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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 **THUY HUYNH**
thuy.huynh@oivietnam.com

For advertising please contact:

Sales Manager **NGAN NGUYEN** 
ngan@oivietnam.com
090 279 7951
Account Managers **QUAN NGUYEN** 
quan@oivietnam.com
0122 277 3538
(MS.) MAN TRAN 
man@oivietnam.com
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General **advertising@oivietnam.com**

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Phường Đa Kao, Quận 1, TP. Hồ Chí Minh
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Giám đốc, Tổng biên tập
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Sói & Mèo
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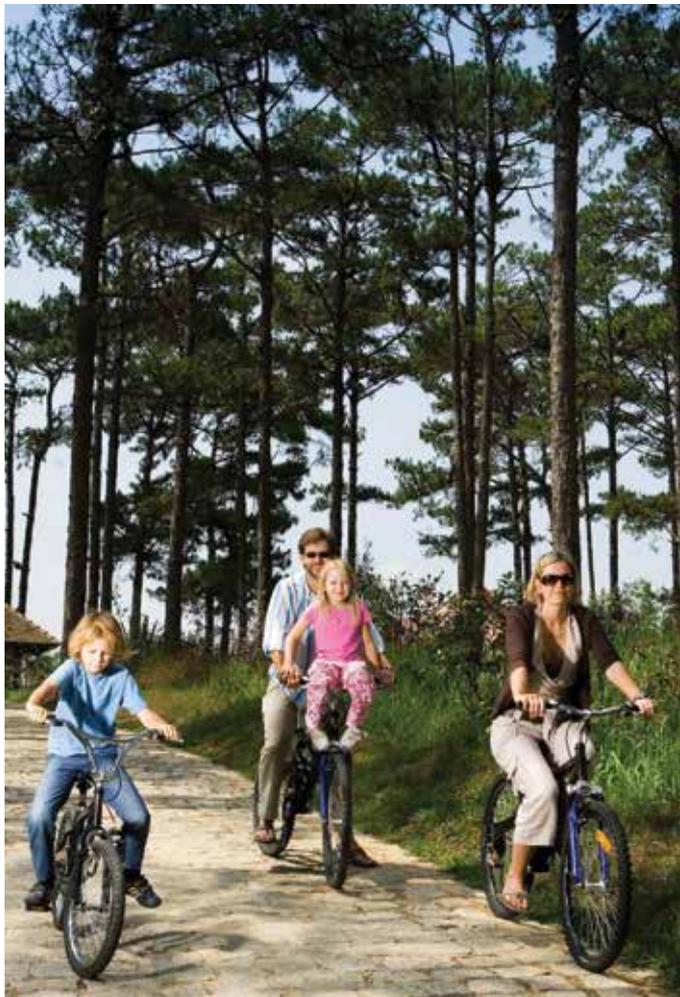
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SPOTLIGHT ON MICHELIN-STARRED
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April 14, 15 and 16

For a three-night showcase of standouts, the Italian-born Chef of Michelin-starred restaurant Beefbar Hong Kong will prepare for diners in the heart of Saigon, a five-course menu showcasing favourites from Beefbar—Hong Kong’s only starred steakhouse.

Spagoni’s degustation menu at Reflections will feature Beefbar’s iconic dishes. The meal opens with a refreshing Scallop Carpaccio with Ponzu sauce, followed by the Traditional “Bistro-Style” Beef Tartare. The Black Angus Mini Burger accompanied by its signature Kale Salad is another highlight that precedes Beefbar’s ‘Great Meats’ served with ‘Unrivalled Mash Potato’. Lastly, Chef Spagoni’s modern take on a lemon tart is the house favourite dessert to end the experience.

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Reflections
RESTAURANT



Datebook

What's on this month...

TASTE OF AUSTRALIA & WIN INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Taste of Australia is the annual Vietnam-wide celebration of Australian food, beverages and cuisine, as well as the country's world-class culinary education and innovative fashion and design. Throughout April 2017, across Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Da Nang and Nha Trang, you can taste high-quality Australian produce and delicious Aussie cuisine through a variety of special events, restaurant promotions, exclusive dinners, wine tastings and more.

As a major partner of Taste of Australia, Jetstar Pacific invites foodies to join in with an exciting competition on Taste of Australia's Facebook page at tasteofaustralia.vn from April 1-30, 2017. The winner will receive two international return economy flights operated by Jetstar Pacific. To enter dine at one of the many Taste of Australia partner restaurants and hotels across Vietnam in April (listed on the Taste of Australia website), take a photo of your Taste of Australia experience, and send it, along with your contact details, to tasteofaustralia.vn@gmail.com. The runner-up will win a skincare package from Organique Australia—a premium Australian skincare brand. All information about Taste of Australia and the competition is available at www.tasteofaustralia.com.vn.



APRIL 12

What: Forbes Vietnam – Women's Summit 2017

Where: GEM Center (8 Nguyen Binh Khiem, D1), 8am-8pm; VND1.1 million

About: Women Bettering the World is the biggest event about women leadership and women empowerment in Vietnam with more than 1,000 participants. Forbes Vietnam applies the Forbes methodology of annual Most Powerful Women list with adjustment to fit with Vietnam context. Four metrics are used: money (net worth, company revenues); media presence; spheres of positive influence; and impact, analyzed both within the context of each woman's field and outside of it. Women's Summit 2017 comprises panel discussions of topics; presentations of prestigious speakers and other attractive activities about women's leadership and how to balance between career and life. Additionally, the interaction among speakers and participants in this event will go through many inspiring stories, questions and activities.

Contact: Visit event.forbesvietnam.com for more info

APRIL 12

What: Nutrition, Obesity and Good Eating Habits Workshop

Where: Anne Hill International School (33 Giang Van Minh, D2), 5pm-6:30pm

About: With rapid urbanization and the development of modern lifestyles, many parents in Ho Chi Minh City now face difficulties in properly feeding their children. Family Medical Practice, in collaboration with Anne Hill International School, is proud to co-host their new workshop for parents—Parenting for Health with pediatrician Dr. Jonathan Halevy and registered dietitian Jill Tuong Truong.

Contact: Call 3822 7848 (ext. 5) for more info

APRIL 15 & 16

What: Droidcon Vietnam

Where: Hoa Sen University (8 Nguyen Van Trang, D1); 8am-7pm; tickets start at VND200,000

About: Droidcon is a global developer conference series and a network focusing on the best of Android, and in 2017 it will be coming to Vietnam. The idea behind the droidcon conferences is to support the Android platform and create a global network for developers and companies. The event offers talks from different parts of the ecosystem, including core development, embedded solutions, augmented reality, business solutions and games. Meet a lot of rockstar international developers and level up your Android game.

Contact: Visit www.droidcon.vn for more info





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APRIL 19

What: Dvorak's 8th Symphony

Where: Saigon Opera House (7 Lam Son Square, D1); VND200,000; 8pm

About: Dvorak's 8th Symphony, one of the most famous symphonies of 19th century European romantic music, will be presented to classical music enthusiasts at the Opera House. This is Dvorak's most acclaimed Bohemia-themed symphony. The show also features talented pianist Nguyen Bich Tra, who has performed at prestigious venues around the world: Queen Elizabeth Hall, Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall, the Kennedy Center and Tokyo Opera City. She will perform Joachim Raff's concerto in G Major for piano and orchestra, which was successfully performed by Bich Tra and was recorded by big names Sterling Records and NAXOS. The program is staged and conducted by young and talented conductor Tran Nhat Minh.

Contact: Visit www.hbso.org.vn for more info



2016: A Transition Year

Pacific Cross Vietnam (Formerly Blue Cross Vietnam)

ANNOUNCEMENT: We are happy to say that we are now operating under our new name **PACIFIC CROSS VIETNAM.**

Thank you for continued support in 2016.
All the best in the year of the Monkey!

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

APRIL 19

What: Gynecologic Infections

Where: Family Medical Practice (95 Thao Dien, D2), 10am-11:30am

About: Join Dr. Jane Shadwell-Li and Dr. Serge Gradstein for a morning light breakfast health talk on gynecologic infections. Panel discussion topics will include sexually and non-sexually transmitted diseases that affect the reproductive health of women. For attendees only, FMP is offering one free consultation with Dr. Jane (general) or Dr. Serge (STI consultation only). Inform yourself with relevant up-to-date medical knowledge concerning your own health and wellbeing. Space is limited, so register your attendance early.

Contact: To register and for more info, email mktg.admin@vietnammedicalpractice.com



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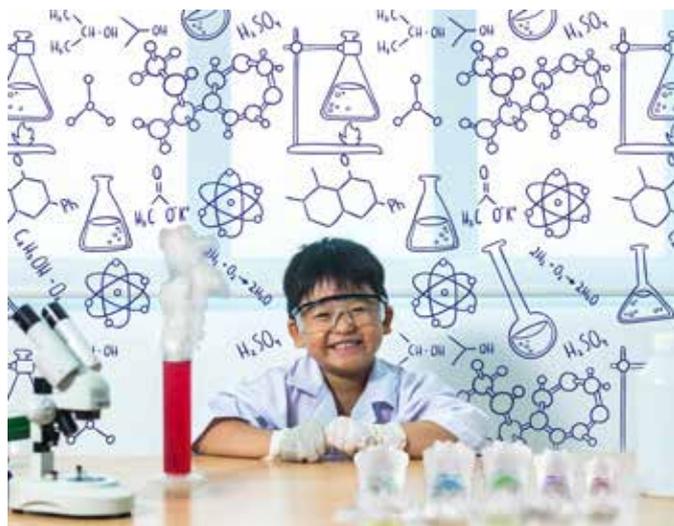
APRIL 22

What: ISSP's Free Family Fun Day

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

About: Join ISSP's school community for a morning of family fun inspired by science. Receive a free science kit and let your child become a scientist for a day. There will be practical experiments led by the school's highly qualified and dedicated teaching faculty. Children can make their own ice cream using liquid nitrogen! Enjoy complimentary refreshments set within the school's purpose built campus while your child explores ISSP's outdoor play areas. Children aged 6 months to 4 years old are also invited to join for their highly popular free Mommy & Me playgroup.

Contact: Register at www.issp.edu.vn/fun or 2222 7788/99



APRIL 28 & 29

What: Cinderella Ballet

Where: Saigon Opera House (7 Lam Son Square, D1); VND400,000; 8pm

About: The Cinderella ballet, with the music of Sergei Prokofiev, is so well-known that there are over 1,500 different versions of choreography for this masterpiece. In 2013, Norwegian choreographer Johanne Jakhelln Constant, renowned international artist with nearly 10 years of experience as artistic director of the Quad Cities Ballet (US), staged a completely new version of Cinderella for HBSO and it immediately became a success. This time famous Japanese ballet artist Nobuo Fujino will take on the role of the Prince, accompanied by HBSO artists: Chloe Glemot, Tran Hoang Yen, Nguyen Thu Trang, Sung A Lung, Pham The Chung, Do Hoang Khang Ninh and Tran Thi Hong Van.

Contact: Visit www.hbso.org.vn for more info

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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

Silk Sense Hoi An River Resort Opens

A Dong Silk, a leading garment brand in Hoi An, officially launched its international “four-plus-star,” resort—Silk Sense Hoi An River Resort—last month. Silk Sense Hoi An River Resort (silksenseresort.com) features 86 resort style rooms composing of 70 hotel rooms and 16 villas on two floors with private river view balconies and modern amenities. The resort also included a sunset pool bar and cafeteria, swimming pool, gym, spa and wellness facilities, river access and meeting rooms.

Welcome Momoko

Momoko Hanamura joined The Landmark (thelandmarkvietnam.com) as their new Marketing & Leasing Manager in February 2017. Hailing from Japan, Momoko has over eight years of experience in hospitality management and sales, having worked in Myanmar, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Opened in 1994 and managed by Peninsula Properties, The Landmark is Ho Chi Minh City’s first international serviced apartment and office complex. Situated on a prime waterfront site, The Landmark features a combination of luxurious living and spectacular river and city views. The 16-storey complex includes 65 elegantly furnished and fully-equipped serviced apartments. Many contain private balconies, units ranging from studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, and one three-bedroom apartment. Office space totals over 10,000 sqm, comprising of eight floors of up to 1,285 sqm per floor. Each is designed for subdivision, providing flexibility for office tenants. The Landmark Health Club is located on the 15th and 16th floors and offers a complete gym, rooftop swimming pool, saunas, fitness studio, and squash court.



Visit The Closet

The Closet Concept Store (81 Xuan Thuy, D2) offers a unique shopping experience in Saigon that includes women’s and kids’ clothing. Discover high quality ethical fashion clothing and accessories from international and local designers. Pop in to view and try on the latest from Tonlé, Claycult, Elsewhere, Moniko, Noro, Suka, Les Saigonaises, Linda Mai Phung to Norjinn and other creative brands.

Mia Resort Mui Ne’s Special Offer

Mia Resort Mui Ne is celebrating its 15th anniversary and is ready to be discovered and re-discovered after an extensive renovation but still staying true to their “rustic luxury” character. Besides a new appearance, there is much more to be discovered at Mia. Beachfront restaurant Sandals brings together great food, great drinks and an even greater chilled atmosphere. A new, exciting and health-oriented menu features delicious Vietnamese cuisine and seafood that complements creative international dishes. To fill up the day, guests are invited to learn the local lingo with Vietnamese language classes or perk up with exciting Vietnamese coffee sessions. For those who are looking for something more thrilling, experience kitesurfing and blasting across the water. Mia is a retreat that will rejuvenate your senses and soul. Book directly with the resort, stay for a minimum of 2 nights (between May 3-October 31, 2017) and enjoy a 15% discount on all accommodation and spa treatments. Visit miamuine.com for more info.



RISS Appoints New Head of School

Last month, the Renaissance International School Saigon (RISS, renaissance.edu.vn) announced the appointment of a new Head of School, Peter Gittins. The incoming Head of School has been involved in international education for a period in excess of 30 years as both a teacher and school leader. Trained as a teacher of History and English, Peter taught History in Papua New Guinea, Nepal and Australia before commencing his school leadership career in the capacity as the Founding Principal of the International School, Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC). There followed an interim Headship in Australia, the Headship of the Overseas School of Colombo, Sri Lanka and the Headship of the International School Hamburg, Germany. Peter currently works for the Council of International Schools in the area of school accreditation and also works directly with school Boards in the areas of strategic planning, change management and governance. During his time with the CIS, Peter has been able to observe leading international schools and their best practice, and this experience will be invaluable for helping Renaissance to further leverage its academic standards and beyond.

Boutique Hoi An Resort Promotion

The Boutique Hoi An Resort (boutiquehoianresort.com) is running a promotion that gives travelers who book a room on their website a special discount of up to 30% (applies for new booking in May, June, September and October 2017 for all room categories). Room rates include buffet breakfast for two and free shuttle bus to Hoi An ancient town. The promotion excludes peak season and black out days.



Global Education Center Opens

Global Education Center (GEC, 45-47 Vu Tong Phan, D2), begins an exciting new venture in District 2. At GEC they pride themselves on having a multicultural teaching faculty, believing that an all-inclusive recruitment policy ensures that the center can employ quality teachers with a diverse set of qualifications. The unique professional knowledge of GEC's teachers helps bridge the gap between school and language center. The center's specialist test preparation classes assist students to unlock their potential whether it is a test for IELTS, TOEFL, IGCSE, A Levels, SAT's, the ACT or international school entrance exams. They also offer one-on-one tuition for a wide variety of subjects, which are currently on the school curriculum. For more info, visit uec.edu.vn.



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300 meter

OF WALKING A DAY IS BEING encouraged by the Ho Chi Minh City administration in efforts to curb traffic congestion. The city's Party members, public servants and students will be the first to join in the walking movement, whether it is to work or to everyday activities. The three-phase movement is planned to run in three years, with the first phase scheduled to begin in April. In the first phase, the program seeks to attract participants from District 1 and 3, and will expand to other neighborhoods in the next phases. Nguyen Ngoc Tuong, deputy head of the city's Traffic Safety Committee, believes that the walking movement will help create a habit of walking among city's residents, resulting in less traffic on the road and therefore reducing congestion.

359

AIR QUALITY MONITORING STATIONS are planned for Hanoi by 2020, adding to Hanoi's ten existing ones. Seven of the stations will run automatically throughout the year, while 352 will be operated regularly to monitor Hanoi's air at different times of the year. The ten monitoring stations already in place are funded by the French government, and have been useful in determining the main cause of the capital's pollution—exhaust fumes from automobiles and motorbikes. However, the installed stations can only provide indicators for limited areas of Hanoi, while a complete system of 359 stations by 2020 is crucial in improving the city's capability to cope with its worsening pollution, said Nguyen Duc Chung, chairman of the municipal People's Committee.



1,150 meter

PARK RUNNING ALONG THE BEACH of a province in south-central Vietnam is expected to give the emerging tourist destination a facelift. The park will span along Doc Lap Street in Tuy Hoa City, the capital of Phu Yen Province, with the main attraction being three pedestrian paths and a 4,500-square-meter playground paved with granite and basalt. The VND68.5 billion park will be embellished with sculptures and artistic lighting, and is slated to be finished by April. Phu Yen, the easternmost province of Vietnam's mainland, has emerged as a new popular tourist destination for locals since the release of Vietnamese-language children's movie *Toi Thay Hoa Vang Tren Co Xanh* (Yellow Flowers on the Green Grass) in 2015.

VND 2 BILLION

WAS FOUND ON A VIETNAMESE man trying to smuggle it into Laos. During border patrol, Nam Can's border forces found Cho, a 30-year-old local, on a trail in Nam Can Commune, Ky Son District, carrying a suspiciously large bag on his shoulder. On inspection, it was found that the bag contained a large amount of cash in two kinds of denominations: VND200,000 and VND500,000. Cho admitted he was hired by an unknown Lao national to deliver the cash across the border. He was promised VND2 million in return.





2 tons

OF TRASH IS COLLECTED FROM Ha Long Bay's shores daily, according to the attraction's management department. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2000, the bay is visited by approximately 3 million domestic and foreign tourists each year on average, according to Vietnam's General Department of Tourism. However, Quang Ninh's fast-growing tourist industry, coupled with thousands of fishing vessels operating off its coast, has resulted in large amounts of garbage being dumped into the bay. Most of the trash is found near the shore, having been dumped into the water via sewer pipes or by fishing vessels operating near the coast. Ha Long Bay currently employs a team of four trash-collecting boats tasked with cleaning up eight kilometers of coastline including areas as far as 700 meters from the shore, every year VND5.8 billion is spent collecting the trash.

