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VIETNAM

11-2016

DESIGNER OF THE YEAR

Vietnam's Leading *Ao Dai*
Designer Vo Viet Chung

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SMOOTH SAILING

A Major Break for the
Country's Yachting Industry

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REI OF LIGHT

Japanese Cuisine at Its Fresh
and Finest

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DUBLIN LIKE A LOCAL

For a True Irish Experience,
Do What the Dubliners Do

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GOOD MORNING, SAIGON



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- Director **XUAN TRAN**
- Managing Director **JIMMY VAN DER KLOET**
jimmy@oivietnam.com
- Managing Editor **CHRISTINE VAN**
christine@oivietnam.com
- Online Editor **JAMES PHAM**
jpham@oivietnam.com
- Chief Photographer **NGOC TRAN**
ngoc@oivietnam.com
- Graphic Designer **HIEEN NGUYEN**
hien@oivietnam.com
- Editorial Intern **ROISIN MURRAY**

For advertising please contact:

Sales Manager **NGAN NGUYEN** 
ngan@oivietnam.com
090 279 7951

General **advertising@oivietnam.com**
Inquiries **info@oivietnam.com**



This Month's Cover

Sponsored Cover
Photo: **Long Thuy**
Makeup: **Dzung Tran**
Hair: **Thuan Levansy**
Costume: **Vo Viet Chung**
Model: **Vo Viet Chung**
Assistant: **Hong Thuy**

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Phường Đa Kao, Quận 1, TP. Hồ Chí Minh
ĐT: (08) 62907317

Chịu trách nhiệm xuất bản:
Giám đốc, Tổng biên tập
Nguyễn Xuân Trường
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IMAGE BY NGOCTRAN

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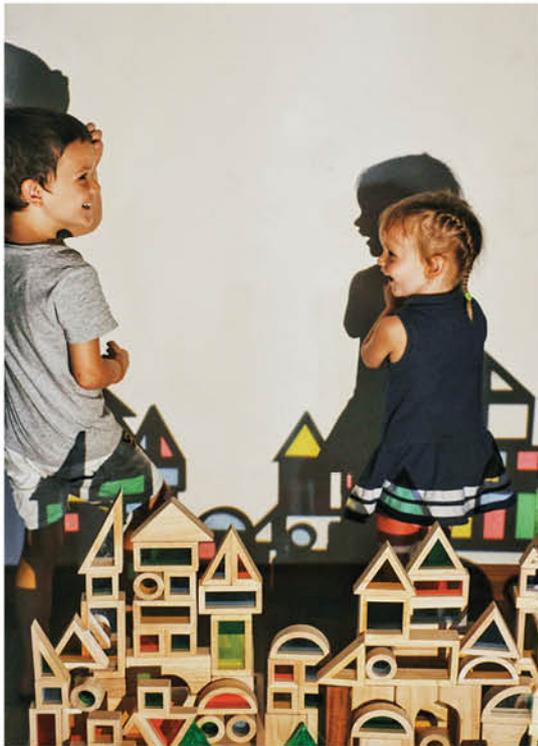
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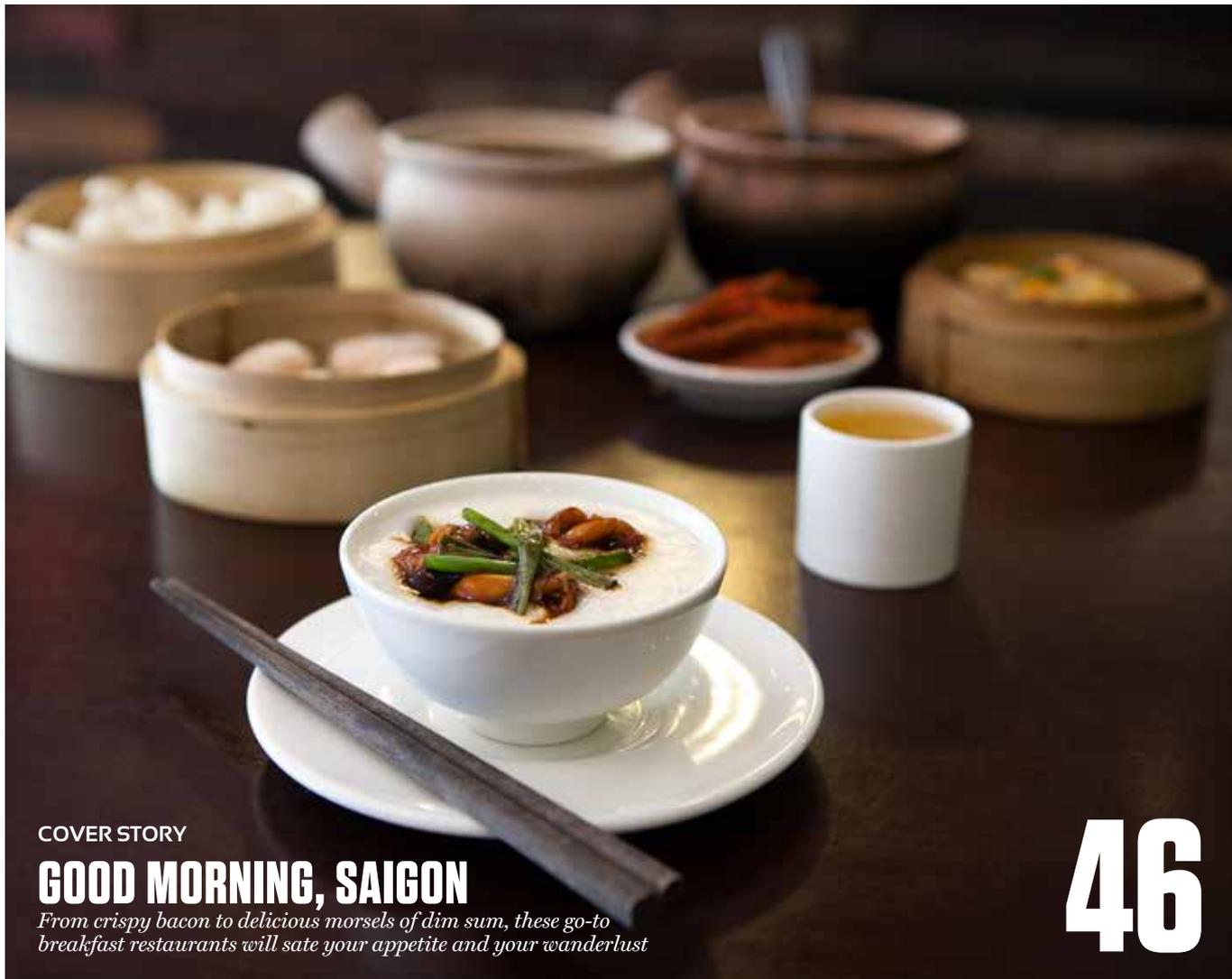
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PRIVATE MARINA - Artist's Impression

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Datebook

What's on this month...

NOVEMBER 6

What: Neuroticos Live

Where: La Canalla (44E Pasteur, D1); 8pm-9:30pm

About: Formed in 2004, death metal band Neuroticos originally started in Hiroshima. The band consists of Bruno, his older brother Kleber and friends Junpei and Henrique. Three of the members are of Brazilian nationality, while the remaining member is Japanese. They have embarked on international tours in Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam, and last year completed a tour in their home country of Brazil. Neuroticos have shared the stage with some of the biggest international acts, such as Cannibal Corpse and Vomitory in Japan, in addition to Vader and Master in Brazil. In 2014, they released a split album with Deadly Spawn (Tokyo) and Taste (Sendai) titled *trisected strangulating sermons and black mastication*. With all this momentum behind them, they are set to release their first full EP, *Hell in the House of God*. Those who have not yet heard the merciless, brutal sound of the Brazilian underground scene coming out of Japan are sure to be blown away.

Contact: Call 090 929 9420 more info



NOVEMBER 11 & 12

What: Goethe Institut x Heart Beat Present Till Von Sein

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 9pm-6am; free until 11pm, VND150,000 after

About: Expect to experience Till von Sein's version of pure and deep house and techno. The second album from Till von Sein is named *Precious* and was released last year. He has been releasing music for almost ten years, but he's only dropped one LP until now. *Precious* comprises ten tracks in the German producer's familiar hip-hop-influenced deep and tech house style, and features guest vocals from Kid Enigma, Russoul and Mr. V. Supporting acts at the gig include DJ OUCH!, Chris Wolter and Visuals: Erol, who are sure to warm up the crowd into a techno frenzy before the main event commences.

Contact: Visit www.heartbeatsaigon.com for more info

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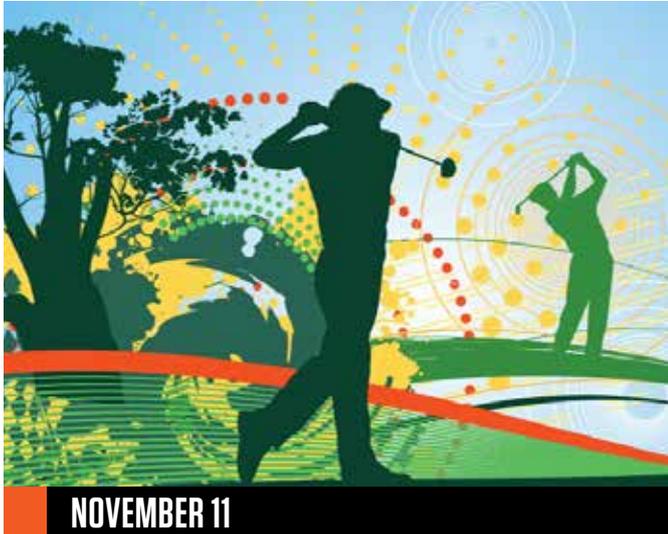
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What: Charity Golf Tournament 2016.

Where: Tan Son Nhat Golf Course (6 Tan Son, Go Vap); 12pm

About: Hosted by the Hong Kong Business Association, the annual tournament aims to raise funds for The Library Project, The Speaking Book Library and Nhat Hong Blind Orphanage School. The 18-hole golf package (4 ball Scramble teams) is priced at VND2.9 million each for all four registrants with at least 1 HKBAV member on the team or VND3.2 million each for non-member registrants. Even if you are not a keen golfer, consider attending the dinner at Eastin Grand Hotel with a special menu prepared by Ngo Thanh Hoa, the first crowned Vietnam MasterChef 2013. The MasterChef Dinner is priced at VND1.5million per HKBAV member and VND1.75 million for non-members. During the dinner, prizes for the winners of the tournament will be announced, and a lucky draw competition will be conducted.

Contact: Email hcmc@hkbav.org for more info

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For more information please visit www.pacificcross.com.vn

NOVEMBER 13

What: Concert Tour of the German Band Von Wegen Lisbeth.
Where: Ben Thanh Theater (6 Mac Dinh Chi, D1); 7pm
About: The Goethe-Institut Vietnam is looking forward to presenting this successful band from Berlin in cooperation with the Goethe-Institut Thailand. The five concerts are accompanied by interactive workshops and talks in which German learners from the Goethe-Institut, PASCH partner schools and universities will get the chance to meet and communicate with the musicians. Their sound is a mixture of guitar, bass, Casio-keyboards, a steel drum, an electronic harp and a chime to create energetic dancing beats. Put on your dancing shoes and don't miss Von Wegen Lisbeth play their lightweight indie pop sounds in Vietnam.
Contact: Visit www.goethe.de for more info

NOVEMBER 15

What: Vietnam Forbes Conference
Where: InterContinental Asiana Saigon; 8:45am-12pm
About: Forbes Vietnam's Real Estate Conference 2016 is the place for developers, investors and market regulators to meet and share the latest information on market trends and to learn about opportunities, risks and capital movement. With a stabilizing economy, the government continues to invest in public infrastructure in the big cities, with interest rates at the lowest level in years, the real estate market continues to witness robust growth in 2016. The conference will discuss the most important factors that could impact the development of the market, as well as opportunities that come from urban development planning by the government. The conference will also look into different ways to add value to real estate products for developers and investors. Conference speakers include economists, bankers and developers who will offer unique insights on the future of real estate in Vietnam.
Contact: Visit event.forbesvietnam.com for more info



NOVEMBER 13

What: Barcamp Saigon 2016
Where: RMIT University (702 Nguyen Van Linh, D7); 7:30am-5pm
About: Barcamp Saigon is an un-conference that was created in the tech community in 2005. Organizers of the event only organize the space, while people from the community are the presenters. This means that the quality of the event depends on the input of the local community. Barcamp 2016 will experience the 10th Barcamp to be held in Saigon. From a meetup of 200+ local techies, Barcamp Saigon has continued growing to meet the needs of the community. Last year alone featured 1,000 participants and 65 talks covering tech topics. Other stories covered included the Vietnamese local coffee bean in the global market, tales of a long-time Barcamp volunteer on his way across Vietnam, and information on how mediation touches many aspects of life without us realizing. But Barcamp's main purpose is to bring the community together. So come to Barcamp Saigon and present about anything you want. The community will vote on topics and the top topics will get the biggest rooms.
Contact: Visit www.barcampsaiгон.org for more info

NOVEMBER 19

What: Festive Bazaar
Where: International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC, 28 Vo Truong Toan, D2); 10am-3pm
About: ISHCMC will host its first Festive Bazaar open to the public. The marketplace will offer festive products and holiday-themed food and beverages from local businesses. This bazaar promises to be a great day out for the entire family with shopping, activities and entertainment. At the Festive Bazaar, attendees can participate in the charity silent auction with the chance to take home one of the 12 themed baskets of joy. Entertainment includes musical talent from ISHCMC Primary and Secondary students. There will also be photo opportunities with Santa Claus in the ISHCMC Festive Grotto.
Contact: Visit www.ishcmc.com for more info

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NOVEMBER 16-19

What: Vietnam Foodexpo 2016

Where: Saigon Exhibition and Convention Center (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7)

About: Vietnam Foodexpo offers the most complete food and food technology event under one roof in Vietnam. It boasts the largest scale of regional and national food business opportunities through exclusive access of international and national networks. This year, Italy has been named as the Country of Honor at the Vietnam Foodexpo 2016. Italian businesses will bring modern and advanced technology, and unique products representing the country. Italian import delegations have also planned to visit the expo to look for potential Vietnamese export partners.

Contact: Visit www.foodexpo.vn for more info

NOVEMBER 18 & 19

What: The Wizard of Oz

Where: Australian International School, Thu Thiem Campus (264 Mai Chi Tho (East-West Highway), D2); 6:30pm on the 17th, 4:30pm on the 18th; VND50,000

About: Grab your ruby red slippers, your oil-can, your best lion roar—don't forget your scarecrow hat—and head to the Australian International School's Thu Thiem Campus auditorium. For the first time, the AIS production team under the direction of Jacqui Gaynor brings to the big stage *The Wizard of Oz*. So if you're up for an evening filled with singing, dancing, laughing, great snacks and fantastic acting then AIS Thu Thiem Campus will be... the place to be.

Contact: Email Gabriel.price@aisvietnam.com for more info



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NOVEMBER 4-6, 11 & 12

What: The Secret Garden Musical

Where: SOUL Convention Complex (214 - 216 Pasteur, D3); 7:30pm; VND500,000

About: A community theater production performed in English, with all proceeds going to the Saigon Children's Charity, it is a certainly an event not to be missed. Based on the book of the same name by Frances Hodgson Burnett and set in 1906, *The Secret Garden* tells the story of Mary Lennox, a young English girl born and raised in British Colonial India. Orphaned by a cholera outbreak, Mary is sent away from India to Yorkshire (England) to live with her embittered, reclusive uncle Archibald and her cousin Colin, whom she has never met. Her personality blossoms as she and a young gardener bring new life to a magic garden which beckons the children with haunting melodies. The "Dreamers," spirits from Mary's and Archibald's past, guide her through her new life, as well as her sickly cousin and uncle, dramatizing *The Secret Garden's* compelling tale of love, forgiveness and the renewal journey to reach brighter days.

Contact: Visit soulliveproject.com.vn for more info

NOVEMBER 27

What: Hello Kitty Run Ho Chi Minh City

Where: The Crescent Mall (101 Ton Dat Tien, D7); 6:30am-11:45am; tickets start at VND380,000

About: The Hello Kitty Run has been taking the world by storm, having been hosted in places such as Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. This month, Hello Kitty will be hitting Phu My Hung and the race itself will be 5km in length, with a 6:30am starting time. The Hello Kitty Run HCMC is a running program that combines eating, make-up, entertainment, technology and Japanese cultural exchange activities at the end of the race. It's the ideal event for fashionistas, running enthusiasts and Hello Kitty fans.

Contact: Visit helloworldkittyrun.vn for more info

NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 3

What: The 14th Vietnam International Trade Fair

Where: Saigon Exhibition and Convention Center (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7)

About: Organized for the past 13 years, the Vietnam Expo in Ho Chi Minh City serves as a bridge for trade promotion between Vietnam and international enterprises, especially in the Asia area. In 2015, the fair attracted 450 participants with 550 booths from 16 countries: China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Japan, the US, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Romania, Spain, Thailand, Singapore, amongst others.

Key areas of focus are international pavilions, machinery and electronics, home improvement and ecotech (ecological technology is a new feature this year). Its debut is a response to the green technology trend within renewable energy in manufacture and industrial activities, with the ultimate aim of contributing solutions to global climate change and environmental pollution.

Contact: Visit www.hcm.vietnamexpo.com.vn for more info

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DECEMBER 3

What: Festive Fair at the International School Saigon Pearl

Where: International School Saigon Pearl (92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh); 9am-12pm

About: Join the International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP) for their Free Festive Fair, for children aged 18 months-11 years old. It features a morning of festive fun that includes cookie decorating, making Christmas tree trimmings, a visit to Santa Clause and more. Children 18 months to 4 years old can also visit the free Mommy and Me playgroup.

Contact: Visit www.issp.edu.vn for more info



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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



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NOVOTEL PHU QUOC RESORT FIVE STARS

Novotel Phu Quoc Resort (www.novotel.com) received a five-star certification from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) last month. The resort has become the first internationally-managed property on the island to receive this accolade for its service and facilities. The five-star certification recognizes the on-going efforts of AccorHotels and the CEO Group in the past year. Novotel Phu Quoc Resort is not only the first resort project of CEO Group, but also the largest internationally-branded resort operating on the island.

The 366-room beach-front resort opened in January 2016 and is situated 15 minutes from Phu Quoc International Airport. Other resort amenities include a day spa, gym, Kids Club, two tennis courts and an extensive MICE offering including a 400-seating, 470-square-meter ballroom along with three multifunctional meeting rooms.



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BEP ME IN OPENS

Bep Me in (136/9 Le Thanh Ton, D1) is a new Vietnamese restaurant in a small alley in the heart of downtown Saigon. While downstairs captures the heart and soul of a street food eatery, the upstairs provides the comfort of a more contemporary home dining room. *Bep Me in* focuses on home-cooked dishes popularly found on the streets and countryside.

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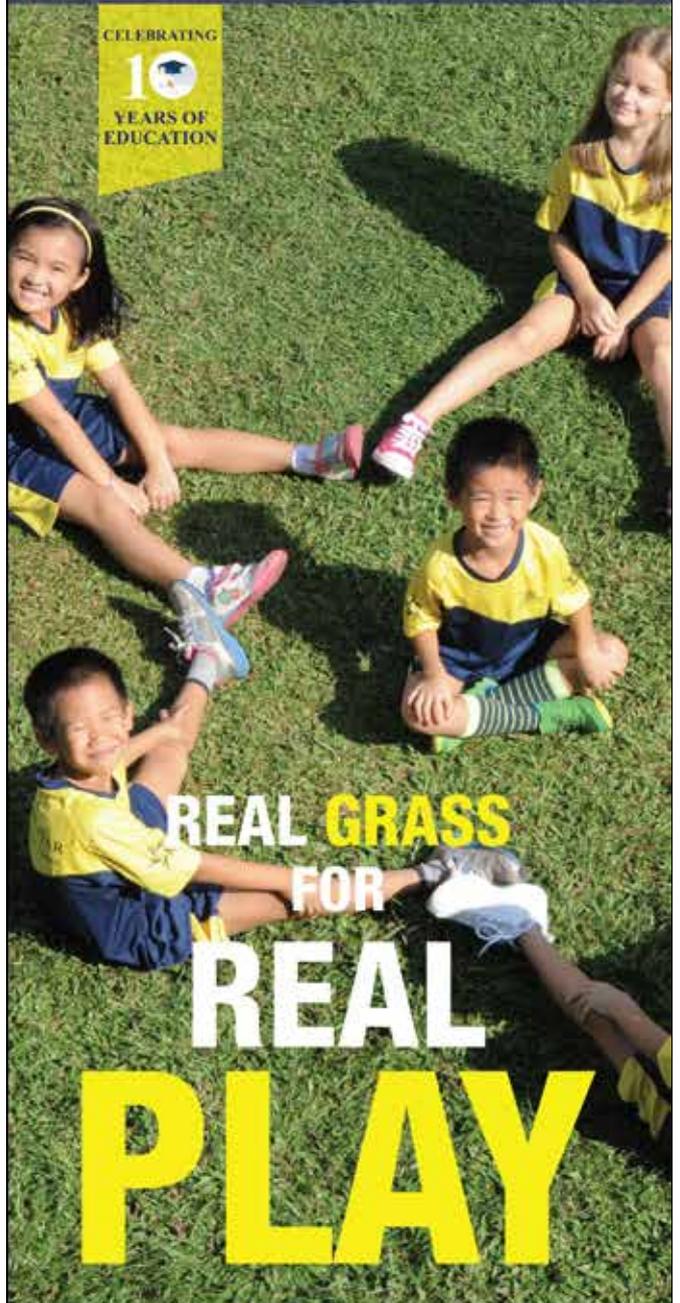
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TROI OI!

The country in numbers



394,200

HOURS IT TOOK Jimmy van der Kloet to find the right woman. Wed last month on the 15th, Jimmy met his wife Nguyen Thi Huyen on February 8, 2015 in Saigon. Accompanied by their puppy Xtin and still-unnamed kitten, all four are now starting

a one-way adventure trip to growing up with a little advice from Winnie-the-Pooh: "Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day."

20

NEW HOMES WERE BUILT IN under a week in the disadvantaged communities of Huong Nha and Xuan Quang, both in the province's Tam Nong District. The project, the Vietnam Big Build, is Habitat for Humanity's largest event of the year. 210 international volunteers hailing from countries such as New Zealand, Japan and the US flew to

Vietnam to help with the project. The newly-built houses measure 60 square meters, and will be provided with financial support amounting to VND45 million a year from Habitat for Humanity. HFH Vietnam's country director, Kelly Koch, concludes that the project is a "great demonstration of Habitat's mission in bringing people together to build strength, stability and self-reliance."



8

LEGGED-CALF HAS BEEN BORN IN Tan Hong District in Dong Thap Province. Owned by Dinh Van Thanh, the unique calf has two forelegs and six contorted hind legs. Thanh's wife, Nguyen Thi Bao Ngoc, believes that the calf's extra legs are the result of genetic mutation. Fortunately, the calf is able to walk normally with ease and appears to be healthy, in spite of its peculiar appearance. This calf has had a sizeable impact upon the local community, and attracts daily visitors from Thanh's province and beyond. Thanh says that 50-60 visitors a day flock to their house in hopes of viewing the calf. Superstition surrounding the special calf has exacerbated the volume of people visiting. According to Thanh, visitors bring votive paper to burn with incense for the calf, and frequently ask the calf to help them win the lottery.



