speak Vietnamese, French and English fluently, I've traveled far since I was young. I feel comfortable everywhere most of the time.

To date, what's been your proudest achievement as an actress?

There have been many great moments of which I'm proud, but thinking about my career to date what really gives me satisfaction is that I've found my place in French cinema without resorting to typecast parts of the Asian chick. I get approached by directors and casting agents because of my body of work, and because they see me as an actress, not as an Asian actress, so I've been able to explore different genres and not be limited to certain types of films, resulting in an eclectic filmography. That doesn't mean I won't take roles that are specific to an Asian character, like in *The Beat that My Heart Skipped*, when I feel excited by the acting challenge that it presents.

The character I'm most fond of is Cam in *Adrift (Choi Voi)* [an award-winning 2009 Vietnamese film which dealt with modern themes like homosexuality and loneliness]. I'm not Cam, but I felt very much at home in Cam's skin. Cam is a young woman who is a writer, single, living with her mother, and there is such a richness and complexity to her persona, which is charged with all the contradictions of her position. On the surface she seems calm, in control, and sometimes a little callous towards her younger friend, Duyen (played by Do Thi Hai Yen). But underneath you can glimpse all of these conflicting elements driving her actions. She's clearly modern, yet her artistic life seems set amid that very traditional environment of a writer's studio. She's single, but with hints of complex romances. There is the traditional mother-daughter relationship with the mother's calmly unquestioning and patient

expectation of the ultimate goal of a wedding. And then of course there is the ambiguity of her relationship with Duyen, who seems so pure and simple against Cam's complexity. It was wonderful to try to capture and play all of that, to try to carry these motivations inside and allow them to emerge. Anyway, for me it was a wonderful experience, especially as the first fully Vietnamese production I have done. I never expected it to be a box office success, but I was captivated by the script and by [director] Bui Thac Chuyen's vision from the very beginning. I was thrilled with the final product and so proud that it got an award at the Venice Film festival.

Outside of a small handful of films, Vietnamese cinema has made a very small impact on the world scene. What needs to change to put Vietnamese cinema on the map?

Most movies made in Vietnam are commercial films, which need to make it at the box office in Vietnam, since there is

"I knew it was not going to be like making a movie in Europe or the US: no private rooms or trailers for the actors; limited filming equipment; young inexperienced crew; but everyone was so eager to make it happen, to learn, to move forward."



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not a wide international audience that can support ticket sales. At the same time there is limited finance for films and the production companies need to survive without taking too many risks, so there is a lot of formulaic plotting, copying of successful concepts from abroad (“Let’s make *Sex and the City* for Vietnam...”), and a focus on numbers. But what I’d love to see is films with more soul; sincerity is key. There are a lot of crazy talented people in film in Vietnam who can and will create works that will captivate and convince international audiences, and producers should have the courage to exploit this talent. I can’t criticize, as I understand that the challenges facing a young film industry are significant, and I’ve discussed it many times with friends who are producers, writers or directors in Vietnam, who also yearn for this evolution.

Vietnamese performers (actors, singers, etc.) in general are not paid well. And it is even a more unstable lifestyle here than in the West, perhaps. What advice do you have for aspiring Vietnamese actors?

I would say: “If you are in this business to get rich and famous, then get out right now” because you never know what tomorrow is made of. Especially that a lot of it has to do with chance: being there at the right place at

the right moment. But I also believe in destiny and hard work. I’ve been lucky so far but I’ve also worked pretty hard to get to where I am today. Celebrity is a strange commodity these days, but has become even more divorced from talent through the impact of reality shows, and from hard work through star search shows like *Pop Idol*. I don’t begrudge any of the success or riches that some may enjoy that way, but I have a feeling that many younger people increasingly see celebrity and artistic performance as equivalent. They aren’t.

Despite being known for your dramatic roles, what is it about comedy that you enjoy over other genres?

Comedy allows you to play roles which are somehow less connected to real life, at least that are further from me as a person. So it becomes more like a composition of a totally new persona. I played a retired super model who’s kind of a spoiled, druggy, party girl in a comedy called *All That Glitters (Tout ce qui Brille)*, and I was really just playing with making up a personality, which was great fun but with whom I felt no connection. But that’s also why comedy is hard - it’s so easy to slip into caricature and cliché, which becomes boring and two-dimensional for the audience, or to indicate the jokes, which ruins the impact of the humor. I love watching

comedians who also have a deep sense of the dramatic and of character in their comedy. Will Ferrell is incredible, even at his silliest you completely believe in this outrageous personality he has created. Same goes for Kristen Wiig. And Sandra Bullock is a rare example of an actor who is strong in both drama and comedy.

Tell us about an experience you’ve had in Vietnam that sums up what you love about this country.

I’ll talk again about *Choi Voi*. We were making this film on no money, and I knew it was not going to be like making a movie in Europe or the US: no private rooms or trailers for the actors; limited filming equipment; young inexperienced crew; but everyone was so eager to make it happen, to learn, to move forward. Such a dynamism, so much passion, and such clever solutions to get things done on a shoestring. Seeing this and being part of it gave me such a buzz and told me that the resourcefulness and creativity that I see in other walks of life in Vietnam are also there in the nascent film industry.

Do you ever look back and think what your life would’ve been like had you stayed in Vietnam?

No, not really. Life’s been good so far! ■



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Pride

A look inside a lucky lion's head

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGES BY **NEIL FEATHERSTONE**

"LIONS AND DRAGONS are symbols of luck and prosperity. For the Vietnamese, without luck there is no life," says Nhu Tra, a dancer from the Ha Nhan Duong troupe. "Which is why you will see lion dancing not just around Tet but also at opening ceremonies of many new businesses. It is hard work hoisting a 14kg lion head on your shoulder while dancing nimbly on your feet."

"Thirty years ago, every single lion dance group in this city had to get their costumes from Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and China, and they weren't cheap. They ranged from USD1,200 to USD1,500 – a fortune back then," explains Tam Quach, owner of Binh Hoa, a workshop in District 6 that specializes in making lion costumes.

But that has since changed. It started with one family learning the basics of how to craft the framework, then this knowledge was quickly shared and developed. And now there are more than 50 international-standard lion

and dragon costume producers in Ho Chi Minh City alone – centered around Districts 5, 6 and 11. The workshops are open, with bamboo frames, lion and dragon parts and mixed paints strewn haphazardly from inside the home out into the street.

"Lion costumes made in Vietnam are very popular, you know?" shares Luong Tan Hang, the chief at Hang Anh Duong workshop and dance troupe. "We have developed a reputation for high quality at very affordable prices. Though we lack years of experience, we can still easily compete with our Japanese or Singaporean competitors. Most people don't realize it but even lion costumes have trends in fashion. This year, luminous paint and beauty marks on the lion's head are in."

No single workshop can undertake the creation of a lion costume alone. Instead, the work is split and distributed among collaborating workshops with each team

specializing in one task or creating a specific part of the lion's body such as the mane, the eyes, the frame, even down to seemingly little things like the claws or the nose.

"The work requires painstaking attention to detail. A lion costume is a big thing. By dividing up the parts, we can make sure attention is paid to each individual part," explains 60-year-old artisan Tu Nhut. One lion costume takes a week to produce while a procession dragon takes two or more weeks to complete. The lion can cost anywhere from VND15 million to VND25 million and, depending on the length of the body, a dragon can cost anywhere from VND50 million to VND200 million.

"Business has been very good despite the state of economy," says Hang, whose shop recently sold 100 lions and 20 dragons to various Southeast Asian countries. "Or perhaps because of it. The tougher the going gets, the more luck people seem to want." ■





Opposites Attract

How to mix and match styles and make it work



As an interior and furniture designer for Austin Home Interiors (www.austinhomeinteriors.com), **McNeill Shiner** is always looking for new ways to mix styles and influences to create spaces that are uplifting, comfortable and very personal.



IMAGE BY BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS



IMAGE BY REBECCA MARTYN

THE PRINCIPLE OF contrast probably makes you think of color, and that's a natural place to start - black and white or complementary color palettes are classic sources of contrast. However, you can also use contrast in pairing architecture, furniture or art styles together (modern with vintage or antique), textures (smooth and shiny with rough or soft) and form (straight shapes with curvy ones). In terms of effect, contrast draws your attention, whereas grouping items with similar features allows your eyes to pass over them. Contrast is exciting, similarity is calming; every space needs some of both.

The iconic Louis Ghost Chair by Phillippe Starck is a study in contrasts in itself - it marries the neoclassical style of Louis XVI with sleek, glossy Lucite, to stunning effect. But we can even go a step further and see how interior designers have mixed this piece with other elements for both similarity and contrast.

The Swedish kitchen photographed by Rebecca Martyn plays with contrast in the

largely black and white color palette, and certainly with the single copper pendant, but the chairs' Lucite material fits right in. In fact, there isn't much variation in texture here at all, as it ranges from smooth and matte to downright shiny. How would the space feel different if the designer hadn't chosen to whitewash the wood floors? How might that affect where your eye is drawn?

The Better Homes & Gardens dining room takes a different approach. Style-wise, it's quite a cohesive space, and the original wood-framed Louis XVI chair would be perfectly at home. Instead, the Louis Ghost's sleek modern material pops and makes a serious statement among the many classic elements. Whether you love or hate this choice, you certainly can't help but notice it. On a side note, the translucent chairs are a smart choice for what looks to be a small space.

When you do opt for contrast, be sure there's enough of a difference between the two elements so it appears purposeful. You

may recall from an earlier column that a major key to mixing patterns successfully is considering scale and size. Two geometrics side by side might look like an accident rather than a choice, but one large and one small will highlight the individual qualities of each. A geometric plus something completely different, like a floral or a tonal texture? Even more so. The principle applies elsewhere as well, so always make those choices intentionally.

Dining rooms are a good place to analyze similarity and contrast, because the components involved tend to be limited - table, chairs, chandelier, art, and possibly a rug, sideboard and window treatments. There isn't a whole lot of innovation in layout either, so all of this makes it easier for you to hone in on sources of contrast. Are you seeing variation in color, style or material? Which do you find most appealing? Pinterest.com is always my favorite place to browse interior images, but you can also use Houzz or even Google Images for ideas. ■

Just Married

A defining wedding ceremony takes place openly in Vietnam

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD**
IMAGES PROVIDED BY **ADRIAN ANH TUAN**

SOMETIMES THE MOST significant transformations in history happen quietly, beautifully, perfectly. They occur as a convergence of forces that may have been in motion for some time - and they represent the single point of transition when the struggles of those who have gone before culminate in generation-defining change.

On January 24, 2015, well-known local fashion designer Mr. Adrian Anh Tuan married Mr. Son Doan, a Vietnamese-American, in a private ceremony at the Amiana Resort in Nha Trang. As with every same-sex wedding ceremony in Vietnam, the marriage was not registered, and no law was broken. But this time, no officer of the law arrived to take anybody away in the name of public decency; nobody was fined or sent off for re-education. The ceremony occurred openly, proudly, and joyously. Most significant, however, was the fact that in the weeks that followed, thousands of messages were sent to the happy couple in overwhelming support of their union - and not a single message of hate. There was no condemnation in the media, not one statement of disgust or protest, no claim that Vietnamese traditions were under threat. For the first time in modern history, Vietnamese society itself faced a love between two men for what it was - and smiled in acceptance, offering their congratulations.

For Adrian, the intense outpouring of love and admiration from the public has come as a complete surprise. "Just last year, the police would have come to stop a wedding like ours," he says. "Somehow, there has been no negative impact. We did our wedding out of love; we didn't think we were going to inspire people or make it to the news or anything. That all happened out of nowhere. But I think we're really lucky it happened that way. I've received messages every day from young people who say 'I want to come out,' or who want to ask about our love story. Every day since the wedding. My Facebook followers have doubled over the past week. I think it's had a pretty good impact - and

really inspired people."

Acceptance in Society

The couple's wedding ceremony followed a long-awaited change in marriage law, which came into effect on January 1, 2015. Although the timing is a lucky coincidence (they had originally planned for their ceremony to take place last August, and say they would have held it regardless of any changes in the law) the release of the 2014 Act contained an important rephrasing in which same-sex marriage is no longer a 'forbidden' union but has instead been labeled as 'not legally recognized.' Although homosexual weddings (as opposed to marriages) have never been explicitly outlawed in Vietnam, law enforcement agencies have frequently cited the previous legislation to justify punishments levied against same-sex couples who have dared to hold public ceremonies in the recent past.

Since the new law came into effect, there has been some confusion about its stance: some international news outlets proclaimed that gay marriage was legalized here, while others expressed their disappointment that Vietnam had missed its opportunity to become the first Asian country to do so. What makes Adrian and Son's wedding so important, however, is that the reaction from the public shows this issue is no longer as stigmatized in Vietnamese society as it once was - and therein lies the most significant change. It's this, more than anything else, that LGBT activist groups have been fighting for - the right to be accepted not just in law, but in society at large.

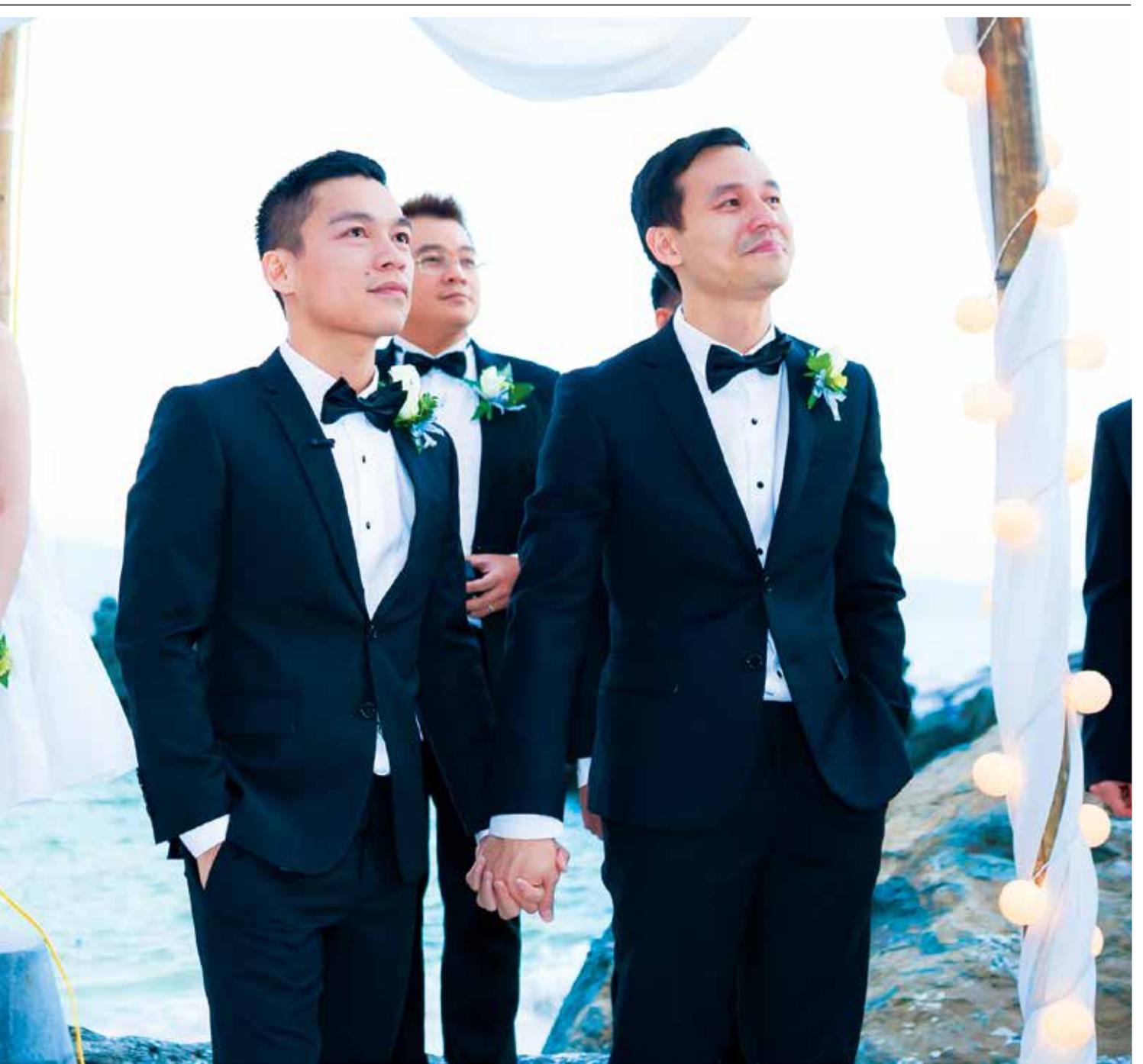
"I haven't heard of any other recent same-sex weddings," says Adrian. "I'm sure there have been some, but they probably weren't done openly like ours. Maybe after this, things will change. Definitely if there are more events like this, and they're well-received by the public, then I'm sure that it will affect the lawmakers and they will do something about it."