300

SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS WILL BE INSTALLED in traffic jam-prone spots. These cameras will transmit information of congestions into the city's digital map to help people choose alternative routes if needed. Cameras will be installed in hot spots including Nhi Thien Duong Bridge in District 8, the Go May Crossroads in Binh Tan District, An Suong Tunnel in Truong Chinh Street in

Districts 12 and Hoc Mon, Truong Son-Tan Son Nhat overpass, and Nguyen Kiem-Nguyen Thai Son construction areas in Districts Go Vap and Phu Nhuan.



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Gender in the Gym

Bodybuilder Kendy Nguyen opens up about his journey as a transgender man in Vietnam

Text by **Wes Grover**

Image by **Ngoc Tran**

KENDY NGUYEN IS A NATIONAL CHAMPION bodybuilder, but he will tell you he is just an ordinary guy. In many ways, he is right, though to leave it at that would be to grossly oversimplify an extraordinary personal journey.

Before he discovered his passion for bodybuilding, Kendy worked for his family in the hospitality business in Saigon. Before that, he grew up in the northern city of Hai Phong. And before that, Kendy was born a woman. As far as he is aware, he is the first person in Vietnam to transition his body through bodybuilding, making Kendy a trailblazer for the transgender community in a traditionally conservative country.

Sitting down at the gym where he works as a personal trainer, his sense of place is readily apparent. Kendy is more comfortable in his skin than most 27-year-old men and conveys the emotional strength to match his impressive physical stature. As we discuss his life and the obstacles he has faced, it's clear that Kendy is a man who has found his place in the world.

How old were you when you knew you were a man?

I knew when I was three or four years old. I had an inclination early on because I never liked doing feminine stuff. I liked roughhousing and always saw myself as a boy. All my friends were boys.

That's very young. Was it confusing as you became older and more aware of your body?

There was confusion. From a young

age, I felt that I wasn't like other people. But, it also felt kind of natural. I played with boys and I behaved the way boys do. My family, in some ways, restricted me from expressing it at first. They made me keep long hair like a girl.

But my father was away on business a lot and my mother was always very busy. My brother is ten years younger and he's my only sibling. So, there was a kind of divide between us. I was left alone a lot of the time and it gave me freedom to mature on my own.

What was your life like growing up and how did you become interested in bodybuilding?

My family used to have a textile factory in Hai Phong, but I was not very interested in that. It was too feminine for me. We moved to Saigon when I was in high school and that's around when I got into karate. The coach saw that I was dedicated and let me join the team for competitions.

I did karate competitions for three years and did pretty well, but then I had an accident and fractured my arm when I was 18 years old. Because of that, my family forbade me from continuing to do karate. I studied hospitality and tourism in college for two years and worked as a hotel receptionist. During that time, I was no longer doing karate and my level of fitness declined. I got sick a lot. Some of my friends that I worked with suggested I go to the gym, and that's how I was introduced to bodybuilding. I didn't know much about it at first, but I was very dedicated. Eventually,

I got the attention of a member of the bodybuilding team and have been on the team since then.

What is it about bodybuilding that you enjoy?

It's a combination of my love for sport and determination to never half-ass anything. If I'm going to do something, I will do it with my full heart. My first goal was to improve my physical health. But this is also when I was first introduced to the idea of transitioning my body. As I spent more time in the gym, I saw my body change and that's when the idea started.

When did you become aware that there is a whole transgender community and that you were not alone?

I started realizing that I wasn't alone around the same time that I was working as a receptionist. I got a lot of exposure, met a lot of people, and the internet was becoming more useful. More people in the trans community were coming out to the world and not hiding themselves. I read stories of other trans people coming out in Thailand, Philippines, America, and elsewhere. But at that time, the thought was always that you need a lot of money for surgery and hormones. It was a faraway thought in my head until I started going to the gym. Then I thought, "Ok, there's another way I can do this. It's possible."

Can you describe your transitioning process?





Transitioning the way I have is a very gradual process. It's not like surgery. I just started taking hormones within the last two years. The trans community is still very young here in Vietnam, and so I did not have a lot of information at first. When I started transitioning about seven years ago, I was 20 years old and I would look to the internet for information, but there was not a lot available in Vietnamese. I got some advice from coaches and trainers who knew that I wanted to change my body.

How did your family and friends react when you told them?

There was resistance from my family, of course. But because of the nature of my transition, not going for surgery, it happened very gradually. It happened in front of their eyes very slowly, so it gave them time to get used to it. Yes, there was resistance but it was not insurmountable or traumatizing. Nothing too drastic happened too quickly. I actually got some support from relatives living abroad who were more aware of what I was going through. Also, at that point, I already had a reputation for being very manly. Friends were 100 percent positive and very supportive.

My lifestyle motivated me to prove to my parents that I'm going to be a good man. I wasn't going to be self-destructive, but rather be a normal man who is productive and contributes to society.

Are you allowed to legally change your name and gender on your ID cards?

Not yet. The situation is going in the right direction, but it's going to take time. Hopefully, I will be able to in 2018. Even without that, what's more important is that the general attitude of society, especially in Saigon, has become a lot more open. People are more exposed to everything and they see that nothing bad is happening when people come out. The perception of society is improving day by day. Before, there was resistance. People were outwardly hating us, but it's definitely improving.

What are the biggest challenges you've faced being transgender in Vietnam?

I have learned that if you think something is going to be difficult, it will be. I've always known who I am since the beginning, so it does not matter to me what sort of opposition I face.

It sounds like you've been very fortunate in that sense. Are you involved in the transgender community to help others who are struggling with their gender identity?

I help other people here who want to transition the way I have. Sexual realignment surgery is not possible in Vietnam. You would have to go to Thailand, which is very expensive and also dangerous. There can be many health complications. Transitioning through bodybuilding, the way I have, is much healthier. It's very gradual and doesn't cost that much. I offer advice and coaching to other people who want to do the same. People can reach out to me on Facebook and I will help.

It's a matter of cost and lifestyle. When you have surgery, the change is drastic, but also costly and painful. The way I have done it is slower and doesn't cost as much. Even if you're just taking hormones, they are not too expensive. It costs about VND150,000 per week. Not exactly cheap, but it's not prohibitive either.

How did the bodybuilding community react to your being transgender?

Gender lines get blurred in bodybuilding already, because a lot of the women who compete have very masculine bodies. Taking hormones is not such a strange thing to do in this community. It hasn't been 100 percent smooth, but I've been accepted for who I am.

You recently competed at the National Bodybuilding Tournament. Did they let you compete as a man?

I was not allowed to compete with the men, but it doesn't really bother me. I went against good competitors and I won my weight class. I'm the national champion in the women's 49-52kg weight class.

Outside of bodybuilding, what do you hope to do in life?

My goal is to live a normal life. Nothing particularly special. I definitely want to do other things besides bodybuilding, like own some sort of business where I can make a stable income. Maybe a café. If I have enough money, I would like to open my own gym. ■



La Veranda Resort

2017 Gold List: Our Favorite Phu Quoc Experiences This Summer

Text and Images Provided by **La Veranda Resort**

FROM LUXURY HOTELS to theme parks, the island of Phu Quoc has so much to offer when it comes to luxury holidays. And when we talk about inclusive family breaks along the amazing vistas of the sparkling East Sea, award-winning **La Veranda Resort MGallery By Sofitel** (www.laverandaresorts.com) has so much to spoil you with. Our top 5 summer experiences for the family that craves luxury and adventure:

1. Family Fun On The Shores of La Veranda

Located on a wide stretch of untouched beach and azure waters, and inspired by the grandeur of a French colonial mansion, La Veranda elegantly transports you to a bygone era of Indochina when life was slower, simpler and more refined.

La Veranda's summer offer, An Inspired Summer, offers so much amazing activities included in the room rate. One of its summer offers for the family called V.I.K. (Very Important Kid) lets families have a chance to indulge in summer adventures filled with warm laughter and meaningful connections. With the V.I.K program, kids under 12 can enjoy exclusive luxuries that will certainly create memorable moments from arrival to farewell.

Kids are received with welcome cookies and drinks in addition to a red carpet photo shoot to commence a special trip. Awaiting inside the luxurious rooms are nightly VIP nightly kiddie sweet treats, luxe bathroom amenities for the little ones, and even a teddy bear turn-down service. The VIK facilities include the VIK Kids Club with indoor library and play center, mini screening room, Xbox gaming and a selection of play and learn-style activities that begs to be photographed and shared.

Going outdoors, La Veranda has got you covered with all-day beach activities

designed be both fun and to aid family bonding. Adults and offspring can work together to unveil hidden clues in their search for long-lost treasure; or they can resort to simple pleasures like building sandcastles.

All these amazing activities are inclusive in the room rate for a summer to remember.

2. Go To The Safari Park

While living in the luxurious comforts at La Veranda, don't forget to go for a day's adventure at the Northwest coast of Phu Quoc Island with Vinpearl Safari Park, home to 400 species of plants, and 2000 wild animals representing 140 different species.

Add VND 500,000 to your hotel package to enjoy a Safari day tour.

3. Get The Speed With Go-Karting

More than the theme park, the speed devils can also indulge in go-karting for a furious morning. The Phu Quoc go-kart track is located right in the jungle – a serene setting to tear up the road! With karts clocking in at a ridiculous 200cc, the no-holds-barred racing lets you get up to speed on a 320m track on Phu Quoc Island for a real racing.

4. Run Away To Bai Sao

Chill and relax for half a day at Bai Sao. La Veranda's summer promotion includes a complimentary visit to Bai Sao and Paradiso Beach Club, the most pristine area on the strip of Bai Sao beach. After all adventures, it's time to take it slow and be with nature.

5. Escape to Wellness

For those preferring a wellness holiday, what else could be more ideal than an 'Escape To Wellness' at La Veranda?

Through a multitude of complimentary activities such as: Daily



yoga and mediation by the sea, Art of Vietnamese Massage Workshop, and Neuro-muscular consultation session, the program can rejuvenate your body, and bring you back to a wonderful sense of wellbeing based on the principles of Movement + Relaxation.

Whether it's a family bonding V.I.K. Summer or an Escape To Wellness, you will surely find your summer holiday at La Veranda in Phu Quoc. Deluxe Garden View room starts at VND 3,405,000++/night. Come and enjoy numerous complimentary offers that are too many to mention!

For more info about La Veranda Resort MGallery By Sofitel and their special summer offer, email contact@laverandaresorts.com ■

Bar None

At one time or another, most of us have toyed with the idea of owning our own bar in Vietnam, here's how

Dear Antoine,

I'm a US citizen in the process of teaming up with a Korean corporation to open a bar/club concept. Can you give me an idea of the requirements involved? Another alternative would be to partner up with my soon-to-be Vietnamese wife, but she has a number of businesses in her own name already. I'm not 100 percent sure what our arrangement will be, perhaps you can advise on the pros and cons?

I'LL BE HAPPY TO GUIDE YOU

through the process but be warned that opening a bar/club in Vietnam could be a long and difficult road for foreigners.

The first question a foreigner must ask before starting any kind of business in Vietnam is whether the economic sector in which you would like to invest is open to foreign investments. To answer this question, you have to dig into what is called *Vietnam's World Trade Organization commitments on services*.

Vietnam became a member of the World Trade Organization in January 2007. Following its accession, and in accordance with the World Trade Organization rules, the Vietnamese government made specific commitments to gradually open some economic sectors to foreign investors.

Regarding the food and beverages supply sector (including bars and restaurants), the Vietnamese government committed to fully open it to foreign investors eight years after its accession to the World Trade Organization. It means that since January 2015, there are no restrictions on foreigners setting up bars and restaurants in Vietnam. Before that date, it was only allowed for foreign investors to supply food and drink services as part of an investment in the construction, renovation or acquisition of a hotel.

Therefore, in theory, you now have plenty of options as you should be able to 1) set up your fully-owned company in Vietnam, 2) set up a 100 percent foreign-owned company together with your Korean partner, or 3) team up with a local partner, such as your fiancé, through a joint venture company. This sounds good but in practice setting up your business as a foreign individual may be much more complicated.

As a first step, you will have to apply to the Vietnamese authorities for two essential documents: the Investment Registration Certificate, and the Enterprise Registration Certificate. The process to obtain these certificates may be burdensome but there is no other way for a foreigner to invest in Vietnam. You will have to provide substantial information on your technical, practical and financial capacity to develop your proposed project, together with sufficient supporting documents.

As a key requirement of your investment application, you must secure appropriate commercial premises for the bar evidenced by a letter of intent or memorandum of understanding entered into with the landlord. You will need to make sure that your proposed business is in accordance with the master plan of the district in which the bar is to be situated. Another key point is that you will be required to prove your "financial capacity" to implement your project—which means producing a bank certificate that shows sufficient available funds or credit. In practice, the local authorities have a quasi-discretionary power to determine whether your financial capacity is sufficient to properly implement your investment project.

Even when you have obtained these two certificates, you have not yet achieved your objective because you still have to obtain various specific licenses from the authorities before you can open your bar. In order to open a bar in Vietnam, it is required that you obtain, among other things, a fire safety certificate, a food safety license (if you plan to serve food or snacks to your customers) and a liquor trading license. Alcohol is a very sensitive issue in Vietnam and this might be



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. 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.

the toughest part of the process.

The number of licenses is limited and the issuance is subject to many requirements. Having a local partner to help guide you through this process is, from our experience, essential.

The legislation over bars is still not clear on many points and we can only recommend that you keep a very good relationship with the local authorities in order to obtain the information you need and to make sure you comply with their requirements.

If your project turns out to be a nightclub, things become harder as you will have to add many conditions to the list of requirements. In theory, the club must be located far from schools, churches, public authorities, hospitals... It is also mandatory that the manager of the club graduated in Cultural or Art studies.

You probably see by now that your investment will require a lot of courage and determination! Alternatively, you may prefer the option of teaming up with your soon-to-be wife under a personal arrangement. These kinds of arrangement are quite common in Vietnam and rely more on personal trust than legal efficiency and protection. Remember that things can turn out badly even if you are going into business with a friend or partner that you have known for years and trust completely. Make sure that you at least set out in writing your respective responsibilities and commitments, and how any profits or liabilities will be shared between you, and always keep some resources in reserve just in case.

Whatever you decide, don't give up and keep in mind that you will have plenty of time to rest with a cold beer in your own bar once you are done with all these formalities. I will buy you a few drinks to celebrate on the opening day! ■



Speed to Success

Select Point of Sales (POS) System for your bar, restaurant and quick service store



Text by **Luan Khanh**, Director of Speed POS Vietnam

Images Provided by **Speed POS**

WHETHER YOU ARE OPENING a brand new site or upgrading an existing one, choosing the right POS is a big decision. Besides the large capital expense, the typical POS lifecycle is 4-5 years, but I have seen some be used for 9+ years before being replaced (yes, it was a Speed POS system).

Several factors need to be taken into consideration, and you need to be prepared to ask the right questions to your provider:

- Technical specifications: What do all those acronyms mean and why do you care about them? It all comes down to what is needed to run your restaurant.

- Is it built for your environment? A purpose built POS is more than “just a PC,” it is designed and built to run 24x7 in the extreme conditions that exist in

the restaurant and retail environment.

- Aesthetics – does the look and feel of the unit fit your environment? The unit should complement and provide a good customer experience.

- Is it easy to use? Will you and your staff be able to easily learn the POS and train new employees once the install is completed?

- Reputation of the provider - Since the POS will be with you for a while, will the supplier be around to support you?

- Support – regardless what you are told during the sales cycle, there will come a time where you will have a problem. How do you get it solved? You need to have a plan for support and understand that “one plan” does not fit all customers. Read the fine print and understand the SLA’s to make sure they meet your business requirements and budget. You don’t want surprises when you have a problem that is affecting your ability to serve your customers.

- Integrations – Do you want to purchase your hardware, software and services from one company? Having one company to deal with reduces

your burden and ensures that all the components that make up your system are optimized to work together. It also provides the “one throat to choke” concept when issues do arise. Depending on your site concept, application provider and business requirements this may not always be possible, but at a minimum you should look for an approved hardware providers’ list from your software provider since they should have established relationships at the right levels to support you.

- Lifecycle -What is the lifecycle of the technology? Is the technology of the hardware and operating system at the end, middle or beginning of its life? Will you be able to get repairs and updates throughout the expected lifecycle? This not only should include hardware but security patches and updates to the operating system to avoid any issues in this area.

When considering a POS, it all comes down to making sure you choose what you need to fit your business and looking at the total cost of ownership of your investment. Find out more at speedup.vn ■

The Farmers and Fermenters

How Puratos-Grand Place Indochina seeks to reshape the cocoa industry

Text by **Wes Grover**

THE FIRST THING YOU NOTICE

upon entering the Puratos-Grand Place Indochina fermentation plant in Ben Tre is the smell of vinegar. It hangs heavy in the thick Mekong air as farmers buzz in with hundreds of kilos of raw cacao beans slung over their motorbikes in oversized burlap sacks. Each load, a pulpy heap of slimy beans that look more like garlic cloves, is emptied onto a large scale to be weighed and methodically inspected for any signs of rot. Those that pass inspection are then transferred into a wooden box to ferment for up to a week, producing the acrid smell, and ultimately bound for chocolate treats served in upscale hotels, bakeries and restaurants, such as the Park Hyatt Saigon and Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi.

It's a seemingly inconsequential part of the process for Vietnam's largest chocolate producer, responsible for 1,000 of the country's 2,500 tons annually, and yet it is the convergence of two innovative components that define Puratos-Grand Place Indochina's (PGPI) unique approach to change the industry, not just here, but around the world.