7

MILLION INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS have visited Vietnam in the first nine months of the year, marking an increase of 25 percent year-on-year, reports the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism. Tourists from north-east Asia represented the fastest growing demographic of tourists visiting Vietnam.

China and South Korea totaled 3.1 million, or 43 percent of visitors, to Vietnam so far this year. Total tourism revenue for this period was approximated at VND291.161 trillion, a 20.2 percent increase year-on-year.



26,000

RESIDENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY are being relocated from District 8's Doi (Twin) Canal in order to facilitate restoration efforts aiming to purify the waterway. Heavy contamination from household waste and garbage over the last several years has had a devastating impact on the wellbeing of the canal's marine life, and has caused an unpleasant stench to blanket the surrounding area. The local authorities hope to restore the contaminated canal to its original state, but require the relocation of those inhabitants living on the southern bank of the nine-kilometer waterway in order to fulfil this aspiration.

20

AIR-MONITORING STATIONS are being prepared for installation in Hanoi. Nguyen Trong Dong, director of the city's Department of Natural Resources and Environment, maintains that the installations will aid agencies in issuing timely air-quality warnings to residents. The present shortage of the air-monitoring stations has been attributed to a lack of funds. According to the environment department, there are currently six air-monitoring stations in the city, but only two—one on

Nguyen Van Cu Street and another on Phao Dai Lang Street—are operational. Nine of the new air-monitoring stations will be located at major intersections, while nine others will be situated in particularly crowded urban areas.



USD 4 million

HAS BEEN AWARDED as the first jackpot prize of the 'Mega 6/45' computerized lottery, which made its debut in Vietnam in July. The prize was won by a farmer from the Mekong Delta province of Tra Vinh, who became the first jackpot winner

following the 39th draw last month. The VND92,030,182,500 amount had accumulated after the 38 previous lottery draws failed to produce a winner for the initial VND12 billion prize. The winner will receive a sum of over VND83 billion after a 10 percent personal income tax deduction as required by Vietnam law, Vietlott says. Following this big win, the jackpot value has since been reset to the initial prize of VND12 billion.



135

YEAR-OLD STRUCTURE BUILT BY THE FRENCH, the Saigon Tax Trade Centre, is in the process of being demolished to make room for a 40-storey office and hotel tower. Doan Hoai Minh, deputy director of Satra, investor of the project, said the multi-functional building, which has six basements and a helipad, will provide shopping, office and hotel services. The new building will also incorporate Ho Chi Minh City's first metro line, which will connect

Ben Thanh Market in District 1 to Suoi Tien Park in Thu Duc District. The project is expected to be completed in 2020, with work on the new building—the Saigon Tax Plaza—due to start early next year. City authorities maintain that the new building will preserve the general aesthetic of the old building in order to be in harmony with other historic buildings nearby, such as the Rex Hotel and the Opera House.



DESIGNER OF THE YEAR

Meet Vo Viet Chung, Vietnam's award-winning *ao dai* designer and UNESCO honoree

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD** IMAGES PROVIDED BY **VO VIET CHUNG**

VIETNAMESE FASHION WAS GIVEN new recognition last August with an unprecedented international award bestowed on local designer Vo Viet Chung, one of the country's foremost innovators in fine traditional garments. At Leonard Simpson's Fashion Forward awards ceremony held in the US at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront, Vo Viet Chung was selected for the accolade from a number of international figures presenting interpretations of both ancient and modern Asian garments, being awarded the title of Designer of the Year (as well as Best International Designer) for—according to the organization—his “stunning array of elegant gowns that portrayed the history and future of Asian fashion; with details and prints that reflect the history of the



Vietnamese culture, the modern designs with high splits and flowing trains shattering the traditional, transforming it to the remarkable.” As the first Asian designer to win the award—now in its 39th year—the immediate media attention that the win has brought to both Chung and Vietnamese traditional fashions in general has represented a new peak in the designer’s career.

“Those were big awards,” says Chung, still clearly stunned by the announcement. “Many professional designers desire them in order to support their profession and business. This is also the first time for an Asian to win this award. Although people praised my work, I still think a very important element was luck, because if I was not lucky and wasn’t able to convince the judges, it would have been hard to win.

I don’t feel emotionally affected quite yet, but this is a milestone in my life that really surprises me. Even those who are really good at what they do, in art—especially fashion—it’s like a painting, maybe you can feel it or maybe not, or maybe you like it but I don’t. That’s my personal judgment, everyone is different. But this time, there was common agreement between all the judges. I even won two awards, and this is something that makes me feel really proud of myself this time.”

While the surprise victory provides validation for Chung’s extensive work in the traditional genre, Chung has in fact long sought to distance himself from the garment with which he is most commonly associated—the *áo dài*. What is more definitive of his oeuvre is an attempt to reinvent international styles using Vietnamese precursors, thus producing designs with recognizable but somewhat obscured Vietnamese features.

During a previous interview with our magazine in 2015, Vo Viet Chung explained that “Foreigners who visit my store seem to sense that the *áo dài* is very important, very spiritual. I know that, but for a designer like me, I choose to make it look more relaxed, more open, like these ones I’ve shown you. I can cut it shorter to make it

into a dress; I can make it longer so that it becomes a gown; but all my pieces are made of materials that are exclusively used for making *áo dài*.”

Chung’s presentation at Fashion Forward this year, *Dynasty*, was a more flamboyant dramatization of this design principle, borrowing liberally from national costumes throughout Asia to produce a collection of staggering couture pieces that overtly exposed their influences without being limited by them.

“*Dynasty* refers to elegance and something regal, but also dreams of a royal garden,” the designer said in an interview with *Vietnam News*. “The collection consists of 20 designs with red, yellow and metallic black as the main colors. The colors reflect the characteristic nuances of the royal style, while the materials of silk, brocade, velvet and lace clearly express the spirit of the collection, the ‘royal’ haute couture line of fashion. The motifs on the clothes are shaped like Italian baroque motifs with stones, metals and pearls. The accompanying accessories such as jewelry, shoes, hats and scarves are handmade. This is the first time I have combined hair, dresses and flowers to tell a poetic royal story. All form a path throughout Asia’s dynasties.”



While the design aesthetic presented in *Dynasty* proved so popular in the United States—Chung is still fielding calls from interested American partners—he has been reluctant to exhibit the collection here in Vietnam or produce the individual pieces for sale. “Those were high-class garments, not really applicable for here, only for attending the program,” he explains. “Some have said I should hold a show, others said I should not, I just want to let people be curious about them. In any case, I have been producing *ao dai* for many years, but it’s my hope that through programs like that one, people overseas will learn more about our culture.”

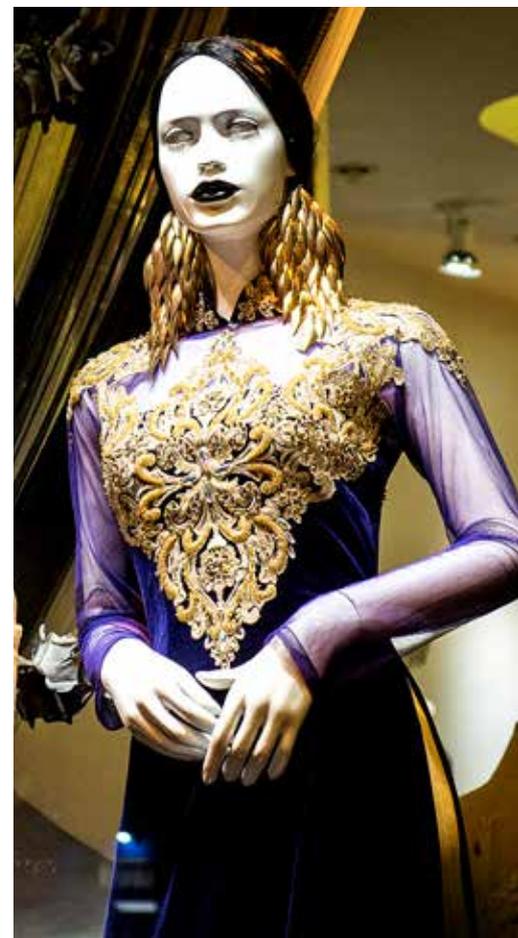
“For any fashion show, we must follow a theme,” he continues, and that particular program was themed around Asian designs, so it had to be Asian. My feeling is that we shouldn’t always try to overtly introduce Vietnamese culture, but just reveal part of it, enough to symbolize the rest. Otherwise we run the risk of limiting our creativity in a stereotype. That’s fine to show overseas, we’re proud of our home country, but if I kept focusing on that, I could never develop.”

Chung remains philosophical about the award, insisting that it is his own creative drive that provides his primary

sense of artistic direction. “There were many opinions,” he says with a tone of defiance, “but I don’t care. Only someone who has been traveling as much as I have or someone in the same field can really understand what I’m doing. It’s good to maintain our culture, but we shouldn’t hold on to it all the time. For example, I don’t want any Vietnamese elements to relate to my designs for models in China. This time there was a sense of thematic tourism, so I went for something of an integration while still featuring the region’s characteristics. But in general, while I have already put a lot of effort into working with more traditional materials and specializing in the *ao dai*, I still keep attempting to renew myself and to learn more about international fashion and follow the common trends, while still holding on to some traditional traits.”

“I’m not bringing the whole *ao dai* to introduce abroad, but taking inspiration from it,” he adds. “The sleeve, for example; the collar, the button—just the traditional buttons themselves could inspire a new collection.”

One of the most obvious considerations Vo Viet Chung had to take into account from an artistic perspective was the fact that many of the models presenting the garments





would be of European rather than Asian descent. “It’s not easy for Westerners to feel comfortable in Asian garments,” admits Chung. “I wanted them to be more relaxed, so that they wouldn’t feel uncomfortable wearing an *ao dai* as foreigners. Whenever I give a Western lady an *ao dai*, those models for example, if I don’t tell them in advance just to walk as usual, they tend to be very unnatural. Almost every model who works with a Vietnamese designer thinks that they need to be like this or that when they wear an *ao dai*. For me, in order to make them suitable for Westerners, I know the collar should not be too high, not too tight, because the most important thing is the confidence of the wearer. Only when they’re confident can they look right in an *ao dai*.”

REVIVING THE PAST

This is not the only prestigious award Vo Viet Chung has been presented by an international organization—in 2007 he was honored by UNESCO for his work in

reviving a unique, jet-black Vietnamese silk known as *lanh my a*—the production technique for which was almost forgotten by the time Chung brought it back to life while seeking a traditional material on which to base his graduating collection for his studies abroad in Denmark.

“It was a matter of chance,” Vo Viet Chung said when speaking to us about his rediscovery of the materials during our 2015 interview. “I noticed in our family photos that my grandmother and my mother wore *ao ba ba* and the Mekong-style black pants. I asked my mother about the fabrics, and she explained that they had a long history, but were no longer available in our modern markets. *lanh my a* is particularly amazing—I remember examining my late grandma’s *ao ba ba* and realizing that it was something really special. The material is dyed with the resin of a kind of wild fruit named *mac nua*. The rainwater makes it look more beautiful, stronger, and it also becomes smoother over time. At

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



that time, I had my mother and our relatives in the Mekong, Tan Chau, and An Giang help me to figure out how could I reproduce them all.”

“When I watched *Fashion TV* or read magazines like *Elle*, I realized that Vietnam had definitely never acknowledged a traditional material and brought it to the modern world,” he said. “We always import our materials from overseas. So I thought that it would be great if I could bring out a forgotten traditional material comparable to modern ones all over the world, and upgrade it to an international standard. So that’s exactly what I did.”

His mother, now 86, remembers the origins of the material very clearly. “I always used to wear *lanh my a*,” she recalls when we speak to her at her home in Cu Chi, where Vo Viet Chung was raised as a countryside boy obsessed with fabrics even as a child. “Only wealthy people could afford that material. The poor usually wore *vai xien*—you don’t know that material. It looks dull after several washes. That was a hard time. Wealthy people could own several pairs of pants. Our family wasn’t bad (we weren’t exactly poor), since their father was a driver. I still kept some of those pants when we moved here, although they were old.”

“Pants made of *lanh my a* and white *ao ba ba* were what we usually wore in the past, not the pajamas you see now,” Chung’s mother says. “It’s glossy black. There was a certain period when people ignored it, stopped wearing it. Then when Chung went abroad to study, he called me to ask about it. I said it’s a strange material, you can use it to create your stuff. If you want it, I can buy some for you. But it was very hard to find. I went to Chau Doc to buy several dozen meters and sent it to him. It was VND40,000/meter at the time. When he returned, he went to Tan Chau and Hong Ngu to make orders. Then that material came to be known, otherwise it might have been forgotten.”

“This material has become very expensive since being reproduced,” she adds. “He ordered a lot of material and used it to create his collections. I don’t know how much, but afterwards I saw so many models wearing *lanh my a* silk.”

“Maybe the path I chose is different from other designers,” says Vo Viet



Chung of his work with the fabric. “I love renewing these materials, I love taking these ordinary things that were once connected to the peasantry, and elevating their status to make them high-class materials comparable to Chanel or Valentino products. That’s why I like to revive these materials and give them a new look, a new context, at the fashion weeks of New York or Paris.”

ORIGINS

The designs of Vo Viet Chung have their roots in the countryside because the designer’s own roots are firmly planted in the rural Vietnamese south. Like many who grew up in the areas around Cu Chi, Trang Bang, and Tay Ninh in the era following the war, the environs of his childhood were perfectly idyllic. What was unique about Chung’s own experience was that his character and passions were obvious from his earliest days.

“He used to make *ao dais* from scarves,” recounts his mother with obvious fondness. “He would steal his sister’s *ao dais* to make clothes for the cats and dogs. When he was in first or second grade, he was thin and weak, so I gave him money and told him that he should eat something at school, no

need to save it. But he always saved his money to buy fabric and made clothes for himself. He fried rice to eat before going to school, not buying any food outside. He seemed to have even more money than I did. He used it to buy cloth and made garments, ironing them perfectly, always, since he was a young boy. We did farming back then, but he himself couldn’t do any of it.”

“I did what I love, despite everything,” remembers Chung. “I knew that my mom wouldn’t yell at me whatever I did. It’s those memories that formed me and made my personality what it is today. It was fun, every time I designed or made something for my cat, it tore everything to pieces. I couldn’t reach it because it was on the roof. By the end of the year, when we were spring cleaning, we found many scraps of cloth up there. But clearly there was something very interesting to me in what I was doing.”

Even though Vo Viet Chung’s family was relatively financially secure, there were still obstacles between the emerging young designer and his chosen path in life. “In the markets there was colorful kate,” he explains, “but those were hard times. I remember that we were issued with ration tickets for cloth. I was like no one else, if I wanted to exchange the



ticket to get other color, I would pay more money. For example, I made an exchange of more than ten meters of one fabric for one meter of another, as long as it didn't look like anyone else's."

"I remember there were red and other colors, but they looked terrible," he says. "I liked white, simple colors, so I had my sister embroider it and then show me how to do it. How to embroider dramatic motifs and that kind of thing. I like something unique. Obviously there were items of mine that were like no one else's. Now I have the factory to do the hand embroidery, but at least my creative ideas are still informed by my childhood. In the design world, if you have something that is so unique and atypical, you will definitely not be confused with others."

"In the past I also had a passion for drawing," he adds. "Usually I drew ladies in *ao ba ba*, *ao dai*... that was something that accompanied my childhood. I feel it now to be the source of my creative inspiration, of my love toward my profession. My childhood was very beautiful. People often say that the past is something very beautiful, something that carries the soul of our hometown. I didn't have a clue that I would be a designer when I grew up, but obviously such a childhood

helped to make the choice for me."

LOOKING AHEAD

Now having exhibited his collections in many countries overseas—including attending international fashion weeks in China, Australia and New Zealand, among others—Chung's greatest enthusiasm is reserved for the US. It was just last year that Vo Viet Chung presented a major collection of traditional Vietnamese *ao dai* at the "New York, I Love You" fashion gala, a 2015 spring/summer event featuring haute couture evening gown designs in nude tones. As the only Asian designer among the 100 international talents taking part in the Independence Day gala, Chung brought special attention to his Vietnamese collection with a very public photoshoot in Times Square with Victoria's Secret supermodel Angelica Kotliar, who reportedly agreed to pose without charge out of her respect for the traditional garment.

"I have traveled a lot, and America is one of the places I like most," grins Chung. "If there's a chance for me to develop my career in the US, I would feel very happy. After the awards, there were many invitations to collaborate, but I'm still making my choice, and so far I'm not

thinking about it too much, particularly from now till the end of this year. You have to consider things closely when doing business. Besides the financial issue, I have to consider a lot, I can't make any decision overnight even though it feels like I've reached a new level."

Having reached a certain level of celebrity, Chung is now often approached by younger designers hoping to find some inspiration, but the designer only rarely accepts an apprentice, having been disappointed in the past.

"I went through student life, I understand that it's really hard when you want to achieve something, it's not simple," he sympathizes. "Every year, fashion design contests give opportunities to young designers, but in the meantime, many of them can't survive in the industry. A contest may generate several hundred young designers each year, but then they all give up. I think it's a waste to lose that source of talent. People may think I'm very well-known these days, but they don't usually know that I had to go through a very hard time. It wasn't a process of luck, but a great deal of effort and patience. Young designers today have better opportunities than we did, it takes only several hours for the latest information or collection to be updated on the internet. We didn't have that in the past, and so we had to try much harder."

"Sometimes young designers come to me, but I have often found that they don't have the qualities I require," he sighs. "Their love toward this career is just not that profound. They have no passion or enthusiasm, and they just want to become famous as quickly as possible. I spent 20 years to get to where I am today."

Vo Viet Chung leans back and permits himself a rare, genuinely warm smile. "I try my hardest because I like it," he says. "If someone says they don't want to become famous, maybe that's misleading. I want to be free without anyone to bother me. I still want a quiet death that no one cares about. I don't want to be a celebrity, that's my nature. I love living a normal life without caring about all these people around me. But it's a simple fact—when setting out on this career, you have to be strange and special." ■

SMOOTH SAILING

High hopes for yachting in Vietnam

TEXT BY LORCAN LOVETT

IMAGES PROVIDED BY AZIMUT YACHTS

WITH 3,260 KILOMETERS OF STUNNING coastline, Vietnam seems a natural fit for yachting. Countless bays are carved into the spindly country, and its rivers are easily accessible. Why then, are yachts still a rare sight? Besides the obvious point that not everybody can afford a multi-million dollar vessel, boating for pleasure has been hampered by strict marine regulations, a lack of infrastructure, and the relatively alien concept of sailing for the fun of it.

Marina projects planned for Danang, Nha Trang, and Vung Ro promise to

change all of that. Regulations have also eased over the past few years, illustrated by several large catamarans skimming the shores off the central coast, and there are more rich people willing to splash their money on luxurious cars or boats.

Azimut Yachts is counting on an upturn in Vietnamese clients. The established Italian firm opened a Vietnamese branch last year—its first in Asia—to distribute its boats and develop the industry.

“It’s going to happen next year,” says 29-year-old Kirill Kuvatov, CEO of Azimut Yachts Vietnam, on the forecasted

boom of the pleasure boating market in Vietnam. “It’s not an overly optimistic inference. It’s purely realistic, quite grounded, based on visible factors. The marina in Nha Trang is a very good sign for us and for everybody (in the market).”

Most people in the nation’s boating business would agree with Kirill: Ana Marina in Nha Trang will elevate Vietnam’s yachting scene to an international level. Locally-based Focus Travel Company began constructing the VND388 billion project in July 2014 after being approved the capacity for 300 yacht berths. Its shipyard is





IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN



currently building two boats—a 26 meter catamaran and a 24 meter yacht. A 300m breakwater has already been built at the site along Pham Van Dong, Vinh Hoa Ward, though work is still underway for an initial 70 berths.

Focus Travel has not announced an official completion date although Kirill says it's likely to be in early 2017. It will provide a base to explore central Vietnam as well as offering crucial opportunities for maintenance. "People will feel more at ease using a yacht," adds Kirill, who is originally from Moscow and joined Azimut eight years ago as a sales manager.

There's another marina being developed just north of Nha Trang in Vung Ro by Singapore's ONE o15 and Vung Ro Petroleum while even further north in Danang, DHC-Marina is constructing a marina 160 meters away from the iconic Dragon Bridge. High-end residential projects such as VinHomes Central Park in Ho Chi Minh City are making space for yachts, too.

Kirill says customers who will buy their boats include rental businesses, which show "a lot of potential," and the slice of Vietnam's young population that are enjoying booming incomes.

"If you generalize, our clients aim to surround themselves with beautiful

things and create a certain lifestyle, meaning they know how to indulge themselves. The population of Vietnam is quite young for the most part. It introduces a big difference from European clients (who are older).

"What is peculiar about the Vietnamese market is that we see it will develop massively in medium size boats, from, say, 14 to 15 meters, whereas in Europe they tend to start from smaller sizes and upgrade themselves over the course of years.

"Here they have that sense of community, always tending to group up with like-minded people. Families are quite numerous, and what they need is big boats with a certain number of cabins. It's not a one-man trip or not the way it exists in Europe where a couple may spend a weekend on a boat. Here that couple will tend to invite their friends."

Instead of yachting for sport, Vietnam, like other new markets, will revolve around recreation, predicts Kirill, who is expecting a speedy pace of development. "We have been here for slightly more than one year; over this timeline the situation changed dramatically. Finally we are seeing local investors moving their capital into yachting developers, building



infrastructure facilities like yacht clubs and marinas. Once they appear, which will happen very soon, at the beginning of 2017, the situation will change even more.”

Those with enough cash to get into boating are typically faced with three options: a boat, a yacht or a mega yacht. Kirill explains that boats are usually six to 12 meters long and cost between USD60,000 and USD400,000. Super yachts, the kind of floating palaces on which Russian oligarchs like to sunbathe, are 30 meters long or more and cost anything upwards of USD7 million dollars.

Medium range yachts are 12 to 30 meters and cost from USD450,000 to USD7 or USD8 million dollars. It's this second option that Kirill says will be “the most visible” in Vietnam where first-time yacht buyers are likely to spend from USD1 to USD3 million and dock their toys in front of their private residences. Needing a crew of at least one captain and an assistant, these vessels have a size more suitable for sailing on the sea rather than rivers.

Azimut Vietnam has secured deals on a yacht and two boats so far this year, according to Kirill. “It requires a bit of time to have more impressive numbers,” he adds, estimating there to be 60 to 70 boat owners in the country of which 10 to 15 are yacht owners.

The Route of the Problem

From limestone karsts to golden sands, Vietnam isn't short of attractions that are best seen by boat, but, as the country is new to yachting, routes are still being established.

“Routes have to be created by people,” Kirill explains. “Where we are now, there's no experienced routes. Where can you go on a yacht? You could plan a longer trip; go to Cambodia, Thailand. You can go to Phu Quoc. It's an amazing island which has a lot of upsides compared to Thailand. You can go to Nha Trang, which promises to be a perfect destination—people will have the possibility of keeping their yachts there. Speaking about the north, it's Halong Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Sight. Those who start yachting in the north will stay around Halong Bay. There are yachts there already.”

In the past decade, traveling Vietnam by motorbike has become an internationally renowned adventure. Swapping a rusty Honda Win for an Azimut 72 (only a mere USD3.5 million more) could be the new way to see the country, taking two weeks from north to south if rushed, or perhaps over a month if done leisurely.