As with any marriage, the couple has



discovered that the experience of going through the ceremony has deepened their relationship in unexpected ways. "We've been together and we've lived together for almost three years," says Adrian. "It's not like it's a big change in terms of our living situation. It's more about what's in your head. We feel more attached, actually. I didn't expect that. I thought that what we had was the best we could have already. But with the wedding, we feel closer. The point of the whole thing was for us to have a memory to keep, to have more responsibility to one another, and to really be recognized as a couple in our families' eyes."

The wedding itself was almost dreamlike. "It was quite Westernized, but modified for our purposes," he continues. "A ceremony on the beach. Rings and vows. Our parents gave



speeches and everybody was very emotional. I think they could see the love that came from us. They were really happy for us.”

“I’m not a crier, and I didn’t think I was going to cry at my wedding. But I don’t know what happened – I just couldn’t stop. Everyone there was crying.”

Adrian and Son hope their example will set a positive precedent for other same-sex couples who wish to follow suit. “It should be this way for a very long time now,” says Adrian. “We’re not in the 80s or early 70s when homosexuality was something blooming and new here. Vietnam even 10 years ago was still very conservative. But the more we grow, the more open we are. I didn’t know that all this would happen, but I’m very honored to be a part of it. It could be the start of something a lot better for the gay community.” ■



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Mekong Quilts and Mekong Creations have joined together to create a unified identity, Mekong+. The Not-For-Profit organisation specialises in high-quality, hand-crafted quilts and accessories using sustainable raw materials.

Working with dis-advantaged women from rural Vietnam and Cambodia, Mekong+ has engaged over 340 women in full-time employment as well as contributed to community development initiatives within their communities.

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The
Sweetest
Things

Summer heat got you down? We're cooling off and indulging in a sugar rush by imagining ourselves sinking our teeth into the world's sweetest, coolest desserts. From America to The Netherlands, here are seven treats that offer layers of sugary goodness.

CHUC AN NGON!

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM, MICHAEL ARNOLD & NPD KHANH
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN & NEIL FEATHERSTONE



Haagse bluf

Double
Dutch
Delight

The only time to “go Dutch” when dining

HOW MANY TIMES have you considered your dining options and thought: “Let’s go Dutch?” Not as in split the bill, but as in eat the cuisine of the Netherlands. And if you were able to locate a Dutch restaurant in Saigon - best of luck with that - do you have any idea what you’d find on the menu? The Netherlands, as these questions suggest, has never been known as a culinary destination. Actually, that’s an understatement. For years, the gastronomy of this country has lagged woefully behind many of its European neighbors.

“There’s a reason for that,” explains Peter Cijssouw, proud Dutchman and owner of the newly opened restaurant **The Bourgonnier** (Number 62, Street 65,



Appelflap

Tan Phong, District 7). “To be perfectly honest, Dutch cuisine is not truly gourmet cuisine. Dutch food is not like French food. It is made of commonplace ingredients, simple techniques and hearty flavors and it absolutely lacks that glamorous flair that makes it instantly recognizable and adaptable.”

And a sweet staple that exemplifies the simple but hearty Dutch cuisine is the *appelflap* (VND70,000). In the barest description, an *appelflap* is a hand-sized Dutch spin on the classic American apple pie. The dessert consists of fresh Goudreinnet (a type of sweet and sour apple grown in Holland) apple slices, cinnamon and assorted fruits wrapped inside a thick pastry shell and oven baked for 20 to 25 minutes. The finished product is a golden brown triangle that is hot and crispy on the outside and sweet and juicy on the inside.

“Everybody in Holland eats the *appelflap*,” says Peter. “Everybody! It is served from ordinary food stands and at high-class restaurants. Rich folks eat it.

Not so rich folks also eat it. Eat it as a dessert or eat it as a snack. Eat it hot and fresh from the oven or microwaved from the fridge. And just about anyone can make one so long as they have the basic kitchen equipment.”

However, as popular as the *appelflap* is, there is an even more quintessential Dutch dessert out there - the *Haagse bluf* (VND35,000) - a dessert that can rightly put on airs. The *Haagse* in the name derives from Den Haag (The Hague), the capital city of the province of South Holland. Loosely translated, it means ‘Hague bluff,’ supposedly because the wealthy residents of the city are full of hot air. The name has since become an endearment to the national favorite dessert. Unlike the *appelflap*, *Haagse bluf* has no cultural equivalent anywhere in the world, nor is it a popular menu item in restaurants in or outside of Holland, according to Peter.

“I’ve spent decades around the world, from West to East and not once have I seen it in any restaurants outside

Holland,” Peter claims. The fault for this startling unpopularity, he says, lies in the extremely short shelf-life of the dish.

“The key ingredient of *Haagse bluf* is raw egg white. Even with a good refrigerator, it will only stay good for a couple of hours.”

The other ingredients are sugar, berries (blended and fresh) and ladyfingers. A highly skilled chef can whip the mixture of egg white, sugar and blended berries into a sweet, frothy, pink puff, place it into a stem glass and garnish the dainty combination with fresh berries and ladyfingers in under five minutes. The final product is a sweet, delicate dish so airy it won’t even register in your stomach.

“Which means that you don’t have to hold back when it comes to this dessert,” says Peter. “You can eat to your heart’s content and not worry about leaving room for the last course. Imagine having your sweet treat on top of a sumptuous traditional four-course Bourgonidian dinner. A perfect end to a meal, isn’t it?”



Alaskan
Surprise

Fire & Ice

VIETNAM'S OWN CELEBRITY chef Jack Lee is probably best known for the exotic *Chinoise* cuisine that he serves up to the rich and famous back in the US. Since touching down in his native Saigon to build up his brand here – cheffing at Compass Living's **Acacia Restaurant** at 149 Nguyen Du, D1 – he's been turning heads with bold French-Californian dishes garnished with his own groundbreaking Vietnamese tropical fruit sauces. What truly distinguishes Jack as a chef, however, is his culinary art: by using food as a medium of artistic expression, Jack literally fashions fine artworks on the plate, drawing inspiration from life and representing this in the textures, colors, and tastes of various food items to create intriguing matches and contrasts – taking 'concept cuisine' to an abstract level.

One of Jack's sweeter creations that's now being served at Acacia is a dessert modeled after a baked Alaska recipe he picked up while working at the prestigious Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles – notorious for its predilection for dishes with dazzle. Inspired by the sunsets over Hawaiian volcanic landscapes, Jack's recipe uses a carefully-prepared ice cream-filled meringue cone with a pandan cake base set on a fine Sauvignon Blanc and blueberry sauce (representing the ocean reddened by sunlight) and surrounded by a coral reef of chocolate rock candy. The flame is provided by a strong cointreau flambé (or cherry kirsch, when available) that is generously splashed over the slopes of the meringue and the candy as well – which in a dimly-lit romantic setting makes them glow like hot magma.

It's a character dish that works a range of subtle flavors into some fairly standard base ingredients – try, for example, to pick up the orange accents of the cointreau as they sink into the brittle meringue shell between your teeth. Dip a scoop of the vanilla ice cream into the blueberry wine and see what games that plays on the tongue.

The magic of all baked Alaskas, of course, is the way the ice cream is insulated during the heating process, creating a contrast of fire and ice. This is nothing new - the dessert was written about back in 1802, although it only became known by its present name when New York's famous Delmonico's restaurant served it to commemorate the American acquisition of the Alaskan territory in 1876. It's traditionally oven-baked, although Jack's flambéed version is technically a bombe Alaska (VND148,000), which has more of a kick. It's not without its risks – when he first attempted the dessert back at Bel-Air, he managed to flambé his own hand. It's fortunate for us that the chef has now owned this dish – indeed, it's one of this season's must-try delicacies.

For Acacia's Valentine's Day menu this year, Chef Jack created a heart-shaped version for sizzling couples, which is still available on request.



Pinoy *Passion*

Ice, ice, baby

THE CUISINE OF the sunny Philippines isn't so easy to hunt down in Ho Chi Minh City, but there are a few enclaves where eager and inquisitive gourmands can check out the taste of Manila for themselves. One of these – **Loriekot's Lutong Bahay** at 193 Dien Bien Phu – has come a long way since we first reviewed it back in our September 2014 issue. At the time, the simple street-side stall was indistinguishable from a local snack stand except for its exotic menu items. Loriekot's has changed much, however, and it's now a dine-in restaurant with a whole range of new dishes. The most welcome feature on its new lineup is the selection of traditional desserts, and the standout of

these has to be the colorful Pinoy delicacy that has recently taken off in New York, described by celebrity foodie Anthony Bourdain as being "oddly beautiful" – halo-halo.

A blend of sweet tubers, beans and fruit stirred through shaved ice like an Asian-style slushee (and topped with a generous hunk of purple taro ice cream), halo-halo (VND60,000) isn't all that dissimilar to some forms of Vietnam's sweet *che* desserts. What distinguishes it from its local cousin are both the choice of ingredients and the caramelized evaporated milk base that imbues it with rich, malty overtones. While the list of ingredients is variable

by nature (the name literally means "all mixed up"), you won't tend to find lychees, water chestnut, or so much fruit as you do in Vietnamese *che* – but you will find jackfruit, cassava, banana, and delicious, nutty chunks of a rare form of Filipino coconut called *macapuno*. The resultant bomb-blast of colorful debris suspended in its creamy white gel has to be one of the best remedies there is for cooling down on warm, sweaty evenings both here and back in the Philippines.

Loriekot's recipe is fairly standard – proprietress Marie Malit claims it's an extremely familiar treat that has been prepared by Filipino families for a very long time, something she remembers enjoying as a child. Those who do remember this delight from their early years won't be disappointed with this version: authenticity at Loriekot's is pretty much guaranteed by the fact that the restaurant imports its essential ingredients straight from the Philippines.

Moving to the larger premises has enabled Marie to consistently provide this fondly-remembered treat to the local Filipino community – and halo-halo isn't the only popular sweet that's found a place on her menu. Some are takes on familiar dishes here – the *leche plan* is a more intensely caramelized version of the local *banh flan*, and the *turon* is a particularly delicious deep-fried banana wrapped up like a spring roll. Other desserts are more unusual – *buko* pie is a coconut-cake pastry, while *pichi pichi* is a down-to-earth dish from the Filipino south that features gelatinous cassava balls sprinkled with a special savory cheese that nicely sets off its creamy sweetness. With these and other new additions to the menu, Loriekot's is on a winning streak – making it a good time to stop by and sweeten up on these rarely-seen desserts after a healthy dinner of some of this city's hardest-to-find delicacies.

Clockwise from left: Halo-halo, Puto, Turon





Incr
[edible!]

Satisfy your
sweet tooth
while saving
the planet



UNTIL THE END of March, the **Lobby Lounge** (Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon, 8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1) is doing its part to save the world while making it a sweeter place. The R-Cookie Coffee (VND100,000++) joins the latest food trend in edible packaging in the form of a deliciously edible pastry cup housing a shot of Procaffe *espresso eccellente*, a blend of Arabica beans with Asian Robusta. The cookie is slightly denser than your average cookie but without being too thick thanks to the almond flour in the dough, allowing it to hold hot beverages for up to 20-25 minutes. An inner coating of white chocolate does double duty by helping to keep the coffee from seeping through with

the added benefit of sweetening your coffee as it melts, so no extra sugar needed. And best of all, when you're done, there's no coffee cup to wash!

Sustainable packaging is all the rage in the culinary world these days. Among the innovations are containers made from caramelized sugar and wax that crack open like an egg and packaging made of biodegradable beeswax that can be peeled like fruit - all compostable or soluble in water. Not content to simply produce planet-friendly biodegradable packaging, other companies are trying to make containers tasty as well. There are now commercially viable products like WikiPearls — skins for foods like ice

cream, cheese, and frozen yogurt and even agar (a seaweed-based gel) cups that look like glass and taste like pink grapefruit and yuzu.

In keeping with the “green” theme, try pairing the R-Cookie Coffee with a slice of chocolate pistachio cake (VND60,000++). Layers of chocolate and vanilla sponge cake are sandwiched between rich, nutty pistachio cream, making for a sweet, but not too sweet, delight. Even the health conscious can indulge because almost 90 percent of the fat found in pistachios is the healthy mono- and polyunsaturated fats.

If edible packaging is the future of food science, then welcome to a brave, new (and very delicious) world.

Sweet *Siam*

Three ingredients, limitless flavor

WHILE SOUTHEAST ASIAN cuisine is some of the trendiest on the planet, it sadly often falls short at the finish line. Traditionally incorporating unexpected and very obviously non-dessert ingredients (at least from the Western perspective) like corn, taro, yams and beans, they can end up a brain-twisting, taste bud-confusing mélange. Leave it up to the Land of Smiles,

however, to save the day. Perennially the Southeast Asian representative in any Top 10 world cuisines poll, the Thais have perfected *khao niew ma muang*, the universally loved and deceptively simple mango sticky rice.

Chef Supachai of **Spice Restaurant** (27 Le Quy Don, D3), a Thai mainstay in HCMC since 2003, thinks that while Thai

cuisine is exploding in Western countries, it possibly hasn't been embraced as warmly in Vietnam due to its spicy nature and the country's hot weather. But one dish diners do seem to love is the simple marriage of sticky rice, coconut milk and mango, the sum being ever more greater than its humble parts.

Chef Supachai's version of the dish (VND65,000) starts off by soaking glutinous rice for hours or even overnight, encouraging it to absorb the liquid which makes it soft when cooked using a minimum of water. Chef Supachai says the secret to the sticky rice is to allow the grains to expand without becoming mushy as it's meant to absorb more coconut milk before the dish is assembled.

The coconut milk is also homemade in the Spice kitchen, starting with a base of freshly shredded coconut left to steep in boiling water for half an hour and then squeezed out using a mesh cloth to extract every bit of flavor. Palm sugar is then added with a touch of salt to bring out the coconut's natural sweetness. Finally, tapioca starch is introduced as a thickening agent.

From there, it's a matter of plating the dish with a scoop of sticky rice infused with coconut milk, a sliced, soft, buttery mango and a drizzle of the remaining coconut milk resulting in a dish that's warm and satisfying, with an all natural sweetness to it. Because all the ingredients are commonly found here in Vietnam, it's hard to imagine why the dish hasn't yet been co-opted into local cuisine. "While it may seem simple to make, every Thai dish contains a secret which makes it hard to copy," says Chef Supachai with an enigmatic Thai smile.



The
Ultimate
Pick-me-up

Italy's much-loved version of cookies and cream

COOKIES AND CREAM taste good in any language. The English have their trifle, the Portuguese the *serradura* and the Italians, tiramisu. Literally meaning “pick me up” for its stimulating combination of coffee and cocoa, the origin of Italy’s most famous sweet can be traced back to 17th century Siena, Tuscany. Prepared for the Grand Duke Cosimo de’Medici III, the cake steeped in liqueur and topped with pastry cream became known as *Zuppa del Duca*, or Duke’s Pudding. It later became a hit in England, where it was known as *Zuppa Inglese* (“English soup”) or the Tuscan Trifle.

“Everybody in Italy eats tiramisu since they’re born,” says chef/owner of La Bettola, Giuseppe Amorello of the simple concoction of eggs, sugar, mascarpone and coffee-soaked ladyfingers. “It’s like *pho bo* for Vietnamese. Every mother in Italy makes it. There’s always some in the fridge to be eaten any time.”

Like the original recipe, **La Bettola’s** family-friendly version (VND125,000+; 84 Ho Tung Mau, D1) doesn’t include alcohol. “If you want, you can add some Bailey’s or brandy. My grandma used to put in a little grappa,” laughs Giuseppe.

Instead, in his trendy eatery, Giuseppe focuses on using 100 percent fresh, homemade ingredients, from the eggs, sugar and flour for the ladyfingers to the mascarpone cheese made with heavy cream and a bit of acid, like lemon juice. “Some places use whipping cream or add more cookie so they can get away with using less mascarpone. But since we don’t have to buy any processed ingredients, our tiramisu has a very homemade taste.”

The assembly calls for soaking the lady fingers in a strong espresso then topped with a layer of mascarpone into which egg whites have been folded for a light, foamy texture, all served up in a martini glass and garnished with a sprig of mint and a *lingua di gatto* cookie. “Even though the ingredients are simple, tiramisu is not very easy to make. You need to find the right balance between cream and cookie,” says Giuseppe.

No longer reserved for visiting royalty, anytime is tiramisu time.





Dessert of
The Gods

**Sinfully simple
chocolate mousse**



CHOCOLATE, THE “Drink of the Gods,” just makes everything better. By the mid 19th century, dark chocolate, together with whipped eggs, found its way into French kitchens in the form of light-as-air yet intensely flavorful chocolate mousse and has remained the classic French after-dinner dessert. While adventurous cooks (“egged” on by the recent vegan trend) have tinkered with the recipe, adding ingredients such as olive oil, basil, avocado, balsamic vinegar and even soy sauce, chocolate mousse in its very simplest form requires only two ingredients: an ounce of chocolate and an egg per person.