For Gricha Safarian, Managing Director of the Belgian-based joint venture that was formed in Vietnam in 2012, fermentation has long been a point of emphasis. A tall, gray-haired Belgian sporting a sticker with the logo of the rock band The Who on his laptop and an autographed Rolling Stones poster in the office, Gricha began experimenting with cocoa fermentation in a small house in Ben Tre in the 1990s, well before Vietnam's cocoa industry was on the map. It conjures up the image of a mad chocolate scientist rocking to the beat of his own drum deep in the Mekong and,

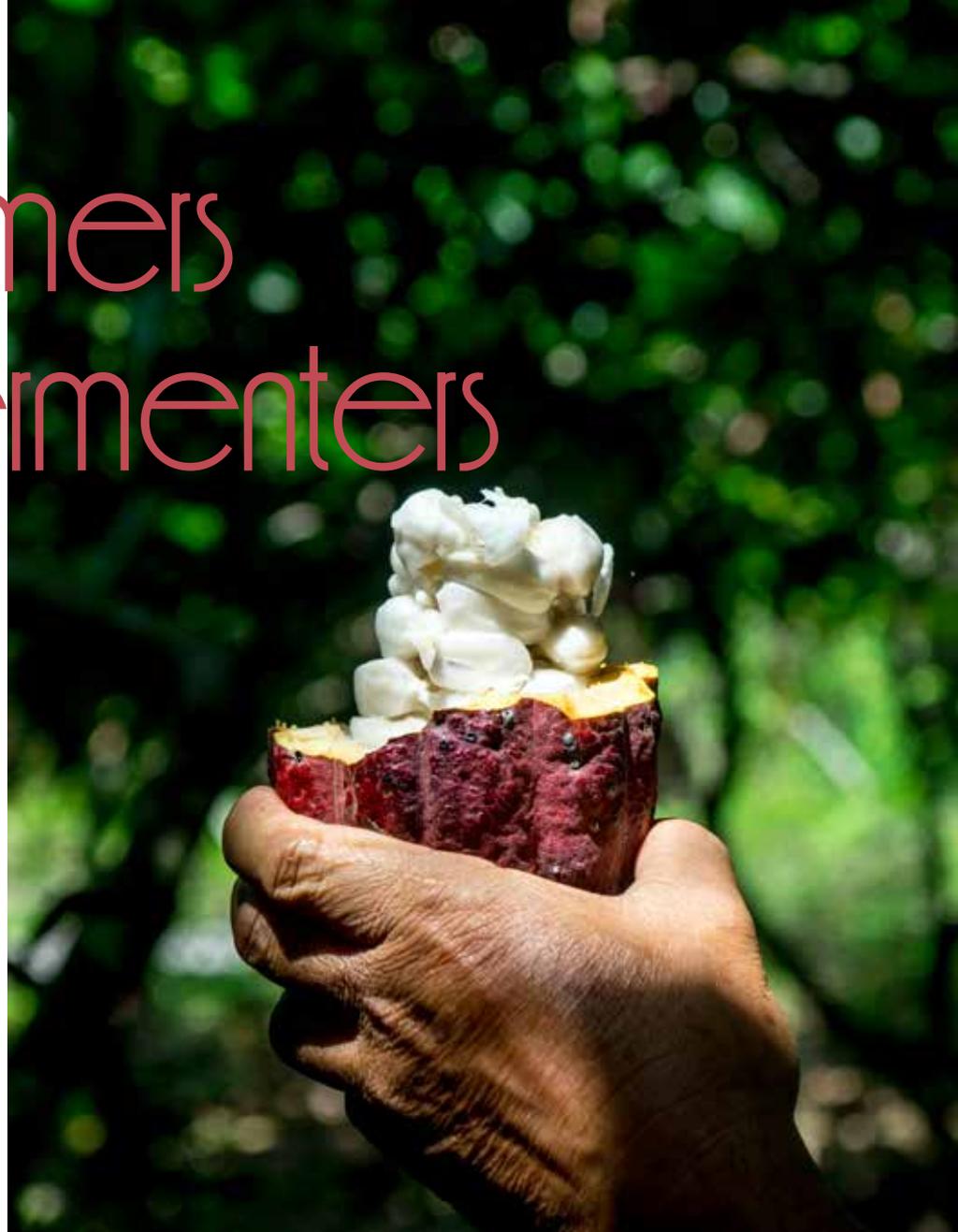


Image by Ngoc Tran

as it turns out, he was on to something profound.

"We experimented with how many days to ferment, what temperature, and so on, and step by step we were able to get a very decent taste from the Vietnamese beans," he explains. Cocoa beans grown here have been noted for having a particularly acidic taste, but as Gricha found out, the flavor could be significantly manipulated. "We were able to get rid of the vinegar taste and then we started to learn that we could take the quality even higher."

"That's when the realization came that our industry was ignoring an important part of the process, which is the part that is differentiating the taste from the origin," he continues. "So all of this happened in Vietnam at first and, as we are part of an international group with 64 offices in the world, they adopted our approach. Not many Vietnamese people know this, but there are big things happening here. The business model was adopted by our entire group and is

now being practiced in the Ivory Coast, Philippines and other countries."

During the fermentation process, temperature quickly rises, making the outside of the wooden boxes warm to the touch as heat emanates. Inside, naturally forming yeast converts the sugar from the beans into ethanol, and eventually it becomes acetic acid. This reaction, combined with the heat, kills the beans, spurring complex chemical changes that impact flavor development and quality of the chocolate. Currently, the interaction between the yeast and other flavors is a main focus of PGPI's research.

"Ironically, while Vietnam has been the innovator of this approach, today our problem here is that we don't have enough beans," Gricha admits. "Vietnamese farmers see more profit in other crops, like pomelo, and they are reluctant to invest their future into a commodity that takes a long time and the prices are fluctuating."

Indeed, it is easy to understand a farmer's hesitancy to enter the volatile

cocoa market. A cacao tree typically takes three years to begin producing pods, which the beans grow inside of, and during this time period market prices can change drastically. In March 2016, for example, cocoa prices were on an upward trajectory with speculation of an impending global shortage driving prices to USD3,076 per metric ton, according to the International Cocoa Organization. Fast forward 12 months and favorable growing conditions in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, the world's top two producers, have resulted in an abundant supply, causing prices to plummet to USD1,980, a four-year low.

In an effort to provide some insurance to their cocoa farmers, PGPI has introduced what they refer to as the "chocolate bonus": for every one ton of dried cocoa beans, a farmer will receive an additional USD170. Essentially setup as a VAT system where the consumer pays about an extra €1 for every 100 grams of chocolate purchased, it's an amount they believe the sustainability conscious cocoa lover is willing to contribute to help tip the scale toward the farmers.

"Right now, a farmer's profit is

decided by speculators in the London market. We want to change this," says Gricha. "What we are trying to do is basically decommoditize the cocoa bean. The USD170 that we supply right now is intended to grow gradually. So if the bonus goes up and the market price goes down, that's decommoditization. We are also applying a minimum price now in Vietnam. If the market goes under a certain level, we still pay a certain price plus the chocolate bonus, so we are really getting away from the control of the financial market and that's a must anyway, because otherwise all Vietnamese farmers will turn to another crop."

Bigger and Shinier

A few kilometers from the fermentation plant in Ben Tre, Ho Thanh Van is one of roughly 2,500 cocoa farmers who are feeling the benefits. After moving to Ben Tre in 1975, the 55-year-old farmer tried his hand with a variety of crops, including coconut, orange, and longan, before being introduced to cocoa. Walking his lush, one-hectare farm, Van exudes a proud yet reserved aura as he readily explains

how PGPI's emphasis on the farmer has helped him.

"In 2011, before working with them, my yield was only about 5 tons. After they sent someone to give me training on my farm, I increased my yield to 17 tons in 2015. Last year, I grew 25 tons," he tells through a translator. Quality, too, has noticeably improved for Van, as he adds, "the cocoa pods are bigger now and the skin is shinier."

While farmers in Vietnam are generally in a comfortable financial position, unlike parts of West Africa where many cocoa farmers still face extreme poverty, the idea behind balancing the profit discrepancy is intended to secure the supply chain for Vietnam's cocoa industry as it continues to garner recognition in the premium end of the global market.

Having recently received the "fine flavor" cocoa bean designation from the International Cocoa Organization, Vietnam is only the second country in Asia to earn this distinction, which commands a higher price in the world market than the alternative, referred to as "bulk" or "ordinary" beans. Indonesia was the first Asian country to receive this merit, though it's worth noting that it only applies to 1 percent of the country's cocoa exports, whereas 40 percent of Vietnam's cocoa exports were deemed worthy of the fine flavor status.

With an abundance of land more than suitable for cultivation, it's clear that Vietnam has untapped potential in the cocoa sector, but only time will tell if PGPI has put together the right combination to take it to new heights in the fickle global market. ■



Images by Sky Nguyen



Image Provided by Park Hyatt Saigon



The REIT Thing

Play the real estate market with little capital

Dear Sven,

I'm interested in investing in property, however, I do not have a large amount of cash on hand and do not want to take out a mortgage loan. Since buying property can be quite expensive, is there any way I can access the property market without having to put up the majority of my cash and pay interest on a mortgage loan?

INSTEAD OF BUYING “PHYSICAL” PROPERTY, you can access property through securities, i.e. paper assets. Modern finance allows you to purchase almost any asset through a security, and the most common vehicle for accessing property is a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT)

A REIT is a type of security that invests in real estate through physical property or mortgages. It is basically a mutual fund that holds only property investments, and is mandated by law to pay out 90 percent of its profits as dividends to investors in order to receive tax benefits.

A REIT has a number of benefits for investors. The most obvious benefit arises from the fact that it allows investors to participate in the real estate market by pooling funds from many investors together to purchase real estate, which allows investors to access real estate through a small contribution from their personal capital. For example, you are looking to buy property in Hanoi and London. You find out that a two-bedroom apartment in Hanoi costs almost USD200,000, and a two-bedroom apartment in London would set you back USD500,000. You really believe that the property market in both countries is going to perform really well over the next few years, but you only have USD20,000 USD in life savings. You don't want to take out a mortgage loan and pay the related interest costs. You can find a REIT that invests in London property, and another that invests in Vietnamese property. You can then purchase shares in both REITs, as the cost of a share in a REIT is quite low, often less than

USD100 per share, and have access to the markets you desire.

The second biggest pro that comes with investing in REITs is liquidity, i.e. the ability to turn your investments into cash and realize your profits in a short period of time. Many REITs trade publicly on stock exchanges, which means you can buy and sell your REIT shares on a daily basis. Many private real estate mutual funds will be available for redemption daily, weekly or monthly. This is in contrast to owning physical property, where it can often take months to find a buyer for your home, and you will have to rely heavily on the sales and marketing prowess of your real estate agent. You might find a situation where you are not able to sell your property and realize the profit you desire because of the time it takes to find a buyer. A REIT solves this problem.

A REIT is also far more convenient from a management perspective than owning physical property. There is no need to find tenants or manage the property in general. The REIT manager takes care of these responsibilities, and will usually charge an annual fee like most mutual funds.

REITs obviously come with a few cons. Most notable is the fact that your faith rests on the REIT manager, whose job it is to manage the funds within the REIT to the best of their ability, to ensure that funds are allocated to the best property assets at the best possible prices, and to ensure that liquidity is managed effectively allowing investors to have their cash and profits returned when required. Although the majority of REITs are sound, some are headed by poor



Sven Roering is a Managing Partner at Tenzing Pacific Investment Management. He holds an Economics Degree from Rhodes University in South Africa, and is a candidate in the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) program, having successfully completed level 1 and is currently working towards the level 2 exam.

managers and inexperienced investors, who run these vehicles because they think that property is an easy concept to sell to their clients compared to stocks and bonds. What happens is that liquidity is managed poorly, funds go into administration when many investors withdraw their money in a short period of time and the fund is unable to sell the underlying properties fast enough to satisfy investors' need for cash. The result is a drawn-out liquidation process, taking years to pay investors' money back, often cents on the dollar. Another obvious pitfall is the fact that you cannot experience any lifestyle utility by owning shares in a REIT. If you want to buy a property on the coast to holiday in once a year, obviously you have to buy the physical asset. Anyway, you shouldn't be investing in a lifestyle option, as you would be forgoing all rental income or “yield.”

You can access REITs from your brokerage account, IRA, pension, savings account or trust, and there are REITs listed for almost every property market. In Vietnam, Techcom Capital runs a REIT that invests in office buildings, retail shopping malls, hotels and resorts. It's listed on the Hanoi stock exchange, providing liquidity and it costs around VND1 million to subscribe to shares. In the US you can access a REIT called PS Business Parks, which acquires, develops, owns and operates office and industrial properties, and is listed on the New York Stock Exchange. As an expat, it's quite easy to access a REIT listed anywhere in the world, from almost anywhere in the world. ■

Meet Momoko

Oi speaks to Momoko Hanamura, The Landmark's new Marketing & Leasing Manager, about Japanese hospitality and why the property has been successful for over 20 years

Interview by **Christine Van**
Images Provided by **The Landmark Vietnam**



Can you tell us about yourself and how you got into the hospitality industry?

I've been working in Vietnam for 10 years now, which surprises myself, as I originally didn't plan to come here, let alone be here so long! I think many expats can say this. I started in Yangon, which brought me to Hanoi, and then down to Saigon. All my experiences in hospitality had been directly with Japanese hoteliers, until now at The Landmark Vietnam, where I am working with everyone.

I got into the industry by chance. I was born in the northern part of Japan, in Morioka. I love my hometown but it is a super cold-weather place and I had always dreamed about living in a tropical place. One day at lunchtime, my boss at the time was talking to me about Myanmar and the place sounded exotic. Luckily, he used to work in hospitality so he introduced and recommended me to a general manager [in hospitality] that was working in Myanmar. I never imagined I would work in a hotel but I love meeting new people, giving others inspiration and ensuring people are well-taken care of, so it naturally fit.

Japanese hospitality is world renown, what aspects of it will you be bringing to The Landmark?

To be compassionate, to show empathy and imagine yourself in the position of the other's situation, this is the basic idea of *omotenashi* (Japanese hospitality). When translated, it doesn't just mean "service" but more, unexpected thoughtful actions or priceless experiences. For example, if

a guest comments that he likes a river view room, we take note, remember, and assign this kind of room for them. We remember their likes and dislikes. Before a guest comes to ask, we have to think like that guest and act to serve based on that guest's personality and preference, both voiced and unvoiced. It is so important to read the needs of guests even when they don't ask. Observe what they are wearing, what they're carrying with them, what conversation they have with you, where they're coming from, all the details that go unnoticed for most people. It might seem easy but requires a great attention to detail, reading the guest and communicating appropriately with your team to take action to make unique experiences happen.

The Landmark opened in 1994, 23 years ago, many luxury residential and office complexes have come and gone in HCMC since then, why do you think TLV has endured in such a competitive market?

It's the reputation of providing personalized service, all in line with our parent property Peninsula Hong Kong and Peninsula Properties. Also we stand on an ideal District 1 and waterfront location, yet also provide a quiet atmosphere for businesses and residents. The building undoubtedly has age, but our aggressive maintenance and staff ensure we stay current here in 2017.

Who are The Landmark's core guests and have they changed over the years? Have their demands for luxury changed?

Our customers are mostly

businessmen, many of who have been with us for over five or ten years! Their demands are simple: cleanliness, consistency and care. They are also proud to be living and working in Vietnam's Peninsula property, in an ideal location, to have the balance of upscale comfort without stress of being taken care of. Many of our guests return and we rely heavily on word-of-mouth advertising. In addition, we have a small but exclusive health club and quiet pool that relieves work stress.

What are The Landmark's plans for the future? Will there be another TLV in Vietnam?

Per Peninsula Properties core values, there is only one of The Landmark in Vietnam. This is to ensure what we are doing, we do well and represent the culture of a city in one location, however, Peninsula is expanding its properties to other global cities. We constantly satisfy our customers by listening to our guests' feedback and anticipating their needs and following market trends; we will continue our efforts to provide this service even after all these years. *The Landmark Vietnam is located at 5B Ton Duc Thang, D1. For more info, visit www.thelandmarkvietnam.com* ■





Left ♥r Right?

The Paktor app aims to take dating in Asia to the next level

Text by **Anh-Minh Do**

ONLINE DATING IS EVERYWHERE, with myriad of apps designed for different dating purposes, and even chat and social media apps function as online dating forums. Although there are still people who are turned off by online dating, it is undeniable that they are popular, especially in Asia. The continent is a combination of frontier markets, emerging markets and developed markets all wrapped into a bundle. The rising young and single population in this region is hungry for dating apps, and it positions Paktor well to enter the scene.

Oi speaks with Joseph Phua, founder and CEO of Paktor, one of Asia's leading dating apps, to talk to him about how the Paktor story started, how it evolved and what he sees on the horizon. The app has a strong presence in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, and will be expanding to Taiwan and Japan this year.

In 2013, while finishing his MBA in Chicago, Joseph was dumped. That same year, Tinder was only a year into

the online dating scene, Okcupid was still mainly US-centric and Coffee Meets Bagel was barely getting to first base. With his newfound singlehood, he was excited and tried them all. After graduation, he moved back to Singapore where he found few online dating apps available, so it seemed only natural that he decided to build his own.

One of the problems that Joseph noticed when building Paktor was the dilemma of the genders. Dating apps tend to be lopsided—there were more men than women. Therefore, his first insight was to make it much easier for women to get in the platform and much harder for men to get in. The result was a game theory solution where the platform has a more balanced set of singles.

The lesson here is: when you are building a two-sided marketplace, make sure to balance them. By balancing, the network effects are more sustainable.

When Paktor first launched, it entered 12 countries. For many in the region, their biggest question is when

should they expand beyond their local market. For Joseph, it's a matter of temperament and stability: "I think really, one of the keys to our success is that we were lucky. When we arrived onto the scene, there were 13 other players. We got funding and we all made mistakes, but we picked the right two to three markets after securing our first market. By being strong in one market, we could fund the growth of subsequent markets. The dilemma of being dominant versus being stable is that if you choose dominance, than it's hard to make money. Our philosophy is that you need a pot of gold first that can fund your expansions. And it comes down to knowing when you are ready. For us, when the uncertainty dissipates and you are not filled with fear than you can move on. The numbers give you a feel where you can manage your fear. But at the end of the day, it's a balance between confidence versus fear."