“Vietnam is one of the countries with the highest rates of tourism development in recent years. Its culture and story are very interesting. It's a mixture of cultures, which eventually developed into something really unique.” Aside

from the current dearth of large marinas, Kirill cites the general lack of awareness about recreational boating as the biggest challenge his company faces in Vietnam.

“In some ways, boating and yachting development goes in a slightly wrong way because of a lack of knowledge about what you have to pay attention to when buying a yacht or boat. This is something we're personally working on. Conveying messages, giving more insight about how the market operates, what's important and what's less important.”

Naval architect and marine engineer Michele Lauriero who works for Corsair Marine International in Vietnam believes the country's boating infrastructure is near a point where the doors can be confidently swung open to the world of yachting.

He wrote on a LinkedIn blog in January 2016 that the sea plays a vital role in the nation's economy, with more than 20 major commercial ports managing huge volumes of imports and exports. On top of this, he recognized shipbuilding as “becoming one of the main thrusts to the national economy” and the increasing quality and choice of maritime tourism trips.

“Despite this fast developing of the maritime economy and tourism, in Vietnam the yachting industry is still sluggish. Unlike other regional countries, such as Malaysia and Thailand, where maritime tourist and yachting industry development seems progressing together, in Vietnam it is really very rare to find a yacht. This seems to be a kind of paradox of this fast growing country where for sure (it's) not missing rich people able and willing to buy the ultimate luxury toy like a motor-yacht or a pleasure sail boat!”

Michele ascribes the delay of the yachting in Vietnam to its poor infrastructure and not to a lack of interest among consumers, many of whom are interested in buying a yacht or small boat. “But today something is changing. In the immediate future, the possibility to own and manage a personal boat will become real and accessible to many people, and with the number of extremely high-end consumers available today in Vietnam, the market of luxury boats will have a real big potential in this country. International yacht building operators are advised: start to look in this part of the world, which most probably will represent the next frontier of your commercial activity!”

Kirill adds that although Thailand probably has the biggest market in Asia, companies and customers are showing a lot of interest in Vietnam. And he hopes people will shake off the misconception that yachting is purely about luxury. “Yachting is not about luxury in itself. It's about having a different outlook. Looking at the same thing from a different perspective. You can't even imagine what your own country looks like from the sea. It always has implications of being a little romantic in a certain way. It's something I've always loved.” ■

THE PERSISTENT DANGER OF RABIES

Make sure you are vaccinated, and your pets are too!



With a family that includes six cats, two dogs and a couple of dozen fish, **Wayne Capriotti** is a zoo curator and, along with his wife, publishes Vietnam's first pet magazine *Me Thu Cung* (www.petmagazine.vn).

AT THE RECENT VIETNAM ANIMAL WELFARE CONFERENCE, an annual event promoting animal (domestic, farm and wildlife) protection, Dr. Phan Xuan Thao, Director at the HCMC Department of Animal Health, presented a poignant reminder of the persistent danger of contracting rabies in Vietnam. Rabies is a virus transmitted through the saliva of an animal which causes acute encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and is fatal if not detected and treated immediately. Although the majority of rabies cases are reported from rural areas, urban Saigon is not completely immune, where only Districts 1, 3, 4 and 5 are considered rabies free.

Startlingly statistics recently reported by the Department of Preventive Medicine and the Ministry of Health highlight the gravity of the situation where 400,000 people are bitten by cats, dogs and other animals annually in Vietnam, and to date, 49 people have died from rabies in 2016.

A factor in the spread of rabies is the overpopulation of cats and dogs created by the demands of the dog and cat meat trade through the smuggling and trafficking of mostly unvaccinated dogs into Vietnam from neighboring countries. A few unvaccinated dogs may escape their captors and run with other stray dogs that might be carriers of the virus. Dr. Thao mentioned that stray dogs are very hard to track and manage, especially in suburban and rural areas where the trafficking of stolen dogs takes place.

High Risk Groups In Need Of Rabies Vaccinations

Rabies can be transmitted by dogs, cats, bats, and other domestic and wild animals in Vietnam. The Department of Animal Health in HCMC recommends vaccina-

tions for the following groups:

- All long-term expats with dogs that 'socialize' with other dog owners in public spaces and who may walk their dogs in rural areas off leash.
- Frequent travelers to Vietnam involved in outdoor and other recreational activities such as camping, hiking, biking, adventure travel and caving, especially in the Northern Highlands region.
- Individuals who are in direct contact and working with animals, such as veterinarians/staff and especially animal rescue volunteers.
- All children must be vaccinated as they have a natural tendency to play with stray dogs or cats. They might not tell you that they were bitten, scratched or licked from possibly unvaccinated dogs and cats that may have rabies.

Puppy and Kitten Rabies Vaccinations

Puppies from properly vaccinated mothers receive maternal antibodies against rabies for their first three months, therefore it is recommended to vaccinate a dog at three months, again at nine months and revaccinate annually or at least every three years.

It is recommended to keep your 'Pet Health Passport' current and available as representatives of the HCMC Department of Animal Health make random checks on households throughout Saigon to check if your dog and cat are vaccinated.

Also, beware of the issues in the storage and handling of rabies vaccines by local veterinarians. Rabies vaccines must be refrigerated and maintained at temperatures ranging from 35-45°F (2-7°C). Temperatures higher or lower than this range can result in the death of the living vaccine organisms, leaving the product ineffective.

Rabies also play a critical role in leaving Vietnam with your pets. Since Vietnam is designated a high-risk rabies country and, no matter what your destination, you have to have your cat or dog tested for rabies at your own cost. There are many capable relocation service agencies and veterinarian clinics to help you in Saigon (read my articles—*Animals on the Go* and *Flying with Fido*—at www.oivietnam.com for tips on relocating your pets).

Do you need a Rabies Vaccination?

If you had a rabies vaccination before coming to Vietnam as a result of following travel advisory advice (pre-exposure vaccinations), then the effectiveness of a rabies vaccination is about 10 years or more. If this is all new to you then please arrange to get a vaccination immediately. It just takes one unexpected bite, and never assume that all dogs you encounter are vaccinated. ■

CLINICS IN SAIGON THAT OFFER RABIES (BENH DAI) VACCINATION:

Pasteur Institute

167 Pasteur, D3
www.pasteurhcm.gov.vn

Victoria Healthcare International Clinics

79 Dien Bien Phu, D1
135A Nguyen Van Troi, Phu Nhuan
Broadway D - 152
Nguyen Luong Bang, D7

International SOS Vietnam

167A Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, D3



CASHING OUT

The highs and lows of working as a cashier

INTERVIEW BY SOPHIA CHEN

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A CASHIER AT THIS SUPERMARKET?

I've been working as a cashier for about three years now. I am good at my job and love the work that I do.

DESCRIBE THE THINGS YOU DO ON A TYPICAL DAY?

A typical day would start with a brief discussion with my manager about the work I am expected to do for the day. Sometimes this would consist of the manager telling me what register I am working at and nothing more. Other times I learn about another department that I am going to help for part of the day, or a project at the front that I am going to be in charge of. The days that I spend in other departments are usually right after large shipments, where my manager would need help getting as much merchandise to the sales floor as possible. The projects at the front are typically displays that need organizing or new promotional items that need to replace the old ones.

I almost always close the store, which means I am the last cashier there at the end of the day. Apart from checking out people at the register, this means that I am in charge of cleaning the store at the end of the day and making sure everything is in place for the opening cashier the next morning. My day would end with my manager counting my drawer and me tidying up all of the displays in the front area to make sure they look good for the morning. If I have spare time, I would help other people put up returns in their departments so we can all leave the store quicker.

OUR SHOP HAS MANY FOREIGN CUSTOMERS. DO YOU SPEAK OTHER LANGUAGES? IF SO, HOW HAS IT HELPED YOU IN YOUR JOB?

I speak a little bit of English, and it has actually helped me in my work. I was in one of the departments of

the store once and I overheard a woman speaking English to another woman, trying to find something in the store. I offered to help them find what they were looking for. They were very grateful, and I felt proud to use my English to help someone.

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10, HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR JOB SATISFACTION?

I would probably rate my job satisfaction as a cashier at about a five. While I love the work and the chance to meet new people, the salary is terrible.

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR JOB?

I happened to hear the manager saying something about needing a new cashier. I told him I wanted to apply and he gave me an application. I turned it in a few minutes later and he offered me an interview for the next day.

WHAT'S THE STRANGEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO YOU IN THIS JOB?

I had a man bring a huge cart full of picture frames to my checkout line, he then claimed he left his wallet in his motorbike and then never came back for his things. I waited for a long time before canceling the bill, but he just disappeared.

ON A GOOD DAY WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL, CAN YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING THAT REALLY MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD?

The best feeling I got from the job would come from a satisfied customer who genuinely appreciated the work I did, and they are polite too.

DESCRIBE A BAD DAY AT WORK?

The bad days usually involved customer complaints. I am a cashier, so I am right in the line of fire for them. I would usually call a manager up to the front if a customer got out of hand,

and then they would take care of it.

HOW STRESSFUL IS YOUR JOB?

I wouldn't call the work I do "stressful" unless I was the only one working the register at a given time. Then I would be dealing with angry, impatient customers all staring down at me. I am able to leave all of that at work every day though, I don't bring it home with me.

WHAT'S A ROUGH SALARY RANGE FOR THE POSITION?

I am paid minimum wage. I think it is fair pay for minimal work, but considering the amount of side work I do for the store, I think I deserve much more.

WHAT'S THE MOST CHALLENGING MOMENT YOU'VE EXPERIENCED?

The most challenging experience I've had was when a person blatantly tried to return an item with a fake receipt. I had to try to tell my manager about the fraud without making it obvious that I knew about it. It was a scary situation, but it just comes with the job.

WHAT EDUCATION AND SKILLS DO YOU NEED TO BE A CASHIER?

I didn't need a particular degree for the job, no special skills needed.

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL A FRIEND CONSIDERING YOUR LINE OF WORK?

If a friend of mine wanted to work as a cashier, I would tell them that it makes a good side job but nothing to be proud of full-time. The pay is not high enough for that.

ARE THERE ANY COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS YOU WANT TO CORRECT ABOUT WHAT YOU DO?

I think the main misunderstanding I want to correct about cashiers is that they don't do anything except run a register. ■

ROOMS AVAILABLE

Must-knows before starting a hotel business

Dear Antoine and Caroline, I'm looking for information on how to register a hotel license in Vietnam. I am an EU and Australian national.

THE VIETNAMESE ECONOMY is booming and I understand that you are enthusiastic about setting up a business here. However, unlike many Western countries, such as European Union countries, Vietnam's legal framework contains many requirements for foreign investors therefore it is best to know a bit about these requirements before making any decisions.

As far as foreign investors are concerned, the first legal instrument to check is the "Schedule of Specific Commitments" agreed upon by Vietnam for its accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2007. This Schedule of Commitments is the list of economic sectors in which Vietnam has pledged to allow foreign investment coming from other WTO members, subject to certain restrictions that Vietnam has reserved the right to impose (most of these restrictions were temporary and expired in 2015).

Regarding "lodging services" (i.e. accommodation services), Vietnam has pledged to open, without restriction, this economic sector eight years after its accession to the WTO. This means that since 2015, foreign investment from other WTO members (such as Australia and European Union countries) may be made via a 100%-owned entity (as compared to the obligation, in other sectors, to establish a joint-venture company with a Vietnamese partner).

If we go a little bit further, most of the hotel businesses in Vietnam also provide a "travel business service," which is defined as organizing tour programs for tourists in Vietnam. Under the Schedule of Specific Commitments, Vietnam has agreed to open this sector but foreign in-

vestors must set up a joint-venture company with a local company, with no limitation on the foreign participation (i.e. you may have 99.9% and your Vietnamese partner 0.01%).

This means that you can operate a hotel in Vietnam by setting up a company that you will entirely own, however, if you want to expand your activity to travel services, then you need to find a Vietnamese partner.

Now, let's have a look at the Vietnamese regulations. As for all foreign investors (and this is not in contradiction with the Schedule of Specific Commitments), you will be required to obtain an investment registration certificate from the provincial level People's Committee; this certificate is a kind of license of business operation and is also a pre-condition for you to establish a company in Vietnam.

In the application file to request such certificate, you will need to provide evidence that you have secured an existing building or a land parcel which fits your project. This could be the most difficult part of your project. Due to regulations, not all buildings in Vietnam may be used as a hotel. For example, a building that is the home of a Vietnamese family (let's say, a beautiful villa in Saigon with a flower garden), cannot be sold to a foreign individual or a foreign company, or to a foreign-invested company, in order to be converted into a hotel. You will need to acquire a building from a Vietnamese corporate entity which is permitted for use as a hotel as provided, in particular, in the applicable master planning, construction permit and certificate of land use rights.

Before launching the hotel into operation, your Vietnamese company will need to obtain a number of certificates and permissions: the Certificate of satisfaction of security and order conditions, the written approval from the police of satisfaction of fire prevention and fighting conditions, and the Certificate of satisfaction of food hygiene and safety conditions (if the hotel

provides meals and catering services).

Furthermore, your Vietnamese company will need to obtain a classification of grade of the hotel, from 1 star to 5 stars, within three months from the hotel's launching date. The classification will notably be based on the status of construction work, facilities and equipment, quality of service, hotel expertise and language qualification of the hotel managers and staff, etc.

If you want to expand your activity to travel services, as described above, you will have to meet a number of additional conditions, such as having a license for travel services, having lodged a deposit of VND250 million at the competent authority and having managerial personnel with at least four years of experience in this sector.

There is an alternative option that you might consider. In practice, most of the major hospitality groups do not directly own the premises where the hotels are located. They only act as "managers" for the benefits of the owner of the premises. Following this practice, and as a small scale business, you could find the premises or site of your dreams; then sign a management contract with the owner, according to which you help the owner to improve the premises in order to convert it into a hotel or guesthouse. The management agreement should provide you with the right to manage the hotel or guesthouse without interference from the owner, including managing the fitting-out of the premises, recruiting employees, drafting the internal rules, setting prices, etc.

In all cases it is highly advisable to meet a legal counsel or someone who has experience in this field. If you enter into a management agreement, you will not be the "owner" of the premise, but will have more limited rights as the manager of the hotel or guesthouse.

Every month, Antoine and Caroline answer legal questions from readers.

If you have any legal question you want answered, send them to legal@oivietnam.com. ■



A member of the Paris Bar, **Antoine Logeay** has been practicing law first in France, mainly in litigation and arbitration, then in Vietnam for three years as an associate of Audier & Partners based at its Hanoi office. Also a member of the Paris Bar, **Caroline de Bellescize** has been practicing mainly business law and real-estate law for three years in a French law firm and is currently an associate at the HCMC office of Audier & Partners. 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.

A Silver Lining

For farmers suffering the effects of a severe drought, the rain couldn't come fast and heavy enough

TEXT BY NICK PIGGOTT

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF HEAVY rainfall caused chaos across Vietnam the past few months—flooding homes, destroying businesses and washing away motorbikes—prompting a deluge of pictures and videos on social media. I rarely come across somebody who doesn't have an insane story about what happened to them during the storms. But locals shake their heads when I poke my head out of my raincoat to ask them if this is the end of days, replying: "this is just rainy season." But I've been here for two rainy seasons already, and it certainly felt like something was amiss. So what's it all about? Is this normal? To confuse matters even further, this phenomenal rainfall came immediately after Vietnam suffered the worst drought in nearly a century. And, according to a report by Vietnam's Ministry of Planning and Investment, the drought cost the national economy more than VND15 trillion, with coffee, rice and fish farmers bearing the brunt of the impact.

Vietnam is the world's biggest producer of Robusta coffee, an industry valued at USD2.4 billion and making up 1.9 percent of Vietnam's total exports, employing around 2.6 million people, primarily in the Central Highlands where most of the 500,000 small holding coffee farms are located. These coffee farmers are forecast to harvest 1.5 million metric tons in this year's crop, the lowest since the 2012-13 harvest.

Fifty-six-year-old Dinh Ngoc Can, a farmer in Di Linh-Lam Dong Province, says his farm was severely affected by the drought, drastically reducing the productivity of his trees, with leaves withering, and branches shedding their pods prematurely. But Can was well prepared, having dug a deep-water well 40m into the ground the previous year. "If I run out of water, I can also build a pipeline to other farms who still have a water supply. Many farmers have dug ponds to harvest rainwater during rainy season. If they have water resources, I can buy it from them."

But other farmers weren't so well prepared. The situation became so severe in some regions that entire communities lost the ability to support themselves, prompting FAO, the UN agency that deals with food and agriculture, to implement a project to support livelihood for rural community affected by drought in Dak Lak, Gia Lai and Dak Nong provinces, worth nearly VND4.6 billion and benefitting over 4,500 households.

Further south in the Mekong basin, the prolonged drought and subsequent saltwater intrusion into the Mekong Delta rivers have caused extensive damage to more than 100,000 hectares of shrimp and fish breeding ponds in eight provinces, according to the country's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and 11 of the 13 provinces



in the delta region declared the drought a natural disaster.

Le Van Thang, who has been farming fish in Tra Vinh for the last 15 years, says he lost 15 tons of his usual 70-ton harvest because of the drought. "This year was bad. I lost almost VND400million as a result of the smaller harvest because of the salt water coming in from the sea. My fish aren't able to live in the brackish water it brings up the rivers." Does he think it will be a problem next year? "Yes, maybe. But I know how to solve it now. I won't start my next generation of fish in January or February, when the salination risk is highest. And I can now check the salinity of the water in the river before pumping it into my pond, so I won't have the problem again".

In addition to fish and shrimp, preliminary losses for rice crops that were damaged by the drought stand in the hundreds of millions of dollars, according to a Vietnamese government report, of which nearly 70 percent occurred in the Mekong Delta, an area which supplies half of the country's rice and 60 percent of its fish and shrimp.

El Niño and La Niña

The drought is one manifestation of the El Niño weather phenomenon—a non-regular occurrence in the tropical Pacific Ocean that affects weather patterns around the globe, often with destructive consequences. In Southeast Asia, El Niño brings drier weather and increases the risk of drought and forest fires, whereas the La Niña phenomenon is the reverse of the El Niño, where cooler waters bring increased precipitation.

The severity of the drought can be partly attributed to the 532 hydroelectric dams upstream of the Mekong, a river that passes through six countries on its journey from Tibet to the East Sea. Dams not only withhold water, but the larger surface area allows more rapid evaporation, further decreasing the eventual water flow downstream. China had to release 200 million cubic meters from some of its dams to ease the severity of the impact in the Mekong basin. These dams are a factor which will exert even more influence in the future despite the launch of the new Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism (LMCM), which is intended to help coordinate the use of water resources along the river, as the 204 additional dams, which are planned and under construction, come online in the coming years.

Clearing of forests to make space for cash-crop plantations such as coffee and soy reduces the land's resilience to natural disasters. The smaller plants with shallower roots are less able

to prevent soil erosion during heavy rainfall, so landslides become more likely, rainwater runs off more quickly, and rapid leaching of fertilizers contaminates nearby water sources like rivers and lakes. The Vietnamese government has restricted logging activities, helping to preserve the primary forests, and is implementing a program to replant 3,000 square kilometers of forest a year, to increase the forest cover to 57.4 percent of the nation's land area.

The biggest factor, though, is the decreased rainfall experienced during 2016, a pattern that, if it continues, could be extremely damaging to the country's agriculture. According to data from the Meteorology and Hydrology Department, rainfall at 10 meteorological stations in Dak Lak and Dak Nong provinces averaged just 25.8 millimeters in April, about a third of the 77.4 millimeters average of previous years. This is in a province that accounts for almost 30 percent of the national coffee harvest, and can be used as an indicator to forecast coffee production.

So, is this a taste of things to come for Vietnam, or an unhappy coincidence of extreme weather events? Talking to Dr. Nguyen Tan Chung, an expert in Soil and Water Sciences, who is currently lecturing at the Nong Lam University Ho Chi Minh City (formerly University of Forestry and Agriculture), it seems like this drought-flood cycle is likely to become more frequent. "That's the first time it has been so bad in Ho Chi Minh City, it's so weird," he says about the September flooding that crippled the city. "It was the worst rain in over 40 years, since 1975. But it's going to happen more often due to a shorter El Niño cycle, so we need to prepare to adapt."

According to World Bank data, average rainfall for September in Vietnam was 256 millimeters between 1990-2012, and while recent data on rainfall is not yet available, Dr. Chung's view is supported by a paper published recently by the Centre for Global Development, *Quantifying Vulnerability to Climate Change*. In it, Vietnam is ranked as the fifth most vulnerable country to extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, and hurricanes, meaning that without a resilience

strategy, agriculture could be in for a tough time.

"There are many ways that people can prepare against this in the future, and for the farmers in the Mekong Delta, switching to drought-resistant crops is a critical part of this. For example, a lot of research is being done into genetic modification of rice plants to make them more resilient against salt-water intrusion," explains Dr. Chung. The government is also aware of the risks, and a recent policy change requires any land being developed for new shrimp ponds in the delta area to include at least 30 percent mangrove trees. "This is because the plants not only could help to remove pollution from the effluent water that is generated by the shrimp ponds, and but also reduce greenhouse gas emission and increase CO2 sequestration in the air."

There's also a solution to the water shortage for coffee and pepper farmers, a system of intelligent irrigation that is beginning to be implemented across farms in the Central Highlands. "By calculating the soil's water retention curve, and using sensors in the soil to identify how much each plant need watering, we can work out the most efficient way to utilize the water resources available. So rather than needing more water, we just need to use the water we have more efficiently," says Dr. Chung.

As the risk of natural disasters such as droughts and floods increases, it's critical that Vietnam takes decisive actions to mitigate against them. This will require a concerted effort, from policy-makers to grassroots decision makers (farmers), to ensure that decisions on land use favors sustainable development. These strategies should include the preservation and conservation of existing resources as well as recycling the resources already in use. The government's greening strategy points towards smarter waste management as well, including the recycling of nutrients from agricultural processes. By following these few basic principles, Vietnam can move towards not only a more sustainable agricultural economy, but also a more resilient one.

Nick Piggott is the CEO of Nutri-Tec (www.nutri-tec.co.uk), a nutrient recycling company based in Vietnam. ■



BUILT FOR CHANGE

Meet Amazin LeThi, former bodybuilder and global advocate

INTERVIEW BY **LORCAN LOVETT**

IMAGES PROVIDED BY **AMAZIN LETHI**



AMAZIN LETHI IS AN ACTRESS, author, fitness coach, and former bodybuilder, but that's not all the strings to her bow. She also campaigns against LGBTQ and HIV/AIDS discrimination, and bullying within the Asian community.

Born in Vietnam, her mother left her at an orphanage in Saigon until she was adopted and raised in Australia. She has since enjoyed a varied career spanning over 20 years, with her advocacy work seeing her become ambassador for Vietnam Relief Services in 2012 and the first Asian female ambassador Athlete Ally, a group focused on ending homophobia in sports, in 2014. Her own group, the Amazin LeThi Foundation (www.amazinlethifoundation.org), fights to end LGBTQ bullying and HIV stigma in the Asian community.

She talks to *Oi* about her advocacy work, pulling herself out of a dark struggle, and being inspired by Arnold Schwarzenegger.

HOW DID BEING A TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEE SHAPE YOU INTO THE PERSON YOU ARE TODAY?