The Sweet Bitter Chocolate Mousse at

the fully refurbished **Café de l’Opera** (formerly the Lobby Lounge of Caravelle Saigon, Ground Floor, 19-23 Lam Son Square, D1; VND98,000++) stays true to the original recipe, with the only additions being whipping cream and a touch of rum. While the ingredients are few, the magic comes in the technique of melting the dark chocolate in a bain-marie (a container gently heated by simmering water) and slowly adding it to a mixture of whipped cream, whisked eggs, sugar and rum while folding gently to maintain the lightness and aeration of a classic mousse.

Traditionally served in a glass to showcase its winning combination of the

airy texture of the whipped egg whites along with the intense color of the dark chocolate, the Café de l’Opera adds a splash of color with a layer of raspberry puree along with some fresh raspberries and brittle cacao sticks, pairing the bright tartness of the raspberry with the rich sweetness of the chocolate.

With its brand new art deco look featuring giant floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the French-inspired Saigon Opera House together with Saigon’s latest “place to meet,” the Champagne Corner (in partnership with Moët Hennessy), it’s hard to imagine a better place to enjoy a quintessentially French dessert.

Wine & Dine

IMAGE BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE







Please Help Yourself

An all-you-can-eat dining concept in a modern style lodge

TEXT BY **JIMMY DAU** IMAGES PROVIDED BY **GEM CENTER**

THE GEM CENTER is a multilevel and multipurpose complex which, as you enter, has the look and feel of a modern art gallery or museum. Tall, white ceilings contrast with polished wooden finishes - both in the interior fit out as well as the ground level cafe - punctuating the spacious feeling as you're making your way through the venue. Located inside Gem Center is its signature restaurant *The Log* (Gem Center, 8 Nguyen Binh Khiem, D1; www.gemcenter.com.vn). Upon entering the dining room we were greeted by Billy the manager who

took us on a guided tour. A few paces down the hallway, away from the a la carte section, was the buffet spread (buffet dinner VND1,050,000/person, 6pm-10:30pm), which we immediately knew was going to be no ordinary buffet experience.

At the seafood bar were rows of individually arranged oysters, fresh blue swimmer crabs, prawns and a variety of seafood cocktails. The entire bar was illuminated with lights reflecting off the ice, giving the impression of a jewelry display case. A few paces away were the soup

and stir fried stations housing a variety of vegetables along with protein ingredients for the soups. They were arranged so diners can select and place their main ingredients and noodles inside a soup bowl then passed to the chef to be finished off with the broth.

The scent of fennel wafting from the Italian sausages temporarily diverted my attention to the charcuterie section, with its giant wheels of cheeses and five types of sausages. Another turn took us face-to-face with bamboo steamer baskets containing 12 types of Shanghai style dumplings. Other Asian fusion inspired items such as sautéed kungpao emu, barbecued ribs, beef stewed with truffles, pork ribs, roast beef and a number of other hot items lay there to satisfy the carnivores. To complete a surf and turf combination was a selection of lobsters and giant river prawns, all ready to be laid on the grill.

Our brief tour ended at the dessert station where a chocolate fountain towered over an assembly of miniature cakes and a selection of seasonal fruit. I thought to myself that making it as far as the dessert bar would be an achievement itself given the number of items starting from the seafood bar.

After the Food Tour

I decided to restrict my selection to the



oysters and sashimi to allow room for the other remaining courses. Only two large plump sized oysters and a few slices of sashimi managed to fit onto the plate, which turned out to be the right amount given the sashimi's rich and creamy texture, and the oysters were accented by the ginger vinaigrette. Wasabi lovers can rejoice at the mound of freshly grated wasabi sitting next to thinly sliced tuna, salmon and kingfish that tasted of the sea.

For my soup, I selected the pork balls, roast pork slices and the fish wrapped in betel leaves and bacon. There are a variety of noodles to choose from but I opted to enjoy a noodle free soup with the spicy broth. The fish in betel leaves and bacon was given its second bathing in hot oil to add another layer of texture to the dish. The spicy broth had a milder and smokier note than I had expected. The consistency was thicker, reminding me of a Japanese or Korean soup stock, rich in pork bones that had been simmering all day long.

My dining companion decided to skip the seafood grill, but the lobsters that caught my eye during the tour were too tempting to pass up. Smaller in size, I was concerned that the char broiled lobster would dry out easily on the grill, however, such concerns withered away after the first bite of the succulent flesh,

brushed with a mild garlic butter.

The theme for the dessert bar is best described as playful. I headed straight for the chocolate fountain. Barely giving the chocolate any time to temper, I gobbled down two strawberries as we eyed the 10 different mini cakes behind the glass counter. We split the 10 between us to sample and if I had to nominate a favorite, I would opt for the chocolate mousse topped with red currents that added acidity and balance to the overall desserts.

Adding to the pleasant ambiance throughout the evening was a live band performing popular ballads. The volume and music was coordinated perfectly and didn't become a distraction. Dining at The Log was a special experience, from the moment we walked through the front door until the final bite. It is a luxurious experience with personalized buffet options, attentive service and an intelligent use of lighting to accentuate the mood and the feeling of intimacy in a large space. ■



Chemical Reactions

Culinary science experiments in the kitchen

TEXT BY ROBERT OI IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

FUSION IS THE core of **Red Door's** (400/8 Le Van Sy, D3; Facebook: *reddoorrestaurant*) culture - and its success. The fusion of tastes between Vietnamese and European influences, the architectural fusion of chic minimalist design with traditional Hue style. The fusion of chemistry and cuisine, which has made Ngo Duc Hun an artist as much as a head chef and restaurateur. The fusion of contrasting flavors - sweet and sour; and the endless quest for fusion of contradictory textures in a single dish.

Red Door is full of surprises from beginning to end. The first is discovering the urban oasis of Hun's parents' former home in an uncommonly wide suburban alley in the heart of District 3, accessed through a tunnel, the only hint that this was once a gated community in an era long past.

Hun's parents hail from Hue and the

distinctive red wooden door from the *hem* is original, creating both a grand, imposing entrance as much as a recognizable local landmark. Step inside and you find yourself in a stoned garden with a giant tree and pond around which the two-story home, now entirely a restaurant, is built, affording an open indoor-outdoor feel. There are private function rooms, open decks and the main dining room on the ground floor. With lots of polished concrete and bleached timber, the design is minimalist and modern, yet warm and friendly, and surprisingly removed from the noise and bustle of the city.

Red Door took Hun and his business partner, professional marketer Do Thi Diem Trang, a year to create from conception to opening. After three months, Red Door has found its feet and the team is ready to make its name.

APPETIZERS:

GOI SEN (LOTUS SALAD) VND145,000

Hun uses all parts of the lotus plant, pickled lotus stem and lotus root, mixed with lotus seed dressing then topped with flower petals, with sesame seeds nestled on crispy wonton flakes on top. Traditionally, this is cooked with fish sauce; Hun uses mayo and the most delicious meaty, fresh prawns we have tasted in an age. It was a fresh, finely balanced dish, sweet and slightly salty at once.

CUON CHUOI (BANANA ROLL) VND95,000

This dish comprises of banana and shredded coconut meat mixed into a paste and rolled in rice paper, and served with pork tenderloin, which is crunchy on the surface - yin and yang on a single plate. The two components perfectly complement each other and - as advised by Hun - we ate the morsels together for maximum sensory impact.

CHA OC NUONG (SNAILS) VND155,000

Snails are usually way outside my comfort zone, but the description was compelling: Grilled *escargot* paste - snail meat ground into a paste then mixed with more snail julienned for a dynamic blend of texture - molded into bamboo skewered squares and grilled. The result is like a cubic satay, the snail meat moorish and fleshy, a nutty texture and again a delicious flavor. Smoky and meaty, it was a little like lamb. Served with pickled vegetables in authentic Vietnamese style.

DAU HU SAY (DRUNKEN TOFU) VND95,000

This dish is influenced by drunken chicken of Chinese cuisine. Hun spent ages experimenting with soaking the tofu in rice wine for varying lengths of time before he felt the balance of flavor was just right and to ensure the right texture when cooked. The result is silky smooth tofu fried with a slim coating of batter and dressed with tiny morsels of dragon fruit, mint, peppers, fruits and minced pork. I've always considered tofu a food you eat when you don't want to taste anything - in other words never. But Hun's enthusiasm for his creation was compelling and I was glad of the adventure. The contrasting texture of silky and crunch combined with that distinctive sake infusion and a hint of spice was alluring.

BANH DUC (DUC CAKE) VND115,000

Banh duc has featured on Vietnamese family dinner tables for generations. But "jazzed up" as Hun puts it, this version has pumpkin and a hint of cinnamon. Served in pairs, one cake is steamed, the other deep fried very quickly, maintaining its soft texture inside and not the least bit oily. Glutinous, yet not dry or chewy. It seems familiar, yet distinctively different.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *Goi Sen* (Lotus Salad); *Cuon Chuoi* (Banana Roll); *Cha Oc Nuong* (Snails) and *Bo Kho* (Beef Stew)

“People have undervalued Vietnamese food,” explains Hun. “We wanted to create a nice, airy, warm ambiance serving experiential Vietnamese food.” An American-born *Viet Kieu*, Hun studied at Harvard University and is a qualified biochemist. That’s where the fusion of food and science comes into play. But don’t be deterred by the almost scientific zeal he has for his cuisine: it explains why some dishes on this extraordinary and unique menu were deconstructed and reconstructed - some for months on end - before the recipes were finalized. “Food is an experiment.”

The Vietnamese names on Red Door’s menu may seem familiar, but the descriptions quickly expose the truth. Have you ever considered *pho* separated from its broth, for example? Reinterpretation indeed. Or how about *mi hai san* (seafood noodle) but made from an udon noodle more than 1.8 meters long and colored with squid ink - Japanese, Italian and Vietnamese influences in a single bowl. Hun tosses it with garlic to enhance the flavor, then mixes it with shrimp cooked two ways and two different sauces.

Another example is his rolls. “Each region of Vietnam has 10 to 20 wraps. Here, we thought ‘OK, let’s come up with three different versions’ and we chose one each

to depict north, central and south Vietnam.” For the north, he chose fish with galangal, for central, morning glory and yam with sliced pork belly, interpreting a Royal Hue style dish “in our own way.” For the south: steamed shrimp, pork belly and noodles.

There is much more to the mixing and matching than the menu reveals. Hun’s chemistry genius makes for much experimentation and it’s not that he wants to keep his recipes secret, more that he relishes challenging customers to guess the ingredients. Few can. Another hallmark of the restaurant is a commitment to ensuring everything on the plate is edible: there are no garnishes on the dishes for decorative purposes.

Red Door’s menu will change each month - several dishes substituted to ensure return guests always have something new to try.

With a menu as adventurous as Red Door’s, we needed advice. Even to the fussiest of eaters, the range of food here is overwhelming. Every dish seems to cry out ‘pick me!’ So we tried an array of dishes, more than an average dining couple will likely order, but it allowed Hun to showcase his favorite creations.



Panna Cotta

MAINS

BO KHO (BEEF STEW) VND205,000

Beef stew is really a misnomer, as this dish is more like a beef fillet with a rich flavorsome sauce. Described as one of Vietnam’s first French fusion dishes, a local take on a beef bourguignon with Vietnamese spices. And apple. Yes, apple: don’t be shocked, it works. The apple is slightly sour and acts as a palate cleanser - and a curved slice of crispy baked French bread and a whole marinated cinnamon-coated crunchy baby carrot. A little acidic and sour, it balances the sweet belly fat flavor.

THIT KHO TAU (CAMELIZED PORK) VND175,000

A Tet favorite all over Vietnam, *thit kho tau* is pork belly slow cooked in coconut juice, sliced and pan-fried. But they sure don’t serve it this way - with purple yam rice and *trai coc* green apple jelly. In one bite “it seems familiar, but different,” my Vietnamese companion marveled when trying the dish she would spend a whole weekend savoring just a week later at New Year. The beef was tender, the serving generous, and the sauce so moorish, you wanted the bread to soak it up to ensure none of it went to waste.

DESSERT

PANNA COTTA MIT (PANNA COTTA WITH JACKFRUIT) VND85,000

Vietnam meets Italy. And the result was a divine end to a sumptuous feast. With a creamy, super soft mouth feel, the jackfruit adds a piquant edge Italians would never embrace, all offset by a raspberry coulis.

Red Door is a superb dining experience, a place where the chef’s experimentation becomes a foodie’s adventure. The menu may seem familiar at first glance for those who regularly enjoy Vietnamese food, but the execution is truly unique, mouthwatering and will appeal to intrigued locals and expats looking for something completely different from the norm. A textural, gastronomic journey of unrivaled fusion. ■



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The Wine Baron

Chateau Mouton Rothschild has few peers in the length and luster of its history



THERE ARE ONLY five “first grows” (considered wines of exceptional quality) in Bordeaux, and one of them, perhaps the more charismatic winery, is Baron Philippe de Rothschild, in Pauillac (Medoc).

I will never forget the first time I tried Chateau Mouton Rothschild over a decade ago in London. Once it was poured I smelled it, and then I smelled it again, and I kept doing so for the first 15 minutes. What a wonderful experience, only to be matched when I tasted it! Something similar happened recently when I attended the Baron Philippe de Rothschild dinner organized by the Wine Warehouse at the Caravelle hotel; however this time we enjoyed seven wines from this fantastic producer, complemented by great food and service from the hotel.

The Bordeaux quality classification was created in 1855 and since then, only one

major addition was made to this exclusive list in 1973, and that includes the five first grows. You have an idea of what it means to be one of the top five. After a wine auction at Christie’s in 2006, where a case of Mouton Rothschild was sold for almost USD300,000, it is now considered the most expensive wine in the world.

But don’t despair; you can get your hands on their wines at affordable prices. A good example is Chateau d’Armailhac 2008, a deep red wine with an amazing nose of dark cherries and delicate aromas of coffee; an elegant palate that develops red fruits, silky while full bodied. Petit Mouton 2007 is another gorgeous wine crafted by Baron Philippe de Rothschild: dark red in color with some violet highlights, the nose is full of berries and red fruits, with an elegant silky palate, rich and full bodied. These were just two of the great wines presented at the dinner, and as you can imagine, each of them



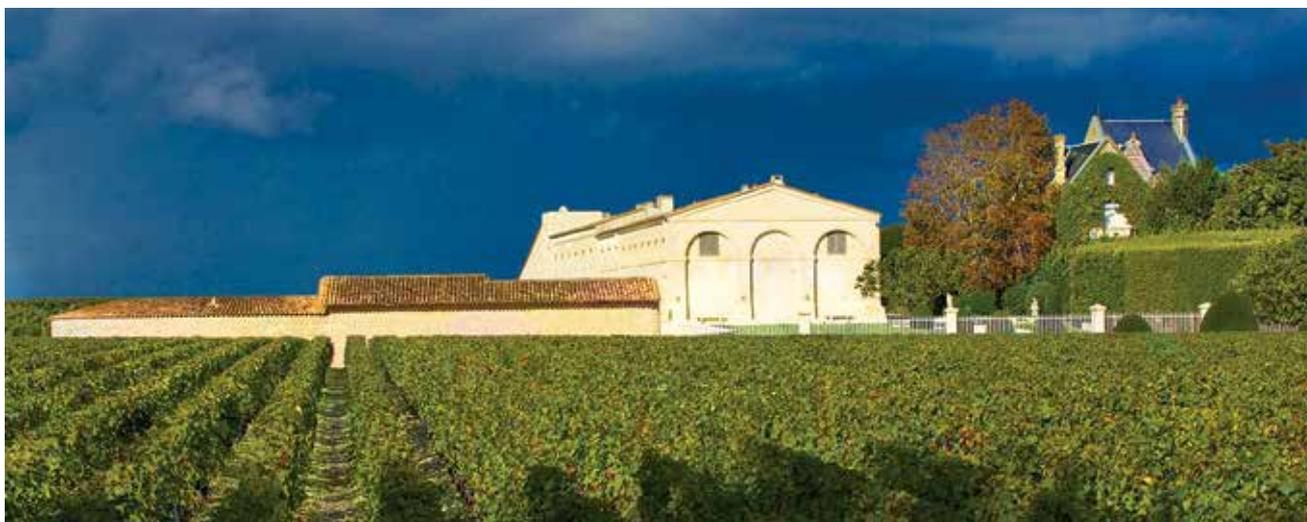
Alfredo de la Casa has been organizing wine tastings for over 20 years, published three wine books, including the Gourmand award winner for best wine education book. You can reach him at www.wineinvietnam.com.

were spectacular and unique.

Baron Philippe de Rothschild also produces several iconic wines outside of France like Opus One (California) and Almaviva (Chile), both awarded 95 points by Robert Parker.

So what makes a winery able to create such wonderful wines? This was my first question to Erwan Le Brozec, from Baron Philippe de Rothschild, who considers not only the particularities of terroir (soil) important, but also the attitude and skills of the wine maker, without forgetting the winery’s willingness to produce quality rather than quantity, making something exceptional as Baron Philippe de Rothschild has been doing year after year. For example, Mouton Rothschild has gone from yielding over 300,000 bottles a year to just 170,000 in the last few years because of improvements in quality, grape selection and aging of the vines. The result is a lesser amount of wine, but greater quality.