Today, Paktor operates in six core markets, with three of them being the

backbone of the business. For some, it's unclear where Paktor stands in a very competitive and complex market, however, Joseph thinks one of the keys to being a good entrepreneur is seeing what others don't see, and optimizing the business around those opportunities.

"What we've learned over the years is that this is not a winner-takes-all market. Tinder dominates many markets, but in some markets it lags behind," he says. With Paktor, on the ground, and close to the users, it has many touch points that translate to new markets for growth. This is especially true of Japan, where Joseph says you must be even more localized. "In Japan, we couldn't be seen as a foreigner, and had to be localized to their population. We have to re-engineer the app so people feel that we are Japanese."

17 & Dating

Joseph's journey at Paktor has been a surprise for him and a learning one. His early enthusiasm has turned into a careful maturity about the future. "If I had known I would have picked a different industry, because this is very hard. The thing about the dating industry, keeping people constantly

engaged, what the industry needs is a breakthrough in content or models that is engaging while also being used for data."

This may be one clue into how and why Paktor has been embarking on new models like 17 Media. According to Joseph, "dating cannot be your only market, since many apps are minimally differentiated. So you have to break out of dating somehow."

Social Entertainment is an industry with plenty of potential for growth, and mobile livestreaming is its newest frontier. While desktop live streaming is already popular, especially in countries like China and Korea, mobile live streaming has redefined the landscape with the proliferation of smartphones. This presents all new opportunities. Fueled by the ever-growing mobile smartphone penetration around the world, mobile live streaming has the potential to grow beyond the desktop. In the past, interaction is limited to near-real time where users can post comments on status text, photos or videos. The level of engagement through other social media is nowhere as close as live streaming. Live streaming enables idols

to engage directly with fans, instead of fans talking to copywriters employed by the idol.

This is why 17 Media makes sense. 17 Media became popular with teenagers sharing photos and earning monetary rewards from the number of likes they received from users on their photos. In addition to this, 17 offers the ability to live stream directly on the smartphone. Though it was founded in 2015, 17 has dominated the Taiwanese live streaming market. With Paktor's recent deal to gain a controlling stake in 17, Southeast Asia will be in the headwinds for 17's live streaming service. Partnering with MNC Group, 17 Media has begun its Southeast Asia entry in Indonesia.

2017 promises to be a unique year for Paktor. Referring to the early days of Paktor and the new frontiers, Joseph reflects, "We likely won't see this crazy growth again. This year is where we will rediscover ourselves. Rebuilding ourselves fundamentally, taking the time to discuss, pushing to break even—pushing to innovate." Indeed, live streaming may just be the start of Paktor's entry into expanding the dating frontiers. ■



The Accidental Pet Owner

Christine Yu, the Creative Director and Founder of Ipa-Nima accessories brand, opens up about her life with four children: two dogs and two cats

Text and Images by **Christina Yu**

I HAVE ALWAYS CONSIDERED MYSELF an “accidental” pet owner. Brought up in Hong Kong, we barely have enough space for humans, let alone pets. I remember I used to see pets in cages in apartments and felt so sorry for them. So, it had never occurred to me that I would be a pet owner. As it turns out, I now have a mini zoo: two schnauzers and two cats.

In 2009, a couple of friends came over to our house for a farewell dinner, they were moving to Scotland. They mentioned that they would have to give their cat away. With a couple of drinks down and getting quite inebriated, I jokingly suggested to take the cat. My husband, Mark, was not pleased because he didn't like cats. When we returned from our Tet holiday we heard this cat screaming for his life from 100 meters away—our friends had organized the cat to be delivered to us zipped up inside a backpack on a motorbike for 20 mins. This is how I ended up having my first pet—a white cat that I named Yoda (he looks exactly like Yoda in *Star Wars*). He is not the friendliest cat (can't blame him because his transition to us could not have been more unpleasant) but he likes to sleep between us in the wee hours of the morning, especially in the winter in Hanoi when we lived there.

Several years ago when we moved from Hanoi to Saigon, Mark decided we needed a dog because we lived in a house, and possibly better to have a guard dog because we heard stories about burglaries happening in An Phu. I was not keen on a big dog as I did not think I could handle an animal as big as me so his father recommended a schnauzer. I found a professional breeder online in Hong Kong. He sent us a photo of his only puppy, which was at the right age for rabies shot and we could take her out of the country. We bought the dog by email and made the necessary arrangement with Cathy Pacific Cargo. My husband then went to Hong Kong to pick her up after all the vaccinations had been completed.

Life sometimes moves in mysterious



ways. On the eve of having the first dog in my life, I was bitten by my friend's dog and ended up spending an entire day in a hospital. Unbeknownst to me at the time of the accident, the dog had bitten another person a week before. What upset me the most about the accident was that the owner did not put a leash or a muzzle on the dog. He could not control the dog and, worse, he dumped me at the hospital and left. I had eight rabies shots and was in and out of the clinic for four weeks. My crab claw arm cost me more than USD2,000 and my friend became my enemy. What I learned from this experience is how important it is to be a responsible dog owner.

Jazzie and Max

When I finally met my first dog named, Jazzie, I was super nervous and I could only pat her with one hand. Although she was a small dog, I felt vulnerable from that dog biting experience.

In preparation to be a dog owner, Mark probably watched hundreds of episodes of Cesar Millan and learned that exercise, discipline and affection are the ultimate truth for dogs. We even hired a dog trainer, Adrian Ramos, who used to train rescue-and-search dogs in the Philippines, to train Jazzie. I would



say this is possibly the smartest thing we have ever done.

A year later, we bought Jazzie a boyfriend named Max, a black and white schnauzer, so they can play together when we are at work all day. Max is not as smart as Jazzie but super loving.

In a way, having dogs are like having kids that never grow old. They can give you a lot of joy but they also come with responsibilities. We try to spend time with them every day, no matter how late and how tired we are, to give them affection.

My most recent pet Buster was also an “accident.” We were at the vet—both our dogs had ticks—when Dr. Nghia mentioned that he had an abandoned cat that was dumped with him for over six months and he could not contact the owner. He asked whether I was keen to adopt, but with three pets in my house, I was hesitant. I asked to see the cat, and this Persian fluffy thing with a warped nose just climbed onto my lap, sat on me



and started purring. And, unlike Yoda, he is the friendliest cat that we have ever seen and, funny enough, have behavioral patterns like a dog.

Now when people ask us whether we have any kids, I would say four. They will normally look at me in an astonished way until I explained. They are like my kids except they don't talk back and don't ask for my iPad. They welcome me with open paws when I come home, follow me around the house, protect me and bark like crazy when there is a stranger at the door. They know me when I am sad, happy, agitated, annoyed and the best thing is that they give me a lot of oxytocin (a love hormone that is produced by the brain when one pats a dog or a cat) which generates feelings of relaxation, trust and psychological stability. Now, how many mothers can say that about their kids?

*This article is an edited excerpt from **Me Thu Cung** (www.petmagazine.vn), Vietnam's first pet magazine. ■*





Say Yes to These Dresses

Our secret obsession as of late? Bridal gowns. We simply adore a good dose of inspiration, and when that inspiration is of the fashion variety (particularly bridal fashion) we stop everything we're doing to take it all in.

Model: Nguyen Oanh
Photographer: Thanh Phan
Designer: Cai's Bridal (www.caisbridal.com)
Stylist: Nguyen Chu
Location: Ke Ga, Phan Thiet









EDUCATION NATION

Few concerns are of greater importance in Vietnam than education. Private and foreign schools have entered the educational marketplace, offering parents and students more choices to choose from than ever before. This issue has plenty of great school-related articles to give you some help and inspiration along the way on your children's learning path.

School Spirit

Anh Kim Tran on why she opened the Greenleaf Learning Center and the future of education in Vietnam

Text by **Wes Grover**

Images by **Ngoc Tran**



AMIDST THE TEEMING ENERGY OF a school with more than 80 children aged 12 months to six years, Anh Kim Tran's warm, convivial presence is immediately assuring. At 65 years old, her demeanor comes across as effortless, though it is undoubtedly the result of a lifetime spent in early childhood education.

Born in Vietnam, Anh moved to the US in 1972, where, after exploring a series of career paths, she found her calling in childcare. Her time there was largely spent helping others, working as a preschool teacher before she ventured into the non-profit sector to provide childcare resources and referrals in Oakland, California, as well as teaching CPR and first aid classes to immigrants who spoke limited English.

In the 1990s, a combination of work and family interests brought Anh and her husband back to Vietnam and since then she has continued her life's work here, launching various charitable projects with a group of Vietnamese-American friends.

"We consider ourselves very lucky for the education we received and are all very keen about it," shares Anh, "so a group of us got together and we said 'Let's form a school.'" Explaining it matter-of-factly, as if starting a school was a small feat, it was then that the Greenleaf Learning Center (Mam Non La Xanh; [facebook.com/GreenleafLearningCenter](https://www.facebook.com/GreenleafLearningCenter)), which opened its doors in Tan Binh District in 2012, was envisioned. The center's curriculum is taught in Vietnamese, which also includes English classes.

"I had to use some of my retirement money," she adds laughing. Flashing her grandmotherly charm, Anh explains that while she considers herself retired in the US, she spends eight to ten months a year in Vietnam, working up to 50 hours some weeks.

As the school gets ready to celebrate its five-year anniversary this spring, Anh reflects on the Greenleaf Learning Center's journey and what she expects for the future of education in Vietnam.

"Society has changed very quickly here," she acknowledges. "The young parents really want quality childcare now. The classrooms are so big in the public schools and not everyone has the income for international schools, so they have to pick and choose what's best for their child. That's why this school exists."

"We started with a small group when we first opened," Anh recalls. "We had maybe five or six children from people who knew us. Compared to other

schools, we have grown slowly, but we're happy because we have very dedicated teachers who like our philosophy and our principal has stayed with us since the beginning."

Bringing an alternative style to the school system has not always been an easy endeavor for Anh, as it has taken time to be embraced by both parents and teachers. "There are a lot of challenges when you come with a background of over 20 years in early childhood education in the US. The teachers here know a lot of theory, but they do not always have the hands-on experience. The discipline technique is very different, too."

"Our approach is geared toward the child's interest and letting them learn to play with each other," she continues, "I spent a lot of time training teachers on our philosophy in the first two years, because it's a little bit different. The first year we had some turnover because it was very hard for some of them to adapt to our system. They were used to doing things a different way. Some of them would try to use discipline techniques that scare the kids. It may be normal to them, but, in my opinion, you cannot do that."

Looking to successful models that they hope to emulate, the school has found organizing teacher trips to Singapore to be an effective way of allowing them to observe new concepts in practice.

Pass it On

The training Anh provides is not limited to the Greenleaf Learning Center's teachers, however, as she frequently travels throughout the country as part of her role as a chairperson for the Vietnamese American NGO Network.

"We fundraise and do training for free CPR and first aid classes for teachers in the rural areas. We also do capacity building workshops for teachers, which shows them how to build self-esteem in the students," she says.

As Anh describes her seemingly endless mission, it makes one wonder if she's fueled by the children's energy



through some sort of osmosis. “Last week, I was in Hue working with about 40 elementary school teachers to teach them about creating a safe environment for social and emotional brain development. I was trained about this when I worked for BANANAS Child Care Resource and Referral in the US.”

Explaining the methodology to parents has been a different obstacle for the school, yet Anh has devised a creative way of going about that, as well. “We do a lot of parenting workshops during the year, and once a month we do an event on Saturday where the parents can come and play with their children at the school. It provides an environment for the parents to learn more about what we are doing here and it’s another way that we can talk with them about our activities and their worries.”

As certain elements of their strategy deviate from traditional Vietnamese values, Anh recognizes that communication is crucial, explaining, “You have to work slowly with parents, especially when it’s their first child. They have a lot of anxiety. I am a parent myself and I didn’t have relatives around to help, so I know their concern. That’s a big challenge.”

“For Vietnamese parents, politeness and respecting the elders is very important,” she elaborates, “but

sometimes it can force the kid to misbehave. It’s not because the child is impolite, but because it can be difficult at their age and stage. Children are active and they need to play before they can sit down.”

A top source of stress for the parents, she says, is food. “Parents today care a lot about nutrition. They want their kids to be a little bit chubby and they try to talk to the teachers to make sure the child finishes all the food in their bowl. Young parents are afraid if a kid loses weight it means they are sick, but sometimes it’s normal.”

“We do nutrition workshops with some of the older kids,” she goes on, “so the kids can observe and make a simple snack.”

Asked what areas she feels are of future significance in the education system, Anh shifts gears a bit, opining, “Special needs kids are an important issue to focus on. Autism is a crisis everywhere in the world. Another organization that I help with is called Project Vietnam. They send doctors from the US to Vietnam yearly to train teachers and professionals on how to best work with special needs children, which is a very new field in Vietnam. The children all have needs. We need to know how to observe them in order to identify what those are and we need to be able to tell the parent if their child

has special needs.”

Listening to her speak of all the projects and causes that she devotes her time to, it’s clear that while Anh is undertaking an ostensibly Sisyphean task, she is unfazed in her desire to make a difference, perhaps a product of her inherent optimism. “I’m a believer. I hope that our young teachers share our ideals. If they dedicate enough time, they know what’s best for the child. You learn this through your heart, not through money. I believe the people who open private schools here, the majority of them are believers in education.”

The optimism is readily apparent as we walk through the school. It’s visible on the smiling faces of the children and in the intimately-sized classrooms. “We try to provide a family style atmosphere. We keep the classroom small. The maximum is 24 children with two teachers,” says Anh.

What stands out the most, though, in a school serving such a young age group, is the absence of chaos. There is an orderly system in place and the teachers have evidently bought into it.

“I love to see our school growing and I hope our philosophy can exist in Vietnam because I’m very keen on this,” Anh says passionately. “I hope our teachers can learn and pass it on to the next generation.” ■



Teacher Dad

Is teaching children in the home really a viable alternative to traditional schooling? Homeschooling parent and professional teacher Ian Kutschke shares his views and experiences.

Interview by **Michael Arnold**

Image by **Ngoc Tran**

THE FATHER OF TWO BOYS, Ian Kutschke's decision to homeschool in Ho Chi Minh City was made back home in Canada before the family arrived. When Ian's wife Lizzy found work here, an assessment of their circumstances made it clear to them that teaching the kids from home was the most sensible decision given their situation. With Lizzy's explicit support and assistance, Ian now takes full responsibility for ensuring his kids keep up with their learning, even though they're not attending a traditional school.

Was it difficult to get started in homeschooling?

I had this idea that you had to register somewhere and buy a curriculum, and it had to be a really organized thing—and you do need to organize—but it's actually

quite simple really. For us, we use the Canadian curriculum and the Australian curriculum, and they both have websites where you can see what's expected of the child and what they're taught at each grade level. You can use that as a guide to see what you should be introducing to the children.

I realized that because of the really small teacher to pupil ratio, you don't need to take as long to get across a concept or an idea, so you're able to finish an academic year long before other students do at school.

Did you need to buy a lot of teaching resources?

We actually had a lot of resources to begin with, because we wanted in general to collect educational types of games—and we see what their interests are, so we

buy books accordingly. When it comes to birthdays and Christmases and that sort of stuff, people ask what they like, and we get a lot of resources that way.

Do you need to connect with other homeschooling parents here?

There is a Facebook group here, Home Schooling Australia Discussion Group, and on that you can meet up, go on playdates and swap stories and experiences. They have excursions, field trips and the like, and if you really get into it you can organize with somebody to teach their children certain subjects, and they can teach your children certain subjects. I haven't gone that far as it is, I'm a teacher by trade and we live in this community where there are enough kids that the boys do get a social aspect out of it. They can play with these kids, so

we organize to go on playdates with the people living here.

Did you ever doubt that you could pull this off?

I didn't have any doubts, but I did realize that there were some challenges that I wasn't expecting—one of them is having patience. I could see myself losing my patience at certain times, and that didn't create a very helpful environment. So I needed to look at different ways of getting concepts across, and breaking activities up and changing things, so we're not spending too much time on one particular topic. Throw some physical activities in there, and even giving myself some "me time." That's another important thing, making sure that I have enough time in the day to do the stuff that I want to do, and not feel that I'm always bogged down with kids.

How do you ensure that your teaching is effective?

I think the challenge for any parent and any teacher, regardless of the setting, traditional or home schooling, is to take the material, the stuff that's in the book, and bring it alive, make it relevant. Make it meaningful for them in their minds. Giving them some workbook and just turning the page can be ineffectual. The lessons that I've found where there's a lot of retention and that they enjoyed a lot were built around themes that stimulated the different kinds of learning—kinesthetic, audio and visual.

Is it important to follow a disciplined schedule?

The beauty of homeschooling is that you're really flexible. You don't have a strict 30-minute class—maybe it's going to take 40 minutes, but so what? Maybe they're having a great time while they're doing it. Sometimes that eats into the time I had planned for something else, but again, so what? The important thing is that they're getting a lot out of it.

Do you rely much on the computer or tablet as a teaching resource?

The internet is just stacked, it's chock-full of resources for homeschooling and teaching resources—in fact, there's too much stuff. One of the biggest challenges is wading through that, but once you do and get rid of the useless stuff that doesn't apply to you, you find your go-to resources.

I actually try to stay away from the computer stuff, to be honest. These guys, they barely know how to turn the computer on. My opinion is that it's not necessary right now. They will pick it up, kids are just like sponges—so they're not missing out. I think it's actually detrimental to spend too much time on the computer. They're not losing anything. They need to know how to

read, they need to do numbers. Any area like that where they have problems, they're going to be behind in class. But if they don't know how to do stuff on the computer, it's not important.

How do you deal with planning your lessons?

You have to listen to the kids. They pretty much dictate a lot of the curriculum and the learning. If you listen to them, and take into account what they're saying, they'll buy in much easier and be far more motivated to do something than if you say "no, no, we're going to do this" and it's all teacher-centered.

It can be time-consuming to prepare the lessons, but I think a couple of hours a week are enough and you're set for the week.

Do you have high expectations of your kids?

I think I do have high expectations, but I also allow them to fail and fall "flat on their face" many times, because learning to get back up and have another go is a far better skill for them to learn in the long run than getting points (extrinsic rewards, praise or accepting less than what they are expected of).

Do you need to worry about testing and grading?