Being a transracial adoptee is a very unique experience unlike any other experience a child would ever go through, particularly being brought up in an all white background, knowing all the time that you look different from everyone else, also being picked on, because you do suffer a

terrible amount of bullying as well.

That kind of understanding and experience definitely lead to me being the person I am today in terms of my work, particularly bullying within the Asian community. We're bullied the most out of all ethnic groups and if obviously you feel different on top of that, that difference and bullying is amplified. I can see things from a very different perspective from maybe how other people can see incidences.

WHY IS BULLYING SUCH A BIG PROBLEM WITHIN THE ASIAN COMMUNITY?

We're seen as an easy target. You see what's happening in the media. For the most part there's this stereotype that if you bully us we won't speak up; we're the smallest kids out of all different ethnic groups, that stereotype that we're quiet, nerdy, and very passive. But there's a change now. It also comes down to our culture. I see it within the Vietnamese community, in terms of kids being bullied at school. Generally a lot of this bullying also starts at home. We're a very conformist community as well. When you have that pressure on you of having to conform, at some point you need an outlet, and it's unfortunate for a lot of children that outlet happens when you go to school, picking on that kid who they think is the weakest.

ON YOUR FOUNDATION'S WEBSITE, IT MENTIONS YOU CONTEMPLATED SUICIDE. WHAT BROUGHT YOU THERE AND HOW DID YOU GET THROUGH IT?

When I was a young adult I became homeless for a period of time and I ended up in a very bad crowd who were doing drugs. I had no money, I was heavily in debt and my world felt like it had spiraled out of control. When you get to that point where your world feels like it's suddenly clouded in darkness, you have these thoughts of what's the point? Why do I exist? And I did contemplate suicide for a period of time.

I know the issues that youth go through because I've been through it myself. The difference with me compared to a lot of youth that actually go through that process and commit suicide is that I had the strength to pull myself out of it, but it's not easy for everyone, and the majority of youth who go through that need the support because not everyone can pull themselves out of a situation like that.

HOW DID SPORTS HELP YOU GET OUT OF THAT FRAME OF MIND?

Sports give you the focus and the direction. It gives you a purpose, particularly if you're playing sports

as part of a team or just within a sports community, you feel like you have a sense of community.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR SPORT CAREER. WHEN DID YOU TAKE UP BODYBUILDING?

I started weight training at a very young age, very unusual, at about six. I was bullied a lot as a child because I was Asian. Sports gave me solace and a sense of community. Because I was a good athlete, it wasn't based on my race; it was based on my ability. I saw myself getting stronger. I started taking up self-defense, martial arts. I liked it so much I started competing as a teenager and felt I could have a career in the health and fitness industry. That's why I went on to writing health and fitness books and being a qualified health and fitness coach. After that I realized I could use sports as a larger platform in my career and also to help youth.

YOUR FOUNDATION FIGHTS AGAINST THE SOCIAL STIGMA ATTACHED TO HIV/AIDS. WHAT KIND OF IMPACT DOES THAT STIGMA HAVE ON VIETNAMESE SOCIETY?

HIV stigma and discrimination is so wide spread within the Asian community.





Even in the West it's still seen very much a taboo topic to even be able to disclose your status. It really comes down to people being educated on HIV/ AIDS and obviously how you contract it. One of the hardest things, particularly within the family unit, is how children are stigmatized and discriminated.

The difficult situation is opportunities within the community. Many children suffer discrimination at school. If people find out they're living or affected by HIV, in many incidents children have to drop out of school. If no one knows their status it's that cycle of lying and hiding because you have to take your medication at certain times, which becomes problematic if that child is staying over at a friend's place. At the workplace as well, if people know your status it may be very hard to get a job.

HOW ARE YOU COMBATING THE STIGMATIZATION OF HIV/AIDS?

I do a lot of advocacy work in the community and to other advocates and also the HIV community about HIV/AIDS within the Asian community. When people think about HIV/AIDS, they think about Africa and, yes, Africa still has the highest incidences but, outside of sub-Saharan Africa, it's Asia, and people still have little knowledge of what's going on the ground. Within Vietnam one of our local partners is Pham Thi Hue who's probably Vietnam's most famous HIV advocate.

She disclosed her status some years ago and she's been doing amazing work in Hai Phong and around the country about HIV awareness and also looking after the children who have been displaced by HIV because

maybe their parents have died of AIDs. We're launching a program with her, which is the first of its kind in the country that brings together two very marginalized groups—LGBT youth and kids living and or affected by HIV—in a leadership mentoring educational sports program in Hai Phong.

WHY CAN VIETNAMESE SOCIETY BE RELUCTANT TO TALK ABOUT HIV?

Within the Asian community as a whole we don't tend to talk about social or health issues. This also comes from this stereotype that we're this invisible model minority race, nothing exactly happens to us, so if we sweep it under the carpet it doesn't necessarily exist.

Also that fear of stigma and discrimination stops people coming forward to disclose their status or to learn about their status. It's important not just to have education about HIV awareness but also to have sex education and feel comfortable talking about these issues.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU HAVE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

People could never see me doing what I had envisioned in my own mind, so it's kind of being able to really believe in yourself when you feel like everyone thinks it's not going to work out and where do you pull that strength from; that the vision you have is the right one. I never had any mentors either so the career I built today is the career I had envisioned in my mind against all odds. That can be a very great challenge if you don't have anyone who necessarily believes in what you do.

The one story I latched onto was

Arnold Schwarzenegger's because I thought to myself here's someone who is completely different, he has a funny accent, he went to the US, against all odds he used bodybuilding as a platform for everything else. I thought if he could do that so can I. One of the most important things that I know now is if you want to create success, you need to find people who have done it before and look at their steps.

WHAT'S YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE WHITE HOUSE INITIATIVE ON ASIAN AMERICANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS (AAPI)'S ANTI-BULLYING 'ACT TO CHANGE' CAMPAIGN?

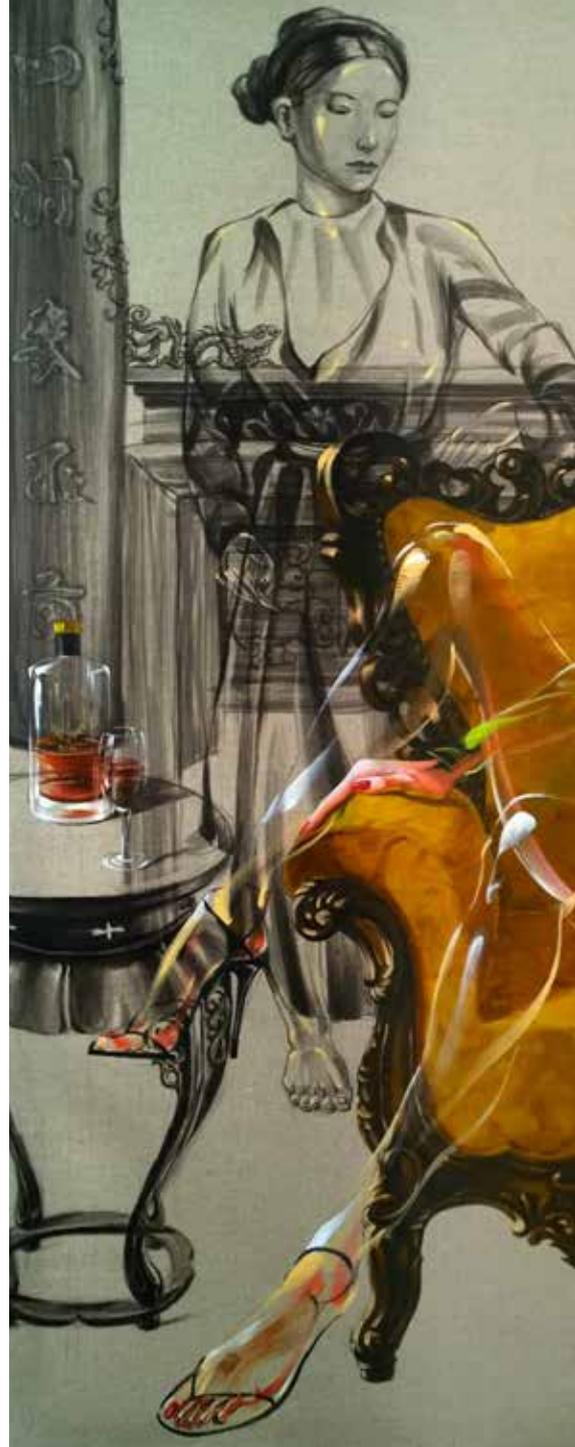
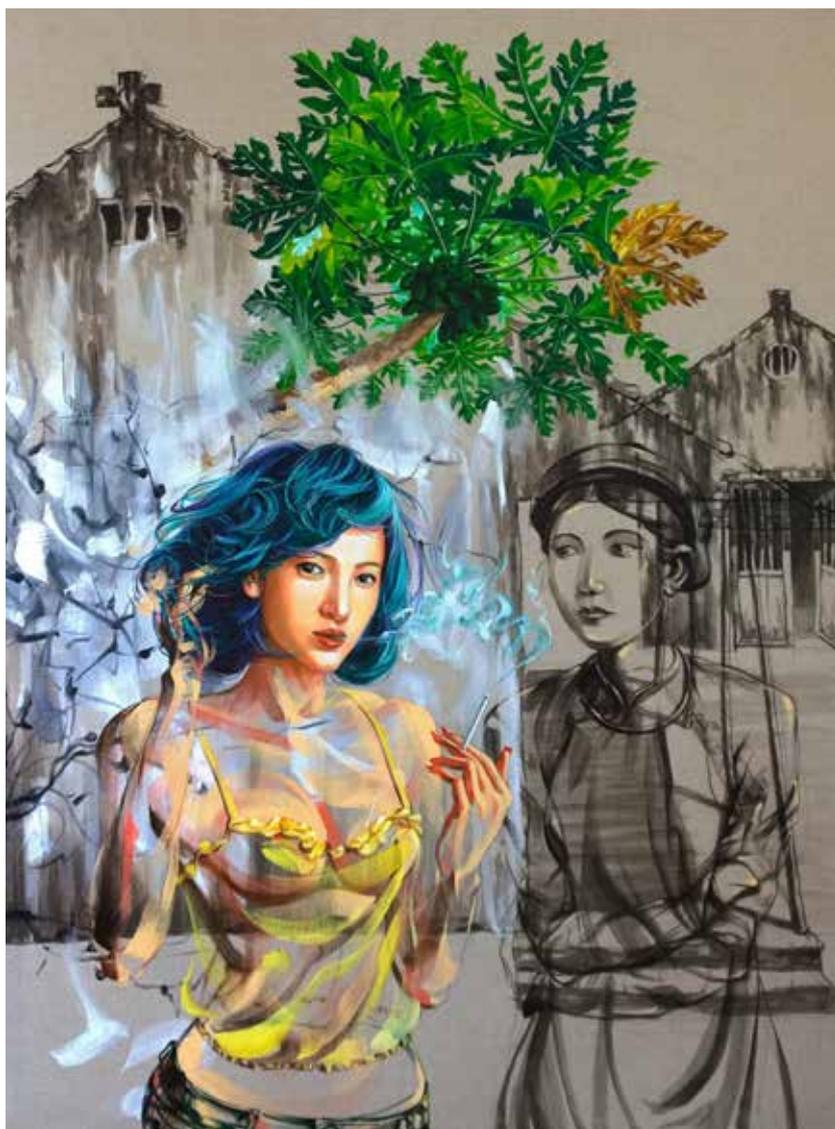
I've been advising them on different Asian issues. Part of our collaboration is that I would be part of the President Obama AAPI Legacy Event in December and I'll most likely be doing an in-conversation along with some other high-profile Asian Americans and people from the administration. We'll be talking about different issues in bullying within the Asian community locally in the US and internationally.

We're looking at taking Act2Change into the school system as a program and at ways that we can confront and address bullying within the Asian community and also the sub groups under that. Asian youth are bullied the most but then if you're bullied on top of that, if you're Asian and LGBT or Asian and have a disability, then that becomes a double layer of bullying. I'm working with the New York education system as well. They've actually asked me to come on board as one of their advisors within the Asian community. ■

FADING MEMORIES

A solo exhibition of oil paintings by Hanoi-based artist Nguyen Minh Nam

TEXT BY CRAIG THOMAS



NGUYEN MINH NAM'S LATEST COLLECTION *Fading Memories* is a further stanza in his on-going paean to the inevitable losses suffered by traditional Vietnamese culture in the country's headlong rush into the modern world. While there is clearly regret at the fading of culture-defining traditions, Nam's paintings also portray an intriguing future-present where a new class of liberated women are freed from antiquated notions of their chastity and roles as mere appendages of men. The women in many of Nam's work are often shown partially naked and



in semi-lewd or provocative positions. They smoke and drink and exhibit great ambivalence to social conventions such as traditional marriage ceremonies from which they are often portrayed as fleeing. Their older sisters from an earlier time are depicted as serving them—brushing their hair, taking their photo, or simply watching silently over them—leading the viewer to infer a reference to the sacrifices made by previous generations of Vietnamese women to help create a world where succeeding generations can live free of societal constraints.

Of his work Nam says: “In the process of living the life of a young

artist in Vietnamese society during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, I have closely observed the cultural lifestyle of the country’s youth. I have also studied and contrasted the present with the culture and lifestyle of previous generations. The majority of my works reference cultural issues. In my opinion, there is a great clash between traditional and modern Vietnamese culture which has yet to reach a place of balance. In my paintings, some of the characters are drawn in black and white. They belong to the earlier generation which was very simple, rustic, unobtrusive and straight-forward. They may have

been farmers or simple city folk, but they had very rich spiritual lives.

Adding: “The young ladies portrayed in my paintings carry the spirit of contemporary Vietnamese life which can be seen as being in stark opposition to the more modest conventions of the previous generation. I do not wish to take a stand between these two conflicting cultural paradigms, however, because both have their pros and cons.”

Nguyen Minh Nam is a graduate of the Vietnam Fine Arts University. This is his first solo exhibition at Craig Thomas Gallery (27i Tran Nhat Duat, D1), until November 15, 2016. ■



MR. DONG KHOI

Meet the man who witnessed 60 years of the city's history from just one street

TEXT AND IMAGES BY **JAMES PHAM**

DONG KHOI, THE RODEO DRIVE of Ho Chi Minh City, is the Madonna of Vietnam's city streets. No one has perfected the art of reinvention quite like the Queen of Pop. From the grungy girl next door with the cutout gloves to the bottle blond with a ponytail and cone bra, it seems the Material Girl has finally settled into gracefully acting her age.

Equally adept at reinvention is Dong Khoi Street, the

trendy heart of downtown Ho Chi Minh City. Now gracefully aged, with an immaculate facade comprised of high end boutiques along the lines of Louis Vuitton, Prada and Ferragamo, like the Material Girl herself, Dong Khoi wasn't always so glamorous. The 630 meter stretch of road, from the Notre Dame Cathedral down to Ton Duc Thang Street by the Saigon River, stands as a silent witness to Vietnam's

modern day history. Originally known simply as "16" out of streets numbered starting from the banks of the Saigon River, it was rebranded as Rue Catinat under the French rule, then changed to Tu Do between 1954 to 1975 when it gained its present name which translates to "Total Revolution."

Someone who's seen almost all of its reincarnations is Le Van Thai. Strolling down the tree-lined street, it'd be easy to casually dismiss the 82-year-old man sporting a quirky beret bedecked with pins from around the world as just another street-side vendor hawking a hodgepodge of stamps, coins and knickknacks. But like the iconic buildings constructed in the 1800s such as the Notre Dame Cathedral, the Opera House and the Saigon Central Post Office, Le Van Thai has seen history in the making. In his more than 60 years of selling along a tiny stretch of Dong Khoi, from the Opera House down to what is now the Bong Sen Hotel, he has witnessed people come and go, from the Japanese to the French to the Americans to the current crop of nouveau riche Vietnamese.

"I was here in the 70s and 80s when this area was just a trash heap, all mud, grass and ponds," he says of the period when the trappings of capitalism were frowned upon. "Now everything has changed. It's developed and much cleaner," he remarks, sipping an iced coffee, sitting on his stoop just outside one of the many silk stores that line the street. He points to various buildings and gleefully whispers bits of gossip on the owners, including how much they paid for the land.

"People like me here. The foreigners think that I'm a

charming old man. The shopkeepers feel sorry for me and let me sit here for free. They even help me put away all my things in the evening," he says proudly, waving his hand over an eclectic collection of old stamps and coins, bought from Vietnamese who have left in pursuit of a better life overseas. Some of his most prized stamps are over 100 years old and sell for roughly VND400,000. But for Mr. Thai, it's not all about the money. "Price is no matter. Sometimes I'll see someone who really likes something and I'll give it to them for free. It always works out, though. They always give me something the next time I see them."

He travels all the way from Tan Binh District to his well-worn spot daily. "I like sitting here. It's like getting away. I don't need my children to take care of me. They live their own lives, I live mine," Mr. Thai says of his eight children. When asked about his grandchildren, he replies, "I really don't remember how many I have. There are just too many of them."

Orphaned from the age of 13, Mr. Thai made his way from northern Vietnam to build a life for himself in the South. Armed with only a third grade education, he holds up a newspaper and proudly shows off his reading skills. Within a span of 30 minutes, he spews phrases in Japanese, English, French and Russian to passersby. "Despite my age, I still like to learn and explore. But I'm getting old now. I'm tired and would like to retire." If that happens, Dong Khoi will be the poorer for having lost a small piece of its rich history. ■





BACK TO **BLACK**

A collection inspired by fall/winter colors, the use of darker pieces serves as a reminder that bold, black designs remain eternally classy and relevant. Teamed with statement pieces adaptable for both day and night, these ultra-feminine designs take sophistication to dizzying heights.





CLOTHES UMBRELLA
(umbrella-online.com)

PHOTOGRAPHER RONG NOBITA
MODELS NGOC ANH THU
MAKEUP PHA NGUYEN
HAIR NGUYEN JV
STYLIST PHUC TRAN



A close-up photograph of several golden-brown baguettes stacked on a black wire cooling rack. The breads have a soft, porous interior and a slightly cracked, crusty exterior. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface.

GOOD MORNING,
SAIGON

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, keeping us healthy and sharp. But breakfast foods vary wildly from place to place. Inspired by the city's cosmopolitan lifestyle, we take a look at some classic breakfast choices from countries around the world. Whether it's pancakes and bacon in America or fermented soybeans in Japan, each country does their first meal of the day a little differently. And with our delicious picks this month, there's no reason to skip breakfast anymore.





BLUE BERRY PANCAKES

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

Through all the fads, eggs and pancakes remain the definitive American breakfast dish

TEXT BY MARTIN ZORRILLA AND SONIA GREGOR IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

AS WITH EVERYTHING IN THIS FAST-PACED WORLD, the average American breakfast has evolved over time. One hundred and ten years ago, that kale-and-almond-butter smoothie you're clutching in your Soul Cycle-sweaty claw would be replaced with a filigreed silver table

fork, perhaps spearing a wiggly lump of jellied veal. Or, 42 years ago, you might have been choking down something called Crab Imperial Chesapeake in between slurps of Tab. Or, 31 years ago, you could have been double-dipping between bowls of Rainbow Brite and Mr. T novelty cereals. (You 80s kids

sure knew how to start the day.)

Changes in the dishes gracing American breakfast tables over the years can be traced to a number of influences: the socio-economic and political landscape (like food rationing during the World Wars), breakthroughs in technology (welcome



would not be complete without a cup of joe, and the BoatHouse offers a full selection of espresso drinks. Both the long black (VND55,000) and flat white (VND60,000) were excellent, with a smooth nutty flavor. The latter had that velvety texture prized by all baristas worth their beans.

Another essential component of an all-American morning feast is stacks of big, fluffy pancakes. Pancakes were a staple food for homesteaders and gold rushers as the US expanded to the West. In Alaska, those who went in search of gold became known as “Sourdoughs” because of their endless consumption of sourdough bread and pancakes. But what sets the modern American pancake apart from the rest is its fluffiness, achieved with leaveners like baking powder, which was first introduced in the 1800s.

The BoatHouse’s blueberry pancake platter, with plenty of butter and syrup on the side, was amazing. Each bite of fluffy pancake had a pop of juicy blueberry. And the truism, “Everything is bigger in America,” applied equally to our breakfast. Our flapjacks came with bacon, ham, or sausage to help soak up more delicious syrup.

We couldn’t leave without trying the BoatHouses’ famed extra large TET Bloody Mary (VND440,000). The drink, really a meal and drink combo, arrives in a glass so large that you need two hands to hold it. And somehow miraculously balanced on the glass are several garnish skewers of fried pickles, onion rings, pickled pepperoncini, cherry tomato, cheese, the aforementioned local bacon, house-made buffalo chicken wings and two cheeseburger sliders. Hallelujah!

Whether you’re recovering from last night, or just want to start the day off right, the BoatHouse’s river front location can’t be beat. Sitting on the terrace or inside the palm-thatched dining room, you can breathe fresh air and admire the greenery on the opposite shore. ■



to the 1930s, refrigerators!), and the advent and evolution of pop culture (hello, 1950s “teenagers”!). But some trends proved lasting—even during the Great Depression, families still managed to fry up a plate of bacon, slap up some pancakes and brew a pot of coffee. You would be hard-pressed to think of a more enduring, beloved American meal than this.

On the hunt for the perfect eggs and bacon breakfast without traveling stateside, we found ourselves at the **BoatHouse Restaurant** (40 Lily Road, APSC, 36 Thao Dien, D2) in Thao Dien, watching the Saigon River slide by on a

glorious Sunday morning. Settled into our outdoor table, we perused their all-day breakfast menu and decided on the American breakfast (VND165,000) and blueberry pancakes (VND195,000). The American breakfast came with eggs (cooked to order), a hash brown and choice of ham, crispy bacon or pork sausages. Our sunny side up eggs arrived freshly cooked and soft in the middle while the hash brown was crisp and golden, but the bacon was the real star of the dish. The restaurant procures it from a small local producer, and it was smoky crunchy perfection.

Any proper American breakfast



SMOKY BURRITO

GOING LOCO FOR BREKKY

What is it that pushes a breakfast burrito beyond hangover helper and into the realm of mid-morning revelation? Find out

TEXT BY **MARTIN ZORRILLA AND SONIA GREGOR** IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**

THERE ARE SOME REWARDS FOR BEING

a late-riser, and one of them is breakfast at **La Fiesta** (33 Dang Thi Nhu, D1). The much-loved restaurant dishes up Tex-Mex comfort food starting at 11am with a full breakfast menu served all day. Breakfast is an undeniable strong suit of Tex-Mex, a culinary tradition that rose from the mixed cultural heritage of the US state of Texas. The name “Tex-Mex” was originally a nickname used for the Texas Mexico railroad of 1875, although culinary exchange was happening well before that date. As well as absorbing essential Americana cooking styles, Tex-Mex cuisine has deep roots in Native American and Spanish culture (the state spent 300 years as a colony of Spain). The resulting fusion has made American food all the greater, and breakfast even better.

We started our La Fiesta breakfast by snagging seats by a wide window and ordering drinks. We resisting the temptation of the margarita selection (it's almost noon?) and ordered a Vietnamese coffee (VND30,000) and a Mexican hot chocolate (VND60,000). The much needed coffee was smooth and rich, while the hot chocolate was deliciously creamy and dark. The chocolate was livened up with vanilla and cinnamon as well as a dash of cayenne pepper.