Baron Philippe de Rothschild is also internationally known for being a pioneer - and in fact, back in the 1930s he created the first wine brand with Mouton Cadet. Today it is one of the leading wine brands with annual global sales of over 5 million bottles in 160 countries. The same innovative skills have been carried forward by his descendants and applied to quality wine making, which now we can all enjoy in Vietnam. ■



>>The List

Wine & Dine

BARS



Cavern Pub

Stylish venue in one of the classier inner-city locales, Cavern entertains locals and expats alike with a live band every night, sports channels on a large TV screen, and a great atmosphere. Happy hour is from 6pm to 9:30pm (buy 2 beers – get 1 free). Live music is from 9.30pm-1am.
19 Dong Du, D1
090 826 5691



The Fan Club

The largest sports bar in Saigon, with all the live sports available on 12 large HD screens, an exciting place to watch your team win! A great selection of food & beverage. We also have a enclosed relaxing garden for the family.

The Vista, 628C Hanoi Highway, An Phu, D2
www.dtdentertainment.com
Facebook: The Fan Club



Chu Bar

At this laid back venue, tourists and locals alike can sit around Chu's large oval bar or on luxurious padded benched. It has a full cocktail menu as well as a short menu of snacks and sandwiches.
158 Dong Khoi, D1



Ice Blue Bar

A small, atmospheric, emphatically English-style pub, Ice Blue is a popular meeting place for Ho Chi Minh City's expats with reasonably priced drinks, friendly staff and a cozy atmosphere. Great place to play darts.
54 Dong Khoi, D1



Blanchy's Tash

Undoubtedly the hippest, coolest nightspot in downtown Ho Chi Minh, renowned for its cool house music, live DJs at weekends and innovative range of cocktails. Downstairs is a trendy bar where the glitterazzi like to be seen; rooftop an open bar with more chilled style music. In between a new Vietnamese dining concept.

95 Hai Ba Trung, D1
090 902 82 93
www.blanchystash.com



Last Call

Saigon's king of cool, Last Call is renowned for the finest cocktails in the mellowest of settings. Slink your way back to the Seventies in the velvety interior or watch over the passing crowds from the laid-back terrace. Funky (and even sexy) to the core, this classy establishment is fittingly close to the Sheraton.

59 Dong Du, D1
3823 3122

Also Try...

Chill Skybar

Offers the most stunning panoramic views of Saigon and a wide range of wines and cocktails personally prepared by Vietnam mixologist Le Thanh Tung.

Rooftop, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai, D1
3827 2372
www.chillsaigon.com

Game On

Opened in July 2013, Game On is one of Saigon's biggest sports bar, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. The bar also has an extensive drinks menu including coffees, juices, beers, wines, vodkas, and more. Game On also boasts a function room for corporate meetings or private parties.

115 Ho Tung Mau, D1
6251 9898
gameonsaigon@gmail.com

Monkey Bar

A new open air, but well cooled bar in the heart of Bui Vien on the site of the once popular Stellar cafe. A cut above the regular backpacker haunts in style and offer. Downstairs is a modern bar

with flat screen TVs showing sports, a huge circular bar and tables, and outdoor seating for people watching. Upstairs are air conditioned rooms, pool table and outdoor deck. Serves a wide variety of liquors, including wines by the glass or bottle.
119 Bui Vien, D1

The Observatory

In just a year, this funky, cosy bar and gallery set in a French villa has become the centre of the city's underground dance music culture. Downstairs is a cosy bar serving cocktails, beer and wines, upstairs a gallery space and a separate dance venue with regular guest appearances from DJs from Asia and beyond. Open daily from 6pm til late (5am close Saturday and Sunday mornings).

5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4
www.theobservatory-hcmc.com

onTop Bar

Located on the 20th floor of Novotel Saigon Center, onTop Bar provides

views over Saigon from an expansive outdoor terrace. The venue offers a menu with over 20 cheeses, cured meats and both Vietnamese and international-inspired tapas.

167 Hai Ba Trung, D3
3822 4866

Purple Jade

Lively and cosmopolitan, Purple Jade is a must on any nightlife agenda. The lounge offers an innovative menu of tasty snacks and signature cocktails in a sleek and chic aesthetic to complement the chilled-out vibe.

1st floor – InterContinental Asiana Saigon
3520 9099
6pm until late
dine@icasianasaigon.com

Red Bar

RED offers one of the longest Happy Hours in Saigon, from 9am - 9pm, with live music available from Monday-Saturday. This multi-level bar has a non-smoking floor and

a function room along with a top quality pool table and soft-tip dart machines. A menu of Eastern and Western dishes includes wood-fired pizzas.

70-72 Ng Duc Ke, D1
2229 7017

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.

Rooftop, 9th floor,
19-23 Lam Son Square, D1
3823 4999
11am till late
caravellehotel.com

CAFÉS



Hatvala

This teahouse, coffee shop and restaurant offers selected, quality Vietnamese tea and coffee to drink or buy as leaves and beans. They also have a delightful all-day casual dining area in a stylish bistro.

44 Nguyen Hue, D1
3824 1534
8am - 11pm
hatvalavietnam@gmail.com
www.hatvala.com
[facebook.com/hatvala](https://www.facebook.com/hatvala)



Guanabana Smoothies

This Californian smoothie bar specializes in healthy all-natural smoothies using fresh fruits and vegetables from locally-sourced farms, with no condensed milk or artificial sweeteners added. Their smoothies can be enhanced with nutritional supplements such as green superfood, whey protein, and spirulina. Best sellers include their Special Blends and veggie smoothies. Fresh roasted coffee, hot panini's and pastries are also available, along with speedy Wi-Fi.

23 Ly Tu Trong, Q1
0909 824 830
www.guanabanasmoothies.com



Cafe RuNam

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

96 Mac Thi Bui, D1
3825 8883
www.caferrunam.com



The Library

The Library recaptures the romance of a bygone era while offering an all-day snack menu as well as the finest tea, coffee, wine and spirits in an elegant setting.

Ground floor - InterContinental Asiana Saigon
7am - 12am
3520 9099
dine@icasianasaiagon.com

Also Try...

AQ Coffee

Pleasing colonial-style café permanently filled with the aroma of fresh coffee roasted with traditional methods, with a shady courtyard and quiet, peaceful atmosphere. Situated in one of the city's oldest mansions.

32 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3
3829 8344

Caffe Bene

A brand new cafe in the heart of District 1, marking the debut of a Korean coffee and dessert concept in Vietnam. When it opened queues stretched out the door with locals and expats alike eager to try the unique offer of European style coffee, blended drinks and sweet, creamy dessert and cakes. Modern, industrial designed interior spanning two floors, and with a corner site street frontage which cannot be missed!

58 Dong Khoi, D1
3822 4012
caffebenevietnam.com

Ciao Café

There's rarely a tourist who's been through inner-city Saigon and hasn't stopped in on the super-friendly-looking Ciao Café. It stands up well as an expat mainstay too, with its fashionable décor that varies from floor to floor and its

classic selection of Western cafe and bistro favorites.

74-76 Nguyen Hue, D1
3823 1130

L'Usine

L'Usine is a retail, café and gallery space occupying two locations in the center of D1. Its retail space is dedicated to Vietnamese designers and more established brands from abroad as well as stocking a wide range of stationery and homeware items. The café in both locations serves international fare and a range of pastries and the ever-popular sweet & sour cupcakes.

151/1 Dong Khoi, D1
70B Le Loi, D1
www.lusinespace.tumblr.com
9am - 9pm

LightBox Cafe

This stunningly designed cafe also doubles as an event and photography studio, so make sure you dress to impress at this location because you never know who might snap your picture. They also serve vegetarian cuisine with prices ranging between VND300,000 - VND500,000

179 Hoa Lan, Phu Nhuan
3517 6668
www.lightbox.vn

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Vecchio Cafe

A self-styled Little Italy that does a good job of looking the part, this venue's interior features ornate Italian décor, dim lighting, and antique furniture enhanced by Italian music. Offerings include fine meals, delicious gelato and beverages.

39/3 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3
6683 8618

The Workshop

A great find, this New York loft-style venue is hidden away up a couple of flights of stairs and well worth seeking out. Spacious and airy with lots of natural light, the central coffee bar offers an exquisite gourmet selection. Superb for setting up your laptop and getting some work done over great coffee.

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1
3824 6801 / 3824 6802
7am-8pm

CHINESE



Dragon Court

The well-heeled Chinese certainly go for luxury and this venue has it in spades. Situated in a classy location just opposite the Opera House, Dragon Court features a broad selection of dishes from across the spectrum of mainland cuisines, making this an ideal a-la-carte venue as well as the perfect spot for Dim Sum.

11-13 Lam Son Square, D1
3827 2566



Dynasty

New World's own slice of Canton with a particularly fine Dim Sum selection, Dynasty is a traditional lavishly-styled Chinese venue with flawless design. Authenticity and a sense of old-world China make this one of Saigon's more refined options for the cuisine. A number of private rooms are available.

New World Hotel
76 Le Lai, D1
3822 8888
www.saigon.newworldhotels.com



Kabin

Dine Cantonese-style by the river at the Renaissance Riverside's own Chinese venue decked out with flourishes reminiscent of classical Qing period tastes. Kabin's cuisine is known for presenting new takes on traditional dishes as well as for its more exotic fare.

Renaissance Riverside Hotel,
8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1
3822 0033



Li Bai

Thoroughly traditional Chinese venue at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers offering choice oriental delicacies against a backdrop of fine Chinese art. This opulent venue, open throughout the day, is one of the city's more beautiful restaurants in this category.

Level 2, 88 Dong Khoi, D1
3827 2828
www.libaisaigon.com



Ming Court

The best in Chinese cuisine with a unique Taiwanese focus in a Japanese hotel, Ming Court is classy in its precision and graceful without compromise. It's certainly one of the city's most impressive venues for fans of the cuisine, and nothing is left to chance with the venue's signature exemplary service standards.

3rd floor, Nikko Saigon Hotel
235 Nguyen Van Cu, D1
3925 7777



Ming Dynasty

Ming Dynasty serves authentic Chinese food in a setting reminiscent of an old Chinese palace. Specialties include dim sum, abalone and dishes from Guangdong.

23 Nguyen Khac Vien, D7



Also Try...

Hung Ky Mi Gia

An old mainstay on the Chinese cuisine trail with well over a decade in operation, Hung Ky Mi Gia is known for its classic mainland dishes with a focus on delicious roasts. Safe and tasty Chinese food.

20 Le Anh Xuan, D1
3822 2673

Ocean Palace

A place for those who love Chinese food. The large dining room on the ground floor can accommodate up to 280 diners. Up on the first floor are six private rooms and a big ballroom

that can host 350 guests.
2 Le Duan Street, D1
3911 8822

Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

The brainchild of an overseas Chinese/Vietnamese architect who wanted to build something extraordinary in his home town, this venue combines the architectural features of seven world heritage structures blended into one. The cuisine is just as eclectic with representative dishes from several major Chinese traditions.

12 Duong 26, D6
3755 1577
www.7kyquan.com

Shang Palace

Renowned as one of the finest restaurants in the city, Shang Palace boasts mouth-watering Cantonese and Hong Kong cuisine served in a warm and elegant atmosphere. Whether it be an intimate dinner for two or a larger group event, Shang Palace can cater for three-hundred guests including private VIP rooms. With more than fifty Dim-Sum items and over two-hundred delectable

dishes to choose from, Shang Palace is an ideal rendezvous for any dining occasion.

1st Floor, Norfolk Mansion
17-19-21, Ly Tu Trong, D1
3823 2221

Yu Chu

Yu Chu is renowned for the quality and presentation of its authentic Cantonese and Peking cuisines along with its elegant décor. Watching the chefs prepare signature dishes such as hand-pulled noodle, Dim Sum and Peking Duck right in the kitchen is a prominent, popular feature.

First floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon (Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan)
3520 9099
www.intercontinental.com/saigon

SPANISH



Tapas Saigon

Tasty tapas at Vietnamese prices not far from the center of District 1. Fresh ingredients, broad menu with food prepared by a Spanish chef. Best washed down with authentic house sangria.
53/26B Tran Khanh Du, D1
090 930 0803



La Habana

Cuban venue with fine Spanish cuisine, Cuban cigars and German beer. A wide range of tapas and cocktails. Great bar atmosphere and late night entertainment.
6 Cao Ba Quat, D1
www.lahabana-saigon.com



Olé

With all the warmth you'd expect from a decent venue in this category, Olé serves authentic and tasty Spanish favorites with great tapas and highly-recommended paella. Family-run venue with a passion for great food and good service without undue fuss. Feel at home.
129B Le Thanh Ton, D1
012 6529 1711



VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill

VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill only uses the freshest ingredients, many imported from Spain, for the most authentic tapas experience in Saigon, starting from under VND50,000/plate. Cool décor, indoors and outdoors eating areas, a well stocked bar, and great wines from VND60,000/glass (sangria just VND130,000 per HALF liter). Delivery available.

90 Cao Trieu Phat, Phu My Hung, D7, HCMC
08 5410 6721

Facebook: "VIVATapasBar.PMH"



Pacharan

Ho Chi Minh City's original Spanish restaurant, Pacharan occupies a high profile corner spot on Hai Ba Trung. Spread over four floors, it offers a casual bar, two floors of dining (one which becomes a destination for live Spanish music late at night) and a rooftop terrace. Features an extensive menu of tapas, main courses, sangria and wines.

97 Hai Ba Trung Street, D1
090 399 25 39





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FRENCH



Augustin

Augustin is a romantic and charming French restaurant located just steps away from the Rex Hotel. Serves lunches and dinners and offers 10 percent discount on a la carte menu items.

10D Nguyen Thiep, D1
www.augustinrestaurant.com



La Creperie

The first authentic Breton French restaurant in the country, serving savory galettes, sweet crepes with tasty seafood and some of the best apple cider in Saigon.

17/7 Le Thanh Ton, D1
3824 7070
infogn@lacreperie.com.vn
 11am-11pm



La Fourchette

Small and cozy, La Fourchette is a favorite among the French expat community. The vintage posters and wood paneling add to the charm of this French eatery located right in downtown, a stone's throw from the Saigon River.

9 Ngo Duc Ke, D1
3829 8143
www.lafourchette.com.vn



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 or enjoy a game of pool.

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



Le Jardin

A gorgeous enclosed garden space that allows eaters to follow the example of the French colonists of a century ago and pretend they're actually in Paris. Whether dining outside under the shaded terrace or within the old, warmly-lit villa, the cuisine, decor, and general mood of the place is like a Stargate direct to France.

31D Thai Van Lung, D1
3825 8465



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1
www.tycozsaigon.com

Also Try...

L'essentiel

L'essentiel offers a quiet intimate dining experience with space for private functions and alfresco dining on an upper floor. The food is fresh, traditional French, and the wine list is carefully collated.

98 Ho Tung Mau, D1
0948 415 646

La Cuisine

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

48 Le Thanh Ton
2229 8882

La Nicoise

A traditional 'neighbourhood' French restaurant, La Nicoise serves simple, filling French fare at exceptional value in the shadow of the Bitexco tower.

Most popular for its steak dishes, the restaurant has an extensive menu which belies its compact size.

56 Ngo Duc Ke, D1
3821 3056

La Villa

Housed in a stunning white French villa that was originally built as a private house, La Villa features outdoor tables dotted around a swimming pool and a more formal dining room inside. Superb cuisine, with staff trained as they would be in France. Bookings are advised, especially on Friday and Saturday evenings.

14 Ngo Quang Huy, D2
3898 2082
www.lavilla-restaurant.com.vn

Le Bouchon de Saigon

Delightful, welcoming French bistro that really puts on a show of fine quality and service. With its small-village atmosphere and exotic cuisine, this is one of the more atmospheric and high-aiming venues of the genre.

40 Thai Van Lung, D1
www.lebouchondesaigon.com

Trois Gourmands

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

18 Tong Huu Dinh, D2
3744 4585



INDIAN



Bollywood

Known for its complete North & South Indian cuisine, Bollywood's specialty is its special chaat & tandoori dishes. Parties, events & catering services are available, with daily lunch tiffin and set menus. Free delivery in Phu My Hung. Complete menu on Facebook.
 2213 1481 | 2245 0096 | 093 806 9433
 Hotline: 0906357442 (English)
 bollywoodvietnam@gmail.com
 Facebook: bollywoodvietnamindiancuisine



Baba's Kitchen

One of Saigon's best-loved Indian venues, Baba's is dedicated to authenticity in its cuisine and fair prices. Tell them exactly what spice level you want and they'll cater to your tastes – from the mildest of butter chickens to the most volcanic vindaloo. Always friendly.
 164 Bui Vien, D1
 49D Xa Lo Hanoi, D2
 3838 6661



Ganesh

Ganesh serves authentic northern Indian tandooris and rotis along with the hottest curries, dovas and vada from the southern region.
 38 Hai Ba Trung, D1
 8223 0173
 www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com



Ashoka

A small chain of slightly more upscale Indian restaurants serving both Northern and Southern Indian cuisine including curries, naan and tandooris.
 Ashoka I
 17/10 Le Thanh Ton, D1
 08 3823 1372
 Ashoka II
 33 Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2
 08 3744 4144



Saigon Indian

Saigon's original Indian eatery is still going strong, located in a bright, roomy upstairs venue in the heart of District 1. Authentic Indian cuisine at affordable prices; functions a specialty.
 1st Floor, 73 Mac Thi Bui, D1



Also Try...