I don't like the whole American testing system, getting really heavy on tests. I know it's part of the school environment, so gradually I will get that into their schooling. But I don't teach the schools, I don't teach to the curricula, I don't teach to the other schools' expectations, because I teach to the kids. They kind of direct their own learning. If you're observant, and see what the child is doing, and listen to what they're telling you, that will direct your schooling and teaching. If they're getting frustrated with math, for example, maybe we'll come at it from a different approach. You start to realize their strengths and work with that as well.

Would you say homeschooling is better than traditional schooling?

The reason we're homeschooling is mainly to do with our circumstances. Being a teacher, I know what teachers do, and there are some fabulous schools with wonderful teachers out there who should be compensated and rightly so, but parents still can't necessarily justify the costs. If you have the money to send your child to school, that's cool—but if you take that same money and invest it properly and stay home to teach your child, it could be the difference between having a few hundred thousand and a couple of million in your bank account for them later on.

There are some great schools here.

I'm not going to say that homeschooling is better, or traditional schooling is better, that's irrelevant and it depends on the circumstances you're in. I would send my kids to an international school for sure, depending on what suited us. You'd look at the environment, the class sizes, and obviously fees, the general vibe of the place, proximity, facilities perhaps.

Do you think it's possible for a child to thrive even if their schooling experience is unusual or even substandard?

Speaking as a former manager and from what I've seen and learned over the years, if a child is in a substandard school, there is still room for growth. Yes, maybe the parent puts in more time at home with their child's school work or maybe not. Either way, the child is still learning something about themselves and about life. I think the key in this situation is for the parent to have those conversations with their children and make sure they are guided towards positive self-esteem, self-evaluation and identify needs, academic or otherwise.

Do you ever worry your kids are falling behind others?

One of the traps that parents fall into is comparing their kids with others, worrying if their kid is falling behind—although that is a legitimate fear. I think everybody compares, it's normal, but you don't want to do it to the point where you're only doing things because your motivation is your status, the status of your child.

Do you think you manage to cover the teaching fundamentals in a homeschooling environment?

Really—and this is a bold thing to say—if you read to your child, you have a garden, and a ball, that's all you need. With those three things there, you can start creating all kinds of lesson plans. With books, obviously there's that bond you create with your child, but also you introduce them to all kinds of new vocabulary, and you stimulate their imagination—whether it's fiction or nonfiction, it's things about the world, the whole universe around them. Questions arise from those readings, and that's when you can say, well, let's explore this a little bit more. Voila, you have your direction to go start making lessons. The garden, that's a life skill, people need to know how to grow their own food—and then there's all that connecting with nature and the science behind it, observing, writing in journals, making pictures and then seeing the progression of how things grow, what happens if you don't do that, what happens if you add this, what are the consequences. And every kid should know how to throw and kick a ball. ■



A Matter of Principal

Soon to celebrate its one-year anniversary, **Oi** speaks to Founder and Principal of Anne Hill International School about her students, teachers and expansion plans for the future

Interview by **Oi Vietnam**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**

Since Anne Hill International School's (AHI) opening last year, have there been any new developments or expansions to the facilities?

New developments are ongoing, as we are constantly expanding our facilities. Bearing in mind the grandeur and beauty of the premises and maximizing the spacious areas that we have. More classrooms are being built as we, at Anne Hill International School, do not like overcrowded classrooms. Children need space, an open environment that is bright and cheerful. Each child is an individual and needs their own pace to settle down.

What feedback have you had from parents?

The response and feedback have

been simply overwhelming. We have a lot of satisfied and happy parents who have been giving us positive appraisals and wonderful compliments. And now even from our new parents that have visited our school. You will see happy and friendly children and will be greeted and welcomed by our staff and also by me personally.

We have been highly recommended for our facilities and cleanliness. Parents particularly love the outdoor facilities to which we have put tremendous thought into, especially in terms of safety.

How do you stay current on new children's activities and teaching techniques?

To stay current on both, we at

Anne Hill International School have a program covering moral education, teaching our older children to be street smart. We continually conduct workshops on Montessori for our team and we have organized a series of workshops on Jolly Phonics and Mathematics workshops by lecturers from abroad, for both teachers and parents, including various health talks and summer camps.

I travel to Singapore to attend various workshops and visit schools to observe so that I can guide my own team at Anne Hill International School to improve and introduce new teaching techniques for our preschoolers. We are geared towards consistently improving our teaching techniques.

Can you tell us about your teachers?

I am blessed with a great hardworking team! We do not have a high turnover of staff since we set up Anne Hill International School in May 2016. Our teaching staff consists of warm, friendly, caring teachers and teaching assistants who come from various countries like Vietnam, Holland, Spain, England and Singapore. Together we share our views, ideas and comments. Most of all we give TLC (Tender, Loving, Care) to each and every child!

To complement the teaching staff, we have a dedicated supporting staff in administration, security, maintenance, cooking, cleaning and accounting.

How are your students shaping the education environment at AHI?

We have a continuous and steady growth to our enrollment from children whose parents are from all walks of life and from different countries. This is a great plus as our children are exposed to multiple nationalities and cultures. There too

giving them a wholistic education.

You've had decades of experience in education in Singapore, is it different here in Vietnam?

With all my 28 years of teaching experiences all over the world, the most important 'concern' for parents is that their child is happy, safe, healthy, well loved, cared for and learning according to their capability and pace. It's heartening to see the children share their joy of an invigorating day when their parents come at the end of the school day.

Vietnam is no different to Singapore or any other country that I have taught. Education is just as important in Vietnam and most of all is what the school can offer with their services, curriculum and activities.

Where do you see AHI in five years? 10 years?

In the next 5 or 10 years I would like to continue our growth and in keeping with our motto "Learn, grow, play. The AHI-Way." And possibly even moving forward to having a primary school



that our children can transition to, to continue their growth and education with Anne Hill International School.

Anne Hill International School is located at 33 Giang Van Minh in District 2. For more info, visit annehill.school ■



The Reggio Emilia Approach

Oi speaks with Ms. Trang Nguyễn, the founder of Aurora International Preschool of The Arts, about the Reggio Emilia Approach and what's important in education today

Interview by **Oi Vietnam**
Images Provided by **Aurora**



Can you tell us a bit about yourself and why you opened Aurora?

I graduated from the Pedagogy Ho Chi Minh City University and RMIT Vietnam. While I have been working in the logistics business and capital investment environment for many years, early childhood education has always been my focus because, according to Loris Malaguzzi, an Italian early education specialist and the father of the Reggio Emilia Approach, “our task, regarding creativity, is to help children climb their own mountains, as high as possible. No one can do more.” The opening of Aurora International Preschool Of the Arts (Aurora) is a combined dream of a mother and international educators who envisioned a high quality early years education and the best care environment for young children based on Reggio Emilia Approach and Arts immersion as a fundamental philosophical curriculum approach.

What makes the Reggio Emilia Approach from Italy different from other educational methods?

The Reggio Emilia involves more collaborative small-group work. It embraces the idea that the teacher is a co-learner, not just someone in the classroom who leads an educational lesson. It is not fundamentally based off the child's independence, but the child and their learning environment are interdependent. As a child begins their journey into education, keeping them

interested is paramount. Every day the children go to school, they will have a new schedule with a variety of space settings for different sized groups. The Reggio Emilia Approach is an inspired curriculum; it will be flexible and emerge from children's ideas, thoughts and observation. The Reggio goal is to cultivate within children a lifelong passion for learning and exploration, incorporation with the principles of aesthetics, active learning, respect, responsibility, collaboration and belief that children have a hundred languages.

“Children need the freedom to appreciate the infinite resources of their hands, their eyes and their ears, the resources of forms, materials, sounds and colors,” said Loris Malaguzzi.

You place emphasis on the school being located in a villa and the food, why are they so important?

Education is often understood as the sole responsibility of parents and teachers. Reggio Emilia identified the environment as the third teacher of children. In its attention to how space can be thoughtfully arranged, Reggio Emilia has conceptualized space as a key source of educational provocation and insight. Aurora is located in a beautiful villa because architecture, organization and aesthetics directly influence the emotional, social, physical and spiritual being of children and teachers. Therefore, we focus on aesthetically pleasing, well planned, ordered and peaceful environments designed in such

a way to support positive children's play and stimulate dynamic teaching.

Food also is the highest focus. Aurora's caterers start at 6am daily to prepare breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea with a variety of organic nuts and seeds, milk, fresh vegetables, pure fish sauce and non-GMO food.

Many parents now want their children to focus on math and technology—believing the arts is not important in education—what is your opinion on this?

Pablo Picasso said, “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up.” The arts, sciences, physical education, languages and math all have equal and central contributions to make a child's education complete. With learning through art, children explore math creatively without any borders—with the mirror tables, light boxes by using loose parts, natural materials—and then children will recognize the presence of math in many different areas of life.

The Reggio Emilia Approach also brings technology with overhead projects where children can discover the stories of shadow and imagine the 3D inflection of any materials, and create a sparkling world with the children's imagination. We understand that “the wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences.”

Aurora is located at 13 Tran Ngoc Dien, Thao Dien Ward, District 2. For more info, visit www.aurorareggio.com ■



Kidsnschools

British Education Startup to Launch a Learning Community in Vietnam

Text by **Oi Vietnam**

Image by **Ngoc Tran**

LIKE ALMOST EVERY MAJOR CITY worldwide, HCMC is home to a burgeoning array of modern international schools serving both local and Expat families. For the learning communities that surround international schools, the launch of Kidsnschools fills a white space in the market. This compelling concept introduces new ways of discovery in the global education marketplace.

At its heart, Kidsnschools exists to help international parents make informed choices when re-locating with school-age children. At the same time our products make it easy for schools to address a hierarchy of enrollment needs - great solutions are needed that inform and take place before, during and after uptake or involvement.

We are more than just a listings website, we are the glue between schools' admissions and marketing goals, and a community that is enthusiastic to be included and informed. "You won't see this concept anywhere else" says Sue, Founder of Kidsnschools. "For K-12 International

Schools' this service is entirely new; some have described us as a Trip Advisor for schools; we think we are much more than that."

We believe that discovery can be achieved in a more meaningful way than as it currently exists. Our aim is to grow a joined-up community, where members can share a dialogue for understanding where education is headed, as opposed to where it is today. Our platform showcases best practice and innovation from the ground up. We will achieve this by enabling schools and communities to share how they support young people for tomorrow's challenges.

Even though the template for growing the community we imagine doesn't yet exist, we do know that customer engagement community platforms and social listening is really taking off. "It is precisely because we are international that we need to become collaborative," says Sue. We encourage innovative educators and talented individuals to come together and advocate for their point of view and

help to co-create the future, not just here in Vietnam, but eventually everywhere.

"I have really enjoyed making the transition from international educator to a startup founder, even though it has been a long process," says Sue. "Coming to recognise myself as an entrepreneur has meant listening to others. It is only when others perceive you as someone who can make things happen, despite setbacks, that you enter into a more energised and productive state. It probably has a lot to do with reaching a critical mass - where the weight of momentum starts to lift you and carry you towards your goal."

Kidsnschools will operate an English language pilot in Vietnam before opening up to other countries. We are looking for educated and passionate believers to join us. We want to discover and understand your needs and motivations and to define the important topics that will drive conversation and add value for our members.

For more info, contact Sue Furness at sue@kidsnschools.com or visit www.kidsnschools.com from April 24, 2017. ■



MOOC Coup

Can Massive Open Online Courses' revolutionize higher education and challenge traditional campuses?

Text by **Sophia Chen**

OOZING FROM A PRIMORDIAL JELLY in 2011, expanding and replicating across the globe... No, not the latest exotic flu, it's MOOCs, those curious online courses proliferating so swiftly that 35 million students registered for them in 2015, more than double the number that took part in 2014.

MOOCs, which stands for Massive Open Online Courses, are university level web-based open enrollment classes. Many are offered by blue chip unis (think Harvard), most are free, and no special background or qualifications are needed. The variety of subjects offered is immense, ranging from Activism (*How to Change the World, from Wesleyan University*) to Zoology (*Do you have what it takes to be a veterinarian?* via University of Edinburgh). 10,000 people signed up for Dundee University's *Identifying The Dead: forensic science and human*

identification, a course that allowed students to investigate a murder mystery by the crime writer Val McDermid.

MOOCs were born of an idealistic and democratic impulse—to make education from the finest sources available to all. No longer would poverty, geography or an absence of traditional educational qualifications stand in the way of learning. Offered by online 'platforms' like Coursera, edX and UK-based FutureLearn, MOOCs would be accessible to everyone with an internet connection and an inquisitive mind. Adult learners who had never had the time or inclination for academic study in their younger days could now surf the mind of the globe.

Less expected, perhaps, were MOOCs' popularity among the young. Private tutors stand aside! The newest weapons in the education arms race are MOOCs. MOOCs offer the same

curriculum and assessments that students experience in the classrooms of some of the world's top universities. School kids can pit their wits against students at the University of Bristol, Exeter or Nottingham—to name just three UK unis offering MOOCs—and show how brilliant they really are. School leavers can, in theory, improve their appeal to employers or beef up a future UCSA attempt.

New MOOCs, specially designed for the school market, have been released to mop up this new well of interest. "There is an increase in MOOCs geared towards high school students to help them bridge the gap between school and university and to get a taste of different degree options through introductory courses," explains Carolyn McIntyre, CEO of MocoLab.club, which provides useful reviews and forums. Two MOOC providers in particular have high school offerings: edX with its High

School Initiative, and FutureLearn with Going to University Collection.

Rather than a substitute for university, MOOCs are helping youngsters to get there. The courses are popping up on personal statements, alongside community service and work experience, as sixth formers strive to stand out from the crowd and show 'passion.' The Student Room advises uni applicants not to hold their light under a bushel: "If you're going to be applying to unis this September and you've taken a MOOC that's relevant to your course then don't forget to mention it in your personal statement as it demonstrates your commitment could help you get a place on the course you want." MOOCs can even be listed among academic qualifications if they are certified (which usually requires a fee).

Best not to go crazy though. "An armful of completed MOOCs is not, in itself, likely to impress a university if you don't have the required exam results," warns Sue Fieldman, an advisor with the Good Schools Guide Advice Service. "It's a bit like reading extensively around your subject—it's great as a conversation starter for university interviews and to include in your personal statements, but only if you know your stuff."

Less Than Five Percent

Along with beefing up CVs, some sixth formers are using MOOCs to take part in subjects not offered at

their school. Your sixth form doesn't offer A-Level Sociology? No problem, try an Introduction to Sociology from Princeton University. Want to push ahead in IT? Register for Web Science from the University of Southampton.

Despite their rapid spread, MOOCs are unlikely to unseat the traditional university experience. "The MOOC I took part in recently was ok," said Josh Cooper who graduated from university three years ago. "But it wasn't like a real university course. It had a forum, where we were encouraged to discuss topics from the course, but it didn't seem like many people did. At university you have to." Josh also found feedback to be an issue—what kind of comments can be on a course taken by thousands of people?

Nor are MOOCs about to depose old-style qualifications when it comes to finding a job. Most people in the real world are more likely to think a MOOC is a bovine atomic weapon than a university level course. And online courses cannot yet match person-to-person contact when it comes to networking.

Completion rates for MOOCs remain absurdly low—often less than five percent. There may be a reason, beyond snobbery, that universities have entry requirements: without a solid background in some subjects a MOOC may be hard to follow. And without the pressure of university exams and graduation requirements, MOOC

assignments may not get completed.

Even for those motivated enough to finish the courses and ace the homework, a niggle remains over identification and verification. How can a course provider verify that it was you who completed the work and took the tests rather than your brainy friend? What's to stop an enterprising post graduate student setting up an online MOOC exam business?

MOOCs may never replace red bricks and ivy, but they are sure to walk ever more cozily alongside them. From autumn 2016, the Texas State University system in the US is offering a cost-free first year of uni to students who take 10 free MOOCs and pass the course tests. Meanwhile, degrees from the University of Arizona no longer differentiate between students who take courses in person or online as long as the latter pay a small fee at the end of each MOOC (to verify their identity). Going further, six universities from Australia, Europe, Canada and the US are working together to award formal credits to each other's MOOCs. Blogger and business student, Laurie Pickard, chronicled her completion of an entire MBA equivalent one MOOC at a time.

However they develop in the future, MOOCs are already making a revolutionary difference. They give us all an opportunity to learn from some of the best. I'm eyeballing *Guerrilla Filmmakers* from Norwich University of the Arts. ■



Sweet Surrender

Already well-known for its one-of-a-kind antiques, decadent desserts and high tea, Villa Royale has opened a second location in D1 to add comfort food to its repertoire

Text by **Brian Jung**

Images by **Ngoc Tran**



Arrancini Balls

WHEN I WAS APPROACHED TO do a food review of an antiques and tea shop I was a little skeptical. Images of dusty relics and worn leather-bound books came to mind, hardly a spot to serve food right? I was wrong.

Villa Royale Downtown Antiques & Tea Room (Level 1, 25 Ho Tung Mau, D1) was in fact a wonderful epiphany for both the eyes and taste buds. In between a chicken shop and store, I found myself walking into a back alley where well-worn wooden steps spiraled upwards into a hallway that opened into a big, tall vaulted room. Immediately I could tell I was at Villa Royale Downtown. Various antiques from all parts of the world (all for sale) were hung, placed, stood, sat and nailed wherever there was space. Tracey, my gracious host, was there to meet us and explained their ordering process. I raised an eyebrow when she mentioned that they personally walk everyone through ordering





the food, desserts and teas, however, this extra service is something that she's made a point to deliver, another added benefit to Villa Royale's character.

Tracey and her business partner David Campbell are from Australia and, like all successful entrepreneurs, immediately recognized Saigon's potential. Villa Royale's first location opened in 2013 in District 2 and was mainly a tea place. Having fallen in love with this downtown building, they decided to open an expanded repertoire to include homemade Aussie comfort food along with a few robust Italian options.

We started with Swedish meatballs (VND220,000) languishing in a creamy demi glaze sauce. I bit into the tender soft meat and let the pure meat flavors flood my mouth. Next were Arrancini balls (VND195,000) rolled together in a celestial formation of Arborio rice, chicken, pine nuts and mozzarella cheese served with a side of homemade chutney. Typically, chutney wouldn't go with this combo but after having tried it, I seriously debated whether to carry around a stash of this wherever I went (rumor has it this chutney may be available to buy in jars soon). I noticed it was a bit more sour sweet with a

freshness of a Mexican picante salsa, rather than a jam sweet.