Our first order of business was a smoky breakfast burrito (VND180,000). By the time it arrived the kitchen, now in full swing, was producing enticing wafts of spice and cilantro. Smokey was an understatement for this burrito, its flour tortilla held within its folds scrambled egg, bacon, its flour tortilla held within its folds scrambled egg, bacon, smoked Gouda and smoked ham. It was cheesy goodness.

Next up is a cornerstone of a Tex-Mex breakfast: *huevos rancheros*. The dish originated, as the name suggests, on

ranches in Mexico where farmhands needed generous portions of eggs and beans to start a day of hard work. We could make no such claim of hard work, but still ordered a plate *huevos rancheros rojo* (VND125,000). Diners can choose to add bacon or chorizo (our pick, VND20,000), their signature chipotle lamb shoulder (VND45,000) or beef shank barbacoa (VND50,000). The *huevos rancheros* came with soft corn tortillas, topped by refried black beans, two sunny side up eggs, a mild red sauce, tomato sauce, cheddar and green onions. As my father would say, *al ataque* (attack)! The dish did not disappoint, the red sauce and chorizo were a match made in heaven and the corn tortillas were just right.

Our final dish was a lesser-known but equally fundamental dish called *migas* (VND160,000). “*Migas*” translates to “crumbs,” because they were traditionally made from the leftover bits after frying tortillas. It was originally a traditional dish belonging to the Extremadura region of Spain, before its adoption in present-day Mexico, where the bread crumbs became corn chips. Tex-Mex took it a step further by adding tomato, onion, refried beans, and, of course, cheese. At La Fiesta the *migas* were all we ever wanted for breakfast and more. The meaty corn chips soak up flavor, while the tomatoes add a fresh bite to the delicate eggs. As if that was not enough both the *migas* and the *huevos rancheros* came with crispy hash browns and a side of absolutely fantastic Australian cream. The genial co-owner, Scott Marquis, told us that it was the discovery of the sour cream that led him to believe he could open a Tex-Mex restaurant in Saigon. We, and all the other fans of La Fiesta, sure are thankful for how that bit of food history ended. ■



HUEVOS RANCHEROS



MIGAS



MEXICAN HOT CHOCOLATE

RISE AND SHINE

A healthy, minimalist Japanese spread might just be the new power breakfast

TEXT BY HUY NGUYEN IMAGES BY ADAM ROBERT YOUNG

THE BEST PART OF MY RECENT stay at a *ryokan* (old-fashioned inn) in Kyoto was the elaborate traditional breakfast. The meal consisted of a multitude of little dishes served on beautiful tableware: steamed rice, miso soup, sardines, sweet-salty black beans, *nori*, fish cake and *tsukemono* pickles, plus a small cauldron of silken tofu and veggies. Naturally,

when I returned to SAigon, I hoped to find a Japanese breakfast again.

Owner of **Achaya Café** (90 Le Loi, D1), Ayako Fuji has added a traditional Japanese breakfast menu to her restaurant. “A majority [of Japanese] eat *natto* as a healthy start to their day,” says Ayako. “Eat it with soy sauce, the pickled vegetables (carrots, daikon and cucumbers) and the pork miso soup

(made of thinly-sliced pork, carrots, potatoes and onions in a hot pork and miso broth).” *Natto* (VND98,000) are fermented soybeans that are notorious for their pungent smell but paired with the right foods, chosen especially by Ayako, they become a delicious accompaniment to the dish. *Natto* takes two days to prepare in a consistent temperature of 40 degrees Celsius. If you are daring, stir in a bit of Karashi mustard paste—strong and spicy like wasabi—too much may cause an explosion, but a little is enough to go a long way. And to cool down your palate after that adventure, try the fresh salad that’s included with the special *dashi* fish sauce dressing that’s specially imported from Japan.

Another symbol of a true Japanese breakfast is the *sakeno siokouji yaki teishouku* (VND138,000) or better known as salmon. Yes, Japanese folks eat a great deal of fish and breakfast is no exception. At Achaya Café salmon is imported for the sake of quality and then marinated in *shio-koji*, a natural Japanese seasoning (also imported) that helps tenderize and add a touch of sweetness without overpowering the dish. The perfectly cooked salmon—not too well done—is paired with a bowl of white rice, side salad, grated daikon and sesame spinach to refresh your palate.

A hearty Japanese breakfast provides energy all through the morning, without getting the 10am faintness one may experience after eating the usual breakfast quickie. And if you can venture beyond Japanese sushi, this place would be worth rolling out of bed for. ■



NATTO



SAKENO SIOKOUJI YAKI TEISHOUKU

TO SUM UP THE MORNING

Start the day the Singaporean way

TEXT BY **NPD KHANH** IMAGES BY **ADAM ROBERT YOUNG**



DIM SUM

AMERICAN CHEF, AUTHOR, AND TELEVISION

PERSONALITY Anthony Bourdain once stated that Singapore, Hong Kong and Tokyo are the food capitals of the world where cuisines from every country can be found and anyone and everyone is crazy about food. But when asked, most people would be hard pressed to identify Singaporean cuisine and with good reasons.

Founded in 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles and with only 197 years of recorded history, Singapore did not have a lot of time to develop its own unique cuisine. The foods and cuisine styles on offer are certainly diverse, but for the gourmand who wants to experience a uniquely Singaporean taste, there are only two choices: the chili crab and the Singapore frog porridge. Both of these are proudly claimed by Singaporeans as national signature dishes, but only one among the two bears the country name in its title and while it is sold and eaten everywhere in Singapore at all times of the day, the Singapore frog porridge is at its best as either a breakfast or brunch entry and paired with one or two servings of dim sum.

It is the 19th century Chinese immigrants who first brought their breakfast tradition to a newly born Singapore where it took roots and persists till today. Despite China's vast culinary repertoire, the traditional Chinese breakfast is deceptively simple—dim sum and porridge—followed by a cup of steaming hot tea to cleanse the tongue. So simple in fact that it almost comes across as boring, what most diners do not know is that this breakfast is a small, finely-tuned three-course meal in itself. A basket or two of bite size dim sums (VND30,000-VND40,000 each) at **Geylang @ Saigon** (134 Nguyen Thai Hoc, D1) preps the palate then the main entrée, Singapore frog porridge, follows.

Proper frog porridge is always served in two separate red claypots, the rice porridge (VND15,000-VND30,000 per pot), thick and rich in one pot and fresh frog meat, flash braised and steeped in Kung Pao sauce (VND80,000 each), in another.

"The meat must be fresh, unmarinated and unseasoned so that the succulent meat can be tasted," Long adds. And despite the popular joke, frog meat tastes a world of difference from chicken. "The sauce is prepared with

herbs and spices. My special Kung Pao sauce recipe involves 14 main herbs. The cooking starts five minutes before eating. We flash cook the meat with dried chili, spring onions, and Kung Pao sauce in a red claypot. The dish is then served to the guests in small porcelain bowls, rice porridge underneath and the frog and sauce in a separate layer on top."

Adding: "Most people find it difficult to distinguish Chinese cuisine and Singaporean cuisine. There's not much difference to be honest since so much of Singaporean culture and cuisine is deeply rooted in their Chinese origin, but the frog porridge is where the Singaporean modern spin is at. Chinese food favors strong fatty tastes with plenty of oil. Singaporean food, in this case the frog and sauce, is far more restrained and there is no cooking oil involved at all."

There is also a proper way to eat the porridge. "Never stir it up," Long insists. "Scoop it up cleanly so that the porridge, the sauce and the frog are not mixed up together. Then you can taste the different flavors: the rich porridge, the sweet and salty Kung Pao sauce, the succulent frog meat and the red hot spicy chili. The first spoon is always the best." ■

FROG PORRIDGE



CHÀO BUỔI SÁNG

Swapping bacon and eggs for offals and noodles

TEXT BY **TRAN THUY HA MY** IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**



PHO



CHAO CA



BANH MI THIT



TRUNG VIT LON

LIKE THE COUNTRY ITSELF, Vietnamese breakfast is a complex subject, changing in overall culture and flavor from north to south. Most Vietnamese don't cook breakfast at home, they usually have breakfast on their way to work. So it's common to see *banh mis* and sticky rice pre-wrapped in food carts and ready to go, and if they do have time to stop for breakfast



BANH HOI LONG HEO



COM TAM SUON

it is usually pretty basic and quick like *pho* or *com tam*. Up in Hanoi cold winters have sculpted unique breakfast dishes that can be found every morning along the streets and the *trung vit lon* (duck embryo) is by far the dish of choice. Crack the top, suck out the steamy liquid inside (it's the best part) and then take spoonful after spoonful of the protein, garnishing with Vietnamese coriander and ginger. For the fainthearted, *chao long* (rich porridge) is a dish that warms deep in the Hanoian heart. Rice porridge filled with boiled pork offal likes stomach, intestine, heart, kidney and many others come together to make a wholesome porridge. *Chao long* is served with a fried bread stick called *banh quay* which is made with wheat flour and originated in China. Coming from Phan Thiet a personal favorite of mine, and very popular in Central Vietnam, is *banh hoi long heo* (pictured) and can be found at Quan Banh Hoi Nia (187 Phung Van Cung, Phu Nhuan). It's a dish of thin rice noodle woven into intricate bundles, which tastes similar to vermicelli. The dish is brushed with chopped spring onions in oil and is commonly served with boiled pork organs and spring rolls. To eat, select a sheet of rice paper, add herbs and the noodles inside, top that with some boiled meat and a small spring roll, roll it all up, and then dip it in chili garlic fish sauce. ■

Wine & Dine

PARK LANE'S SUNDAY ROAST





Live on Top

There are few better ways to enjoy Saigon than from above, cocktail in hand, with live music in the background and free flow tapas floating around

Text by MARTIN ZORRILLA AND SONIA GREGOR *Images by* NGOC TRAN



IT IS RARE THAT ALL THE BEST PARTS of an evening out come together in just one place, but they do at **Zen Rooftop Bar** (Level 10, 3-5 Suong Nguyet Anh, D1, Fusion Suites Sai Gon), where Friday is all about good music, delicious tapas and dazzling views of the city. An added bonus (when we visited) was a generous combination of deals that allow you to enjoy half-priced cocktails, free tapas and live music (every Friday from 8pm-9pm).

On our visit we arrived as the musician was just setting up with his acoustic guitar. His set began with an original interpretation of *Uptown Funk* by Bruno Mars, and we happily started on Zen's signature cocktails. I tried a Desert Rain (VND150,000), a wonderfully complex fusion of bourbon,

cranberry and lychee. My partner chose a gin drink, the Rose Titanic (VND150,000). Aside from a great name, the Rose Titanic had fresh thyme and rosemary with a touch of lime juice and egg whites. The cocktails are two-for-one during Happy Hour from 5pm until 7pm, so our advice is to arrive early and enjoy a view of the sunset with your drinks.

Visitors to the live acoustic nights on Fridays are treated to free flow tapas for the hour, while at other times guests can order directly from Zen's fusion tapas menu. Our first round of tapas started with beef lemongrass skewers (VND60,000), a dish originating in Hue. The beef was grilled well, holding both its moisture and the delicate taste of lemongrass. The skewers were served on an elegant



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: BEEF LEMONGRASS SKEWERS, TUNA TACOSHIMI, TUNA AND SCALLOP CEVICHE

slate tray and garnished in a light sauce with shallots.

The artist performed a beautiful rendition of Ben E. King's *Stand by Me* and we started on a plate of lollipop wings (VND60,000). However, these were not your ordinary chicken wings; they were breaded and baked then elegantly presented with spicy mayonnaise sauce. The spicy mayonnaise sauce, containing a hint of lemon rind, was a favorite at our table.

Next up from the worldly kitchen was a tuna and scallop ceviche (VND80,000), cleverly served in a small inverted *non la*. The ceviche was prepared Peruvian style with some well-chosen regional ingredients, including sesame and chili as well as Japanese Ponzu as the citrus base. The result was applause worthy; the scallops provided an ideal accompaniment for the firm tuna, and the fresh Ponzu and herbs imparted a crisp finish.

When the final tapas for the evening was brought out it was quite clear that the musician was not the only talented artist at Zen that night. The chef introduced his original creation: the tuna tacoshimi (VND80,000). A brilliant fusion of taco and sashimi, the tacoshimi had freshly fried tortilla chips carefully layered with avocado, wakame, caviar and wasabi mayo. Topping it all was a gorgeous slice of tuna sashimi, lightly seared on the edges. The presentation was stunning, and the taste was unforgettable. The creamy avocado paired with the crisp chip, while wakame and caviar danced a salty tango in the background.

Zen Rooftop Bar features a cozy indoor space with soft lighting and beautiful cedar woodwork, as well as an encircling outdoor terrace. The calming layout and decor certainly seem to draw inspiration from the school of Buddhism that is the bar's namesake. Moreover the space feels intimate, regardless of the number of people present. On nights with live music this coziness is reinforced by the presence of the performer, playing acoustic sets in the middle of the indoor space, without a sound system. The musicians that perform at the Zen Rooftop Bars are artists that have been selected from the hotel's special music competition project to support young talents in Vietnam. While the singer played his last song, we slipped out to the terrace, which was a phenomenal space to spend an evening. The view made an instant impression on us, although it took a little while of sipping on our drinks before we understood what was special about it—is just far enough removed from the larger buildings to offer a complete skyline. With Tao Dan Park between you and the traffic, the night feels quiet (a rarity in Saigon) and a cool breeze is almost constant, a perfect ending to a great night. ■





COMING HOME TO ROAST

No Sunday is complete without partaking in this British tradition

Text by JOEL ZORRILLA *Images by* NGOC TRAN

A ROAST MAY BE THE MOST quintessential British weekend tradition, followed by the glorious English breakfast. The definition of comfort food is food that provides a feeling of consolation and that is associated with childhood home cooking. A good Sunday roast can be one of the hardest challenges. Unlike



fancy restaurant-style dishes, there's nowhere to hide, no slick techniques or sauces to cover up slip-ups.

For the substantial population of British expats living in Saigon, Park Lane's Sunday roast will come close to your hearts; so make your way to Thao Dien in District 2. Recently opened, **Park Lane** (28 Thao Dien, D2) is a multi-recreational space for everyone, from kids and families to couples and their dogs. A small mini-golf course complements the large garden area with tables and chairs spread about the place, similar to picnic rest areas often found along highways in the US. The tastefully designed house, which serves as the main room of the restaurant-event venue, is an architectural beauty that stands out amid the whitewashed manors surrounding it.

Not being British myself I brought my mate from Birmingham for an expert opinion on the matter. Hot and juicy and out of the oven at 1pm, the cooks started slicing up the mouthwatering roast, the weekly options rotate around four proteins: roast beef, turkey, lamb and pork (give them a call at 093 790 3140 ahead of time to find out). On our particular Sunday we received the roast beef, served with an array of roast vegetables, a bowl of decadent gravy and, of course, the piece that draws it all together, Yorkshire pudding. We started with the wine (complimentary with the roast), a fine white hailing from Bordeaux. It's a fresh and lively wine, and soothes the palate on a hot tropical Sunday afternoon.

When our plates of roast beef arrived we soon realized we wouldn't do it

justice to taste it in polite appreciative nibbles. Instead, we threw ourselves at it until there was nothing left. The several hours of cooking yielded a tangle of soft and luscious beef, drizzled in rich gravy. And sitting alongside it is one of my favorite British inventions—fluffy and fresh-out-of-the-oven Yorkshire pudding. Like a small volcano with a gaping crater full of gravy, it was phenomenal. The beef was beautifully seasoned and perfectly medium done, it was the perfect start to my day off. I must make special mention of the vegetable sides: the roast potatoes were exactly as you want them, a bit crunchy on the outside, with a healthy coating of spices, and soft on the inside. The carrots and onions were crunchy and flavor packed, while the steamed green beans and bok choy gave balance to the entire roast beautifully. After we sipped away the last of the wine and cleaned our plates of the last dab of gravy, the staff appeared with our cups of ice cream (also included with the roast), our two choices were rum raisin and Bailey's—both creamy, and a cool respite from the sweltering Vietnamese heat.

The weekly roast, glass of wine and dessert included, is VND400,000 and starts at 1pm and goes on until the meat runs out, normally by 6pm. ■



Rei of Light

At an unassuming square building,
pleasures lie within

Text by **BRIAN JUNG** Images Provided by **SUSHI REI**

SUSHI, IT'S BOTH A MAGICAL and a terrifying word. In the past several years in Saigon sushi has risen to enormous heights where it has given birth to some bad sushi food carts and mediocre sushi chains popping up like weeds in places like malls. California rolls, chewy tasteless whitefish and fatty farm salmon dot tables like discarded ticket stubs after a movie. But in some rare cases, one can stumble upon a true gem: **Sushi Rei** (10E1 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D1; *sushirei.vn*). It's tucked in an unassuming side street at the end of an alley with no sign to point the way. Ayumi-san, the manager, tells me the place has only been open for a year but is already regarded as one of the best sushi places in the city.

Japanese culture is deeply rooted in respect, humility and harmony with

nature and Sushi Rei seems to embody this in all aspects. The service here is impeccable and the slightest look can have someone appear at your elbow asking in a hushed tone if there's something they can help you with.

Rei has only eight seats and one private room which I'm told is very common in Japan so guests can enjoy an authentic, intimate experience. The chef and waitstaff speak Japanese, English and Vietnamese so communication is not a problem. The intimacy of the place was offset by soothing jazz piano and modern contemporary furnishings which made me feel absolutely at peace but also seemed to heighten my sense of taste. A wall of wooden fish scales seemed to softly undulate as I heard the soft tinkle of water from a nearby pool. The design itself was created by famous

Japanese architect Joe Chikamori using imported materials from Japan.

At a place like this the only way to order is "*omakase*," which roughly translates to "chef's choice." This is basically a way to let the chef's creativity and skills shine through. It's also a great way to test the quality of the place. In fact, if you ask for a menu, there isn't one, only for the drinks as the food and ingredients change from day to day. For the freshest possible experience, try to book a seat on Tuesday or Friday when fresh fish is shipped directly from the Tsukiji Fish Market, the famous wholesale market in Tokyo.

Lunch sets are priced at VND650,000 with dinner "*Omakase*" priced at VND3 million. I was served several dishes that were separated into appetizers/small plates, soup,



sashimi, nigiri and dessert. There were over a dozen different dishes so I won't list them all but instead describe my favorites of the night.

From the sashimi, the star was definitely the fatty tuna/tuna belly. It was really creamy and melted in my mouth as soon as it hit my tongue. The fresh wasabi was also very lovely and one could easily tell the difference from the squeeze tube variety. This one was slightly sweet but still had that bite to it.

The *nigiri* sushi, which is usually the star of the show, was fantastic here. For my first *nigiri* I was given two kinds of eel: one with sea salt and one brushed with a sweet glaze. The former was slightly torched and the fats caramelized to create a delicious rich mix of eel, sweetness and saltiness. *Nigiri* squid is something I usually avoid because

when the quality is bad it's rubbery, tough and chewy with no flavor. I was very happy to find this squid nearly disintegrate on my tongue. I was hit immediately with a strong citrus flavor and then sea salt, both a welcomed surprise. The secret I was told are tiny hatch mark cuts on the squid: genius.

From the small plates, the steamed egg was creamy and soft. Next came the Pacific Saury, a staple in the Japanese diet. It was deboned and topped with a garnish of ginkgo nuts and a slice of squid. The Saury itself was fatty and tender with a slight oily taste that was offset by the ginkgo nuts. It was obviously very fresh and I could easily taste the difference in this one versus store bought. The urchin topped with salmon roe was equally fresh as well and didn't have any of the fishiness that

I've tasted from low quality urchin. The salmon roe were like little dewdrops of slight peppery droplets that burst in my mouth. Absolutely delightful.

For dessert I was given a small piece of sweet egg sushi which tasted like a fluffy piece of cake. I was looking forward to the real Japanese green tea ice cream I'd heard about but the regret was quickly forgotten as I was then given a dish of chilled melon, gelatinous cubes made from sake and a slice of persimmon to finish off the meal.

As my taxi splashed away through the flood waters, I looked back to see the still respectfully bowed heads of the manager and staff as they stood on the corner of the street bidding me farewell. An unforgettable experience and Sushi Rei now has one more regular customer to add to their surely growing list of admirers. ■

CHICAGO CRAVINGS

For a proper taste of Midwest America, snag a table at Windy City Diner

Text by **SONIA GREGOR AND MARTIN ZORRILLA** *Images by* **NGOC TRAN**

IT MAY BE FALL IN VIETNAM, but walk into the **Windy City Diner** (88 Duong So 23 (Street 23), Tan Quy, D7), and you'll think you're at a late-summer barbecue back in the US. In this quiet corner of District 7, chef and owner Gabe Boyer has created an all-American menu of sandwiches, sausages, burgers and steak, paying tribute to the cuisine of Chicago, Illinois. Grab a seat outdoors in the shade, pat the two dogs who are lazing in the sun, and order a plate of American history.

The city of Chicago has always been

a foodie destination. The name itself comes from a Native American word for wild garlic, which grew on the shores of Lake Michigan. The cool summer breeze that blows off this lake is how Chicago got its famous nickname, The Windy City. Chicago food is known for being hearty—grilled meat, lots of cheese and sauces, thick slices of bread. It's the kind of food we associate with baseball, Norman Rockwell and everything else uber-American. And, as is true of many great things, the food Chicago is known for was brought to the US by hard-





OPPOSITE PAGE: ROAST BEEF SANDWICH, MAXWELL STREET POLISH
ABOVE: REUBEN NUGGETS



working immigrant families. In fact, the total population of Chicago in 1900 was 77 percent first- or second-generation European immigrants. Many came from Germany, Italy, Ireland and Poland, carrying their delicious recipes with them.

At Windy City Diner, this cross-cultural collaboration continues in the excellent hot dogs, which are made specifically to Boyer's recipe by a German sausage maker in Vietnam. After dithering between the New York Dog and the Chicago Dog (different toppings for different cities), we ordered the Maxwell Street Polish (VND150,000). This Polish-style smoked sausage arrived slathered in mustard, scattered with onion and pickles, and nestled in a fresh baguette. Any doubts we had had about a hot dog being enough for a meal vanished as we admired the perfectly seared kielbasa, and the generous side of fries. The crisp fries go well with the bottle of ketchup on the table, but according to the menu "If you want ketchup on your hot dog, you have to put it on yourself. Ketchup on a hot dog is a sacrilege!" - this must be a Chicago thing. We New Yorkers might disagree, but we refrained from using the red stuff. The best time to taste Boyer's hot dogs is during the Sunday Sausage Fest from 4-9pm, when all hot dogs are VND40,000, and the Polish or Italian sausages are VND60,000.

Speaking of New York, we couldn't wait to try the Reuben nuggets (VND100,000). One bite into a golf-ball sized nugget reveals a molten core of Swiss cheese, wrapped in

sauerkraut and homemade corned beef, then rolled in rye breadcrumbs and fried. The nuggets come with a saucer of homemade thousand islands dressing. It's hard to explain just how good they are. You'll have to taste one yourself.

The Windy City Diner is an homage to Boyer's hometown. The flag of Chicago decorates the menu, and its sports teams' logos are printed on the ceiling. So we figured we better try a Chicago-style shaved Italian roast beef sandwich (VND150,000). The thinly-sliced beef was tender and juicy, tucked in a baguette with sautéed bell peppers and *giardinera*. This last ingredient is a salty-spicy mix of pickled hot peppers, celery and cauliflower, famous in Italian-American cooking. You can order the sandwich "dry" or "juicy," in which case it will be dunked in spicy Italian beef *jus*. We went for the immersive experience.