Bombay Indian Restaurant

With its nice, central location and a very relaxed dining area and home-style atmosphere, Bombay is a superbly casual venue well-reputed for its authentic Indian cuisine and Halal cooking.
 250 Bui Vien, D1,
 9am - 10.30pm

Curry Leaf

A new restaurant in District 7, specialising in southern and northern Indian cuisine, which grew from the now closed Indus of D1. Fish, meat and vegetable dishes are cooked fresh in tandoor ovens with a commitment to authenticity. Boasts 20 different breads baked daily and six home made chutneys.
 62 Hung Gia 5, D7
 curryleafvietnam.com

The Punjabi

Best known for its excellent tandoori cooking executed in a specialized, custom-built oven, Punjabi serves the best of genuine North Indian cuisine in a venue well within the backpacker enclave, ensuring forgiving menu prices.
 40/3 Bui Vien, D1
 3508 3777

ITALIAN



Ciao Bella 👉 Oi's Pick

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
3822 3329
tonyfox56@hotmail.com
www.saigonrestaurantgroup.com/ciao

Ciao Bella



La Bettola

Chef/owner Giuseppe Amorello combines sleek decor with traditional home cooking in this two-story centrally-located Italian eatery. Expect creative dishes such as rucola e Gamberi as well as La Bettola that includes shaved porchetta, focaccia and homemade mozzarella. There's a wood-burning oven on the premises and they try to hand-make all their ingredients. They also deliver.

84 Ho Tung Mau, D1
3914 4402
www.labettolasaiagon.com

La Bettola
 ITALIAN RESTAURANT



Da Vinci's

Da Vinci's is an Italian-American style pizzeria delivery offering pizzas, lasagna, spaghetti, calzones, salads and desserts. Their full menu is online at davincisvietnam.com. Free delivery to Districts 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and Phu My Hung. Open 11am - 10pm.

Call 083 943 4982 or
SMS your order to 093 328 4624



La Cucina

La Cucina has opened on Crescent Promenade in Phu My Hung, with an open-plan kitchen that can accommodate 180 diners. Enjoy top-end dining featuring the best of Italian cuisine and a wide selection of imported seafood, prepared from the freshest ingredients, in a relaxed, rustic atmosphere with a wood-fired pizza oven at its heart.

Block 07-08 CRI-07, 103 Ton Dat Tien, D7
5413 7932



La Hostaria

Designed with an intimate atmosphere invoking something like an Italian town, this venue focuses on traditional ethnic Italian cuisine (rather than the ubiquitous pizza and pasta), creations of the skillful executive chef – straight out of Venice. The place lights up on romantic Thursday evenings with candlelight and light music.

17B Le Thanh Ton, D1
3823 1080
www.lahostaria.com



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

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
3824 4286

Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1
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

Pomodoro

Often unfairly mistaken as a purely tourist dining destination, Pomodoro offers an extensive range of Italian fare, especially seafood and beef dishes. The dining area is in a distinctively curved brick 'tunnel' opening into a large room at the rear, making it ideal for couples or groups.

79 Hai Ba Trung
3823 8998



JAPANESE



Blanchy Street Our Pick

Inspired by London's world-famous Nobu Restaurant, Blanchy Street's Japanese/South American fusion cuisine represents modern dining at its best in the heart of downtown, a truly international dining experience in a trendy, modern and friendly setting. Great sake and wine selection.

74/3 Hai Ba Trung, D1
3823 8793
www.blanchystreet.com
11am - 10:30pm



Achaya Café

Achaya Cafe has two floors providing a nice atmosphere for meetings, relaxation or parties. The menu is extensive with drinks and Western, Japanese, and Vietnamese food – from sandwiches, spaghetties, pizzas, steak and special Japanese sweet desserts.

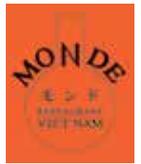
90 Le Loi, D1
093 897 2050
11am - 10:30pm



Mondo

A Japanese whisky bar and grill serving some of the best Kobe beef in the city. The menu is Japanese with a European twist. The venue is celebrity bartender Hasegawa Harumasa's first foray into Vietnam, styled after his flagship operation on Ginza's fashionable whisky bar district in the heart of Tokyo.

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



Ebisu

Serving neither sushi nor sashimi, Ebisu's menu instead focuses on a range of wholesome charcoal-grilled meals and on thick, white Japanese udon noodles – made from imported udon powder from Australia – and presenting an overall rustic cuisine with a variety of good sakes.

35bis Mac Dinh Chi, D1
3822 6971
ductm@incubation-vn.com
www.ebisu-vn.asia



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
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

Also Try...

K Cafe

One of the larger Japanese restaurants in the city, this exemplary sushi venue is an ideal choice for business and friendly gatherings.

74A4 Hai Ba Trung, D1
38245355
www.yahatabune-saigon.com

Chisana Hashi

Serves authentic Japanese cuisine including sashimi, sushi, tempura, sukiyaki and shabu shabu.

River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
6683 5308

Osaka Ramen

This sleek, open-kitchen contemporary eatery serves up Japanese noodles starting from VND78,000. There are also

set menus, individual dishes and a range of smaller, appetizing sides.

SD04, LO H29-2, My Phat Residential Complex, D7

Robata Dining An

The restaurant has a downstairs bar and a second floor with private rooms that have sunken tables, sliding fusuma doors and tabletop barbecues. Popular with the Japanese expats, the menu serves up healthy appetizers, rolls, sashimi and An specialty dishes like deep fried chicken with garlic salt sauce An style.

15C Le Thanh Ton, D1
www.robata-an.com

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
3930 0039
www.sushidingaioi.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
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.

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



Kang Nam Ga

An exceptionally refined style of Korean BBQ fit out with high-tech smokeless racks, Kang Nam Ga is fast becoming the Korean go-to venue for a wide-ranging and clean introduction to the cuisine. Delicious beef sets and the infamous and eminently popular ginseng chicken soup – all Kangnam style.

6B Le Quy Don, D3
3933 3589
kangnamga@gmail.com



Lee Cho

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

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7
5410 1086



Seoul House

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

33 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
3829 4297



Won's Cuisine

One of the city's most important Korean venues – not for reasons of authenticity, but rather for straying from the norms. The restaurant's proprietress has infused so much of her own quirky tastes into the menu she's completely ignored the conventions of the cuisine, making Won's a unique creation with an unforgettable taste.

49 Mac Thi Buoi
3820 4085



THAI



Baan Thai

Stylish modern restaurant with a superb bar, Baan Thai serves authentic Thai cuisine with additional local and European twists. Friendly venue with large screen TVs for casual entertainment.

55 Thao Dien, D2
3744 5453
www.baanthai-anphu.com

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 Linh, Hai Ba Trung, D1
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
3823 7506

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
3521 8513/ 090 688 6180

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 14 12

STEAKHOUSE



Au Lac Do Brazil

Au Lac do Brazil is the very first authentic Brazilian Churrascaria in Vietnam, bringing a new dining concept - an "All you can eat" Brazilian style BBQ where meat is brought to your table on skewers by a passador and served to your heart's content.

238 Pasteur, D3
3820 7157 | 090 947 8698
www.aulacdobrazil.com



El Gaucho

High end steakhouse with fine American and Wagyu beef steaks along with traditional Argentinian specialties. Outlets in Hanoi and Bangkok too. Expect to pay for the quality. Reservations recommended.

74/1 Hai Ba Trung, Ben Nghe Ward, D1.
5D Nguyen Sieu, D1
Unit CR1-12, The Crescent, Phu My Hung, D7
www.elgaucho.asia



Indaba

Indaba Steakhouse combines German style steak and Italian coffee under one roof. Expect fusion dishes like Indaba Spring Rolls, Mexican BBQ Spare Ribs, and Grilled Duck Breast served with sesame sauce, steamed rice and salad.

35 Ly Tu Trong, D1
3824 8280
www.facebook.com/indabacafe



New York Steakhouse

New York Steakhouse is definitely in the upmarket category and serves exclusive American imported beef dishes, with a whole range of steaks from rib eye, New York strip steak and tenderloin being popular options.

25-27 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, D1



Samba Brazilian Steakhouse

Serving the popular Brazilian buffet style, where enormous skewers of meat are circulated around the tables for diners to enjoy as much of as they can.

10C Thai Van Lung, D1
3822 0079



A haven of antique treasures and collectibles from all corners of the globe. Enjoy an opulent high tea or lunch and dessert as you catch up with friends over a pot of luxurious TWG tea.

Villa Royale

A: 8 DANG HUU PHO ST, THAO DIEN, D2
H: Tuesday to Sundays 10am – 5pm
E: villaroyaletreasures.com
T: 08 3744 4897

VIETNAMESE



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
3932 6363
comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com
comnieusaigon.com.vn



Frangipani Hoa Su

Frangipani Hoa Su offers Vietnamese cuisine with a variety of dishes from different parts of Vietnam ranging from pho, bun bo Hue to mi quang. It serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. It also has an open space and a VIP air-conditioned room together which can hold a maximum capacity of 500 people, making it an ideal venue for different types of events and functions.

26 Le Van Mien, D2
frangipani.restobar@gmail.com



Quan Na - Vegishouse

A Vietnamese vegetarian and vegan restaurant that uses the freshest ingredients to create dishes such as fresh spring rolls, sticky rice, curry specialties and coconut-based desserts. Decor is swathed in dark mahogany wood and red curtains.

796/7 Truong Sa, Ward 14, D3
Opening time: 10:30am-2pm; 5pm-9pm
9526 2958
Facebook: quanna.vegishouse



Quan Bui

Leafy green roof garden, upmarket restaurant with reasonable prices and a wide menu of choices. Open style kitchen advertises its cleanliness. Designer interior with spotlighted artwork and beautiful cushions give an oriental luxurious feeling – augmented by dishes served on earthenware crockery.

17a Ngo Van Nam, D1
3829 1515



Hoa Tuc

Relaxing, airy indoor-outdoor venue serving gourmet-style local food. The ideal place to take visitors from abroad if you want to impress them with an authentic Vietnamese dining experience. Set in the refinery courtyard that formerly officially produced the region's opium.

74/7 Hai Ba Trung, D1
3825 1676



Papaya

Brightly-styled and perfectly lovely, this is a minimalist local venue with international appeal that features a menu designed by the former head chef of Hanoi's Sofitel Metropole. Refined and distinguished without a hint of being stuck-up about it and very affordable.

68 Pham Viet Chanh, Binh Thanh
6258 1508
papaya@chi-nghia.com
www.chi-nghia.com

Also Try...

3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1
3821 1631

Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Cuc Gach Quan

Deservedly one of the highest ranking Vietnamese restaurants in Saigon on

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

10 Dang Tat, D1
3848 0144

Highway 4

The menu reflects the ambiance of the north and wider Vietnam, although dishes are carefully selected to meet a more universal palate.

101 Vo Van Tan, D3
www.highway4.com

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
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.

3/5 Hoang Sa
3910 1277

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
3829 9244
templeclub.com.vn

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
3827 7131
www.quananngon.com.vn
8am - 10pm

Thanh Nien

A favorite with tourists and locals for many years, Thanh Nien behind the Diamond Plaza is a buffet in a home setting, with a-la-carte dining available in the leafy garden outdoors. Relaxing, beautiful place to eat.

11 Nguyen Van Chiem, D1
3822 5909
www.vnnavi.com/restaurants/thanhvien

Propaganda Bistro

Spring rolls and Vietnamese street food with a Western twist. Serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. The restaurant features hand-painted wall murals in an authentic propaganda style.

21 Han Thuyen, D1
3822 9048
www.facebook.com/Propaganda-Saigon

INTERNATIONAL



Au Parc

One of the city's more charming international bistros in a perfect tree-lined inner-city location. Au Parc serves Mediterranean cuisine with local flourishes in a venue lightly set off by plush seating and heady exotic styling. A beautiful dining area and extraordinary menu will see this becoming one of the mainstays in your restaurant cycle.

23 Han Thuyen, D1
3829 2772



Boathouse

With a great view of the Saigon River, this restobar serves imported steak, healthy salads and much more in an alfresco environment.

40 Lily Road, An Phu Superior Compound, D2
3744 6790
www.boathouse.com.vn



Portofino

Portofino serves cicchetti - a tradition from Venice best likened to Spanish tapas, but usually served in larger portions, featuring cheeses, salad, pasta, prawns, pork, beef, salmon and seafood. Highlights for innovation: Trippa alla Romana - tripe with chickpeas, marinara sauce and fried egg; Slow braised pork belly served on mascarpone polenta; and Mozzarella in Carozza - breaded fresh mozzarella, anchovy and basil toasted with pomodoro sauce.

15 Dong Du, D1



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
382 48358



TnT BBQ

TnT BBQ delivers authentic American BBQ right to your doorstep. This delivery only BBQ joint specializes in smoked ribs, chicken, beef brisket, pulled pork and turkey breast.

0166 666 7858
11am - 10pm
[facebook.com/tnbbqvietnam](https://www.facebook.com/tnbbqvietnam)



Zombie BBQ

Zombie BBQ is a modern American BBQ restaurant featuring smoked ribs over Beachwood smoke for 8 hours. Offerings include BBQ chicken specialties from around the world as well as Alligator, Fresh Jalapeño poppers, Mexican street tacos with grilled meats as well as Vegetarian food. A never ending parade of meats find their way into the spit roaster as well as new creations every week.

4 Thao Dien, D2
6685 3756 / 09 1851 0139
4pm - 11pm
Facebook: [ZombieBarbequesaigon](https://www.facebook.com/ZombieBarbequesaigon)



Deutsches Eck / German Corner

The restaurant is fast becoming known for its sausage, beers, and their Schweins Haxe or pork knuckles (served with white cabbage and mashed potatoes). A number of German beers to select from including Konig Pilsener, Bitburger, Koertritzer Black Beer, Benediktiner Weisse, HB-Hofbrau Weisse, Schwarzbrau Exquisite, and Schwarzbrau Weisse.

A001 Nguyen Van Linh St., Phu My Hung, D7
54106695



Also Try...

Boomarang Bistro

Located in The Crescent by the lake, the spacious Boomarang Bistro Saigon serves Australian and other Western food in the most pedestrian friendly, relaxed part of town.

107 Ton Dat Tien, D7
3841 3883
www.boomarang.com.vn

Chit Chat

Daily menu change for their breakfast and dinner buffets, served in a relaxing atmosphere with eight live cooking stations with over 60 varieties of domestic and international dishes. A meeting place to enjoy a cup of coffee from selected premium blends and delicious homemade pastries and cakes.

Hotel Equatorial
242 Tran Binh Trong, D5
3839 7777
info@hcm.equatorial.com
www.equatorial.com

Corso Steakhouse & Bar

With an extensive wine menu, contemporary Asian cuisine and wide range of juicy, sizzling steaks cooked to your liking by our professional Chefs, Corso Steakhouse & Bar is the perfect choice for a special celebration or formal business dinner.

117 Le Thanh Ton, D1
3829 5368 ext 6614
www.norfolkhotel.com.vn

Hog's Breath

An Australian family diner and bar concept. Renowned for steaks, seafood and other Western fare served in an informal environment. Smoke-free indoors.

Ground Floor, Bitexco Financial Tower
2 Hai Trieu, D1
www.hogsbreathcafe.com.vn

Khoi Thom

Khoi Thom has evolved into an authentic Mexican-style cantina serving home-style dishes, many from the Mexican chef's family. With bright colors, a large breezy outdoor deck with an open bar and a long street frontage, Khoi Thom has earned respect for its adventurous hues and style since opening.

29 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3
www.rhoithom.com

La Fenetre Soleil

Literally 'window to the sun', LFS showcases a fusion of old-world fittings (exposed bricks, antique furniture and chandeliers) with new-world elements (fur cushions, mosaic tiles and glass tables). Serves a range of cocktails, imported beer, coffee and smoothies together with a Japanese-Vietnamese fusion menu.

4 Ly Tu Trong, D1

Market 39

Market 39 unites the best of East and West in a buffet and a la carte dining experience, along with one of the best Sunday brunch buffets in town.

6am - 10pm
Ground floor - InterContinental Asiana Saigon
3520 9099
dine@icasianasaignon.com

Refinery

A charming venue with a chequered history, the Refinery brings the best of European cuisine to the opium headquarters of the old colonial empire. Loving restoration work has brought out much of the building's architectural charm, and with a menu that delivers the finest in French dining as well as culinary flourishes from around the continent, you'll never be short of options. Stands up to multiple repeat visits.

74 Hai Ba Trung, D1
3825 7667
www.therefinerysaigon.com

Scott & Bin's

All-heart Western cuisine and family friendly venue in the D7 neighborhood. Scrupulous attention to good service and a commitment to great food that makes customers happy.