For vegetarians, the rich tasting Spinach, ricotta and feta roll (VND195,000) is a must-order. It was hearty and rich. Following this, I was given an interesting dish, a Lemongrass chicken and coconut cream pie (VND220,000) that looked like a potpie but had a removable pie top crust. Light as a feather and flakey, the filling was a creamy combination of something close to a Thai curry with the slight bitterness of lemongrass combined with the coconut cream.

My favorite of the evening were Blue swimmer crab cakes served with dill mayonnaise (VND260,000). My biggest complaints about crab cakes anywhere is that often they scrimp on the crabmeat. No such complaints here. Not only were the crab cakes large, they were crammed with loads of crabmeat. The fresh dill offset the heaviness of the potato and the lighter mayo let the crab flavor still come out subtly—a master chef move.

For Aussies who crave a taste of home, try the Lamington (VND90,000), sponge cake covered in Hershey's chocolate and

rolled in coconut shavings, and save yourself the cost of a flight back. Next up was a Carrot cake with both passionfruit icing and coulis (VND95,000). I found it lovely with stringy bits of carrot and hearty chunks of cake. The icing with the passionfruit seeds added a sour note and crunch to the sponge. The next generous slice of Warm banana and cinnamon bread (VND90,000) served with fresh butter was the stuff of Lake Wobegone (mid-west Americans know what I'm talking about).

The next part showed off the sweet menu with several cheesecake options (VND95,000 a slice, *see image on previous page*). Tracey mentioned that these were not NY-style cheesecakes, but rather an interesting hybrid of thick and yet light bodied cheesecakes. There was Hershey's Chocolate & Peanut butter, Oreo Cookies n' Cream, Dalat Raspberry, Creamy Mango, and Wild Blueberry Ripple. The homemade raspberry topping was superb. Extra blueberries were mixed into the cheesecake to give it the ripple effect.

Homestretch was a series of pies and tarts. The Chocolate & Macadamia Tart (VND100,000) was something I dreamt of a day later. The crunchy creamy



*Right, clockwise:
Lemongrass chicken
and coconut cream pie;
Spinach, ricotta & feta roll;
Blue Swimmer crab cakes*

macadamias combined with the sweetness of the chocolate was perfect. Next was an expat favorite, the Salted Caramel Pie with White Chocolate (VND95,000)—delicious. A slice of homemade Apple and Cinnamon pie arrived hot, fresh and brought back childhood memories. After this was a slice of Millionaire Shortbread Chocolate and

Caramel (VND90,000). We went the extra mile and tried their freshly baked Scones with Dalat Raspberry Jam and freshly whipped cream (VND90,000). I would be highly skeptical if there was a better scone anywhere in DI.

I would be severely amiss if I didn't mention the fantastic array of TWG teas

they offered. My cup of "Eternal Summer" was the perfect complement to my sweets gorge. With an official partnership and distribution now in place with TWG, Villa Royale is able to continually offer the latest and greatest in TWG teas. Now excuse me while I climb several mountains to work off these sweet indulgences. ■





Brewtally Good

East West Brewery Company serves up Saigon's newest craft beer alongside a creative food menu

Text by **James Pham**

Images by **Ngoc Tran**

Grilled flatbread pizza



AS SOUTHEAST ASIA'S MOST beer-swilling country at about 40 liters per person, the Vietnamese know their brew. With such an established beer culture, does Vietnam really need another brewery?

As it turns out, if the brewery is East West, the answer is a resounding “yes.”

With its grand opening just a few weeks ago in March, **East West Brewing Company** (181–185 Ly Tu Trong Street, D1) is the latest in the craft beer craze hitting Vietnam. But, like its artisanal handcrafted beer, everything comes with a delightful twist.

All gleaming metal, wood and polished concrete, the huge industrial chic space manages to avoid hipster territory with an upbeat soundtrack and high ceilings, natural light streaming in from the two-storey windows and skylights from the outdoor beer terrace above. Backed by a neat wall of gleaming vats where the in-house magic happens, East West feels authentic in its approach to both its beer and its creative, well-rounded menu.

East West's logo speaks to its mission, featuring the initials SD and SG on either side of a sailing ship. SD refers to San Diego, one of the top US cities for craft beer with over 120 licensed breweries known for their innovation and creativity and the hometown of Vietnamese-American Founder and General Manager Loc Truong. SG is obviously Saigon, with its equally sunny, thirst-inducing weather and emerging interest in all things culinary. While East West does draw some influences from local culture (try an upcoming Lychee Sparkling Ale, for example), its mission is to connect much broader cultures through beer. East West's eight core beers include East West Pale Ale, Far East IPA, Summer Hefeweizen, Saigon Rosé, Modern Belgian Blonde, Modern Belgian Dark, Coffee Vanilla Porter and Independence Stout, while its planned seasonal specials



Pho burger, Turmeric ginger salmon fillet, Beer Affogato

hopscotch the globe in the form of a Makrut Lime Saison in time for summer, a Pumpkin Ale for autumn and Double and Triple IPAs for winter, among others.

Further adding to the artisanal beer experience is Executive Chef Cyndi Tran's exciting new menu, featuring thoughtful international favorites that showcase East West's range of beers, taking into account the unique flavor profile of each beer as well as the "filling" nature of beer versus other types of alcohol. Chef Tran brings to the table a wonderfully whimsical, ethnic storehouse of flavors (her mother is Salvadoran and her father Vietnamese) and experience creating wine and spirits pairing menus in trendy Los Angeles. While beer pairing works off the same premise as wine pairing—lighter beer for lighter meals, heavier beer for red meat and more intensely cooked dishes—the complexity of craft beer lends itself to more precise pairings. East West takes the concept one step further, incorporating its own beer and beer products into the actual food.

We start off with a Grilled flatbread pizza topped with pepperoni, roasted peppers and burrata (VND140,000). The flatbread is slightly darker with a crispy texture, thanks to the inclusion of the slightly sweet spent grains (leftover from the brewing process) ground down to a coarse flour rich in protein and fiber, perfect for flatbread. It's washed down with an East West Pale Ale (all beers between VND75,000 and VND100,000 for 330ml), a refreshing transitional beer with hints of lightly toasted bread that complements the spicy pepperoni.

For our mains, we have the Pho burger (VND150,000), which combines the flavors of everyone's favorite noodle dish (demi-glace hoisin sauce, anyone?) with the meatiness of a burger, paired with a Far East IPA. Higher up on the bitterness scale, the big, bold flavors with just the slightest hints of citrus stand up well to the hearty burger. While the hand-cut fries are delicious, it's the spicy tomato jam and sweet and tangy house pickles that add bursts of flavor, the latter

incorporating Summer Hefeweizen, a German wheat beer with hints of clove & pepper. This is followed by a Turmeric ginger salmon fillet (VND195,000) inspired by a fish steamed in banana leaf that Chef Tran once had in Hoi An. She recommends pairing the lightness of the salmon with a Saigon Rosé, a crisp wheat ale with a fresh raspberry profile wrapped up in a sexy, hazy pink hue.

Even the desserts are beer-friendly, and we end up splitting a Beer affogato—two scoops of vanilla gelato topped with Coffee Vanilla Porter, a dark, nutty beer infused with notes of cold pressed Vietnamese coffee (VND95,000).

Despite just opening, East West looks to be a craft brewery force to be reckoned with, already hitting the ground running with major buzz, a slick website (www.eastwestbrewing.vn) and plans to expand into Sunday brunches (Kegs 'n Eggs), live music, and brewery tours and classes.

East West Brewing Company (facebook.com/eastwestbrewery) is open daily from 11am to 11pm for lunch and dinner. ■

Aloha, Poke

What is poke and why you should be eating it right now

Text by **Joel Zorrilla**

Images by **Ngoc Tran**



“POKE” (PRONOUNCED POH-KEH) in Hawaiian means “to cut crossways into sections,” and refers to the glistening cubes of raw fish that serves as the centerpiece of a quintessential Hawaiian dish created by Japanese immigrants to the island. It is typically served in a bowl with rice piled with fresh raw fish and a plethora of tasty toppings and sauces. Chefs in the state of California are responsible for creating hipster versions of it and then making it trendy across the globe. The owner of **Poke Saigon** discovered the dish in California and believed the denizens of Saigon would definitely embrace the idea—and he was right. Opened for just a few months, the place is bustling with diners eager to try this new trend. Located in an iconic old building on 42 Nguyen Hue in District 1, it's a quaint space on the second floor, a perfect addition to the collection of wonderful boutique shops and restaurants that share this real estate.

Fresh does not even come close





Bowl 1

to describe the level of dedication Emmanuel, the owner, puts into sourcing his ingredients. Before opening he went on a two-month long venture to find the freshest raw fish in Saigon, meaning fish that has not broken the frozen chain from packaging in Norway or Japan all the way to the process of retailing. The vegetables are sourced from the most reliable local markets, and he will soon start bringing produce in directly from the mountains of Dalat.

We tried two very contrasting versions of the poke bowl, which you build through 5 steps in the following order (a 2-scoop bowl costs VND150,000; VND30,000 for an additional scoop):

1) **Base:** sushi rice, brown rice, mixed salad, half sushi rice and half salad, and half brown rice - half salad

2) **Poke (fish):** salmon, ahi tuna, spicy tuna, shrimp (served with pickled onions and cucumbers)

3) **Sauces:** *shoyu*, spicy mayo, *goma* *sesame*, wasabi mayo, among others

4) **Toppings:** avocado 10k+, *topiko* 10k+, pomelo, tomatoes, pineapple, edamame, radish, mushrooms and cilantro to name a few

5) **Crisps:** fried onion, fried garlic, *nori*, ginger, *togarashi*, white sesame, black sesame

* All are seasonal, so you may expect variations.

We chose two bowls, mine came with a sushi rice base and as the main star of the bowl I chose a mix of half ahi tuna and half spicy tuna. After a quick consultation with the chefs I asked for the wasabi mayo. They took the two types of tuna and mixed them with pickled veggies and sauce before adding them to the bowl of rice. I chose edamame, avocado, radish, *topiko* and cilantro



as toppings, followed by fried garlic, *togarashi* and black and white sesames to garnish on top.

It was truly a thing of beauty and a testament to Poke's dedication to finding and sourcing the best possible ingredients. It was one of the most vibrantly fresh bowl of deliciousness we had eaten. The fresh fish mixed beautifully with all the ingredients, producing a unique taste explosion I hadn't experienced in a while.

My lunch companion went the more "alternative" route, which might have made the founding fathers of poke roll over in their graves, but it was equally fantastic. This came with a mixed salad and brown rice base, followed by a glistening assortment of salmon with *goma* *sesame* sauce. For this one we became emboldened and asked for an

assortment of every topping they had. After this the overstuffed bowl received a treatment of fried onions, *togarashi* and both sesames. Again the ingredients worked together like a fine tuned orchestra, because of the contrasting base it produced different results in terms of flavor and texture from the sushi-based bowl, it was yet another fantastic finish. With more of a sweeter taste throughout thanks to the sauces and salmon, it was wonderfully satisfying coupled with the crunch of the lettuce and toppings. If you like fusion food and if you love sushi, come try this *avant garde* eatery and you won't be left disappointed.

Emmanuel will be opening up new locations soon around the city, for updates keep an eye on his Facebook page: facebook.com/pokesaigon. Delivery available. ■

Garden Fresh

Share in traditional Vietnamese cuisine at Ngoc Chau Garden

Text by **Wes Grover** | Images by **Ngoc Tran**

SERVING UP FRESH AND

TRADITIONAL Vietnamese fare since September 2015, **Ngoc Chau Garden** (116 Ho Tung Mau, D1) is a centrally located gem in District 1, just a stone's throw from Nguyen Hue. The extensive menu is loaded with local favorites, ranging from frog legs to snakehead fish and braised cow tendon with ginger, that draws a healthy mix of locals and foreigners who seek a relaxing environment.

Fortunately, the menu, which is in Vietnamese, English and Japanese, also includes pictures of each dish, making it easy to navigate their unique specialties and avoid any surprises when your plate arrives. With an attentive staff and casual atmosphere, our visit made for a palate-pleasing Sunday evening, capped off with a stroll down Nguyen Hue.

Starting things out, the beverages available include all of the usual beers and sodas, as well as fresh fruit juices, smoothies, tea, wine and homemade *ruou*, or Vietnamese wine. Once our waitress informed us that the restaurant owner has been making the *ruou* for over ten years, it was impossible to pass up on. Flavors include mulberry, persimmon and dried banana, though we ultimately went with the highly recommended passionfruit wine (VND75,000) and it did not disappoint. Not typically one to enjoy sweet alcoholic drinks, this had all the alluring flavors of the passionfruit without tasting too sugary. Be warned, though: it's deceptively strong. We also

had lemongrass iced tea (VND30,000), which was simple, crisp and refreshing, as it should be.

The appetizers arrived impressively quickly and we were soon indulging in a Gourami fish and mango salad (VND80,000) and an order of Fried shrimp with sake (VND90,000). It's worth noting that the "sake" here is not the Japanese rice wine, as some might expect, but rather the Vietnamese breadfruit grown in the Mekong Delta that has a starchy texture. Served with a spicy mayonnaise sauce, the shrimp is fried with a piece of pork, making a tasty little fritter on top of a slice of baked sake.

The fish and mango salad was a generous portion with a delicate balance of sweet and salty, garnished with peanuts carrots, and an assortment

of herbs. A somewhat surprising combination, the dried fish and fresh mango paired together nicely to create a light and healthy dish packed with exotic flavors.

Moving on to the entrees, we decided on the braised cow tendon with ginger (VND85,000) and sour carambola soup cooked with shrimp (VND 75,000). The braised tendon, which comes in a clay pot with red chilies, is a Vietnamese favorite, though not always the easiest dish to come across. Succulent and just a tad spicy, these little pieces of meat came out sizzling and disappeared quickly. Of course, cow's tendon is a bit gelatinous, so bear that in mind should you go with this specialty.

Popular in central Vietnam, the sour carambola soup was loaded with plump shrimp, pineapple, tomatoes,



(top, clockwise) Braised cow tendon with ginger, Sour carambola soup with shrimp, Shrimp fried with sake



and, naturally, carambola, also known as starfruit. While piping hot soup isn't everyone's favorite when the weather heats up, this fruity, tangy broth makes for a tropical soup that's fitting for Saigon's steamy climate. We poured it over bowls of steamed rice and slurped it right down.

At this point, we were feeling comfortably full, but there's always room for dessert. Various sweet soups, or *che*, are on offer, though we opted for the coffee flan (VND30,000), a delicious, modern take on the age-old custard. Presented in a saucer with coffee and ice, this caramel and egg-based dessert satisfied our craving for something sweet and left us with a bit of energy to walk off our meal. ■



(top left, clockwise)
Gourami fish and mango salad, Coffee flan

Hey ‘NAMO, ‘NAMO Italiano

Discover gourmet Italian cuisine in the heart of downtown Saigon

Text by **Michael Arnold**

Images by **Ngoc Tran**



ON MARCH 28TH, ‘NAMO Artisanal Pizzeria (74/6 Hai Ba Trung, D1) marked its first anniversary by launching a new menu that draws on the seafood cuisine of the Mediterranean coast. *Oi Vietnam* was there to explore the venue’s new tastes of Italy.

‘NAMO’s corporate chef Ivan Barone is brimming with enthusiasm over his new menu—which effects a coming of age for a restaurant that continues to distinguish itself for prime dining a notch above what’s normally expected of an ordinary pizzeria. Updating the already finely-balanced menu has been an energizing exercise for Barone, a chef so dedicated to his craft that he regularly wakes in the middle of the night to scrawl down fresh recipe ideas for development at the venue.

“We don’t want to be the classic Italian restaurant stuck with one menu for 20 years,” he emphasizes. “As the ‘NAMO brand, we don’t want our guests to get bored, so we want to follow the seasons of Italy—even though Saigon is always hot—and our chefs will also be motivated by preparing fresh menu items, so the team is more excited and willing to cook better.”

The new menu represents something of a statement for ‘NAMO—a demonstration of the maturity of the brand. While artisanal pizza still counts as an emerging food fashion that has only really started to take off in the past decade—even in Italy—Barone’s reworking of the dishes on offer here is a passionate homage to modern trends in his national cuisine that suggests there remains much to be explored. It

is an attempt to couch the more casual, comfortable elements of ‘NAMO’s fine dining experience in the complex subtleties of its more remarkable menu options.

What’s important is Barone’s balancing act between the familiar and the more exotic new items. NAMO’s corporate chef is a composer of his recipes, and his new menu is an orchestral work best enjoyed for its subtleties, with a concentrated effort on the part of the diner to appreciate the delicate balance of tastes on the tongue.

In fact, our overall impression of the menu was one of intrigued surprise—nothing tasted quite as we expected. This was immediately evident in the Selection of Hot & Cold Seafood Appetizers (VND390,000) served as an eclectic range of bite-sized portions with capicum and green bean sauces. The swordfish and salmon carpaccios were prepared in a simple overnight marinade to bring out hidden nuances; the moreish crab gratin was uncharacteristically warm in flavor. Perhaps the most interesting taster was the fried zucchini stuffed with swordfish with its perfectly understated body and freshness on the palate.

‘NAMO’s Crab Tagliolini al Nero (VND390,000) is a classic of Barone’s signature style, with its homemade pasta infused with squid ink to enhance the intensity of the spicy crab ragout. The pasta is made from scratch, every feature bearing the craftsmanship and balancing of extremes of its creator.

One of the more impressive-looking dishes is the free-range Baby Chicken

Hot & cold seafood appetizers



Free-range baby chicken; Crab Tagliolini al Nero



(also VND390,000) folded origami-style with a crisp, golden skin and thin layer of Pommery mustard seeds pressed into the moist flesh. The marination process infuses the meat with fine herbal flavors before the fowl is grilled and served with roasted potatoes.