This kind of food really goes well with a cold glass of pale ale. When we visited, Windy City had just started selling beers by a new local brewery called Mekong Brewing Company. We shared a 640ml bottle of their Blue Elephant IPA (VND110,000). It's brewed with hops from the Pacific Northwest, and they give the beer a wonderful fruity complexity with just the right edge of bitterness. Better yet, a portion of the proceeds go to help endangered Asian Elephant. Windy City has a happy hour from 4-7pm every day. You can get craft beers for VND40,000, or all the Tiger you can drink for VND120,000. ■

Wine & Dine

BARS



Acoustic Bar

As the name suggests, the Acoustic Bar is the ideal place to catch some high-quality live music in a lively atmosphere. Plus, the frequent rotation of performers means that even the most regular of patrons are kept on their toes.

El Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3
83930 7627



Aperitivo

Italian cocktail and wine bar Aperitivo has quickly established itself as a favourite in Thao Dien's bar scene. Cosy, friendly, and chic, with a quality cocktail and wine list, delicious deli sandwiches by day and night, Aperitivo is a great place to relax and unwind after work.

80b/c Xuan Thuy, Thao Dien, D2.
9am - late, closed on Mondays



BiaCraft

Located in the heart of District 2, BiaCraft is renowned for its extensive selection of craft beers. The back to basics décor only serves to enhance the laidback ambience which BiaCraft prides itself on.

90 Xuan Thuy, D2
8374 46863
www.biacraft.com



Malt

Hailed for its shuffleboard table and its smoke-free environment, this American-style bar has quickly established itself as a favorite amongst the expat community. The many local IPAs on tap are not to be missed, either.

46-48 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
9184 84763.



The Deck Bar

The Deck Group is proud to announce the opening of The Deck Bar, right next to its famous pan-Asian sister restaurant The Deck Saigon in Thao Dien, District 2.

38 Nguyen U Di, Thao Dien, An Phu, D2
info@thedecksaigon.com
3744 6632



The Tavern

With its reasonably priced drinks and famously friendly staff, it is no wonder that expats refer to this British bar and restaurant as a 'home away from home.' You can even purchase a British-style Sunday roast to accompany your cold beer.

R2-24, Hung Gia 3, Bui Bang Doan, PMH, D7.
www.thetavernpmh.com

Also Try...

Broma Saigon Bar

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

41 Nguyen Hue, D1

Donkey Bar

An 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.

119 Bui Vien, D1

Game On

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

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
dine@icasianasaiigon.com
6pm until late

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: resident band Living Cuba from 9pm, Tuesday to Sunday, Carnival Party on every first Wednesday of the month.

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

Xu Bar

A cocktail hot spot with Coconut Martinis, Cranelo Sparkles and Passion Fruit Caprioska on offer along with a variety of tapas with DJs and drink specials throughout the week.

71-75 Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.xusaigon.com





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Show Café Hotline: + 84 97 665 0806
 140 Yersin, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

CAFÉS



Bach Dang

An institute that's been around for over 30 years, Kem Bach Dang is a short walking distance from The Opera House and is a favorite dessert and cafe spot among locals and tourists. They have two locations directly across from each other serving juices, smoothies, shakes, beer and ice cream, with air conditioning on the upper levels.

26-28 Le Loi, D1



Café RuNam

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

96 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
www.caferuнам.com



Chat

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

85 Nguyen Truong To, D4



En Tea House & Restaurant

En replicates the feeling of the old Saigon by modern Saigonese, complimented by authentic Vietnamese cuisine and deluxe teas, for anyone who wants to look for Saigon's sense of nostalgia and friendliness.

308 - 308C Dien Bien Phu, Ward 4, D3
 3832 9797

Facebook: Entehouse



La Rotonde Saigon

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

77B Ham Nghi, 1st Floor, D1



The Workshop

The cafe is located on the top floor and resembles an inner city warehouse. The best seats are by the windows where you can watch the traffic zoom by. If you prefer your coffee brewed a particular way, there are a number of brewing techniques to ask for, from Siphon to Aeropress and Chemex. Sorry, no Vietnamese *ca phe sua da* served here.

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1

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



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.7ryquan.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.

1st Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon, Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, D1
3520 9099
www.intercontinental.com/saigon



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

SPANISH



La Bodega

La Bodega is a quaint Spanish restaurant serving succulent tapas dishes in a setting infused with a Latin-American vibe. With a bar open till late serving reasonably priced cocktails, this is the perfect place for both foodies and mojito lovers alike.

11 Xuan Thuy, D2
0120 757 3288



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



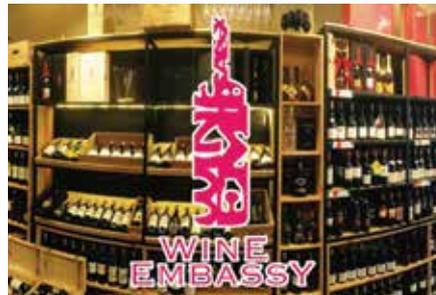
Tapas Saigon

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



WINE



RubyRed Italian Wine Store

The only one Italian wine store in Ho Chi Minh City, with over 200 labels of wine from all regions in Italy, Nardini grappas, Sambuca Molinari and Marsala, Passiti and Bellavista Franciacorta (official sponsor of Armani, Zegna, Gucci and La Scala Teatre of Milan). Cozy design with friendly staff and professional expert of Italian wines managers (Mr. Mirko and Mr. Christian Boarin).

206 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2

Wine Embassy Boutique

Established in the heart of Thao Dien since October 2014, Wine Embassy aims to offer wines for all budgets and from all over the world carefully selected by our Resident Sommelier.

41 Quoc Huong Street, Thao Dien, D2

Also Try...

An Phu Supermarket

Large supermarket stocking a wide range well-known international brands of dry goods along with fresh groceries, frozen meat and fish, fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese, wine, toiletries and more.

43 Thao Dien, D2

Annam Gourmet

An upscale deli and grocery chain offering gourmet groceries, cheese, organic products, gluten-free products, fruit and vegetables, gourmet deli, wine and other beverages. All locations have a coffee

lounge that serves breakfast, lunch, drinks and early dinner.

41A Thao Dien, D2.
16-18 Hai Ba Trung, D1

The Warehouse

A premium wine importer, distributor, and retailer supplying wines from all over the world, the Warehouse also offers spirits, wine accessories, glassware and refrigeration to complement their customers' choices.

15/5 Le Thanh Ton, D1

Veggy's

A specialized grocery store carrying imported products, Veggy's offers wine, a wide range of international food imported from abroad and fresh produce grown in Vietnam.

23A Le Thanh Ton, D1

Vinifera

Established in 2002, Vinifera is one of the most reliable wine distribution companies in Vietnam. Offering prestigious wines from around the world at a great value.

7 Thai Van Lung, D1



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 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
infosgn@lacreperie.com.cn
11am - 11pm



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
094 841 5646



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



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1
www.tycozsaigon.com



Le 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

Also Try...

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 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.

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

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

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.

39 Tran Ngoc Dien, D2
3744 4585



INDIAN



Ashoka

A small chain of slightly more upscale Indian restaurants serving both Northern and Southern Indian cuisine including curries, naan and tandooris.

17/10 Le Thanh Ton, D1
33 Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2



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
www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com



Natraj

Known for its complete North & South Indian cuisine, Natraj's speciality is its special chaat & tandoori dishes. Parties, events & catering services are available, with Daily Lunch Thali and set menus. Available for delivery. Complete menu on Facebook.

41 Bui Thi Xuan, D1
6679 5267 - 6686 3168
www.facebook.com/natrajindiancuisine



Saigons Indian

Saigon's original Indian eatery is still going strong, located in a bright, roomy upstairs venue in the heart of District 1.

1st Floor, 73 Mac Thi Buoi, D1



Tandoor

Tandoor has recently moved to a new location. The restaurant serves authentic South and North Indian cuisine, with set lunches available, in a spacious dining area. Offers free home delivery and outside catering. Halal food.

39A - 39B Ngo Duc Ke, D1
39304839 / tandoor@tandoorvietnam.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

BBGV CHARITY FUN RUN

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Venue Sponsor

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ITALIAN



Ciao Bella

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

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

Ciao Bella



Inter Nos [®]

Inter Nos means "between us" in Latin. Food amongst friends is exciting yet sincere. At Inter Nos, their dishes represent the appreciation they have towards guests, who they consider as family. Many of the ingredients are handmade, from the cheese to the pasta, even the milk is taken directly from the farm. The emphasis is on handcrafting special ingredients so that guests can taste the honesty in the food.

26 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2
090 630 1299
info@internos.vn
www.internos.vn
Facebook: Internossaigon



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 Forchetta

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

24 Hung Gia, PMH, D7
3541 1006



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



VIII Re

VIII Re Eight King Italian restaurant is an open space setting serving grilled dishes, pastas and wood oven pizzas. Internationally known chef Roberto Mancini brings his vast experience at five-star hotels to his restaurant.

R432 Le Van Thiem, Phu My Hung, D7

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

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

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



[®] For full review, please visit: www.oivietnam.com

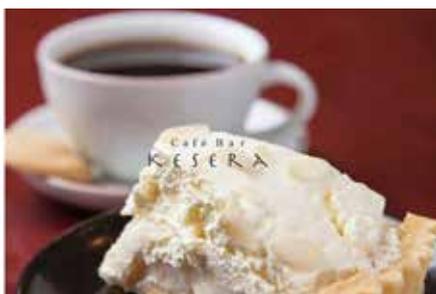
JAPANESE



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



KESERA Cafe Bar

Café Bar KESERA is an ideal space to offer you fresh meals. We are here cozy and friendly serving specialist coffee, Japanese beers, fine wines, freshly baked homemade cakes, bagels and delicious Western and Japanese fusion foods. Live music every Saturday night.

26/3 Le Thanh Ton, Dist 1.
0838 270 443



Miyama Café

Miyama Café was born from an ambition to transport a truly modern Tokyo cafe into the midst of bustling Saigon. From grand desserts to inspired modern Japanese food and service, Miyama Café's minimalist space and large glass windows allow diners to views of the bustling city below. They use the finest and freshest ingredients to create beautiful and delicious set meals and desserts.

Takashiyama Saigon Centre Mall
Level 3-01
(08) 2253 1076
www.miyamacafe.com



Monde

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



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.sushidiningaoi.com



Yoshino

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

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

Also Try...

Blanchy Street

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

Chisana Hashi

Serves authentic Japanese cuisine including sashimi, sushi, tempura, sukiyaki and shabu shabu.
River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
6683 5308

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
3824 5355
www.yakatabune-saigon.com

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



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



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 Bui, 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 Bui
3820 4085



THAI



Koh Thai

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

Kumho Link, Hai Ba Trung, D1
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 Bui St. D1
3823 7506

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 Bui, D1
090 879 1412

Tuk Tuk Thai Bistro

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

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

STEAKHOUSE



Canada Steakhouse

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219C Pham Viet Chinh, DI
6294 8787
www.canadasteakhouse.com
 Facebook: [Canadasteakhouse219c](https://www.facebook.com/Canadasteakhouse219c)
 10am - 11pm



Corso Steakhouse & Bar

The steakhouse boasts an open kitchen with private dining areas. With an extensive wine menu, contemporary Western and Asian cuisines and a wide range of sizzling steaks cooked to your liking, this is the ideal choice for a special celebration or formal business dinner.

Ground Floor, Norfolk Hotel, 117 Le Thanh Ton, DI
3829 5368
www.norfolhhotel.com.vn



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, DI



Nossa Steakhouse

A stylish restaurant featuring Italian cuisine and Western steaks with a wide selection of imported steaks from Australia and the US. Nossa brings food and decor together to create a cozy ambiance. With an attention to bringing authentic flavors, we provide good food, good prices and good taste.

36 Pham Hong Thai, DI / www.nossa.vn



Pho 99

Not a traditional steakhouse per se, but Pho 99 is known for its excellent filet mignon steaks made out of Cu Chi beef. Also serves great *pho*.

139 Nguyen Trai, DI



Wild Horse Steakhouse

The restaurant offers grilled pork, barbecued chicken and steak dishes along with a wide selection of cocktails as well as a number of smaller dishes.

8a/1d1 Thai Van Lung, DI
www.wildhorsesteakhouse.com



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VIETNAMESE



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. New Quan Bui Garden just opened in District 2.

www.bui.restaurant

17A Ngo Van Nam, D1
First Floor, 39 Ly Tu Trong, D1
55 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien, D2



Five Oysters

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

234 Bui Vien, D1



Mountain Retreat

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

Top floor of 36 Le Loi, D1

+84 90 719 45 57



Red Door

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

400/8 Le Van Sy, D3
012 0880 5905

Facebook: Reddoorrestaurant



Time Bistro

Timebistro – a tiny little restaurant will bring you back to Saigon 1960s. Visitors will be impressed by romantic atmosphere with elegant and simple style which is close to your heart.

44 Nguyen Hue, Ben Nghe, D1
09 8910 4633

www.en.timebistro.vn



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

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

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

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.

19-21 Dong Khoi, D1
3910 1277

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

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

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

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

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

INTERNATIONAL



Bamboo Chic

Bamboo Chic serves an inventive menu of Japanese and Chinese dishes and creative cocktails. Open for dinner, the contemporary space features modern velvet chairs with purple and plum pillows and dramatic beaded chandeliers inspired by the Saigon River along with live music from the house DJ.

Level 9, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1

6263 6688

www.lemeridien.com/saigon



Boat House

With amazing views of the Saigon River, the restaurant's open seating plan is the ideal space for business lunches, romantic dinners and lazy weekend brunches. The menu is international with focuses on Mexican and American comfort food. There's live music almost every night of the week.

40 Lily Road, AP5C, 36 Thao Dien, D2

boathousesgn@gmail.com

+84 8 3744 6790

www.boathousesaigon.com

www.facebook.com/boathousevietnam



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91 Pasteur, D1

3822 7099



Eleven

Eleven is located in the center of town, a 5-minute walk from Ben Thanh Market. The Restaurant has a stylish vintage design with a friendly and cozy atmosphere. The Asian fusion menu combines Asian & European vegetables and spices, providing a unique and unforgettable experience.

29 Le Anh Xuan, D1

08 38222605

Mail : info@elevencafe.com.vn

Facebook : [ElevenCafeVN](https://www.facebook.com/elevencafevn)

Website : www.eleven.com.vn



Latest Recipe

Latest Recipe invites diners to an international culinary experience set against views of the Saigon River. An open kitchen is the focal point of this contemporary space, with chefs preparing an array of dishes to order. Every Sunday Latest Recipe serves an elaborate brunch buffet filled with tantalizing dishes from around the world.

Level M, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1

6263 6688

www.lemeridien.com/saigon



Ngon Asia House

Contemporary three-storey bistro that welcomes you with style and leads you into a house of sumptuous colorful food cultures, rich in both in flavors and inspirations. More than 350 savory street dishes from Korea, Japan, China, Thailand and Vietnam come together in one designer space. The drinks menu includes a great selection of wine, cocktails and smoothies. If you can, grab a table by the tall glass windows overlooking the Nguyen Hue Pedestrian Walkway – a great spot for people watching.

Facebook: "ngonasia" / www.ngon-asia.com

2nd - 4th Floors, Saigon Garden

99 Nguyen Hue, D1

08 3821 3821



Rose Garden

With its main focus on Vietnamese cuisine, Rose Garden also has an extensive international menu that includes pastas, sandwiches and wraps. Located with the backpacker district, the restaurant is a great spot for people watching and soaking up the city's vibrant atmosphere. The freshly made juices come highly recommended.

232 Bui Vien, D1

(08) 6680 0847

Facebook: [RoseGardenSaigon](https://www.facebook.com/RoseGardenSaigon)



Saigon Kitchen Club

Saigon Kitchen Club specializes in fresh, healthy and perfectly-portioned meals delivered to your home or office. They offer a variety of packages: Full Day, Lunch, Family and Weight Loss. The ingredients used are 100% pure olive oil, brown sugar, brown rice and strictly no MSG; giving diners exquisite and healthy meals. Place order through the website www.saigonkitchenclub.com or call **0888.629.788**



twenty21one

A new casual dining venue with an innovative tapas menu divided into two categories: Looking East, and Looking West, with dishes such as Crispy shredded duck spring rolls and Bacon-wrapped dates stuffed with Roquefort blue cheese. There are two dining levels: an upstairs mezzanine and downstairs are tables with both private and exposed positioning (open-air streetside; and a terrace by the pool out back). **21 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3**

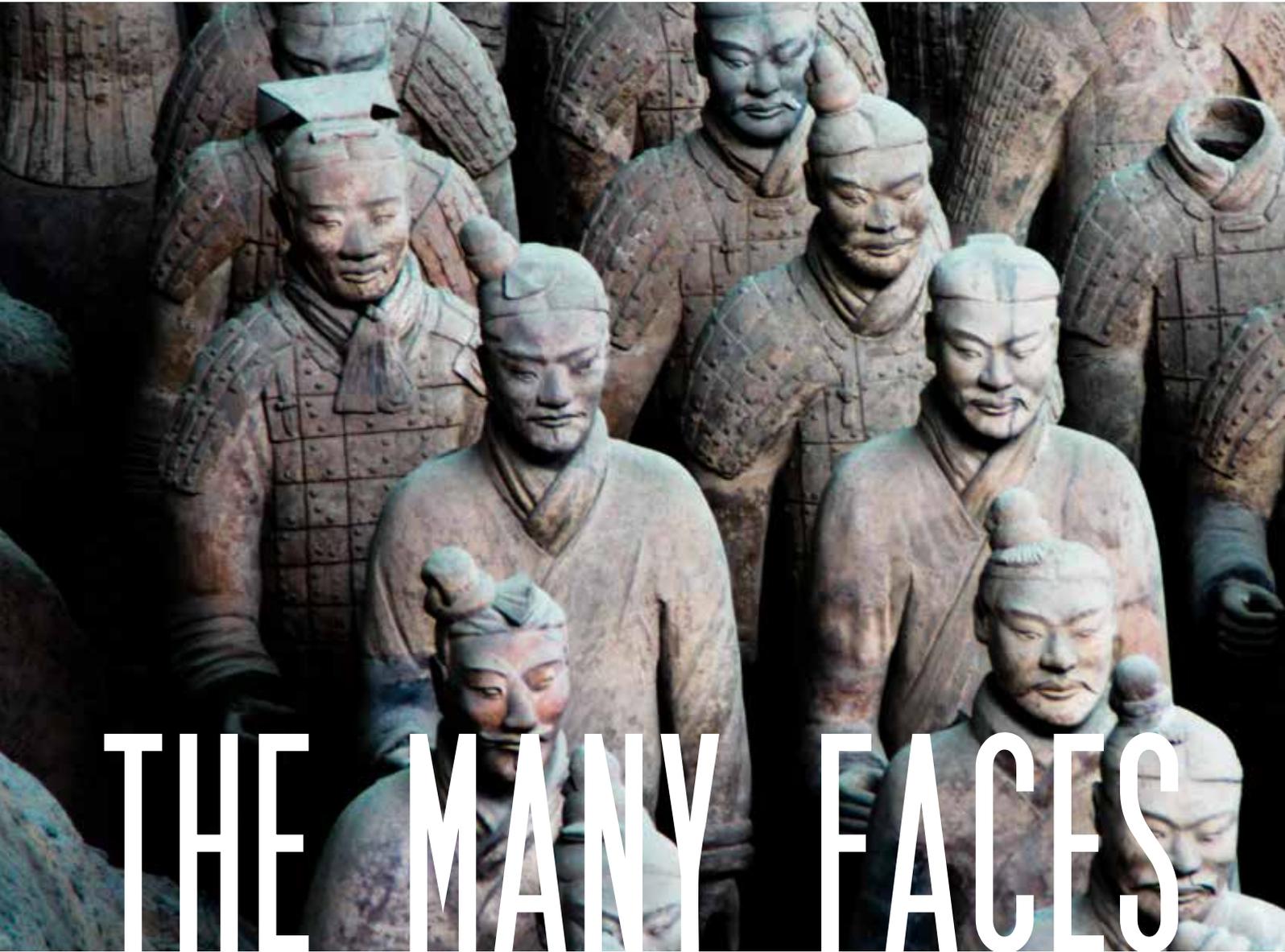


Travel & Leisure

DUBLIN

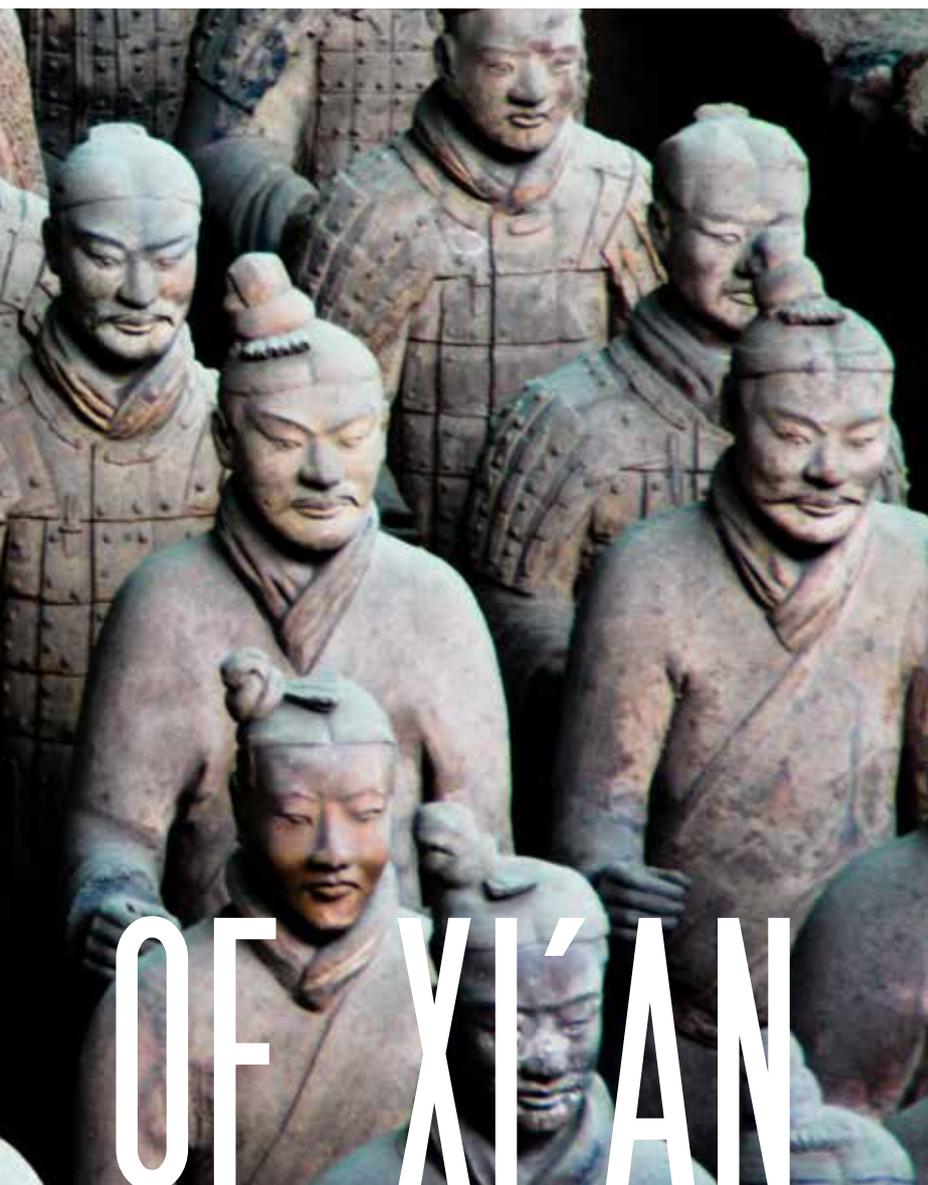






THE MANY FACES





48 hours to learn 3,000 years of Chinese history

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JAMES PHAM

IN A COUNTRY WITH MORE THAN a billion people, it's hard to stand out. Even the cities clash for attention—Beijing with its stretch of the Great Wall, Shanghai's East meets West cosmopolitan chic, Guilin's stunning limestone scenery. But Xi'an, is like nowhere else in China. While most major cities have a single character abbreviation, Xi'an demands two. In ancient script, the first symbol is of a bird on a nest, signifying "west," the direction of the sun at the end of the day when

birds come home to roost. The second is of a frolicking girl, almost Disney-like in profile, with a graceful roof above her head, meaning "security" or "peace." Off and on for almost a thousand years, the verdant flood plain of Xi'an, surrounded by eight rivers as well as jade and gold mines, was the peaceful western capital for an astonishing 13 dynasties and 62 emperors.