15-17 Cao Trieu Phat, D7

Travel & Leisure





The Long Fortress

The only way to really appreciate the Great Wall of China is to stand on its walls and stare in awe

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

MUCH IS WRITTEN about the Great Wall of China that simply isn't true. It doesn't stretch across the whole country in a straight line from left to right; it can't be seen from the moon; it's not 10,000 miles long; and it isn't, for the most part, neatly castellated – except in the most frequently-visited tourist sections. One of the most enduring icons of China's past, it is in fact a complex piece of heritage that in its grandeur and sheer paranoia represents the best and the worst of the Chinese world-view. Largely a Ming Dynasty project to connect a range of existing walls built to defend scattered border towns from marauding tribes to the north, the number of lives wasted in its centuries-long construction is one of history's longest-lasting atrocities – and it could be said that the Great Wall was, in the end, a complete failure: the forces that eventually displaced the Ming simply talked their way through one of its gates.

Most visitors to the Wall get only a postcard-like overview of the structure from the summit at Badaling, the closest section to Beijing where tourists are rewarded, quite frankly, with what they expect to see. Standing at the highest point in the morning sunlight, a traveler can see the Wall snaking away across the mountains, punctuated by symmetrical watchtowers in stunning regularity; majestic, beautiful, and a little too perfect. Follow the wall with your eyes until it vanishes over a distant peak, and you may wonder just how far it goes, and what else there is of the Wall to see beyond this one prettified stretch with its chairlifts and refreshments stands. Answering that question not only provides you with a fascinating China travel itinerary – it will teach you more about modern and ancient China than you might expect.

Where Eagles Climb

The Jiankou section is genuinely untouched and unrestored. This is hiking Wall, where you'll be clambering over fallen bricks and inching your way up near-vertical mountain faces. One of the highest lookout towers is known as the *Ying Fei Dao Yang* – which means that even an eagle flying to the tower has to fly straight up to reach it. Most of the rises have no handrail or any other protection – and as the slope is dangerously steep, you'll need to take the utmost care in climbing. From the highest point at the Zhengbei

Standing at the highest point in the morning sunlight, a traveler can see the Wall snaking away across the mountains, punctuated by symmetrical watchtowers in stunning regularity; majestic, beautiful, and a little too perfect.

Tower, you'll be ideally placed to spot any armies marching on Beijing.

The Jiankou Great Wall was built in 1368, and the white cliff rock used in its construction makes this section stand out rather strikingly against the heavily forested hillsides, making it one of the most photogenic stretches. You can camp out the night in one of the towers, if you like – it'll take a couple of days to cover, so this actually isn't a bad option in warmer weather.

The best thing about this section of the Wall is that it's free – there's no cover charge at all – meaning you'll be able to enjoy being witness to genuine history without feeling like a tourist.

All Rubble and Clay

Zhangjiakou's a smoky little town where the taste of burning coal infiltrates every breath of air and every bowl of rice, but it has a bare, spacious atmosphere that will leave you with a warmhearted (albeit gritty) vision of a China quite distinct from what you'll find in other more well-trodden tourist towns. Climb

up one of the many hills surrounding the city to really appreciate the remoteness, simplicity and dignified decay that typifies Zhangjiakou.

Its position at one of the Wall's most strategically important passes has given the city a significant role in Chinese history as the gateway to the former southern border of old Mongolia. In dynastic times, all traffic through to Mongolia was controlled here; more recently, it was the temporary provincial capital of Inner Mongolia until the borders changed and that honor fell to Hohhot, leaving Zhangjiakou to crumble in the northwestern corner of Hebei.

Apart from the pass itself, the Zhangjiakou Wall is completely unrestored and quite distinctive – it's not castellated and there's no pathway along the top – in fact, most of the Wall here is a simple barricade of reddish clay rock, loosely mortared together, around two or three meters thick. The watchtowers resemble muddy honeycombs, cylindrical in shape. A tourist pathway alongside the wall leading to Shuimu Palace, a temple in the east of the city, is an easy climb. The slopes behind the palace afford nice views of the surrounding countryside, and mark the entrance to Zhangjiakou's 'Underground Great Wall' – disappointingly, a short tunnel.

Where Flowers Bloom

If you want to see the Wall at its prettiest, Huanghuacheng is the spot. Overgrown with sweet yellow flowers in the summer and stretching high above a natural spring lake and crescent-shaped water reservoir, this is a beautifully-preserved section of the Wall favored by nature lovers all year round. The reason it's still in such good shape is that it was built solidly with a special additive in the mortar made from rice glue – a slow and expensive move that cost the chief engineer his head when it was suggested to the Emperor he'd neglected his duties and wasted funds. It wasn't until the Emperor decided to take a look for himself that he realized his mistake and built the poor fellow a better tomb, erecting a monument at the Wall engraved with the characters *jin tang*, meaning 'firm'. This is still called the Jin Tang Wall by locals, and despite having been bombed by the Japanese during the war, it still lives up to its name.

That being said, the paths are far from pristine – this is 430-year-old masonry – but



Perhaps one of the most compelling places to go and see the Wall is at the Old Dragon's Head – where its brick spine topples down the last mountain slope and dives into the sea. Shanhaiguan is the only part of the Great Wall you can see at the beach – fully restored to its former glory (where possible using the original bricks) and jutting into the waves with imposing military splendor.

the climb isn't terribly steep until you get higher up, and in some parts the walk is very pleasant, and you'll be at ease to enjoy the scenery.

Mathematical Precision

Situated at the northern tip of Tianjin Municipality, the Huangyaguan Wall features some unusual architecture and unique watchtower design, a result of principally strategic imperatives. This was an important pass in ancient times that required superb defense facilities, and the small city built at the pass to accommodate militia (now refitted to accommodate tourists, and quite nicely too) was fixed with traps and wrong-turns to confuse any invaders who made it through.

Huangyaguan is another steep and tough section of the Wall, but it was repaired during the mid-eighties in the interests of preserving its rare features, making climbing much safer (although no less of a challenge). It's a particularly old section, first built in 557AD, and so the city of Tianjin regards it as a key relic. Many of its more interesting features – in particular the water pass and the fascinating Baguaguan Castle – have been completely restored.

Huangyaguan is noted for its peculiarly austere beauty and mathematically precise nature. At some points you'll see its jagged reflection in the river below, and standing on the clifftop, you'll see quite clearly how well-designed this defensive structure is – it was once boasted that as long as one man guarded Huangyaguan, ten thousand could not pass through it.

The Underwater Wall

The northern border of Greater Tangshan follows the path of the Great Wall all the way from Qinhuangdao in the East to Tianjin in the West, and its condition is relatively poor. However, the Xifengkou pass near the Panjiakou reservoir makes for an interesting visit, most famous for a stretch of the Wall that has been completely submerged underwater. Characterized by almost obliterated Wall sections that stretch between curiously well-preserved watchtowers, the Wall descends into the reservoir quite suddenly, and depending on water levels, can be seen clearly as a ghostly silhouette of ancient glories.

Apart from the underwater section, there's

an interesting triple-gateway near the Nuan River valley and a recently-constructed memorial to the section's contribution to modern military history at the main gate. In early 1933, Chinese forces under Zhao Dengyu found the pass as strategically valuable as had the Emperors of long ago when they staged successful resistance attacks against the Japanese here – only to be betrayed a few months later when the Guomindang signed an agreement with the Japanese and ordered the withdrawal of all strategic Great Wall defense forces. If you look carefully, you can still find bullet holes in the Wall here.

This is remote and staggering Wall territory, and the presence of other tourists is rare – apart from the odd tour group brought in to see the parts underwater, you can be sure to find places far away from anyone to be alone on the Wall.

Across the Bridge

In 1998, the Chinese government took out a loan from the World Bank to make repairs on cultural relics – the funds were used to restore a very unusual section of the Great Wall at Jiumenkou. Officially tied to Huludao city in southern Liaoning province, the Wall here is notable for its 100m span across the Jiujiang River – the only part of the Great Wall that resembles and functions as a bridge.

The name means 'nine gateways' and refers to the nine sluice gates making up the pass across the river. This section of the Wall dates back to 1381, but is based on earlier walls constructed around 550AD. Visitors to Jiumenkou rarely choose to climb the mountainside Wall here, usually just dropping in to see the nine-gate river pass – but if you do want to make a longer visit out of it, there's two kilometres of fairly easygoing and fully-restored Wall with sixteen watchtowers and a beacon tower to explore. Jiumenkou makes for a nice afternoon and is an easy part of the Wall to conquer.

Taking Tiger Mountain

Hushan is a little farther away from the capital, and it's best tacked on to a visit of Dandong city, an overnight train trip from Beijing. It was only recognized as the true eastern terminus of the Great Wall in 1992, and extensive renovations were carried out after the fact.

As a reconstruction, the Hushan Wall looks brand new. The original Wall here was built with soil, wood and stones, which is why it's had to be speculatively rebuilt using common features seen at other sections in its design. It may seem fake if you're a purist, but it's a genuine attempt to restore something once lost – and the climb rewards with some quite impressive views of the North Korean countryside. Once you've scrambled down to the far end of the Wall, you'll come to a shallow creek which marks the border – on the other side, uniformed border guards on second-rate bicycles are on patrol with some scary-looking guns.

Into the Ocean

Perhaps one of the most compelling places to go and see the Wall is at the Old Dragon's Head – where its brick spine topples down the last mountain slope and dives into the sea. Shanhaiguan is the only part of the Great Wall you can see at the beach – fully restored to its former glory (where possible using the original bricks) and jutting into the waves with imposing military splendor.

Shanhaiguan city is latched onto the Wall along its eastern side and is protected by some commanding stone figures of Ming dynasty soldiers positioned along the fortifications. The real defenders may have let their guard down for the Manchu invaders when they breezed their way through here in 1644, but their modern-day stone counterparts lend an authentic air to a city one imagines has not changed much since those times. Shanhaiguan is still all marble pathways and old courtyards – it has a genuine atmosphere that other walled cities have now lost to the tourist trade, and visitors here often leave with the impression that they've seen some of the real China at last.

Finally making your way up the stairs to the Head and walking its last hundred meters to the end (or rather, the beginning) of the Great Wall is the climax of the itinerary. The Wall tapers to an edge of less than a couple of meters wide, and it's just enough to comfortably stand and gaze out at the ocean from the archer's gap in the stone. If you do want to make a special experience out of your visit to the Old Dragon's Head, come out at dawn and watch the sun rise over the sea – you'll feel, just as those old soldiers once did, like you're at the beginning of the world. ■



Chasing Waterfalls

A biker discovers that a dangerous road can lead to beautiful things

TEXT AND IMAGES BY **TINA WOODWARD**

IT FELT LIKE a very long time ago when we were planning our trip over a leisurely pub lunch in England. We were going to take three months off and ride motorbikes from northern to southern Vietnam. It didn't seem a big problem to me at the time that I couldn't actually ride a bike. After what seemed like an eternity, we had finally landed in Vietnam, about to embark on our first big adventure. We bought mopeds, ponchos and bungee ropes. I had about four days of riding experience under my belt. We knew that south of Hue, the well-trodden tourist routes, would have us hugging the coast, but we wanted something more adventurous with roads that sliced through forests and threaded through mountain passes. We wanted to see Vietnam untouched by tourism. My boyfriend Jamie was interested in Pleiku for its historical significance, and I wanted to go chasing waterfalls there.

Starting from Danang we turned inland, climbing into the Central Highlands and all the promises of the Ho Chi Minh Highway. We poured over our map, plotting our route on how far we thought we could



comfortably ride in a day with weather and daylight permitting. Our plan was to ride approximately 500 kilometers over four days.

The road between Kham Duc and Plie Kan was so incredibly beautiful. At one point the road took us to within three kilometers of the Laos border. As we climbed, the temperature dropped. Our 125cc Yamaha Nouvos coped without a hiccup. For as far as we could see were deep emerald green forests on majestic rolling hillsides. It was just breathtaking. I can't do it justice in words. To top it all the roads were almost perfect - it was the driving experience we had dreamed of. We rode through remote hilltribe villages where packs of schoolchildren on bicycles waved and smiled at us, or just stopped and stared in surprise. We had been so lucky with the weather until I felt a big fat raindrop hit my arm and, before I had time to even register it was raining, the downpour had drenched us both. Clumsily we put on our ponchos (although it was already too late for me). Having seen Vietnamese people riding along inside their raincoats we harbored romantic ideas about being cozy and dry inside of ours. The reality of it feels almost exactly like being wrapped in a wet shower curtain. In my

first attempt I managed to channel the rain directly into my trainers.

We made a pit stop for lunch at a small, unassuming little eatery on the side of the road that only served *pho* in several versions. Maybe because we were wet and cold, but the *pho bo* we had was the best I ever tasted in Vietnam. The rain had stopped and we ventured back out to find a place to stay for the night. The town shuts down at dusk, with not a single person in the streets. We had a couple of cans of 333 and laid our heads down for the night, ready to be on the road again first thing in the morning.

Rough Roads Ahead

With over a 45 meter cascade, the Phu Cuong waterfalls is said to be the most impressive in Gia Lai Province, located about 48 kilometers southwest of Pleiku. No problem we thought, a couple of hours each way at the most, but how wrong we were.

The road out of Pleiku to the falls was horrendous with potholes dotting the highway. I hit a few accidentally and received such a jarring I was certain I'd broken my bike. Accompanying the potholes were fist-sized rocks that would snatch at my front

wheel, yanking me off balance. I was twisting and wobbling and struggling to maintain 15 kph. There were 40 ton trucks, coaches, minibuses, cars, all kicking up huge clouds of dust. The number one rule on the road was to not get hit and the second rule was to not hit anything. The bigger the vehicle the more right of way, so our mopeds we were at the bottom of the pecking order. I watched as my boyfriend disappeared into the dust on the inside of an 18 wheeler. Then it was my turn. I waited to see my exit point, checked the road surface and went full throttle, holding my breath until I was through. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't always like this. I got used to it and became braver. Jamie was more daring so I wasn't surprised at how well he managed. I'd been so apprehensive at the start, but as my confidence grew I began to enjoy it. I was riding along with a huge smile and I realized, to my surprise, that I loved it - this amazingly beautiful country that is Vietnam. I loved the chaos, the dirt and the dust, and even how much my body ached after 170 kilometers of riding. I loved how every time I thought I was beaten, we'd turn a corner and have to stop - so completely moved by the beauty of the place.



Finally we saw the turning for the Phu Cuong waterfalls. It was VND10,000 each to enter but the guard had no change so he just waved us through. We rode for about another kilometer as a quiet rumbling in the distance slowly grew. Both grinning excitedly we started down a flight of metal stairs. At this point we could only see a tiny trickle of water to the right, teasing us. The rumble had become a roar and the falls came into view. The ride here was absolutely worth it. The falls were huge, the thundering of the cascading golden-brown water pounding against the rocks, the rainbow haze around us - it was magical. I read somewhere afterwards that the crashing water can be heard from up to two kilometers away. The base of the falls was covered in boulders which we scrambled over to get close enough to feel the mist on our faces. In the air were dragonflies, butterflies and songbirds, fluttering in flashes of color. Though the journey was fairly perilous, the destination was worth it.

By the end of our journey through Vietnam we had ridden nearly 3,000 kilometres from north to south. Those few days through the Central Highlands were some of the best days of our trip. When the roads were good the riding was spectacular. The landscape was staggeringly gorgeous. I'll never forget that enormous sky and the thick emerald jungles, and I don't think I'll ever be scared to drive anywhere ever again! The adventure was everything we had hoped for and more. Vietnam is an incredible country and we have fallen completely in love with it.

BIO: At 27, **Tina** and her boyfriend decided to take a year off from studying and work to discover Southeast Asia. Read more about their traveling adventures at www.girlandboygoeast.wordpress.com ■



Island Dreams in the Coconut Kingdom

A charming Indochine-themed lodge opens in My Tho

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



ONE OF MY Tho's most famous personages is Vietnamese scholar Nguyen Thanh Nam, more commonly known as the Coconut Monk for allegedly subsisting solely on the watery fruit for three years during a meditative quest for peace. Peace has indeed come to My Tho in the Mekong Delta but in the decidedly more luxurious form of newly-opened The Island Lodge, a 12-room lodge set on Unicorn Island (Thoi Son), a stone's throw away from Nam's floating "Coconut Kingdom" pagoda on nearby Phoenix Island.

The Indochine-themed lodge is a labor of love for owners Michel and Françoise Scour. "My grandparents lived in Hong Gai (in front of Ha Long Bay) for 25 years working for a French coal company. Because of all

the stories they told of Indochine, when I first visited Vietnam 50 years later in 1999, I remember thinking as I was walking on the tarmac at Tan Son Nhat that it felt like coming home," says Michel.

Michel's connection to Vietnam includes a successful chicken slaughterhouse in Bien Hoa in the early 2000s as well as an adopted Vietnamese daughter. However, back in France, his dreams always reverted back to the country from the stories of his childhood. So it was that Michel and Françoise sold their food supply business and returned 16 months ago to make their dream a reality. "We could have chosen anywhere to open the lodge," Michel says. "But Hong Gai is cold like France in the winter. We decided on the

Mekong Delta because it has good weather all year round. My Tho is also just an hour and a half from the center of Saigon, so we can serve tourists, the expat community, local Vietnamese and businesses based in Ben Tre and My Tho. Also, for the French, just hearing the word 'Mekong' is mystical, dreamlike."