'NAMO's food is art—whether you enjoy it casually or attentively is up to the individual diner. This principle extended into the desserts—we tried the deliciously moist Tiramisu

(VND150,000) drenched with espresso and ultra-fresh mascarpone cream, as well as the Triple Chocolate Mousse (VND150,000), crafted to reveal contrasting dimensions in the chocolate for those who enjoy complex desserts not overwhelmed by their sugars.

We barely scratched the surface of 'NAMO's new creations—intrigued diners should investigate some of the venue's other premium dishes, which include the cherry tomato-infused Linguine with Spicy Lobster

(VND450,000) and the Pizza Tasting Platter (VND490,000) featuring a mini-trio of authentic Stefano Ferrara wood-fired pizzas. If you do dine at 'NAMO this month and drop off your name card, you'll be in the draw to win a round-trip ticket to Rome or Milan from Thai Airways. Just remember, no matter when you experience this venue, be prepared to take your time with every mouthful—the restaurant's careful attention to the poetry of its flavors are designed to reward the astute diner. ■



Triple chocolate mousse



Banana Blossom Salad



Serves 3

Ingredients

- Young banana blossom 300g
- Pig ears 300g
- Carrot 1
- Cucumber 1
- Bean sprouts 200g
- Peanuts 150g
- Herbs 100g
- Salt enough

Sauce

- Fish sauce 2 tbsp
- Lime juice 50ml
- Garlic 3 cloves
- Chili 1
- Sugar 2 tbsp
- Seasoning 1/2 tbsp

IF YOU'VE EVER SEEN a banana tree, perhaps you have noticed the teardrop-shaped purple flower at the end of the banana fruit cluster. This is the banana blossom, also called the banana heart. It is an edible flower used in Southeast Asian and Indian cooking, where they consider it a vegetable. You might be surprised that banana blossoms have a lot in common with a more well-known and popular vegetable. Can you guess what it is? Hint: while more widely known as

a vegetable, it is actually a flower!

Banana blossoms can be eaten raw, and are also cooked in soups, stews and curries. They can also be steamed and served with dips, and peeled apart like an artichoke. Some people claim the flower's petals taste like artichoke leaves. Similar to artichokes, the fleshy petals and the "heart" of the banana blossom are edible. And while most of us think of artichokes as vegetables, they are actually flowers—they are large, un-bloomed thistles.



With an eye for visual beauty as well as a discerning palate, Ngoc Tran has undertaken to collect and present *Easy To Cook: 40 Delicious Vietnamese Dishes As Listed By CNN*. Ngoc has personally traveled around her native Vietnam in search of the most outstanding variety of every recipe featured in her book. Find her book at all Phuong Nam bookstores (nhasachphuongnam.com) or on Kindle at Amazon



1. Julienne the banana blossom into fine strips. Soak it in a large bowl of cold water and white vinegar, or lemon juice, to prevent it from browning. Finely grate the carrots.



2. Wash the pig ears and boil with a pinch of salt for 20 minutes. When done, place in cold water to cool. Slice finely.



3. Wash herbs, bean sprouts with salt. Cut the herbs.



4. Crush the roasted peanuts.



5. In a mixing bowl, combine the banana blossom, pig ears, herbs and bean sprouts. Mix lime juice, fish sauce, garlic, chili, sugar, salt and seasoning together. Adjust the flavors to balance out the sweet and sour.

6. Mix well and let sit for 15 minutes.

The subtle flavor of the herbs, the crunchiness of the banana blossom and pig ears and the nutty flavor of the roasted peanuts all combine to make this one of Vietnam's tastiest salads. ■

Wine & Dine

ROOFTOP BARS

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Liquid Sky Bar

A casual destination to escape and unwind in the sun. In the evening, the space transforms into a rooftop lounge where guests and locals will come to socialize, dance or just let loose. On the mezzanine level, comfortable lounges and a flow of cocktails create a casual and fun atmosphere. It is the perfect spot to watch the sunset over the horizon.

21F - Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon
8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1 / 3822 0033



Rex Hotel Rooftop Bar

Set on the fifth floor, Rex Hotel Rooftop Bar makes up for its modest height with breath-taking views of Vietnam's French colonial structures such as Saigon Opera House and People's Committee Hall. Rex Hotel Rooftop Bar is also fitted with an elevated stage and dancefloor, hosting live Latino bands and salsa performances at 20:00 onwards.

141 Nguyen Hue, D1



Thao Dien

Tropicana

Tropicana is the first and only rooftop bar in Thao Dien, District 2. The venue, with its sweeping views, looks over the Saigon River and Thao Dien, with an exciting selection of beverages, including signature cocktails, an extensive wine list and liqueurs. The bar is based on a Latin concept with live music and a Latin food menu.

Tuesday to Sundays: 5PM till late
41 Street 41, Thao Dien, District 2, Ho Chi Minh City
info@tropicanasaigon.com
Phone: (+84) 165 424 3972

SUNDAY BRUNCHES



Hotel Equatorial

Indulge in extravagance with the freshest seafood, roasted meats, international dishes, all-day breakfast favourites, and decadent desserts. A family brunch your kids will love. Complimentary for children below 6 years old. Prices: VND790,000 ++ per adult, VND395,000 ++ per child (12 years and under. VND990,000++ includes house wine, and beer VND1,390,000++ includes champagne, craft cocktails, wine, and beer

11.30am - 2.30pm
242 Tran Binh Trong, D5
3839 7777
www.hochiminhcity.equatorial.com



Indulgent Sundays @ Nineteen

A legendary buffet in the Heart of Saigon. Sensational cooking and an intimate, lively atmosphere are guaranteed. Authentic cuisine from around the globe, prepared by award-winning chefs, with fresh seafood as the highlight of the brunch. From noon to 3pm, with options from VND 890,000++ without drinks to VND 1,490,000++ with a free flow of Champagne, cocktails, house wine, and beer.

19-23 Lam Son Square, D1
hotel@caravellehotel.com / 3823 4999



Le Meridien

Centered around three distinctive dining venues - Latest Recipe, Bamboo Chic and Latitude 10 - Le Meridien offers three brunch packages, prices range from VND1,500,000 to VND2,500,000 and include Oriental and International cuisine.

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1
6263 6688 - ext.6930
www.lemeridiensaigon.com

BAR & CRAFT BEER BREWERIES



Acoustic Bar

A 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.

E1 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3



Aperitivo

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.



BiaCraft

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

90 Xuan Thuy, D2

NEW WORLD

SAIGON HOTEL



Sunday Brunch

VND1,200,000 food only.

VND1,400,000 free flow of house wine, Sapporo beer, soft drinks.

VND1,800,000 free flow of Champagne, house wine, Sapporo beer, soft drinks.

Prices exclude service charge and tax.

CHINESE

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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



San Fu Lou – Cantonese Kitchen

San Fu Lou combines tradition with our Chinese kitchen and sophisticated contemporary Oriental ambience. San Fu Lou exudes colors and cozy feel of a traditional Chinese "house". Our open kitchen, which is a first in Vietnam for a Chinese restaurant, allows diners to take in a visual feast before the food is served.

SAN FU LOU 1
Ground floor, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai St., Dist 1, HCMC
(+848) 38239513
SAN FU LOU 2
195-197 Phan Xích Long St., Phu Nhuan Dist, HCMC
(+848) 35176168
SAN FU LOU 3
24 Ba Thang Hai St., Dist 10, HCMC
(+848) 38620920
24 Ba Thang Hai St., Dist 10, HCMC
(+848) 38620920



Also Try...

Hung Ky Mi Gia

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

20 Le Anh Xuan, D1
3822 2673

Ocean Palace

A place for those who love Chinese food. The large dining room on the ground floor can accommodate up to 280 diners. Up on the first floor are six private rooms and a big ballroom that can host 350 guests.

2 Le Duan Street, D1
3911 8822

Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

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

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

Shang Palace

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

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

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

Yu Chu

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

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

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CAFÉS

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K.Coffee

Accented with sleek furniture and dark wood, this cozy cafe serves fresh Italian-style coffee, cold fruit juices, homemade Vietnamese food and desserts. The friendly owner and staff make this a great spot to while away the afternoon with a good book or magazine.

Opening time: 7AM- 10PM.

Sunday closed.

86 Hoang Dieu, D4
8253316 / 090 142 3103



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

FRENCH

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Le Terroir

Recently opened, Le Terroir serves dishes such as Bouchée à la Reine duo, Pan seared salmon along with pastas, risotto and decadent desserts. The wine list here is an oenophile's dream with over 200 labels in stock from Australia, California and Chile to Italy. The restaurant is on two levels with a small terrace in the ground floor.

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



Le Bacoulos

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

13 Tong Huu Dinh, D2

3519 4058

www.bacoulos.com



Le Jardin

This place is consistently popular with French expats seeking an escape from the busier boulevards. It has a wholesome bistro-style menu with a shaded terrace cafe in the outdoor garden of the French cultural centre, Idecaf.

31 Thai Van Lung, D1



Long Phi

French-owned, this longstanding restobar has been a favorite among late-night revelers because of its late opening hours - 4am. The menu is a combination of Vietnamese and French with pasta dishes thrown in to cater to everyone.

207 Bui Vien, D1



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1

www.tycozsaigon.com



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 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



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

INDIAN

Fest.vn
call 1900636997



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



Saigon 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



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ITALIAN

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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



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



Portofino

Great place for pizza's, pasta's and interesting main dishes in a cozy setting.

15 Dong Du, D1
+84 8 3823 3597
info@portofinovieta.com
http://www.portofinovieta.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

Carpaccio

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

Fest.vn
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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

Cafe 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



SORAE Sushi Sake Lounge

"Sorae". Up in the sky, is one of the most spectacular Japanese restaurant and a "must go" destination at the heart of the bustling busy district of Saigon. Located in the heart of District 1, on the 24th floor of AB Tower, it has a gorgeous 360 degree overview over the city. Sorae can accommodate up to 368 people in a spacious 1,000 sqm elegant setting including a bar with hundreds of varieties of beverages and the finest cigar club in town. Besides offering delicious Japanese cuisine, Sorae delights its guests with great entertainment and DJ.

Level 24, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai St., Dist 1, HCMC
08 3827 2372
<http://www.soraesushi.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/Soraesushi/>
50% off wine bottles on Tuesday night. Fest.vn or call 1900636997



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

Fest.vn
call 1900636997



Galbi Brothers

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

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



Lee Cho

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

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7
5410 1086



Seoul House

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

33 Mac Thi Bui, D1
3829 4297



THAI



Koh Thai

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

Kumho Link, Hai Ba Trung, D1
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

Thai Street

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

26 Thao Dien Road, Thao Dien, D2
0866549525

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

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

STEAKHOUSE

Fest.vn
call 1900636997



B3 STEAKHOUSE & CRAFT BEER

Large selection of fresh New Zealand Grass-fed Beef cuts and Local Craft Beers. Decoration style is a mix of retro and contemporary street art that results in a friendly and cozy atmosphere. The restaurant is conveniently located on Nguyen Hue street, making it very suitable for after-business dinner, group hangouts or romantic date night on the terrace.

3pm-11pm
Level 1, 90 Nguyen Hue, Dist 1, HCMC
Reservation: 0166 519 9846



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, D1
3829 5368
www.norfolkhotel.com.vn



El Gaucho Argentinian Steakhouse

The fine dining steakhouse boasts a modern yet rustic decor, giving it an inviting ambiance and genuine atmosphere. The authenticity of the Argentinian cuisine is strictly followed by the methods of preparation, hand-made charcoal grill serves as the focal point in the kitchen to maintain and accentuate the original flavor of the meat.

74/1 Hai Ba Trung, D1



Nossa Steakhouse

A stylish restaurant featuring Italian cuisine and Western steaks with a wide selection of imported steaks from Australian 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, D1 / www.nossa.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, D1



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, D1
www.wildhorsesteakhouse.com

Baba's Kitchen
164 Bui Vien, District 1
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Full Menu
www.woknroll.vn

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Scam for the full menu



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



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136 - 138 Le Thi Hong Gam St., Dist. 1, HCMC
08 3821 7786

nhahangdimai.com/

<https://www.facebook.com/nhahangdimai/>



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

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

INTERNATIONAL

Fest.vn
call 1900636997



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

For restaurant promotions go to fest.vn or Call 1900636997



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.



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

2nd - 4th Floors, Saigon Garden

99 Nguyen Hue, D1

08 3821 3821



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Panam is a cozy restaurant and pub with a friendly and chilled ambience. If you're searching for a place to meet up for happy hours after work, Panam is the perfect choice. Come and enjoy great food like falafels and kebabs with homemade sauces, cold craft beers, cocktails and board games.

12pm-1am / Tel: 0122 733 0235

91 Pasteur, D1

(in a side alley behind Cuba la Casa del Mojito)



Poke Saigon

Poke is a traditional Hawaiian dish made with fresh, cubed raw fish and toppings. Poke Saigon is the first poke restaurant in HCMC where diners create their own bowl. Located on the second floor of an apartment building, the dining space reflects the menu: fresh, fun, creative and healthy. There are many different options for your poke bowl with bases that include sushi or brown rice, including mix-in sauces like wasabi mayo and gomaes sesame and toppings such as wakame seaweed salad, crab salad and poke options: ahi tuna, salmon, shrimp and more. We are available for delivery.



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Travel & Leisure

OREGON / IMAGE BY ROB MCNAMEE





Have Dogs, Will Travel

Images by **Rob McNamee**

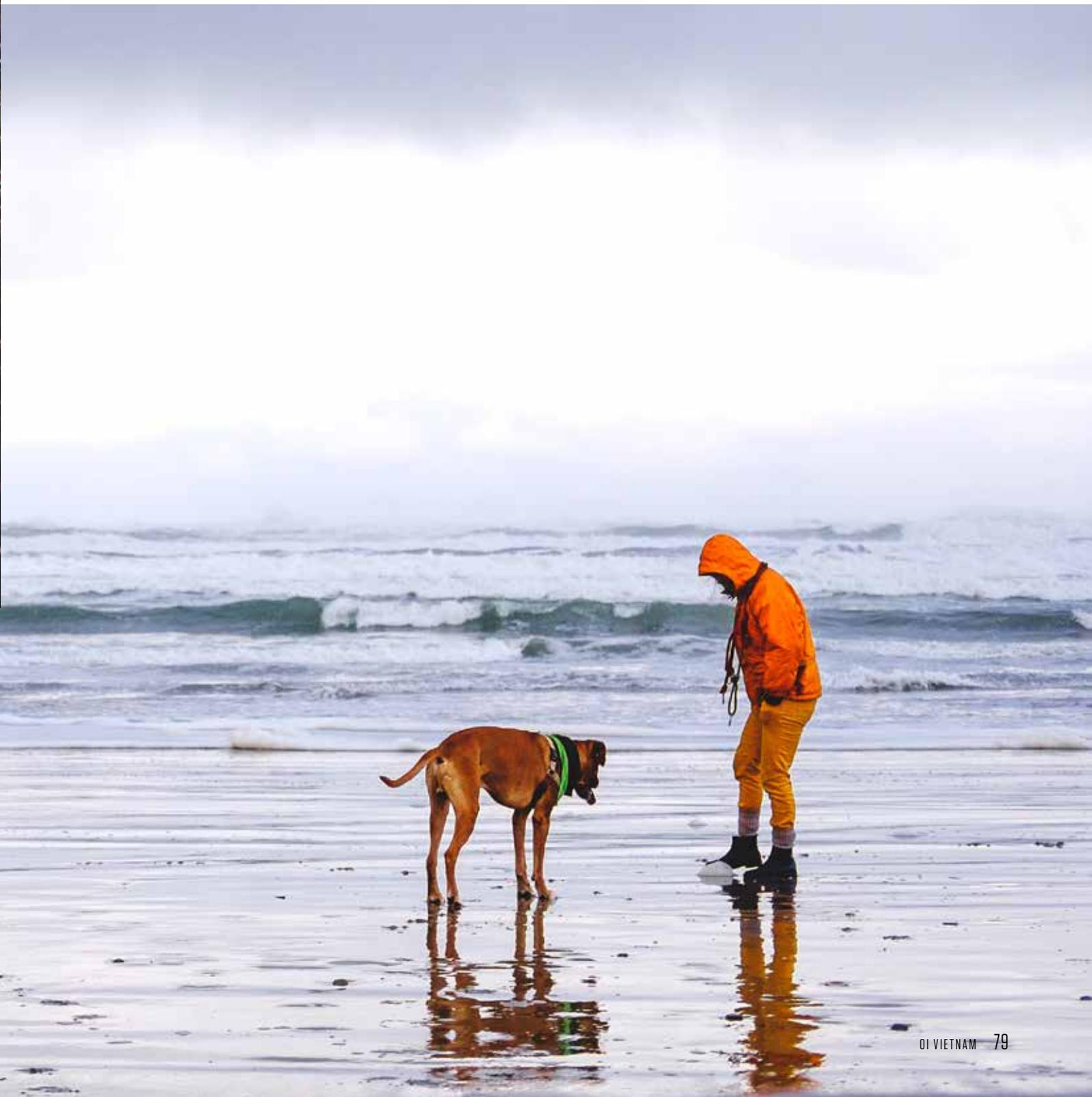
THE DOGS, LOCKE AND RONAN, are stepbrothers banded together on their mission to explore the world. Rhodesian Ridgeback Ronan prefers to spend his time pondering and looking mean while white-speckled Locke is

the more playful of the two who tends to get into trouble often. Along with their humans—Rob and Chelsea—the family of four are constantly on the search for adventures. Follow their journeys at arrowswest.com. ■











Beyond Temples and Tombs

Cycling to Hue's lesser-known sights

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JAMES PHAM

INSCRIBED AS A UNESCO WORLD Heritage Site in 1993 for its gorgeous temples, imperial buildings and royal tombs, Hue's beguiling charms and laid-back vibe are often lost on the millions of tourists who come through on a one-day whirlwind tour of the Citadel in the morning followed by the tombs in the afternoon. In comparison, nearby Hoi An, inscribed as a UNESCO site in 1999, manages to hold on to visitors for several days with its street food scene, shopping, beaches and cultural sites.

To find out whether there is more to Hue than a tired one-day itinerary, I hop on a bicycle and ride the pancake flat coastline with nary a temple or tomb in sight.