But it's just one in particular who has brought me here—Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor to gather warring

kingdoms into a unified China in 221 BCE. Failing to find the elixir of immortality, the emperor had to settle on creating a mausoleum filled with palaces and towers, treasures and rivers of mercury, to rule in death as he did in life. To guard such opulence required an army that could survive into the afterlife, a garrison of 6-foot-tall terracotta soldiers. But like a bad *Mummy* movie, to see the army of the dead, I must first brave the army of the living.

I have the misfortune of traveling during "Golden Week" where seemingly all of China's 1.3 billion people are performing a mass migration often described as a "mountain of people, sea of people." I later read that 415 million people visited tourist attractions across the country in just the first four days of the week-long holiday. Today, it feels like we're all headed to Lintong, the site of the terracotta warriors 27 miles east of Xi'an. As traffic crawls, I notice the many streetside vendors selling baskets of neatly arranged persimmons and plump pomegranates bursting with bright red seeds, a symbol of large, happy families. Inside Pit 1, the largest of three excavation sites, there are large families, too, but they are anything but happy. Even though the pit is almost the size of three football fields, it's filled to overflowing, and I can't help but think that Qin Shi Huang's 8,000 or so terracotta soldiers wouldn't have stood stand a chance against the estimated 100,000 visitors craning and straining to get a glimpse of the clay army. To get to the one ideal vantage point in the front where all the soldiers are facing forward requires navigating a tightly pressed, human Great Wall of bodies, six or seven deep, all vying for the perfect terracotta selfie. Finally jostling my way to the front in my own sweaty battle fought with elbows and hip checks, I come face to face with rows upon glorious rows of men and horses, immortalized in battle-ready formation. As I scan the vast army of 2,000 or so soldiers, with another 4,000 as yet unearthened, I try to pick out the hairstyles and uniforms that differentiate the infantry, cavalry, charioteers, officers and generals.

Further down the pit, the painfully slow work of excavation and restoration has been taking place ever since farmers serendipitously uncovered the site in 1974 while digging a well. Archaeologists discovered that when built, the soldiers were lined up in corridors 16 feet below ground level, with thick earthen partition walls acting as supports for a roof of heavy wooden rafters. Fiber mats and more earth were piled on, completely

concealing the army from above where they would remain buried and forgotten for more than 2,000 years. Over time, the wooden roofs gave way, crushing the soldiers below into hundreds of thousands of shards, turning the army into the world's greatest 3D jigsaw puzzle. On a slab in the center of the pit, fragments of one soldier are laid out, missing a torso, in a disconcerting version of *CSI: Xi'an*. Other soldiers have mostly been reassembled, temporarily held together with straps and plastic wrap, eerily lifelike features gazing out from cracked masks patiently waiting to be made whole again.

While remarkable for their sheer multitude, what's even more fascinating is that each statue is unique in shape, size and facial features. There are the generals with big bellies bloated from copious amounts of pre-battle beer, charioteers with hands outstretched holding imaginary reins, and archers with bows semi-drawn. A single, exquisite kneeling archer is on display in Pit 2, one of the rare warriors to have been unearthed completely intact, down to wrinkles on his battle robe and stitches in the soles of his shoes. But it's the faces that captivate. There's the baby-faced infantryman, eyes open wide, and the battle-hardened officer, expressionless as if war is both friend and foe. A general with arched eyebrows to go with a pencil moustache shoots a death glare as intimidating now as it was 2,000 years ago. Recent studies focusing on the warriors' ears, unique as fingerprints, seem to confirm what people have thought for decades, that the statues were based on actual individuals instead of simply mass produced. That level of detail may explain why it took 700,000 workers 30 years to build the army.

PAST TO THE FUTURE

Wanting to know more about the faces that have played a role in this city's long narrative, I head to the Shaanxi History Museum, home to nearly 400,000 artifacts that tell the story of this province from prehistoric times down through its succession of dynasties. In its dramatically lit galleries, I see many faces, some human, some not, like the legendary *taotie*, an animal that voraciously ate everything until one day it ate itself. It's emblazoned on the side of a metal cauldron used for boiling meat, a reminder against gluttony. Then there's the mythical *pixiu*, an animal that devours gold and silver but has no anus, a favored mascot amongst businessmen for attracting wealth. But it's the snarling face of a 13-foot-high stone lion that resonates



most with me. While most Chinese lions are pictured lying down or squatting, this one is running on all fours, mouth agape, teeth bared. A replica from the Shunling Mausoleum, the ancient lion symbolizes China rushing out to meet the world, largely facilitated by the fabled Silk Road. In the third century BCE, Xi'an became the eastern terminus of the trade route, offering up silk so fine that a woman could wear five layers of it and still see a birthmark on her arm. But perhaps even more important than silk, tea and porcelain, the road carried with it new ideas and cultures.

In the 7th century, a monk named Xuanzang traveled 10,000 miles along the Silk Road, crossing mountains and deserts to India to bring original Buddhist writings back to Xi'an. To learn more about this monk on a mission, I head to the nearby Big Wild Goose Pagoda and come face to round face with his large metal statue in the square. Rebuilt by Wu Zetian, China's only female emperor who also ruled from Xi'an, the very plain seven-story tower was originally a library housing the delicate slices of wood inscribed in ancient Pali which Xuanzang spent the rest of his life translating. I wander the rooms, some

filled with giant murals elaborately carved out of exquisite boxwood and priceless jade telling the life story of the Buddha. In the courtyard, children play hide and seek amongst centuries-old stelae, while students about to take the national exam rub their fingers for good luck against a 1,000-year-old tablet inscribed with the names of ancient scholars.

The Silk Road also brought foreigners to Xi'an—Iranians importing carpets, Uzbekistanis dealing in glassware, Indians bearing spices. Some continued on, while others, including Arab and Persian traders, settled down, intermarrying and integrating into Chinese society. I walk over to the 70,000-strong Muslim enclave behind the city's Drum Tower, the heart of the Hui or Chinese Muslim area. Thanks to their loyalty to the Tang emperors, the Hui were given this choice neighborhood in the middle of the walled city. While in almost all respects Chinese, without a particular dialect of their own, the Hui can sometimes be identified by their dress—men wearing delicate white caps and women with head scarves. I can also see it in their faces—a boy with round eyes flashing flecks of light brown, a girl with slightly curly hair tucked under a



glittery pink scarf. I walk down “Muslim Street” and take in the cacophony of sounds—giant wooden hammers pounding candy, hawkers touting beautifully patterned flatbreads, and the *thwap* of handpulled noodles as they hit the oiled metal table. This area is known for its incredible street food, a delightful mix of Chinese cooking styles and Middle Eastern spices. I pick my way through the maze of stalls and spot sure signs of a good eatery—hanging animal carcasses stripped clean to the bone and a bucket full of discarded red willow skewers. I sit down for some *chuan'r* or grilled mutton flavored with cumin and chili. In a waft of smoke, the cook makes several heavy-handed passes of spices, like a farmer sowing seed, producing some of the most flavorsome, tender mutton I’ve ever had. Satiated for the moment, I make my way through a narrow bazaar to the Great Mosque of Xi’an. Built in 742 AD, it’s said to be China’s oldest and largest. But instead of spires and minarets, the mosque is almost entirely Chinese in its architecture. I stroll through the quiet courtyards, past the Prayer Hall and the “God is One” inscription in Arabic, one of the few obvious indications that I am indeed in a mosque. The

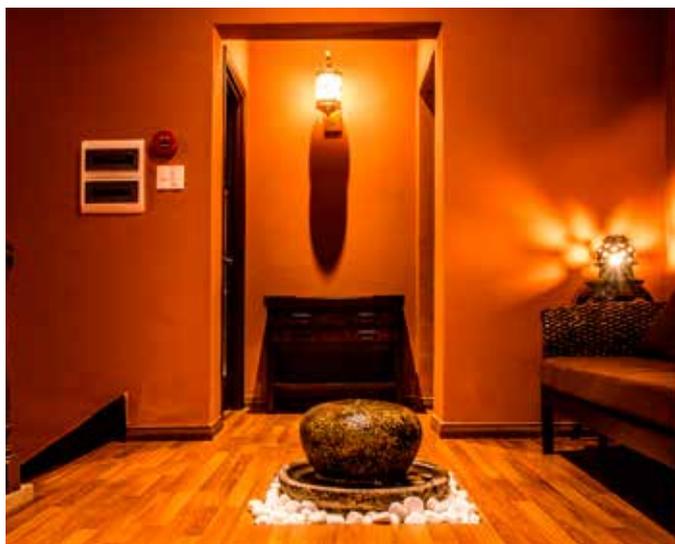
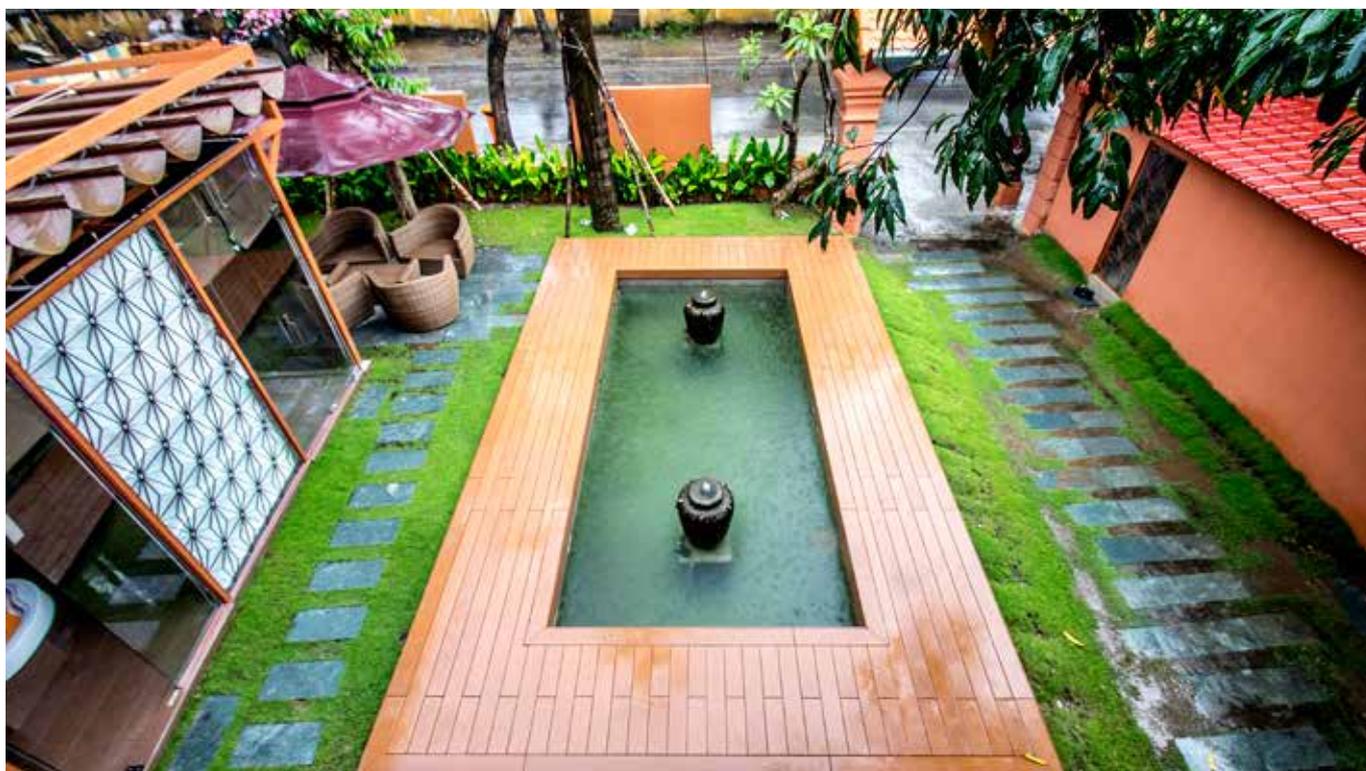
rain lets up just enough for a bearded worshipper to lower his umbrella and flash me a huge smile of welcome.

By the time I make it to the city wall, the light rain has turned into a steady drizzle, but that hasn’t deterred tourists and locals alike from climbing the 40-foot-high fortification encircling the old city. Built in the 14th century and surrounded by a moat, it’s one of the oldest and best preserved city walls in all of China. The 9-mile-long, 40-foot-wide walkway atop the wall has welcomed everyone from a jogging Mark Zuckerberg to a dancing Michelle Obama. Today, though, it’s just we, the people, swathed in tattered disposable raincoats, sheltered under colorful umbrellas, or peddling wobbly tandem bikes. I wander past the ramparts, spaced almost 400 feet apart, just within arrow range of each other. I take in the scenery on both sides of the wall and see the two faces of Xi’an—the beautiful Bell Tower and the low houses with baked clay roofs of the ancient city on one side, and the skyscrapers of modern Xi’an on the other. Not content to simply look back, city officials have plans to move Xi’an ever forward. By 2020, it is hoped that at least half of Xi’an’s 10 million residents will be able to read 500 or more

traditional Chinese characters, know 900 English sentences and be able to guide visitors around the city’s landmarks in English. By then, the province also aims to add more than 2,000 miles to its railway, making Xi’an the center of a “one-day traffic circle” covering half of China.

In a city where residents interact with history on a daily basis—commuting through the gates of a 700-year-old wall or doing Tai Chi next to a thousand-year-old pagoda—it’s clear that Xi’an isn’t done making history, facing forward as much as looking back.

My guides from City Discovery (www.city-discovery.com) were invaluable to researching this article, sharing their passion and insight into Xi’an’s long and fascinating history. While you can see the terracotta warriors by public transport, having dedicated transportation, especially during the holiday crush, was a godsend. History can very easily become dry and museums overwhelming, but my guides shared gems of information and pointed out details that I would certainly have missed on my own. City Discovery provides sightseeing tours, travel experiences and ground transportation in over 700 destinations worldwide. ■



Time Out

Escape the madness of the city and spend the day in a cocoon of pampering

TEXT BY **SONIA GREGOR**

IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**



was given a pressure chart to fill out. One side of the chart lists body parts (head, neck, shoulders, etc.) while the other side lists pressure levels (soft, normal and strong). I was able to indicate exactly where I wanted more pressure and where I wanted less. Such communication is important in a massage, especially to avoid injuries and get the most out of your session.

The spa interior was designed for both relaxation and drama. The tall ceilings were complemented by long velvet drapes. A wall of plants and a fountain in the center of the second floor brought a touch of natural serenity indoors. I was given a VIP suite with a Jacuzzi and steam room to relax in before starting my treatment.

The Moc Huong Signature massage began with firm pressure applied through a towel. The therapist targeted Shiatsu energy points on my back then she added oil and started Swedish gliding and kneading strokes. In a Swedish massage, the basic theory is that muscle fibers get stuck together as you repeat certain movements all day, like hunching over a laptop. The five strokes of a Swedish massage are meant to break apart these ‘knots’ of muscle fibers, releasing tension. After the Swedish segment, the therapist placed hot stones on my back, the heat helped my muscles loosen even further. Finally, she led me through a series of Thai-style twists and leg stretches before pummeling my back with the side of her hands. I felt invigorated at the end of the massage—my muscles were relaxed but my mind was wide awake.

My visit to Moc Huong was like a mini-vacation. If you want to treat yourself for a day, they offer several package deals that combine massages with facials and nail treatments. If you’re short on time, try an Express massage for 35 minutes. In addition, every month the spa offers a different promotion. ■

THE NEW STYLIST VILLA
ON 61 Xuan Thuy in District 2 may have already caught the attention of those living in the neighborhood with its standout pink façade. But peek over its pink wall and you’ll find a well-kept lawn and a water fountain centerpiece, both representing the calmness and energy flow of **Moc Huong Spa** (*mochuongspa.com*). I walked passed this into the glass entrance of the villa, where I was greeted by impeccable English-speaking staff. Iced tea was brought out, along with candied ginger and lotus seeds. While I snacked, I pored over the extensive menu of treatments.

What sets Moc Huong Spa apart from others is the different international style massages they offer—Swedish, Thai, Japanese Shiatsu, Balinese and

Indian Ayurvedic—there’s even a Hawaiian massage available. Depending on the style, your massage may involve oil, acupressure, breathing, dance movements, assisted stretching and/or yoga positions. In addition, you can opt for a four-handed massage, a six-handed massage, hot stones, herbal steams, or the brand new Vichy shower. The Vichy shower is only available in Moc Huong’s Thao Dien location. To experience it, you lie on a padded table, while seven separate shower heads are positioned to massage your back.

I had a hard time choosing between the many options so I chose the Thai, Shiatsu and Swedish combined Moc Huong Signature massage (VND500,000 for 90 minutes), which I highly recommend. Next I



DUBLIN LIKE A LOCAL

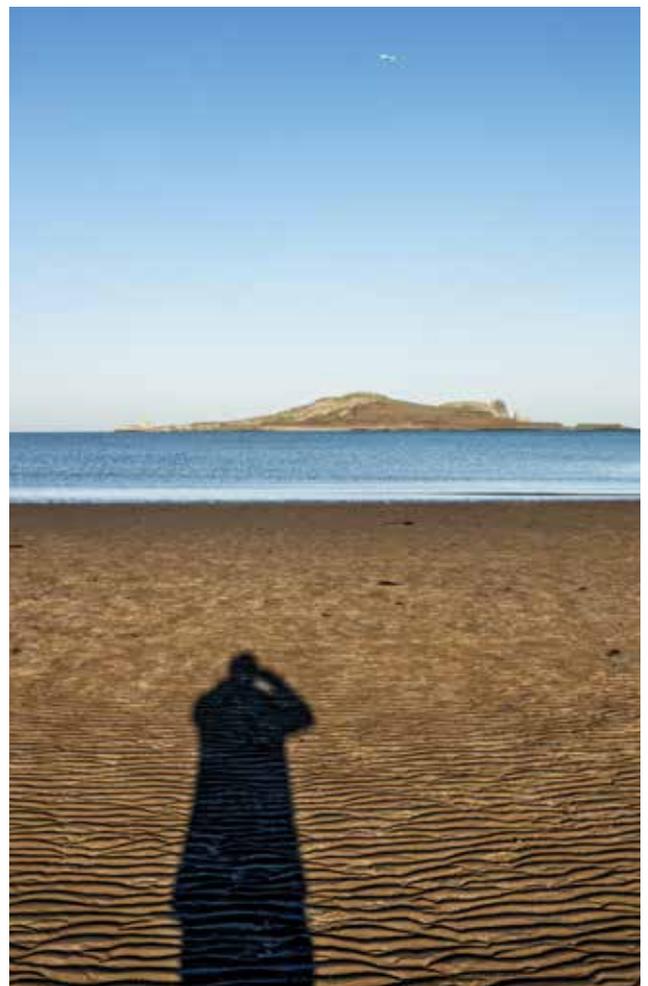
This compact Gaelic city is no longer the land of ramshackle pubs and baked-potato pushcarts

TEXT BY ROISIN MURRAY

WITH A REPUTATION AS A HOTBED OF Irish culture and heritage, home to good tipples and some of the friendliest locals in the world, there is a constant stream of tourists favoring Dublin as their must-see destination on the Emerald Isle. While popular sightseeing locations are considered must-dos—sure, I could go and visit the Guinness Storehouse and drink a pint of the black stuff on the rooftop bar, or ride around the city on the sightseeing tour bus, complete with luminescent rain poncho—but I know that if I really want to experience

the heart of Dublin, I should get off that tourist track; it's a track more well-beaten than Conor McGregor's opponent. I need to find the local, unpublicized spots.

Only a short stroll away from the bustling streets of the center of Dublin, I discover the trendy suburb towns of Rathmines and Portobello. Here, the buildings are adorned with graffiti artwork, often underpinned by a political message, and the streets are filled with boutique shops. Both towns are renowned as hotspots for artisan events. I stumble across the popular Bernard Shaw pub hosting its



weekly flea market in Portobello, where an array of vintage clothes, handmade jewelry and vinyl records are sold, all at bargain prices. After a fortunate wrong turn, I discover a double-decker bus sat idle in a beer garden. As it turns out, this famous 'Big Blue Bus' is a converted restaurant, complete with funky picnic tables. It sells signature stone-baked pizzas and other nibbles for those hungry bargain hunters in what can only be described as the most unique dining setting ever experienced. Welcome to the suburbs.

After venturing a few more miles out of the city center, I have yet to be disappointed. Despite being a capital city, Dublin is far from simply a concrete jungle. On the outskirts of the city lie some of Ireland's most scenic spots. I join the herd of other locals journeying to the fishing village of Howth to take advantage of a rare but precious sunny day in Dublin.

Fortunately, the DART service provides a useful travel route to Howth from the city center. Howth offers a popular cliff-walking trail, which rewards its hikers with panoramic views of Dublin Bay on completion at Howth's head. An eager eye can even spot the steady stream of ferries en route to England. For a less strenuous activity, a stroll across the pier and Claremont Beach is ideal. Framed by the Mountains of Mourne and overlooking the Dublin eye, the cove-like beach stretches all the way to neighboring town Sutton. In typical seafront fashion, the pier is dominated by a litany of quaint seafood restaurants, laden with fresh oysters and local Irish produce. It is impossible not to notice the eclectic contrasts of visitors; the throng of tourists blatantly thrilled with their first visit to Howth versus the enamoured locals who have made it their regular weekend destination. If anything, it's a testament to the fact

that Howth is a place worth returning to over and over again.

While struggling to decide on which attractions in Dublin to try out, it becomes apparent that the old traveler gem of “do what the locals do” could not be more applicable. Dublin is a popular spot for hosting sporting and musical events, which the locals flock to in hordes. Whether it’s Gaelic football, hurling or rugby, many Dubliners spend a free Saturday afternoon at one of Dublin’s sports stadiums to indulge in a spot of healthy sportsmanship. I am one of the fortunate ones who happen to be in Dublin during peak rugby season, and I manage to get my hands on some coveted Six Nations rugby tickets. The recently refurbished Aviva stadium and Brian O’Driscoll’s old stomping ground is the perfect location to watch the clash between the rugby giants of Europe. Given that Dubliners are renowned for their patriotism, this setting is the ideal place to experience the pride of the Irish pouring onto the field. Sitting in the crowd while the Irish supporters belt out a rousing rendition of famine song *The Fields of Athenry* is an experience that I will certainly not easily forget.