The result is a stunning oasis of refined charm on Unicorn Island, one of the many river islets in the area. Set five kilometers off the main road, an unremarkably pretty country lane edged by coconut palms and banana trees suddenly opens onto a ridiculously gorgeous property with fastidiously manicured gardens featuring lotus ponds, gazebos and a waterfall. A few bungalows are scattered around the grounds,



but the jewel of the lodge is the open air restaurant/lounge set on 50 meters of riverfront.

Home, But More Than Home

In The Island Lodge, Michel has built an homage to his roots, sparing no expense to recreate a corner of fabled Indochine marrying 5-star luxury with the intimacy of a guesthouse. Touches of French flair, unexpected for such a small property, are felt in the welcome drink and amuse-bouche, the high staff to guest ratio (30 staff caring for 12 rooms: eight Mekong River View rooms overlooking what Michel calls the “permanent theater” of life on the Mekong and four slightly larger Pavilions Garden View rooms), the same 100% Natural Rendez-Vous bath products found in many of Vietnam’s luxe hotels, the branded amenities from bottled water to sugar packets to bar coasters, the Jacuzzi and steam room off the picturesque swimming pool overlooking the Mekong, the custom Indochine-themed fabrics and the list goes on.

“We want the Lodge to feel like more than home,” say the first-time hoteliers of their favorite amenities. “We love having a long, leisurely breakfast, so we’ve included an unlimited a la carte breakfast. We like swimming, so we built a large 24 meter swimming pool. We like to linger, so we put in really comfortable chairs throughout.” The concept of “home, but more than home” reveals itself in family mementos spread throughout the breezy La Manufacture d’Opium Lounge including vintage family photos and an upright piano that belonged to Michel’s maternal grandmother. Le Comptoir de Marthe et Edouard Restaurant (named after Michel’s paternal grandparents) has its own bakery where croissants and breads are freshly made, including a batch of heavenly madeleines that Françoise whips up for the day, just because. The kitchen is presided over by Chef Patrick Berenger who’s worked in the kitchens of Joël Robuchon and Hôtel Matignon, the official residence of a former Prime Minister of France.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Seafood with fresh pasta; Quiche Lorraine; Françoise and Michel

I amble down to breakfast on a lazy Tuesday morning and scan the menu, deciding on Eggs Benedict, followed by a freshly baked croissant slathered with a homemade pomelo and mandarin jam sweetened with honey from a nearby farm and a cappuccino (the first of many, as it would turn out). Michel encourages me to try the Swiss muesli with homemade yoghurt, but I’m already stuffed. At the table next to me is a Irish-German couple who’ve now extended their stay twice already, reluctant to leave this tiny oasis devoted to the art of *joie de vivre*. The day is set aside for simply reading by the pool while watching the occasional barge pass on by. Dinnertime comes quickly and the Cap Saint Jacques fish and shellfish sour cream soup (VND110,000) is hearty and flavorsome thanks to a stock of shrimp heads and fish, begging to be sopped up with a basketful of beautiful homemade bread. My main for the evening is Roasted yellow chicken with forest mushroom and truffle sauce (VND320,000), meaty and earthy

served with gratinated potatoes. *Quelle surprise* to have such sophisticated, French cuisine when the lodge feels so secluded with the lights of My Tho twinkling across the river seemingly a million miles away.

I spend day two exploring the nearby area, including fruit orchards, bee farms and little coconut candy factories. The Mekong Delta’s intricate labyrinths of waterways are perfect for short jaunts by canoe, through natural tunnels created by water palms. In the afternoon, we take the local ferry just minutes from the lodge over to Ben Tre and explore the little markets and endless laneways dotted with French-era houses and filled with smiling country folk, not yet jaded by visitors. It feels like I’m inhabiting multiple worlds: in the country but so close to the city, in a little corner of France in Vietnam.

Just over an hour’s drive from south Saigon, doubles at the The Island Lodge are USD170 with unlimited a la carte breakfast. Visit www.theislandlodge.com.vn for more. ■

Going the Distance

Making a success out of long-term travel



Sucre, Bolivia



Jeremy and Angie Jones at Machu Picchu, Peru

AS SUMMER DRAWS near, many of us are starting to plan holiday destinations. For some intrepid voyagers, though, travel isn't limited to two weeks a year or even a season. It's a full-time occupation. However, unless you're a trust fund baby, turning that dream into a reality involves a lot of saving and planning and that's before you even hit the road. For this month's column, I tapped Jeremy Jones, author of *The Long-Term Traveler's Guide* (available in print or e-book at Amazon and iTunes) to share some

lessons learned from traveling to nearly 70 countries, many of them on two long-term trips he did in the past six years.

Saving up for a big trip is daunting to many. What's helped you to do that?

My favorite thing to do is put any leftover money from an ATM withdrawal in a secret jar, and then re-deposit it in my account after a period of time. I found that I'd take USD20 out to pay for a USD5 item, and end up



Having visited nearly 60 countries as a travel writer and award-winning photographer, James Pham blogs about his adventures at FlyCarusFly.com

spending the other USD15 on stupid things like snacks or soda at my day job. By stashing that money I think we saved over USD1,000 in two years.

You talk about three types of travelers: Rigid Structure (entire trip is planned out), Open-Ended (general itinerary, flexible dates) and Always a Mystery (never knowing what's next). Which are you and which is more advantageous for long-term travel?

We're a mix between Rigid Structure and Open-Ended depending on when our itinerary calls for it. Our travel style is all about not needlessly wasting money, so if a destination calls for booking tickets in advance (such as Europe in the summer) we'll do that. Otherwise we've been known to have our general route but not plan but more than one city ahead just to give us freedom to see whatever we want for as long as we want.

Are you an advocate of the round-the-world (RTW) ticket or buying segments as you go?

I've never purchased a RTW ticket and only think they're worthwhile for very select itineraries where a pre-made route has a special sale price or if you are starting from a major hub. Otherwise I've found buying as you go always saves the most money if you are willing to put the effort into route planning. Even if it did save me money, on a very long trip I'm not sure I'd commit myself to such rigidity!

I favor more planning, especially hotels. I'm picky about where I sleep. Do you always have your first night of accommodations booked for any given city or do you find one on the fly?

I can count on one hand the number of times we've rolled up into a city without accommodation, and I really hate doing it unless I absolutely have to. Wasting time to walk around and find a place to stay, while carrying our heavy bags, is not worth it to save a few bucks, in my mind.

One of the joys of long-term travel is



the ability to stay in one place longer. Which places have you fallen in love with?

We've had some pretty great cities take us by surprise where we ended up staying longer than we had anticipated. One of which was Sucre, Bolivia, because it is a quaint little town with lots to do and what is possibly my favorite market in the whole world. We were staying at a nicer B&B on a hill overlooking the city, and couldn't pry ourselves away so we doubled our stay. If it wasn't for the fact that we had a tour to Machu Picchu booked already a few weeks later, we would still be there now!

Thanks to your book, I now know that a 429ml bottle of shampoo should last me 107 days and a 6 oz tube of toothpaste should last 86 days. Did you really keep track of all that?

[Laughs] Oh yes, I did! It kind of happened by accident when I started making a mental note of when I went to go buy toiletries. I realized I hated doing it so much that I decided to keep track of when I did it and ultimately wrote about it in a blog post. Don't worry, though, I don't track them anymore!

So you have a penchant for tracking things... How closely do you monitor your budget while traveling?

I've always tracked my spending on every day of my travels to relay the information to our readers. It is a habit that came about from my previous training as an engineer. I'll log just about everything from accommodation, transportation, food, sightseeing, to souvenir purchases, and miscellaneous spending. I'd like to think that I'm a very good judge of spending, and

most of the time my surprises come from conscious decisions to splurge rather than not planning properly! But if I do have to pick one part of the world that surprised me, it would be how affordable some of the Eastern European countries (like Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Macedonia) were!

Spending so many days on the road, aren't travel ruts inevitable?

Yeah, my worst one was when I was in China on my first RTW trip. I spent about four weeks traveling around the country and was very burnt out from the pollution and bad food (sorry, China!). By the end of it I just spent a lot of time at McDonald's, in movie theaters and sleeping to break away from the fact that I was in China and recharge my batteries. After that, and leaving the country, I was good to go for more travel!

Speaking of McDonald's, I think we've all had that moment where we cave instead of eating local.

You know, we love going to McDonald's when we travel to get that taste of home we sometimes miss. We've had some pretty crazy things like the Petite McBaguette in France, GreekMac in Greece, Spicy McPaneer in India, and a whole lot more. I love the local variations because the flavors remind me of home, but are 100% local creations.

I like your idea of collecting a similar souvenir from each country you visit. What's your personal travel obsession?

I still collect shot glasses like I mentioned in my book. Now that I'm up to 66 countries my collection is getting pretty amazing although I have to re-purchase a few that

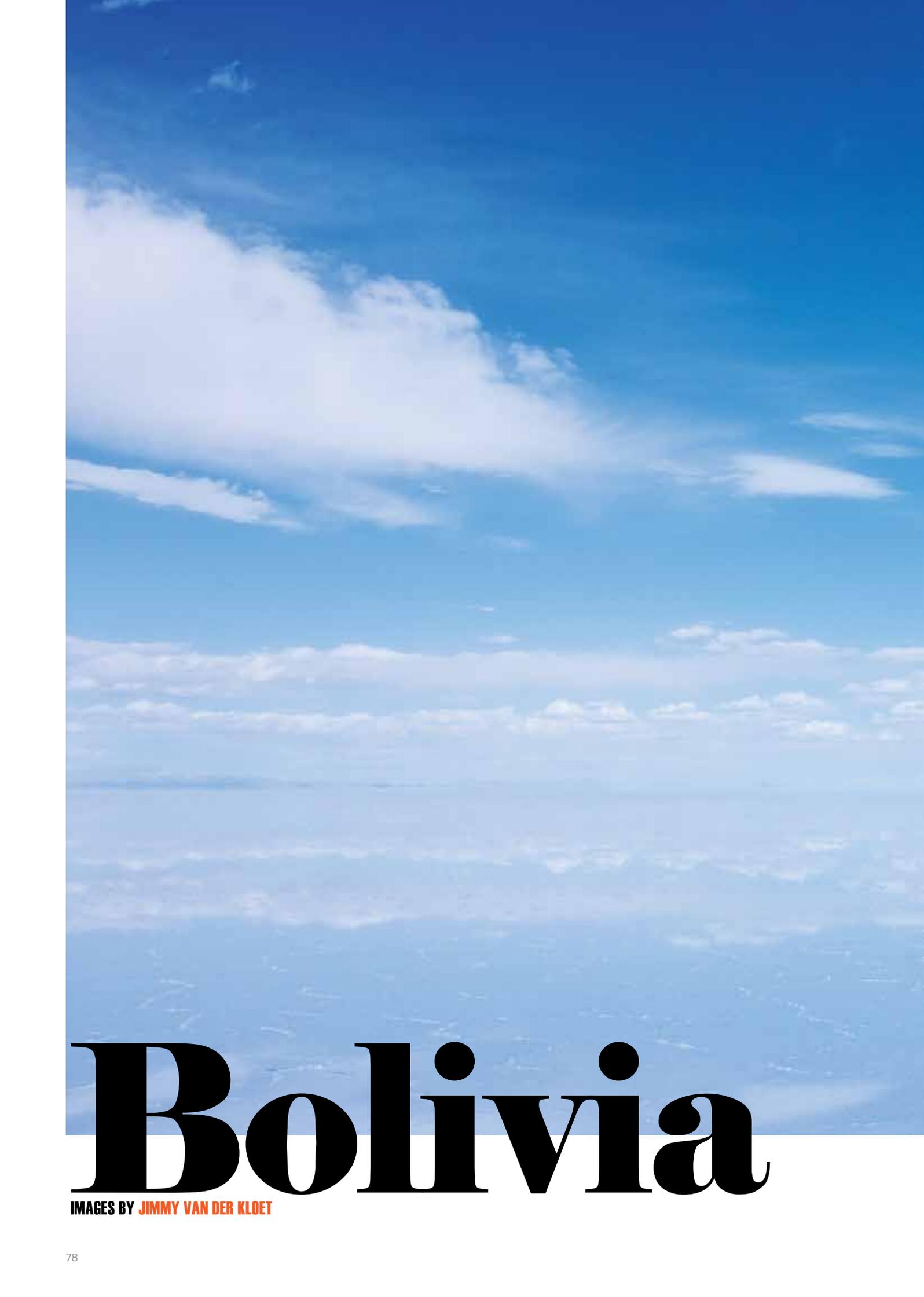
have broken over the years. Angie [my wife] has also jumped on board with this and collects trinkets that can be used as ornaments, so between these two we have a lot of fun when it comes to seeking out items to buy!

Long-term travel is fun, but there comes a time when you have to come home. Don't employers look down on long employment gaps especially if perceived to be frivolous travel?

No, never! The first time I came back from my long-term trip, my interviewers spent more time asking me about all of the awesome places I went to than about my skills for the job (and I did end up getting the job). Although I didn't have a problem, I do think it is important to foster new skills while traveling that you can put on your resume which helps overcome the gap in work. In my case I always put information about the languages I learned more of and work I do for our website, livingthedreamrtw.com, in my resume to show that I've been learning new skills even though I wasn't working in a traditional job.

What would be your advice to people who dream of traveling RTW, but think it's not realistic?

If you have the dream, you've got to do it. The fact that it isn't realistic to most is a great reason to make sure you actually get out there and do it! If you're serious, let the dream consume you such that it is all you can think about, and use that energy to figure out how to make it happen financially, logistically, or for any other aspect you may be struggling with. Committing to do it is the hardest part, and once you do you'll figure out ways to make it happen! ■



Bolivia

IMAGES BY **JIMMY VAN DER KLOET**



Salar de Uyuni, the largest salt flat in the world, near the crest of the Andes at a 3,656 meter altitude





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Isla del Pescado is an outcrop of land in the middle of Salar de Uyuni covered in cacti;

A 7.5-hour train ride from Oruro to Uyuni through desert landscapes;

7am, hot springs close to the border with Chile



Making a Scene

A city is only as dynamic as its art scene



A professional artist and author of *A Week in Hoi An*, Bridget March specializes in urban landscapes and aims to reveal the hidden treasures of city life and small town cultures through her illustrations. Bridget offers art classes and sketching tours in Ho Chi Minh City. For more of Bridget's work, visit bridgetmarch.co.uk

ACCORDING TO A recent index, Ho Chi Minh City was ranked the sixth most dynamic city in the world. The factors that were taken into account were: inward investment, how many international company's headquarters there are, growth in the property market, connectivity, economic growth, new business start-ups and higher education. However, the survey didn't measure how lively the arts are, how many galleries, theaters and orchestras the city has. I don't think any city can be considered dynamic without a well supported and vibrant arts scene.

Number one in the index is London, which has one of the most vibrant art scenes in the entire world. The art museums all rank highly with visitors and are free to enter. At number two is San Jose, US. Their city art gallery costs USD8 to enter but they offer lively exhibitions and events whereas the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts museum costs only 50 cents a ticket but many of the exhibits have been languishing on the walls for a few years now. Beijing ranks third and offers more than one public art museum. Entry to the National Art Museum is free and the collection is astoundingly varied and beautiful. Shenzhen, China, is placed fourth. It does have one art museum but it is ranked in the bottom third of attractions in the city on TripAdvisor. I have never heard of an art museum coming so low in the rankings; I wonder what they got wrong? Shanghai has three art museums and they rank high as attractions on Trip Advisor. Well, Shanghai is currently the biggest city in the world so its galleries ought to be good.

At number six is Ho Chi Minh City. It is the 31st largest city in the world by population. We have one art museum and the entry fee is very affordable at VND10,000. It is ranked number 15 out of nearly 100 attractions in the city, which is quite something. The exhibits are from over 300 years of fine and



FINE ART MUSEUM BY BRIDGET MARCH

decorative arts and tell a story of life in southern Vietnam that is rich and varied - all housed in a fabulous mansion which is an experience in itself.

In the past three years, I have seen the art scene in Saigon grow and become livelier. I know from personal experience that artists from Hanoi and Hue are moving south to be a part of an artist-led movement in our city. Saigon-based San Art brings a much needed dimension to critical thinking in contemporary practice and provides a focal point for all artists. Commercial galleries provide support for more established artists through cultural

programs and by taking Vietnamese art overseas to international markets. 3A Station is trying to create an "arts quarter" where live performance and street art rub shoulders with independent designers, raising the profile of the arts amongst the young, proving that there are pockets of vibrant arts lighting up the cultural landscape all over the city.