Twelve kilometers outside of Hue, I find myself at the Tam Giang-Cau Hai Lagoons, a series of shallow, brackish ponds where the famed Perfume River

empties out into the ocean. Stretching 70km, they are some of the largest in Southeast Asia. I trade bicycle for boat and cruise the glassy waters, past fishermen casting their nets and women neck-deep in the water, feeling for clams with their toes. The water in the lagoon averages about 3 meters deep, and the locals set down long bamboo poles into the lagoon bed to form simple channels bordered by nets, creating fish "mazes." Utilizing the natural currents of the nutrient-rich water, the fish swim along the mazes and into tall traps set at the corners. I watch as fishermen empty the long, cylindrical traps yielding fish, shrimp and other seafood from this serene, watery world.

I continue cycling north, past endless fields of emerald green rice paddies, sometimes with friendly school children on e-bikes or curious buffalo for company.

Cycling makes it easy to stop whenever I want to photograph a duck herder armed with a long bamboo pole and trailed by hundreds of noisy birds or a curious man holding a bucket, a shovel and a stick. I ask him what the tools are for and he answers with a toothsome grin: "catching field mice."

I also pass all manner of cemeteries, from simple circular mounds in the middle of a rice field to stupendous "ghost towns," ornate, over-the-top monuments erected for the dead. While the largest and best-known city of tombs is An Bang, south of Hue on the way to Hoi An, smaller cemeteries dot the landscape. The cult of ancestor worship is strong in Hue and the tomb cities are an expensive extension to the *phong tho* or "worship room" dedicated to the remembrance of ancestors found in most traditional Hue houses. Thanks to a strong fishing culture,



many from Hue were able to make the dangerous journey abroad decades ago as refugees aboard their fishing boats, building new lives for themselves overseas. Thankful to the protection from their ancestors, they now fund enormous tombs as a symbol of piety.

I stop by the cemetery town of Quang Ngan and wander among the colorful tombs beautified by intricate ceramic mosaics. One of the tombs is locally known as “Two Billion,” the cost of the ornate multi-room structure which includes a banquet room for when the overseas owners come back to pay their respects. The tombs are both a source of pride and envy, as vast amounts of overseas money are poured into making each one the biggest, most ostentatious in the village, while living family members struggle to eke out a living, forced to wait until the afterlife to taste a life of luxury.

I continue cycling to the late 15th century village of Phuoc Tich, known for its many *nha ruong* or ancient houses. Built entirely of wood without the use of nails, the dark homes feature three rooms marked by giant wood pillars: one for men, one for women and one for ancestor worship. The houses call to mind the Vietnamese word for “foundation or keystone,” *ruong cot*, literally meaning

“supports and columns.” The façade is actually a long series of folding doors, ingeniously set on pegs for easy removal to allow the cool breeze in, with sliding panels instead of windows to guard against the winter cold. The residents of the quaint village are mainly senior citizens, left behind to take care of the houses while relatives move closer to the city. Surrounded by trees and water and

cloaked in a deathly stillness, it feels like time has stood still here.

The elderly villagers say living close to Nature is their secret to longevity, eating what you grow. We stop at Mrs. Kieu's home for a stunning home-cooked lunch that includes a salad made from green figs plucked from the garden and a dessert of sticky rice cake colored dark green with a local, wild leaf. *Banh it la gai* is known all over Vietnam, but according to Mrs. Kieu, it was her great-grandmother, a cook for the imperial court, who first found this aromatic leaf growing in the area around her home and invented the dish. In Phuoc Tich, even the food has history.

Frogs in March and Chicken in August

Early the next morning, I cycle 8km to the covered bridge in the 15th century village of Thanh Toan. Much less well-known than Hoi An's Japanese Bridge, the Thanh Toan bridge was constructed in 1776 by Tran Thi Dao as an act of merit so that her fellow villagers would have an easy way to cross the Nhu Y River. The bridge even has built-in bench seating for weary villagers returning from the nearby market. Next to the bridge, the community has erected a beautiful agricultural museum filled with simple but ingenious machines for farming and fishing. One of the plaques proclaims: "Frogs in March and chicken in August." I have to ask around for the meaning and a local tells me that's when they taste the best, speaking to the joys of country living.

I cycle 10km back towards town to the Tu Hieu Pagoda, nestled in a forest setting at the end of a dusty, red road. Amongst Hue's 100 or so pagodas, this simple structure has one of the most interesting stories. In 1843, an abbot

named Nhat Dinh gave up his position in the court and returned home to look after his ailing mother. When his mother's condition worsened despite medicine and care, it was suggested that Nhat Dinh add fish and meat to her diet. Ever a dutiful son, he walked to the market to buy those things for his mother, accepting the shame that came from people seeing a monk buying meat and therefore contributing to the death of another living thing. Word got back to the king who praised Nhat Dinh for showing honor to his mother. The king sent money to build the Tu Hieu Pagoda, meaning "filial piety" or the devotion that children show to their parents.

Off to the side of the pagoda are 20 or so tombs of eunuchs who served under the Nguyen Lords. Flush with wealth from controlling which wife or concubine got to spend precious nighttime hours with the king with the possibility of providing a royal heir, the eunuchs donated to the pagoda so that they would be remembered after their death, with no heirs of their own to offer up incense to them.

After two days, my calves are burning and I'm definitely saddlesore, but I've discovered that Hue has much more to offer than just temples and tombs.

My cycling trips were arranged by ÉMM Hotel Hue. Completely renovated in October 2016, the bright, cheery 72-room hotel just a few minutes' walk from the Perfume River and the Hue Citadel features a colour scheme inspired by ancient Hue itself, highlighted by imperial jade and royal purple. A restaurant and poolside bar as well as a mini-gym, spacious reading area and two meeting rooms complete the property. For more, see www.emmhotels.com ■





HAWAII

IMAGES BY JIMMY VAN DER KLOET



Kress Cinemas in Hilo



The Kilauea'ihi hiking trail takes you over the still fuming floor of the Kilauea'ihi caldera



Dried lava marks the end of the road

Saddle Road connecting the East-side of the Big Island to the West-side



Travel



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3519 4182

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Kids & Education



Acne Agony



Dr. Ruben Martinez-Castejon holds a postgraduate diploma in dermatology from the University of Cardiff and is responsible for skin disease consultations at Family Medical Practice.

“Mom, what’s happening with these pimples on my face?”
 “Oh, don’t worry, I had them too...”

MANY PEOPLE FEEL ACNE IS a natural condition that should be accepted. It happens to almost 80 percent of the population between 15 and 30 years of age. That’s why they feel that one day it comes, if you’re unlucky, and that it will most likely eventually go away without leaving any permanent sequelae—or instead, it may leave scars or permanent pigmentation. In the meantime, it might make you feel like a monster and cause psychological trauma, because normally it happens during the building of a teenager’s self-esteem and confidence.

Acne arises from four main factors. The first is an overproduction of grease, which makes the skin look oily. The second is a blockage of follicles where hair grows from the skin. Therefore, the excess grease and the occlusion of the follicles bring about the third factor, inflammation. An infection is then produced by a resident bacteria on the skin called *Propionibacterium acnes*. All together, this is what we need to treat. There is no evidence to suggest that acne is caused by poor diet or hygiene. It’s no more common in Vietnam than it is anywhere else. And, while it is an infectious disease, it is not a transmissible one.

The overproduction of fat, the occlusion of the follicles, the inflammation and the infection—these have been traditionally treated with antibiotics and peelers, which work to peel the skin, making it more diffusely red and dry. So we dry the skin, we irritate the skin, and we will see the skin become flaky. That’s also something that people don’t like, but it has been considered part of the price to pay to get rid of the pimples—by having dry, irritated, burning skin.

For many years, acne has been treated with antibiotic creams or pills. Unfortunately, a good deal of resistance to the antibiotics has occurred, because normally the treatment is so long. This is something that we need to tell everybody who has acne, and who has the will to treat it—they must be patient. You don’t see improvements in acne even with the more efficacious treatments before 12 weeks. The full treatment should normally take place within the course of one year, and there can be relapses, so this can be very hard to cope with.

The good news is that the best medications available on the market today are used earlier, when the disease is not so advanced. That’s a new trend—ten years ago, after-the-fact treatment from powerful medicines (such as retinoid creams, benzoyl peroxide, adapalene creams, and antibiotics) were used in an escalating manner—and when the disease was really advanced, then people were put on oral retinoids. These are the best treatment for acne, because retinoids interact with inflammation, infection, occlusion, and sebaceous production—all four causes of acne.

Retinoids were formerly used in very high doses. In some cases, the reaction was so violent that you would need to inject steroids into some of the lesions. This is why retinoid treatment is sometimes associated with psychological trauma, mostly because it was used when people were already desperate from the disease.

The modern trend is to use the oral retinoid earlier and in smaller doses. Today, what we have learned is that you can help people feel less anxious about the acne and prevent the scars and the pigmentation, which is important,

especially with teenagers from Asian countries whose skin is more easily tanned from exposure to the sun (in general, the darker the skin, the more risk you have of post-inflammatory pigmentation, or PIP). These days, we don’t want to treat only the acute problem, we want to treat the whole thing—we want to treat the person and their experience of life. If we can prevent the acne from becoming violent by starting with low doses and using oral retinoids with appropriate controls, we can prevent scarring and PIP from the beginning, and greatly reduce the chance of relapses of the disease.

Some are reluctant to have their acne treated, seeing it as a cosmetic problem. I completely disagree with considering acne as a cosmetic issue. We are not talking here about “wanting a smaller nose” or “bigger lips.” We are talking about “wanting skin to appear healthy.” Some people can be disfigured or even lose their jobs because they are facing the public and can be seen as dirty and untidy.

Parents who see their child starting to show a growing number of pimples on their face should consider preventive treatment. An adolescent does not have to suffer an inflammatory disease; medical options are available to greatly reduce the severity of this condition.

Parents have the power to lead their children in having a first consultation and starting treatment before acne really becomes a problem. Some early decisions, made on time, will spare kids from going through physical and psychological issues that will distract them from concentrating on learning, socializing and becoming successful in their teenage life, which is important in building the personality. ■



Catriona McKechnie is the Year 4 teacher at Saigon Star International School, and is a literacy and English language specialist.

The Need to Read

“Do something ‘booky’? Hold on, let me just find an app for that...”

IN A WORLD INCREASINGLY DOMINATED by screen technology, are printed books still relevant? The answer, of course, is yes! Concern is growing over the number of hours children spend absorbed in their tablets and smartphones, and most adults would also admit they spend too much time glued to their screens. For this reason, the tagline for this year’s World Book Day is “Do Something Booky,” reminding us to pick up a book, read some poetry or share some stories, engaging our minds and sparking our imagination along the way. World Book Day is celebrated globally on April 23rd every year. The date is significant because it is the death date of several internationally renowned writers and authors, including William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes. Organized by UNESCO, the event is designed to promote books, reading and literacy in all its forms, celebrating our global love for the written word in all languages.

Unsurprisingly then, the event was celebrated in a big way at our international school (although World Book Day falls at the end of this month, schools around the world celebrate on the first Thursday in March, so as not to clash with Spring vacation). Students and teachers at Saigon Star International School came dressed as their favorite book characters and we held a parade to show off our costumes. As a lifelong lover of books, it was a delight to see the next generation enjoying the same characters that I grew up with as a child. It was also impressive to see the huge range of characters the children had chosen to

dress as—from fairy tale heroines to the heroes of modern classics—it was clear our students share my passion for reading across a wide variety of genres.

World Book Day is not intended to be a one-off event where we enjoy books for one day before returning to our screens. We celebrate the day to remind us of the power of literature and its unquestionable importance in our daily lives, especially for children. Regular reading, independently or with an adult, has established benefits for students’ cognitive, social and verbal development, which is why books are afforded such a high status in our school.

We follow the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), where an equal importance is put on academic, personal and international learning. One of our key Personal Learning Goals is *communication*, and it is proven that children who read regularly, generally have a wider vocabulary, more vivid imagination and are more highly skilled at writing, as they have internalized the ‘author’s voice’ through reading. They are also more confident when using complex grammar structures or varied punctuation, as they have seen the powerful impact of these ‘in action.’

Working in an international school, where a high number of the students speak English as a second or additional language, the benefits of reading on a daily basis are particularly evident. Reading a book not written in one’s mother tongue quickly introduces the reader to a vast range of vocabulary and can open a window to the beautiful idiosyncrasies of that language, which

may be harder to grasp through daily conversation. Thus, whenever parents ask me which language apps to download to help their child improve their written and/or spoken English, I tell them to put down their smartphone and pick up an English book!

For even if you cannot understand every word of a book or poem written in another language, you will still gain huge enjoyment from the rhythm and flow of the words. At another recent school event, Mother Language Day, other teachers and I read stories and poetry in different languages, including French, Spanish, German... even Swahili! These immersive language experiences were enjoyed by all of the students, as the magic of the words transcends the boundaries of language.

Of course, there are many further advantages of regular reading, beyond improved communication skills. Stories have long been used to teach valuable life lessons and to help the reader (or listener) gain an understanding of *integrity*, another of our key IPC Personal Learning Goals. For example, traditional tales passed down from generation to generation have often included moral messages, which we can use to help us learn how to make good choices. Reading for meaning also helps children, and adults, to develop *critical thinking* skills, by presenting the world from different perspectives

So, parents *and* children, put down your tablets and smartphones and ‘do something booky.’ Share a book together, trade riddles or simply spend time retelling one of your favorite tales; the possibilities, and benefits, are endless. ■

Namaste



Catherine Mihowich is a Grade 3 teacher with an M.Sc Education at the International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP).

Yoga for mindfulness in the elementary classroom

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL about yoga, anyway? Isn't it just a bunch of people rolling around on mats, twisting themselves into pretzels or passing out in an overheated room?

Far from it. Any yogi will tell you it's not a form of exercise, but a way of life. As a practitioner of yoga for over 20 years, it makes me feel great, reduces my stress levels, clears my mind, helps cultivate stillness, and reduces my muscle tension. I hadn't thought about utilizing it in my elementary classroom until last year when I took a course to become a children's yoga instructor. Yoga was such a large part of my private life, I can't believe it hadn't spilled over into other parts as well. Why not integrate some simple yoga poses and breathing techniques into classroom transitions or before a test?

The yogic lifestyle consists of four pillars, each working together to create a mindful whole. One of the pillars is Achar, or your daily rituals. Rituals require a certain amount of focus, or mindfulness. Without that focus, you begin to miss the point of the activity or perform it absentmindedly. How often can you say you don't remember the drive home, or brushing your teeth? Another is Vichar, which are your thoughts. The more often you have positive thoughts you will find the quality of them increase and the quantity of negativity lessen. These pillars work together to create a balanced lifestyle. The ultimate goal of yoga is inner knowledge; your body, mind and thoughts are all a part of nature. There is no higher knowledge than that of self.

"Be faithful in small things you do, because it is in them that your strength lies." — Mother Teresa.

Yoga, or union, has a number of health benefits: increased flexibility and balance, a boosted immune system, increased muscle tone and strength, weight loss, cardio

and circulatory health, improved respiration, more energy, and protection from injury, to name a few. Students also benefit through increased focus, body awareness and development of gross motor skills, stress management, increased confidence, a positive self-image, and learning how to use their bodies in a healthy way. They will also practice mindfulness about other living things and in regard to food.

After just one session, my students reported a 58 percent decrease in pain, 68 percent reduction in stress and 68 percent increase in relaxation. It is also an easy way to integrate mindfulness into your daily routine. Cultivating mindfulness has received more attention recently due to its association with improved psychological well-being and reduction in stress-related health disorders. It also increases capacity for feeling satisfied with life, enjoying the everyday pleasures, generates a greater capacity for dealing with adverse events, and reduces the likelihood of getting caught up in worries about the future or past regrets. As a teacher or parent, you may be thinking, "My child/student doesn't need to worry about this yet, do they?" In actuality, they are laying foundation for the future.

Emerging research also suggests that yoga can help students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) by improving attentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsivity. It may also boost performance in school, and a number of schools are introducing it to physical education or classroom curriculum.

Mindfulness is the practice of purposely focusing your attention on the present, and accepting it without judgment. It is also considered to be a key element in happiness. While it does have its roots in Buddhism, most religions include some type of

meditation technique that helps to shift your thoughts away from your usual preoccupations toward an appreciation of the moment and a larger perspective on life. In general, practicing mindfulness brings improvements in both physical and psychological well-being in addition to bringing about positive changes in health attitudes and behaviors.

Aside from practicing yoga asanas, how can we bring more mindfulness into our daily lives? One method is through basic meditation where students sit quietly and either focus on natural breathing or on a word, or mantra, repeated silently. Another is to concentrate on subtle body sensations such as an itch or tingling without judgement and letting them pass. Food may also be introduced in a sensory manner, where an item is presented and students are directed to notice the color, texture, scent and weight. They then will savor the item, bringing an awareness to the food they consume. Also, through focusing attention on the moment-to-moment sensations during everyday activities; slowing down, doing one thing at a time, and giving it your full attention will allow for full presence and involve all of your senses.

Depending on the age of students engaging in yoga, there may also be included activities that one may question how they relate to yoga. Younger students are just learning about their bodies; how to move them and what they are capable of. They engage in active storytelling, dance, and other sensation building activities. The aim is not to hold a serious yoga class, but to bring focus, mindfulness, reach multiple intelligences, and overall, have fun!

"That which we persist in doing becomes easier, not that the task itself has become easier but that our ability to perform it has improved." — Ralph Waldo Emerson ■

Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



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office@theabcis.com

www.theabcis.com



Anne Hill International School

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School ages: 18 months to 6 years old

Website: annehill.school

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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)

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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.

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www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



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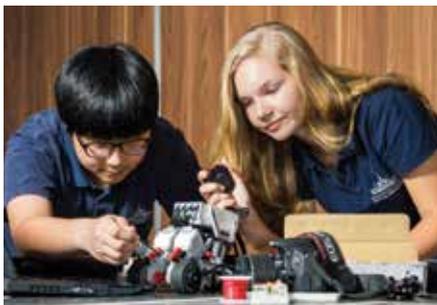
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The Australian International School is an IB World School with three world class campuses in District 2, HCMC, offering an international education from kindergarten to senior school with the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP), Cambridge Secondary Programme (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

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



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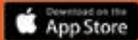
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