WHISKEY IN A JAR

However, sport is not the only passion of the Irish. For a country that produced U2, Damien Rice and Glen Hansard, music is considered extremely important to Irish culture. So I make time to visit one of the most famous musical spots in





Ireland—Whelan's, which attracts a constant stream of both Irish and non-Irish acts to perform on its hallowed stage. Previous notable performers have included Arctic Monkeys and Hozier. Set in an authentic Irish bar with a more relaxed attitude than any of its Temple Bar counterparts, Whelan's hosts four different stages for high quality live music. It's not difficult to see why its reputation for being an intimate, personal venue with a good selection of beers exceeds it. International superstar Ed Sheeran has even cited it as his favorite place to perform. And on nights with no special events there is no cover charge for entry. What's not to love?

With all this sightseeing and immersing myself in local culture, it's impossible not to build up an appetite. But 'traditional' Irish cuisine—coddle, steak and Guinness pies and Irish stew—are not what locals tend to eat on a regular basis. I'm anxious to stay away from the stereotypical Irish eateries with a crowd of other tourists. While searching for a subtler Irish fare, a Dublin local recommends a visit to the Fire Restaurant and Bar on Dawson Street. It serves exquisite dishes from locally-sourced produce, in an elegant setting only a stone's throw away from the Lord Mayor's residency. Patrons hail it for its artistic décor, complete with opulent water feature out front, and its consistently lively atmosphere. I'm told that the signature dish of Irish Hereford prime ribeye steak with prawns is a keen favorite with the local patrons, and it certainly does not disappoint. Yet while Fire is a great choice to experience upmarket Irish cuisine, it is not very budget friendly. A single main course promises to set you back between €30–€50. For a dinner location that offers value for money, I find that Jo Burger is the perfect alternative. Do not let the name fool you; it is far more than simply a run-of-the-mill burger joint. A popular spot with Irish students and young professionals, Jo Burger is a casual restaurant decked out with wooden benches, serving extraordinary gourmet burgers with signature twists. The menus are set

in children's storybooks and encyclopedias from the 1990s, and their homemade lemonade is infused with adventurous flavor pairings. Plus, the recommended combination styles are nothing less than innovative; the green Thai curry mayo and coriander burger is not to be missed. These little idiosyncrasies make the experience so distinctive. And the entire meal will set you back less than €20 per person.

Dublin after hours, for many, is the best time of the day. I soon discover that in tourist mentality, nightlife in Dublin is considered almost synonymous with Temple Bar. The famous cobbled streets (that many a high heel have been broken on), home to pints of Guinness and live Irish folk music, are worth having a drink in. I am, however, charged premium tourist prices for the honor. It soon becomes apparent that there is a distinct absence of Irish people here; Temple Bar is a mecca for English stag dos and American exchange students, while the locals generally tend to avoid it. Instead, Dubliners favor less commercialized spots to enjoy a pint. I head to South-William Street on the South side of the city, which is cited as a particular hotspot. It boasts a strip of trendy bars, cocktail joints and clubs that is a favorite with Dublin's afterwork crowd. A must-visit bar in this area is Pygmalion, set in the beautiful Powerscourt Townhouse Centre and known fondly by its regular patrons simply as 'Pyg.' Its two-for-one weekday cocktails certainly pack a punch, and are greatly complemented by the tapas on offer. But after hours, the relaxed atmosphere makes way for the late night crowd; the tables are swiftly removed to make way for a dance area, where famous house DJs are often hosted. The most distinctive hallmark of this bar, however, is its outdoor terrace. As plentiful heaters ensure that the changeable Irish weather is made irrelevant, I find that this area is perfect for mixing with local Dubliners. With the terrace living up to its reputation for being incredibly sociable, I make an entire group of new Irish friends by the end of the night. *Faillte go mBaile Atha Cliath* or welcome to Dublin: the real Dublin. ■

Travel



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



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+84 (0)510 3939 111

www.boutiquehoianresort.com



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+84 62 3741 234

www.chamvillas.com



Cham Garden Restaurant

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32 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Phan Thiet

+84 62 3741 234

www.chamvillas.com

www.facebook.com/chamgardenmuine



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www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com



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www.mianhatrang.com

info@mianhatrang.com



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www.pullman-danang.com



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www.sheratonnhatrang.com



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390 Ap Thoi Binh, Thoi Son, My Tho

073 651 9000

www.theislandlodge.com.vn

Health & Beauty

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(Mon - Fri 8am - 5pm)
www.star9999.vn



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0838 247 433

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3926 0561-62-63-64

Saigon Dep Clinic and Spa

Saigon Dep offers cosmetic, acne and pigmentation treatments, as well as scar and rejuvenation services, alongside a full reflexology suite.

90 Le Lai, D1
www.saigondep.net

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74 Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.templeleafspa.com

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178B Hai Ba Trung, D1
www.ykcsa.com

>> The List Business

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www.insuranceinvietnam.com**

Liberty Mutual Insurance

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15th Floor, Kumho Asiana Plaza, 39 Le Duan, D1 3812 5125

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McLarens Young International is a global claims service provider that helps our clients achieve timely and equitable claims resolution.
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**53 Dang Dung, D1
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Saigon Pet Clinic

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www.saigonpethospital.com 3519 4182**

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**38-40-42 Nguyen Thi Thap, Him Lam, D7
www.sasakihospital.com 2253 1179**



Kids & Education





Early Education at Renaissance International School Saigon

Creativity and Scientific Thinking in Early Childhood

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY **RENAISSANCE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL SAIGON**

IN THE WORDS OF BRITISH EDUCATIONALIST

Sir Ken Robinson, "Creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status."

Ten years ago, this speech set in motion a new trend in worldwide educational reform. Following this momentum, modern parents are now seeking

early academic programs that nurture both creativity and talent in their children. In fact, a balanced curriculum that develops creativity and scientific thinking plays a particularly crucial role in stimulating intelligence in children from between two to five years old.

As one of the leading international schools in Vietnam in terms of delivering

a modern and internationalized British curriculum, **Renaissance International School Saigon** (www.renaissance.edu.vn) has successfully employed a new strategy in Early Years/Foundation Stage education that has been accepted with great excitement by all pupils. The "Early Years Playground Creation Challenge" is a new initiative that presents challenging

tasks within the scope of a child's ability and means to develop comprehensive solutions. This strategy has helped children to learn through play, stimulating their creativity and allowing them to develop and practise scientific thinking.

FROM LITTLE THINGS, BIG THINGS GROW

As part of the challenge, children were posed a series of engaging and open questions to help them to conceive of and describe their ideal playground by encouraging them to remember and discuss favorite playgrounds that they had visited before. In great excitement, the children would raise their hands and take turns to talk about their best-loved moments playing on castles, slides, and colorful swings. The activity was guided by Renaissance's belief that children should be encouraged to develop their skills by describing things, as this helps children to practise their abilities in memorization and to draw on their own sources for stimulating imagination and creativity.

Their next activity, called "Little Designers", enables children to draw their own ideal playground following the dedicated instructions of their teachers.

"I want a big bouncy castle!" Lily called out eagerly as she raised her little hand. Her opportunity to share her ideas and discuss them with others is in part made possible by the school's small class sizes—in line with international standards that allow teachers to focus on helping each pupil individually.

Renaissance cherishes and supports children to verbalize their creative ideas, recognizing that major initiatives can have their origins in simple initial concepts. This strategy inspires children's creativity and imagination in their early years, laying the foundation for their comprehensive development in the future.

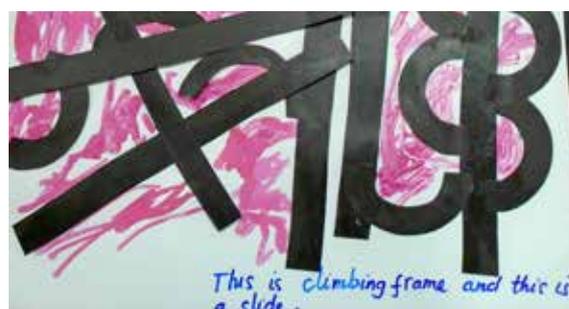
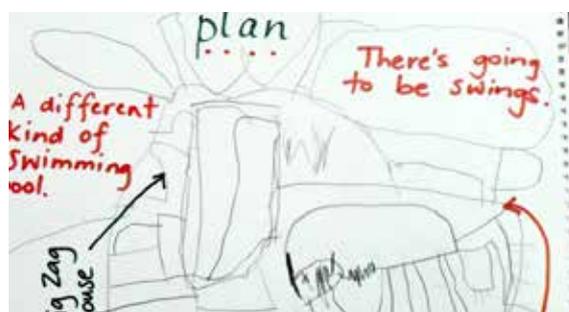
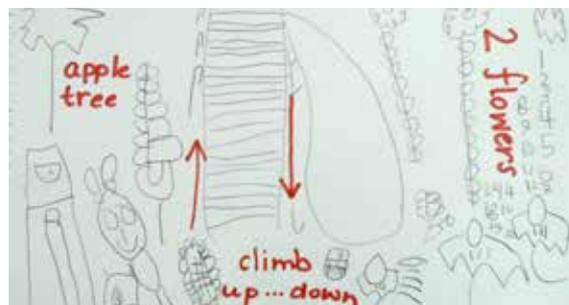
PROMOTE THINKING FROM LEARNING AND PLAYING

The "Playground Creation Challenge" was a combined and integrated activity designed to stimulate logical thinking in children, involving pupils in ways that boosted their confidence and energy. Through the story "Farmer Duck", teachers were able to instruct children on how to build on their creative playground plan through drawings. Subsequently, while playing cutting games, the teacher guided

children in how to recognize, organize, and categorize all the playing equipment into different groups. Finally the challenge ended, and our "little designers" met the "supplier" who would be in charge of building their playground, and received feedback on the feasibility of their creative plan.

From these activities, our students practiced scientific thinking—increasing their cognitive capacities and learning how to organize things logically. This provided them with an opportunity to properly perceive information and practise good analytical thinking skills, stimulating the development of their personal levels of intelligence.

The challenge ended with joy and happiness as pupils looked forward to welcoming in the next challenge with their teachers and friends. Renaissance was one the first schools to provide an outstanding creative environment for children to experience more advanced ways of thinking in early childhood. This is also a goal that Renaissance International School Saigon has been striving to achieve, in order to improve students' confidence and creativity—a basis for every child to gather their strength for future development. ■



Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



Anne Hill International School

Anne Hill International School is a school for children from 18 months up till 6 years old and its curriculum incorporates the Montessori Method, Jolly Phonics and enrichment programs.

Classes are conducted in spacious, safe and well-equipped classrooms with a low student-to-teacher ratio.

Outdoor facilities include a large covered playground, covered and gated swimming-pool, built-in water-play feature, mini-trampoline, mini-golf area, tent fun area, sandpit, and eco-garden.

"Learning is a journey, not a race."

33 Giang Van Minh, An Phu Ward, HCMC

School ages: 18 months to 6 years old

Website: annehill.school

Phone: +84 906 846 939, +848 3740 4019

info@annehill.school



ABC International School (ABCIS)

Inspected and judged an outstanding school by British Government Inspectors (October 2013), the ABCIS is one of the few schools worldwide awarded this Department for Education rating. Progress of students puts the ABCIS among the top 8% of schools in the world. Providing education for 2-18 year olds in a supportive and friendly environment, it delivers a culturally adapted version of the British National Curriculum supported by Cambridge & AQA IGCSE and AS/A levels. Students are prepared for Universities in the UK, USA, Australia, Korea and Canada.

Foundation & Early Primary Campus:

4, IE Street, KDC Trung Son,

Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC

Primary & Secondary Campus:

2, IE Street, KDC Trung Son,

Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC

5431 1833-34-35-36

office@theabcis.com

www.theabcis.com



EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City

The EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City is an IB World School offering an academic and supportive English language education for students aged 2-18 years. EIS is committed to educating students to become creative critical thinkers and problem solvers. Students are immersed in a multicultural learning environment which values multilingualism. Language programmes at EIS include Spanish, German, French and Vietnamese.

730 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2

www.eishcmc.com



International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

Vietnam's only international school offering a U.S. curriculum for children 18 months to 11 years old within a 100% English language environment. With a library containing over 13,500 English books and more than 60% of students achieving above grade level English, ISSP graduates are well prepared for secondary school at ISHCMC or ISHCMC - American Academy.

92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh

+84 (8) 2222 7788/99

admissions@issp.edu.vn

www.issp.edu.vn



Saigon Star International School

Saigon Star is a student focused international school offering a high quality, first class education. Specialising in the British National Curriculum, all of the class teachers hold an international teaching qualification. In our Early Years programme, a Montessori specialist works closely with the mainclass teachers to ensure a high rate of progress and attainment. The school also provides specialists for children requiring additional ESL support.

Residential Area No.5,

Thanh My Loi Ward, D2

3742 STAR / 3742 7827

www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



The American School

The American School (TAS) is an international school that has been accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), representing 20 nationalities. TAS provides an American-based curriculum with rigorous performance standards and a variety of academic offerings including Advanced Placement courses, university credit courses through our partnership with Missouri State University, and an Intensive ESL Program for English Language Learners.

177A, 172-180 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2

3519 2223 / 0903 952 223

admissions@tas.edu.vn

www.tas.edu.vn





**The International School
Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)**

ISHCMC is HCMC's most established international school and first IB World School authorized to teach all 3 International Baccalaureate programs for students 2 to 18 years old. ISHCMC is excited to launch a new secondary campus in 2017, featuring Vietnam's first Innovation Center, a 350-seat professional theater, NBA-sized basketball courts, 25m – 8 lane competitive swimming pool and sports field.

**28 Vo Trung Toan, D2
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admissions@ishcmc.edu.vn
www.ishcmc.com**



**The International School
Ho Chi Minh City – American
Academy**

ISHCMC – American Academy is a U.S. curriculum secondary school, preparing students aged 11 to 18 years old for success at universities worldwide. Early university credits, through SUPA and AP courses, a 1:1 University Counseling Program, and an extensive EAL program sets our graduates on the road to success with 100% acceptance rate and U.S. \$1 million scholarship fund to overseas universities.

**16 Vo Trung Toan, D2
+84 (8) 3898 9100
admissions@aaavn.edu.vn
www.aavn.edu.vn**



Renaissance International School Saigon

Renaissance is an International British School offering the National Curriculum for England complemented by the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), Cambridge IGCSE and the International Baccalaureate. The school has made a conscious decision to limit numbers and keep class sizes small to ensure each pupil is offered an education tailored to meet their individual learning needs. It's a family school providing first-class facilities including a 350- seats theater, swimming pools, mini-pool, drama rooms, gymnasium, IT labs, music and drama rooms, science labs and an all-weather pitch.

www.renaissance.edu.vn

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 six-hectare, well-equipped campus.

www.ssis.edu.vn

The Montessori International School of Vietnam

For children 6 months to 9 years old. A registered member of the American Montessori Society. Montessori uses an internationally recognized educational method which focuses on fostering the child's natural desire to learn. The aim is to create a sense of self and individuality through an encouraging and learning environment. Available are Extra-curricular Activities, Summer camp and immersion programs in Vietnamese, French and Mandarin.

www.montessori.edu.vn

Also...

Australian International School (AIS)

The Australian International School is an IB World School with three world class campuses in District 2, HCMC, offering an international education from kindergarten to senior school with the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP), Cambridge Secondary Programme (including IGCSE) and IB Diploma Programme (DP). Xi Campus (Kindergarten)

www.aisvietnam.com

British International School (BIS)

Inspected and approved by the British Government, BIS provides a British style curriculum for an international student body from pre-school to Year 13. The school is staffed by British qualified and trained teachers with recent UK experience. Fully accredited by the Council of International Schools and a member of FOBISIA, BIS is the largest international school in Vietnam.

www.bisvietnam.com

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Adrienne is a passionate Montessori Specialist who joined Saigon Star International School in September 2012.

Play = Work = Play

Why children work in Montessori



BY THE TIME A 6-YEAR-OLD CHILD graduates after three years in Montessori, not only do they know how to find the answers to “ $56 \div 8$ ”, “ $2893 + 7065$ ” or “ 2381×3 ”, they also know that “beautiful” is an adjective, “quietly” is an adverb—and how to use them in a sentence. To parents, that may sound like students must go through a very tedious and rigid process in order to achieve such results, but that is far from the truth. In my Montessori class, I have had children chasing me to request more ‘challenges,’ whether it is doing arithmetic or writing sentences. I have also had children dragging me to the dressing frames to ask me to show them how to do the buttons, or to help them put the last blocks on their vertical ‘Brown Stairs’ tower because they can’t reach the top themselves. When, in the end, they manage to accomplish these challenges independently, they clap, skip and cheer. Their personal joy and sense of achievement are far greater than that of being given a sticker.

All these great results that a Montessori child achieves are gained through ‘work.’ Children work in Montessori classes, and work brings them serenity, joy and confidence.

In the adult world, work seems to be stereotyped as something negative: “I’ve got a lot of work to do—reports, meet-

ings and chores.” But take a moment to imagine you are doing something you love every day. How would that make you feel? Most likely, you would feel energized on waking up each morning and very satisfied at the end of your day. That is exactly what we want to achieve in a Montessori classroom.

Work and play are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact, Dr. Maria Montessori once stated: “Play is the work of the child.” In Montessori, we strive to combine work and play to achieve optimal results. For example, instead of having children practice holding a pencil, we invite them to squeeze an eye-dropper, tongs, pegs or tweezers to strengthen their finger muscles first. And instead of having children sit at a table to memorize times tables, we invite them to lay out beads to find out what “5 times 8” is.

In Montessori, ‘work’ is interesting and fun. Each set of ‘work’ is designed and presented according to children’s interests and needs, based on Dr. Maria Montessori’s extensive experience with children and Montessori teachers’ observations. For instance, children learn to differentiate the functions of words using a task called “The Farm.” By selecting a brown cow instead of a black one, children learn that “brown” and “black” are

two “describing words” that help us to tell the difference between things.

In Montessori, ‘work’ is children’s free choice. We believe that each child should pursue what their inner voice guides them to do, and to progress at their own pace. That is why children are free to choose or leave their ‘work.’ And, of course, if a child is intrigued by their ‘work,’ they are free to do it as many times as they wish, just like any ‘play’ activity. And through repeated practice comes a perfection of skills and an understanding of ‘work.’

For example, I may invite a child to join me for a lesson on static addition using golden beads but, if the child declines, I respect his choice. Or, if he watches a presentation of ‘work,’ I give him a choice—either leave this ‘work’ until later or try to do it independently. Such freedom is no less than a child would enjoy in any other play-based Early Years class.

Some may worry that if the choice is left to the child that they might choose not to learn but, surprisingly, during my years as a Montessori teacher, it is often the children who come to me to request lessons on advanced ‘work,’ especially after they have watched their friends enjoying it.

Montessori ‘work’ has many similarities to ‘play.’ But one major reason why we call Montessori materials and activities ‘work’ rather than ‘play’ is because the materials and activities are purposeful, i.e. by the time students have finished a piece of ‘work,’ they will have achieved a certain outcome. Take the ‘Pink Tower,’ for example. By the time a child masters this ‘work,’ they are able to build a tower from the biggest cube to the smallest cube and, during the practice phase, they learn to distinguish between sizes of objects.

Pupils aged 2–6 years at Saigon Star International School attend a Montessori class for one hour each day. ■



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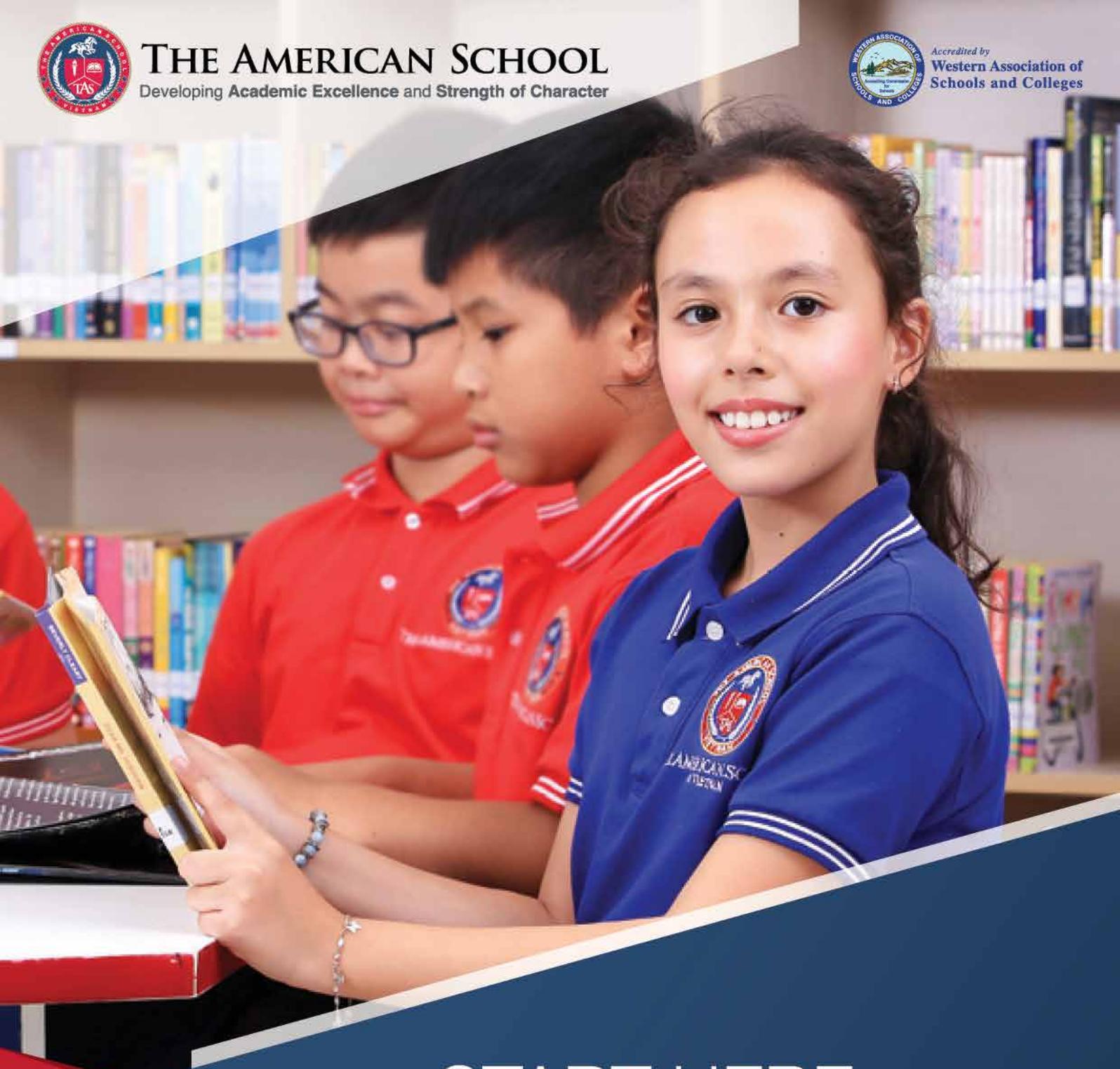
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