What would add some real dynamism to the arts is to use just a small amount of the revenue from all the new inward investment and inject some cash into our beautiful museum and local art scene to make them as dynamic as the economy. ■

>> The List

Travel



An Lam Villas | Ninh Van Bay

Built amidst enormous granite boulders and natural fauna on the shores of Ninh Van Bay and inaccessible by road, An Lam Villas Resort is serenely beautiful, silent, relaxing and safe. With private pools, butler service, and superb modern facilities, the whole concept is based on respecting the ecological hinterland, celebrating Vietnam's food and culture - and service. There are 33 villas, and is an ideal location for honeymoons.

Tan Thanh Hamlet, Ninh Ich Commune, Ninh Hoa District, Nha Trang
(05) 8362 4964
reservation@anlamnvb.com
www.anlam.com

An Lam
VILLAS
— NINH VAN BAY —



Ana Mandara Villas | Dalat

Ana Mandara Villas Dalat comprises 17 restored French-style villas from the 1920s and 1930s, preserving the original design, décor and charm; and set in the cool climate of the rural highlands of Central Vietnam. Striking views of the surrounding town and countryside abound from all areas of the gently sloping hillside property. Some of the villas have been converted into 65 guest accommodations, with each villa comprising between three and five ensuite rooms.

www.anamandara-resort.com



Princess d'Annam | Phan Thiet

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www.laverandaresorts.com



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INTERVIEW BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGES PROVIDED BY **ORIENT SKINCARE**



Orient Skincare and Laser Center
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 3 Phung Khac Khoan, D1; 3824 4650
 64D Truong Dinh, D3; 3932 5781
 945 Cach Mang Thang 8, Tan Binh; 3970 3674
www.orienskin.com

FROM AS EARLY as Ancient Rome, many women - and even some men - have been dealing with unwanted hair using razors, depilatory creams, tweezers and wax. But laser hair removal, the most effective method to remove hair to date, has only been around for the last 20-odd years. This month, *Oi* speaks to two dermatologists from Orient Skincare and Laser Center - Dr. Le Thi Thu Ha and Dr. Chuong Ngoc Hanh - on this cutting edge solution to a hairy problem.

Laser hair removal is said to be the most effective method to remove unwanted hair. How does it compare with plucking, shaving, waxing and Intense Pulsed Light (IPL) hair

removal methods?

Dr. Ha: First of all, compared to traditional hair removal methods, laser hair removal is far superior. Not only is it more effective and lasts longer, laser removal is also better for your skin. If you shave or pluck your hair, it will grow back within a couple of days and if it's the armpit, then the skin will become dark and wrinkled. You also run the risks of getting skin irritation, ingrown hair, even folliculitis. Waxing on a monthly basis is a little better, but it still has many of the same hygienic risks aside from being less convenient and more costly in the long term compared to laser hair removal.

Second, compared to IPL, laser hair removal is applicable and safer for more people. Technically speaking, IPL has the same level of effectiveness as laser and it is painless. However, due to technological limitations, IPL cannot be used for people with dark complexions. Anyone with skin tone darker than pure alabaster has a chance of getting burned when using IPL. Laser

hair removal, on the other hand, does not have the same limitation and can be used safely on people of all skin tones.

Is laser hair removal painful?

Dr. Ha: There is some pain during the procedure yes, but it is nowhere as painful as, say, getting a bikini wax for the first time. You will also grow used to it after a couple of times.

Is laser hair removal really permanent?

Dr. Hanh: Certainly not. Truly permanent hair removal is still impossible. The laser hair removal procedure simply weakens hair follicles underneath your skin in a gradual process. Over time, the hair that grow from these follicles becomes like the hair on your face: so fine and thin it all but becomes invisible to the human eye, but it's still there.

How many sessions does it take to completely remove hair?

Dr. Hanh: Anywhere from four to eight sessions depending on the individual. We advise repeat sessions every three months to maintain optimum condition of the skin and hair of the treated area.

How long does a session take?

Dr. Ha: Depending on the exact location, a single session can be as short as 15 minutes or as long as one hour.

Before and after laser hair removal treatment, do the patients have to prepare anything?

Dr. Ha: Yes. Within six weeks before laser treatment, they should refrain from waxing as this will interfere with the effectiveness of the treatment. Within three to four weeks before treatment, they should stay out of the sun. Within 24 hours of treatment, we advise against shaving.

After the treatment, patients should stay out of the sun and use sunscreen of at least SPF 30 and up. After treatment, they may see some hair growth in the treated spot. They should not shave, wax or pluck these hairs. Instead, they should use a wet towel to gently clean them away.

Does laser hair removal have any contraindications?

Dr. Ha: Laser hair removal has the same restrictions as any other laser treatments. It is not for pregnant women, people with metal inserts in their bodies, people with pacemakers, people with melanoma, people with scratched skin or diabetes. If you have any of these conditions, then laser hair removal is not for you. ■



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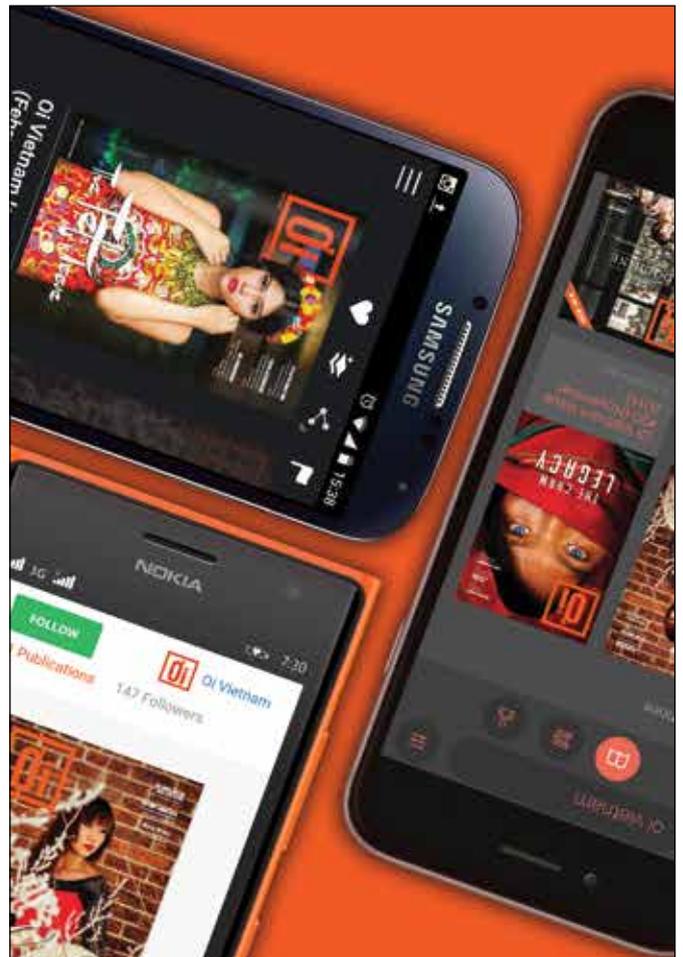
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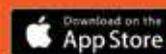
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3926 0561-62-63-64

Kids & Education



Child's Play

A world of adventure and fun awaits

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

CONSIDER THIS: AN entertainment park for children that isn't all about giddy rides and distractions, but instead created to give them a vision of themselves as they one day will be – free city dwellers, independent thinkers, members of a community, earners, spenders, citizens engaged in their own world. Wouldn't that be a more edifying day out than a circuit around the Ferris wheel or a tumble down the water slide?

If you've ever wondered how to give your children an experience that will gently and playfully introduce them to the life they will one day inherit, *Vietopia*'s concept may well intrigue you. It's a small-scale city for children, built entirely indoors and designed to provide a fantasy realm grounded in adult

realities – how to use money, work, be at leisure, create art - and provide a service to the community. Children visiting the park wander independently as they please, deciding for themselves what role to play, whether they choose to learn, contribute, or get creative. It's one of those non-instinctive ideas that actually makes perfect sense – what better method is there to provide a fun, stimulating environment in which kids can follow their own interests and discover what inspires them in a way that may unveil their natural career paths and core interests?

It's idealism, for sure – but when it comes to children, there's nothing wrong with idealism, and Vietopia has it in spades. As the name suggests, this is a Vietnamese

utopia, one in which everyone is gainfully employed, individually centered, and encouraged to take pride in their labors and pastimes. It's a version of Saigon envisaged as a friendly neighborhood that could have come straight off the set of *Sesame Street*, all clean, wide boulevards set about the central town landmark – a replica of the HCMC Opera House with a real theater inside.

Entering the complex is an experience designed to stoke the imagination as families make the transition from reality to a children's world: parents and their kids check in together in the shadow of a Turkish Airways airliner, passing customs as if they've just stepped off the plane. They'll



each receive a tracking bracelet, so that even if the kids run off by themselves (something you should encourage if they're old enough, as they're more likely to benefit from it all if they're self-directed) you'll know where they are and where they've been – and they won't be allowed to leave the building without you. A few comfortable restaurants are within 30 paces of the front door where parents can pass their time on the free WiFi while the kids explore.

The first consideration, just as it would be in any new country on touchdown, is money. The town bank lies just beyond the gate, where credits from the entry ticket can be exchanged for local currency – *vido* – which can be spent (and earned) throughout Vietopia. With cash on hand, kids can become active members of the community, following their interests and selecting the activities most in line with their own personalities.

Fond Memories

The majority of the installations at Vietopia are storefronts, each sponsored by a real-world company hoping their presence in the miniature city will help instill a sense of fondness for their brand. Some offer

entertainment, which the children must pay for out of their *vido*, but others offer 'employment' – the kids will put on uniforms, assume roles to play – and are supervised as they perform their jobs. Either way, it's a lot of fun: kids can earn money being camera operators in a realistic TV studio, staff a supermarket checkout, create packaging with colorful stickers for a noodle factory, nurse newborn babies at the hospital, or even man a mission to the moon in a model spacecraft, collecting samples from a surprisingly realistic lunar landscape. One of the more subtle lessons is that learning experiences also cost money – Vietnamese kids shell out for real English lessons from their own pockets, while at other locales, children learn art or other practical techniques. If the kids spend their money wisely, they'll leave with some genuine knowledge to take away with them.

Other activities are even more exciting. One of the most popular includes working in the fire station, where the kids slide down a pole, cram into a fire truck, and are then whisked to the other side of town where they can douse a burning hotel with their hoses. Those with a bent for discovery can explore an ancient temple, digging for artifacts in the

main chamber. Whatever they choose, if they earn enough *vido*, they'll find themselves swanning about the town, chauffeured by the park's sole Vinasun taxi – always available for those who've been diligent enough to afford it.

Part of the reason Vietopia exists is that local education can be somewhat lacking in inspiration – and it's the hope of the park's organizers their 'edutainment' concept may help to bridge the gap between the skills taught in the classroom and those capable of enriching children's lives. The challenge is their strategy works best with kids who are prepared to explore independently, something that international school children will have less of an issue with than those coming straight from the national system. Those parents of children falling into either category will see them get the most from Vietopia by preparing them for the experience and showing their support for the choices made at the park – for kids who overcome their inhibitions at Vietopia, it may just be a life-changing experience.

Vietopia (www.vietopia.com.vn); 6264 1777 / 098 465 8975 / 093 587 8885; 2-4 Street 9, Khu do thi Him Lam, Tan Hung, D7 ■



Sound it Out

Phonics is a way of teaching children to read quickly and skillfully



Brendan is a senior teacher at Saigon Star International School. He moved to Vietnam 18 months ago, having previously taught at two award-winning schools in the UK

HOW DID YOU learn to read? For many adults, chances are this is a difficult question to try and answer. We all know how we learnt to talk - we listened and we copied - but we have few memories of learning to read.

For most of us, we learnt to read by looking at a set of letters, grouped together in a particular order, and being told the word by an adult. We learnt with short words to begin with, gradually growing in length. But when you think about how many thousands of words there are in the English language, this is a very complex task to be asking of young minds. Fortunately, there is an easier way.

For approximately the last 15 years, many primary schools around the world have reverted back to a teaching technique called “phonics” or “letters and sounds” as you might know it.

To describe this simply, this means teaching children the sounds that each individual letter, or combinations of letters, make in a word, so that when children see a word they don’t recognize (which we ask of children all the time), they can break the word up into smaller chunks, as in “sh-i-p” - say each sound individually, then blend the sounds together to read the word as a whole.

In total, there are 44 sounds in the English language. We make each sound by moving our mouth and tongue in a different way. “But wait! There are only 26 letters in the alphabet. How can there be 44 sounds?” I hear you say.

At this point it is important to understand that some sounds are represented by more than one letter. Take the word “fish” for example. While there are four letters in the word, we only make three sounds when we say the word. If you try saying the word *verrrrry* slowly, you will notice that your mouth changes shape three times. Once, to make the ‘fuh’ sound (by placing your top teeth on your bottom lip); a wide, open-mouthed smiley shape to make the short ‘i’ sound, and a pursed lip shape to make the ‘shhhhh’ sound. That’s three.

Try it with a different word, for example “shout.”

You moved your mouth three times, right? If not, check again.

If you’re sitting in a room with other people right now, they’re probably wondering if they’re sitting next to a crazy person, but hopefully you’re starting to get the idea.

This is a skill that children begin to learn from the age of four and become very proficient in by the age of six. By mastering this knowledge and skill, children are able to decode unknown words by themselves, without adult support, meaning they can read independently at a younger age than they would otherwise.

If you have young children you’re probably already quite familiar with the idea, but never quite understood it. That’s why at Saigon Star International School, we run Letters and Sounds workshops for parents, so that parents feel confident in supporting their child at home with the same techniques that are taught in school.

Take the test – How many sounds are in each word below? (Answers are at the end.)

- 1) hat
- 2) car
- 3) rash
- 4) thin
- 5) bring
- 6) chair
- 7) shower
- 8) shark
- 9) rainbow
- 10) darkness

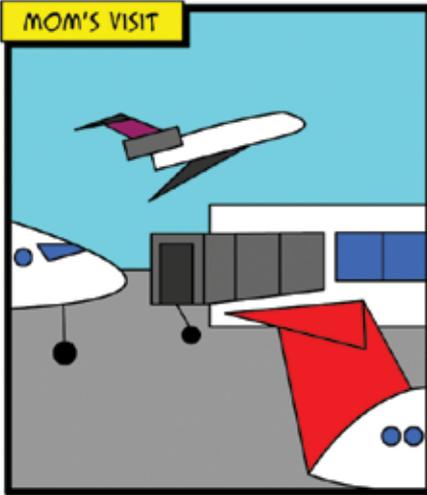
As children move through school, they learn that sounds can also be represented by various letter combinations. For example, the long ‘ay’ sound can also be represented by ‘ai’ in “brain” or ‘a_e’ in “cake.” The other major benefit to teaching children phonics is that children can use and apply their knowledge and skills to become independent writers at a much younger age too.

- 1) THREE 2) TWO 3) THREE 4) THREE
 5) FOUR 6) TWO 7) THREE 8) THREE
 9) FIVE 10) SIX ■



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BY DAVID PERRY



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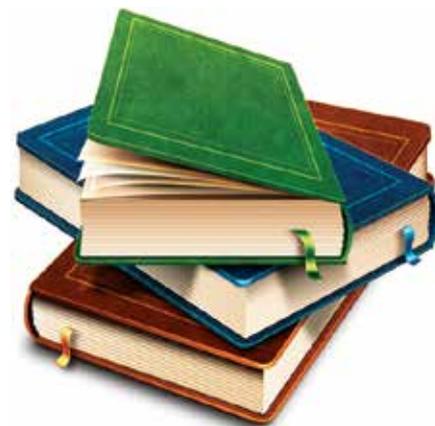
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Saigon South International School

Founded in 1997, Saigon South International School seeks to accommodate an increasing need for American education for both local residents and expatriate families. SSIS enrolls over 850 students in Early Childhood - Grade 12 from over thirty-three countries in a spacious five-hectare, well-equipped campus.
78 Nguyen Duc Canh, D7
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Faces & Places



Bike for a Future

Simon Wilson has set off on a cycle ride from Vietnam to France. The ride aims to raise awareness on climate change. This marks a momentous occasion for the 350 Vietnam, the organisation leading this initiative, Simon and the AIS student community who will be following the cyclist throughout his travels.

IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE



Lemongrass Takes Root

Opened last month, Lemongrass (Ground Floor, The Vista, 628C Hanoi Highway, D2) is a restaurant serving traditional Thai cuisine with an interesting drink list based on lemongrass.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY LEMONGRASS

Every day, your child goes through tests
that can have an impact on their future.

Ours is on May 16th



Secondary students are invited to apply.
Application Deadline: Monday, May 11th

Examination Details: Saturday May 16th - 9:00am to 12:30pm - BIS An Phu Secondary Auditorium

Applications can be delivered or emailed to Ms. Claudia Lambie
BIS An Phu Secondary Campus, 246 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien Ward, District 2
Email: claudialambie@bisvietnam.com - Tel: (84-8) 3744 2335 - Ext: 237

www.bisvietnam.com



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- IB Diploma Program, highest average scores in Vietnam
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- Co-Curricular trips within SE Asia
- 3 Libraries, 2 gymnasiums, 25m swimming pool and visual & performing arts rooms
- Student fitness center
- Large park-like campus
- Buses to Districts 1, 2, & 3



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